

ACTION AND REACTION: THE “ISLAMIC STATE’S” CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND U.S. COUNTER TERROR POLICY

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned **Carly Rivezzo** hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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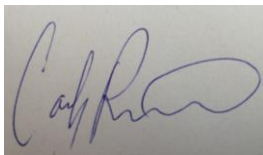
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carly Rivezzo', is shown within a rectangular frame.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between the United States' counter terrorism policies and the self-proclaimed "Islamic State's" actions from inception, April 8th, 2013, to present day. The "Islamic State" is unlike any terrorist group seen before due to their sheer size, territorial expansion throughout multiple sovereign states, and level of ideological fervor. By examining this case with an understanding of who the "Islamic State" is and what their goals are, I can suggest counter terror methods for the U.S. based on findings about their current counter terror program. I use two major research strategies: (1) a quantitative analysis of major "Islamic State" events and United States events and their relationship, (2) as well as a descriptive study of the "Islamic State" and how terrorism theories fit their model. Data was collected from primary source documents such as "Islamic State" news bulletins, and videos, but English language news articles were used exclusively for the quantitative data research. Upon testing the data this thesis argues that the current United States' counter terror program against the "Islamic State" is fundamentally ineffective. They are an organization capable of fighting a guerilla war on multiple fronts, and the strict air campaign put forth by the United States is not enough. This thesis offers some policy options moving forward based on who the "Islamic State" is, and what their strengths are.

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List of Abbreviations

ATGM- Anti-Tank Guided Missiles

CSCC- Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication

DoD- Department of Defense

DoS- Department of State

ISI- Islamic State of Iraq

ISIS- Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

ISIL- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

JTWJ- Jama'at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad

SVBIED- Suicide vehicle-born improvised explosive device

All words from Arabic are transcribed into English and are denoted by italics.

The group the “Islamic State” is denoted by quotation marks due to author discretion

Introduction

“The time has come for those generations that were drowning in oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise.” –Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi June 29, 2014 (Islamic State 2014)

On June 29, 2014, the first day of Ramadan, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared to the world that he was caliph of this new “Islamic State.” He urged Muslims around the world to pledge allegiance to him, that it was their religious duty, and that they should flock to Iraq and Syria to wage jihad to assist with the growth of the “Islamic State.” Rebel factions were stunned, the Western world took this as a joke, and no one thought that this new “Islamic State” would survive. Yet, here we are almost a year later and the “Islamic State” is stronger, larger, and more feared than ever.

Islamic-based terrorism is not a new phenomenon and nearly the entire world knows the word ‘al-Qaeda,’ but the “Islamic State” has been able to utilize terrorism in a new fashion. They have created a governable state in the power vacuums of the Middle East. The “Islamic State” governs a territory larger than the United Kingdom with more than 8 million citizens despite being considered a terrorist group by much of the world with no legal state founding. They have a professional media team that successfully spreads their propaganda throughout the Internet and releases monthly magazines in numerous languages that promote jihad and their ideology. They also have friends and enemies alike. Extremist groups around the world ranging from Boko Haram in Nigeria to al-Qaeda offshoots in Afghanistan and Pakistan to Ansar al-Khilifah in the Philippines and numerous others have pledged allegiance to the “Islamic State.” They operate openly around the world. Other than claiming vast territory in Iraq and Syria, the “Islamic State” governs in the Mediterranean coastal city of Derna, Libya, and they regularly target Egyptian

military bases in the Sinai Peninsula. If any sort of political or military power vacuum exists, it is clear that the “Islamic State” will find refuge and flourish there.

The United States entered into the fight against the “Islamic State” in early summer of 2014 via reconnaissance missions (Entous and Barnes 2014), but only officially began fighting in Iraq on August 8th, 2014 in direct response to the August 7th Yazidi plight. The Obama Administration justified this use of force by stating it was necessary to protect American interests in the region, as well as to protect minority groups, and finally to stop an advance into the Kurdish Autonomous Region (Statement by the President 2014). However what the Obama Administration has not done is to commit ground troops to the fight against the “Islamic State.” The pure air strike campaign, with a variety of advisors and Special Forces teams throughout the country, has been supported by a coalition including both Western and Muslim nations alike. What we do not know however is if this coalition is making any damage to the “Islamic State” or if an air campaign is even remotely effective. This thesis will address this very dilemma. The main research will be focused on answering the following questions:

Does the United States’ counter terror policy program affect the “Islamic State’s” actions? If so, how?
What can the descriptive makeup of attacks by the “Islamic State” tell us about how the organization is progressing?

In this thesis I will argue the importance of these questions and will further determine if the current policies taken by the United States and the coalition are affecting the “Islamic State.” Due to the limitations regarding secret information about attacks, I focus my thesis on primary research that provides an overview of both the “Islamic State’s” and United States’ policies. This thesis attempts to fill the gap between theory and practice regarding the “Islamic State.” Due to the topical nature of the “Islamic State”, research is incredibly current but must be based in a theoretical framework. In Chapter 1 I provide a brief theoretical framework established by

numerous terrorism scholars who address terrorism motivations, ideology, and tactics will support the descriptive data motivations. Chapter 2 explains the intricacies of the “Islamic State’s” history and how it evolved into the group we see today. This chapter also discusses their ideology, strategy, and how they differ from groups previously seen. Chapter 3 analyzes United States’ counter terrorism policies towards the “Islamic State.” Both Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) policies are highlighted as well as their criticisms and potential downfalls. An action and reaction cycle is presented for how the two actors interact with one another to justify my research. Chapter 4 highlights my methodology for answering the presented research questions. Later in the chapter I go into detail regarding the implications of my findings for any counter terror policy when challenging the “Islamic State.” Chapter 5 offers brief policy recommendations based on my research and framed with terrorism theory. I argue that fundamentally understanding the “Islamic State” is essential to effectively fighting them through targeted policy.

Chapter 1- Theoretical Framework

“The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights...” –Yasser Arafat, November 1974 (Richardson 2006, 3)

Terrorism is a disputed concept with little to no universally approved, recognized legal definition. While there have been attempts at defining terrorism through the United Nations Security Council, nothing is binding. Therefore the definition and recognition of terrorism is vague and depends on the viewpoint of each actor. However as of late academics have agreed upon a universally accepted definition of terrorism that encompasses twelve distinct features. Louise Richardson provides the most basic concept of terrorism as “simply [meaning] deliberately and violently targeting civilians for political purposes” (2006, 4). Richardson narrows her definition of terrorism to seven distinct features and they are exceptionally similar to Alex P. Schmid’s definitions of terrorism in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*. Schmid focuses heavily on terrorism as a tactic that can be employed in “three main contexts” ranging from illegal state repression to propaganda to a tactic of warfare used by non-state actors (Schmid 2011, 86-87). He argues that terrorism must also include physical violence, or the *threat of physical violence*, and this violence must be primarily targeting civilians and/or noncombatants. Although terrorists must primarily target noncombatants, their victims are by and large *not* their intended targets in terms of message; they are merely symbolic and are much easier to draw attention to (Schmid 2011, 87). For example, the 9/11 hijackers did not seek to address their message of a global caliphate and Western dominance to the people they killed. They were able to use this event to broadcast their message on the largest, most global scale possible to the West through their indiscriminate violence. Had al-Qaeda targeted a U.S. military base in the Middle East one would assume that the recourse by the United States would be much less severe, and the world would not pay nearly as much attention to the attackers’ grievances.

Terrorism as a tactic can be viewed as a revolutionary fighting for self-determination or a religious fanatic out to kill innocent people. Response discourse all depends on the perspective of the viewer, but Richardson's and Schmid's criteria allow us to much more clearly define the tactic.

Despite a lack of a universally lawful definition of terrorism, the tactic is not new and has been a part of conflict for quite some time. David Rapoport's theory on the waves of modern terrorism gives a brief timeline and theme for the majority of terrorist groups that have operated in the past 150 years. His idea of waves transcends individual groups because "[waves] retained sufficient energy to create a generation of successor or new groups. When a wave's energy cannot inspire new organizations, the wave disappears. Resistance, political concessions, and changes in the perceptions of generations are critical factors in explaining the disappearance" (Rapoport 2004, 48). The most modern wave is the current wave of Sacred Terror—what Rapoport describes as religious terrorism. Everything religiously based from abortion bombings to the 9/11 attacks can fall into this wave, but he believes that "Islam is at the heart of the wave. Islamic groups have conducted the most significant, deadly, and profoundly international attacks" in this time frame (Rapoport 2004, 61). Theories point to three events that have caused Islamic groups to come to far to fruition: the 1979 Iranian Revolution that brought down a secular regime for a religious one, a new Islamic century that invokes religious connotations, and the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. These events planted the belief in many Muslims that this was their time to act and to obtain an Islamic State of their own. In response, the size of Islamic terrorist groups swelled and became much more deadly. Rapoport seems to believe that these waves will only last a generation or so, but the strange appeal and continual

engagement by American and Western forces into the Middle East and Muslim nations may be encouraging a subsequent generation to follow in their parents' footsteps.

Waves can be sparked by a number of factors and the setting for terrorism proliferation is incredibly important when trying to establish a framework of analysis. Martha Crenshaw explores the "conceptual distinctions among different types of factors" that create a setting for terrorism (1981, 381). Background settings are generally divided into two main categories: the preconditions and precipitants. Preconditions are "factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run" while precipitants are "specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism" (Crenshaw 1981, 381). For groups in the Sacred Terror wave preconditions can be demonstrated through the Sykes-Picot agreement that divided relatively homogenous religious populations into heterogeneous countries, or Huntington's proclaimed clash of civilizations between the Islamic world and the Christian world that has become more imminent through globalization (Huntington 1993). A precipitant factor could be a reaction to Israeli occupation in Palestine or the Sunni repression from Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki following the U.S. downsizing in Iraq. Preconditions are then further broken down into enabling and permissive factors that either allow events to occur or are situations that are directly tied to motivating terrorist organizations. She also argues that factors leading to resistance of the state and a lack of political inclusion present terrorist groups with ample opportunity to create an environment where they are likely to succeed (1981, 383). This is because terrorism is an easy tactic for the minority to exploit so that their message is heard. To her terrorism "is seen as a logical means to advance desired ends" that rational actors can claim based on their ideology and goals (1981, 385).

Chapter 2- Understanding the Enemy- who is the “Islamic State”?

“I have been appointed to rule over you, though I am not the best of you, so if you see that I am right, assist me. If you see that I am wrong, advise me and put me on the right track, and obey me as long as I obey God in you.” –Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi at Mosul Mosque (Islamic State 2014)

What emerged in response to the United States intervention and subsequent withdrawal of Iraq is the most well-trained, wealthiest, and largest terrorist organization that modern history has ever seen. The “Islamic State” is a conglomerate terrorist organization that can trace its foundational roots back to Jordan’s Abu Musab al-Zarqaqi, and ideological roots to the musings of legendary Islamic scholar Taqî ad-Dîn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah. Currently the “Islamic State” is operating freely throughout Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and pledges of allegiance have stretched as far as the Egyptian Sinai to Khorasan (the historical region and realm comprising a vast territory now lying in northeastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, and northern Afghanistan) to Algeria. They also inspire lone wolves throughout the Western world. Despite their popularity the world does not entirely understand them, and the “Islamic State” cannot be defeated without being understood first. Richardson argues the point that understanding the enemy is the major advantage any counter terror campaign could have to target their goals, strategy, history, and ideology. By not understanding their past we are destined to miscalculate their present and underestimate their future.

2.1- The evolution of the “Islamic State”

Since the times of the Prophet and resulting spread of Islam there has been an appeal towards an Islamic State. The Ottoman Empire was the closest modern state that Muslims were able to achieve. With its fall after World War I there has been significant pushes by Muslims around the world for a true Islamic State. However it wasn’t until the rise of the *mujahedeen*

fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan that jihadists were trained with capabilities to challenge the modern nation-state and the precondition for Islamic-based terrorism was conventional.

The “Islamic State’s” origin traces back to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian man originally distrustful of the Jordanian monarchy, who went to Afghanistan under the permission of bin Laden and the Taliban, to set up a jihadi training camp. Upon establishment of his jihadi group, Jama’at al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (JTWJ), Zarqawi pledged allegiance to bin Laden despite bin Laden’s resistance to the brutal tactics by Zarqawi (his targeting of Shiites in Iraq and division of the Muslim populous). JTWJ morphed into al-Qaeda of Iraq, but gradually drifted apart from al-Qaeda’s tactical advice and strategy by inciting civil wars between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq and essentially ignoring al-Qaeda’s main target in the Middle East: apostates (Lister 2014b, 8). This led to the then number two in command of al-Qaeda, al-Zawahiri, to publically distance al-Qaeda from their Iraqi branch via a letter that tentatively encouraged an Islamic State in Iraq, but also reinforced to Zarqawi that he was not following al-Qaeda’s overarching strategy (Al-Zawahiri 2005). When Zarqawi was killed in a US airstrike in 2006, the group was transformed into *al-dawla al-islamiya fii Iraq*, لدولة الاسلامية في العراق, The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), and was headed by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.

Under Abu Omar al-Baghdadi the group derived its ideological framework in order to pave the way for their future trends. With the chaos of the U.S. led invasion in Iraq, al-Baghdadi followed in the footsteps of Zarqawi with inciting a sectarian war between Shiites and Sunnis. U.S. reconstruction policy of overhauling the government sector of Iraq by firing the majority of Sunni government workers allowed ISI to gather popular support of Sunnis out of fear of Shiite repression (*Frontline: Losing Iraq* 2014). Throughout this time ISI was able to gather funds for support and continued to incite sectarian violence throughout Iraq by means of suicide bombers,

car bombs, and anything that would vex Sunnis and Shiites against each other. In addition to inciting violence, ISI offered a future to many unemployed Iraqis—they offered higher salaries than the government did in 2010, and portrayed strength by continuously challenging the regime (Lister 2014b, 10-11).

Upon Abu Omar al-Baghdadi's death, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi emerged as the new leader of ISI. With the eruption of the Syrian civil war in 2011, ISI's "expansion of operations into [Syria] undoubtedly energized the organization's base" and provided an arena to sustain growth and recruitment (Lister 2014b, 11). The Syrian civil war was the "Islamic State's" precipitant event setting for expansion into Syria. The Arab Spring throughout 2011 also gave ISI an avenue to recruit young, restless Sunnis from around the Arab world. As time progressed ISI became stronger and eventually created their first external alliance with Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. On April 8, 2013 al-Baghdadi announced this alliance and further renamed the group to include their new territorial base in Syria. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, الدولة الاسلامية في العراق و الشام, (ISIS), was publicly established. ISIS spread terror throughout Iraq and al-Sham through public beheadings, indiscriminate bombings, sectarian style warfare, and the capture and execution of multiple Western hostages. It was through these actions that in 2014 al-Qaeda's al-Zawahiri officially cut ties with ISIS by stating that "ISIS is not a branch of the al-Qaeda group, we have no organizational relationship with it, and the group is not responsible for its actions" (Zelin 2014). The ideological and strategic wedges between ISIS and al-Qaeda are vast and complicated and should be discussed in another paper, but the main reason for the split could be that ISIS primarily ignored al-Qaeda's leadership.

June 29, 2014 marks the day in which ISIS proclaimed itself a universal caliphate and once again changed its name to just the "Islamic State," الدولة الاسلامية or the caliphate دولة اخلافة

.This name change shows incredible symbolic significance because now they represent a universal, global Caliphate as opposed to a Caliphate just centered in Iraq and the Sham. This has been significant for attracting foreign recruits and for creating a sense of legitimacy. Since becoming the “Islamic State” the group has made advances throughout Iraq and Syria while extending their reaches into Libya and the Sinai.

2.2- The ideological justification behind the “Islamic State”

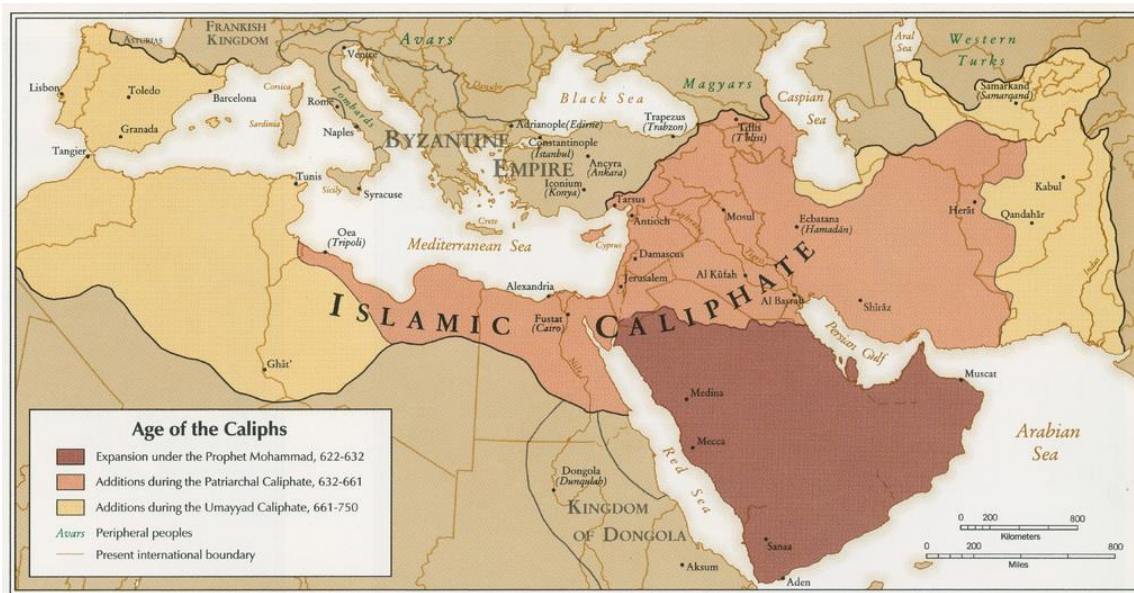
The “Islamic State” is *very* Islamic indeed; however the strain of Islam that they follow is not the mainstream ideology for the majority of the world’s almost 1.6 billion Muslims. The “Islamic State” focuses on an extremely traditional interpretation of Islam based on Salafi scholars and teachings that go back to living similar to the times of the Prophet. Taqî ad-Dîn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah’s teachings are basic foundations for the “Islamic State” and their approach to how they rule their “Caliphate.” Ibn Taymiyyah is famous for proclaiming the first *fatwa*, legal opinions based upon Islamic laws, against the Mongol empire by claiming that they are not true Muslims. Therefore it is not only recommended but it is also compulsory for Muslims to declare jihad upon them. It can be argued that Ibn Taymiyyah’s *fatwa* provides the precondition that the “Islamic State’s” actions are based off of. They have taken his *fatwa* and extended it to Shiites, nonbelievers, and essentially anyone who doesn’t give *bay’a*, an oath of allegiance, to the “Islamic State” in an effort to religiously justify their actions.

Ultimately the “Islamic State’s” end goal is set on creating and further maintaining a Caliphate. This idealistic world showcases an integrated way of life with the government and religion being one. Unlike in the West there would be no division between public and private life in a true Islamic State (Al-Turabi 1983, 241-243). *Tawhid*, acceptance of the oneness of God, is essential for an Islamic society to produce an Islamic State because it eliminates any trace of

secularization. A true Islamic State has no territorial borders and no sense of nationalism—there are only ebbs and flows of a religious society for the *ummah*, the entire community of Muslims, and universal acceptance of the system of law. This ideal is what the “Islamic State” is claiming they want to achieve. By breaking down the Sykes-Picot borders between Iraq and Syria, by establishing sharia law, by not heavily focusing on a central leader, and by eliminating secularism from government the “Islamic State” is forecasting what their version of this Islamic State will look like.

The Caliphate is meant to challenge the Western idea of a modern nation-state while simultaneously helping Muslims recover from the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the only legitimate Caliphate since the time of the Prophet, by establishing another Caliphate.

Figure 2.2.1:



Source: Map of Islamic Caliphate

What the West must understand is that the “Islamic State” is not playing a short-term game, but they are willing to sacrifice themselves now for their Caliphate in the future whether that is ten years, a hundred years or a thousand years. This initial caliphate may not produce a governable

Caliphate at the moment, but by declaring a Caliphate run by Caliph Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi “Islamic State” followers believe that in time the Muslims will win against the West since all empires must fall at some point.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself provides the legitimacy, albeit self-proclaimed, for leading the Caliphate due to his lineage in the Quraysh tribe that proves his ties to the Prophet Mohamed. Baghdadi’s speech in the Grand Mosque in Mosul on the 6th day of Ramadan 2014, spells out his plans for the future caliphate. Baghdadi’s announcement of the Caliphate on the first day of Ramadan provides Muslims with a parallel narrative with the announcement of the Qur’an, since Ramadan is when the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (Islamic State b 2014). He claims that following the caliphate is an obligation for all Muslims, and that Muslims were ignorant of this demand by God for a long time. Quoting numerous passages of the Qur’an, Baghdadi states that with God on their side then they will be victorious just as the *mujahedeen* were previously in their fight against the Soviet Union. The religious parallels and direct quoting of the Qur’an and *hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet, are a part of the grander plan to draw in religious, pious Muslims who are outraged at the current international system.

2.3- “Islamic State” strategy and tactics

The “Islamic State’s” common narrative and ideology support their goal of establishing a caliphate and their strategy complements this. Their slogan can best be summed up as: *baqiyya wa tatamaddad* ("remaining and expanding"). Their grand military-like strategy can be broken down into four key points:

- 1) Destroy state boundaries (namely in Iraq and Syria, but also including the rest of the modern nations that were a part of Islam’s largest territorial spread);

- 2) Establishing the “Islamic State” and governing from within while protecting its population from external threats;
- 3) Draw like-minded people into the caliphate from around the world (this also promotes a legitimacy of the caliphate and draws on the Sunni narrative, the “Islamic State” is the lesser evil compared a Shiite, apostate government);
- 4) Expand the caliphate to the rest of the *ummah*.

Their strategy and tactics can further be divided into three different categories; the first being the birth of the “Islamic State” as we see it today, the second being the strategy the “Islamic State” currently uses to keep control of its territory and continuing expansion, and the third being the estimated future strategies used by the “Islamic State” to maintain the caliphate. Similar to al-Qaeda’s expansion, the “Islamic State’s” strategy parallels the strategy put forth by Islamist strategist Abu Bakr Naji in his manual the Management of Savagery (Naji 2006). Almost everything that the “Islamic State” is doing today can be traced to a linear advance through Naji’s book.

What makes the “Islamic State” so successful is both the environment in which it operates in (the lack of government control) as well as their strict military structure and experience. The “Islamic State” has its distinct strategy and a majority of its military leaders have experience in their respective fields. For example, the Deputy of Iraq, Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, is the former lieutenant colonel in the Iraqi Army and an officer in the Iraqi Special Forces. The Deputy of Syria, Abu Ali al-Anbari, was a former major general in the Iraqi military. And the man in charge of Syrian military operations is Umar al-Shishani, a Chechen-Georgian national who is a former sergeant in the Georgian military intelligence unit (Lister 2014a). The “Islamic State” has also successfully utilized suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices

(SVBIED) for the majority of their territorial advancements. Professor Terrill of the US Army's Strategic Studies Institute believes that this marks the first time that SVBIEDs are a large part of a military campaign in the Middle East (AFP 2014). This tactic is difficult to counter due to the guerilla-like warfare and possible collateral damage of the civilian population. Also vehicles are nearly impossible to target with defensive missiles unless there is a clear, long line of sight. Their blast is akin to a nuclear bomb dropped from the sky, hence the notion that SVBIEDs are the "Islamic State's" air force. Without SVBIEDs the "Islamic State" would not be gaining nearly as much territory and would be forced to fight a more conventional war.

2.4- What makes them different?

Despite the world believing that the "Islamic State" is a group of irrational actors, the "Islamic State" is operating rationally by doing everything possible to achieve their ideological and territorial gains of establishing and overseeing a Caliphate. Yet the "Islamic State" is different and more dangerous than other Islamist groups that emerged from the 'Sacred Terror' wave. They operate openly, govern territory, and have completely changed the way in which a terrorist group functions online, domestically, and overseas.

All facets of the "Islamic State" are different than groups before them. The "Islamic State" is incredibly effective at making territorial advances as well as organizing a proper military. Unlike al-Qaeda's secretive web presence, the "Islamic State" is exceedingly successful at disseminating its information and propaganda online for the entire world to see. They run their own media team through Al-Hayat Productions. Their presence on social media is nearly impossible to ignore. They have taken advantage of the Internet in a way never seen before. The Internet is their main medium for recruiting foreigners who do the majority of the dirty work (foreigners are the most used for suicide bombings due to their general inability to fight and

speaking Arabic), and for giving lone wolves instructions on how to carry out attacks in their own countries via a jihadi manual available online.

The “Islamic State” is also distinctive in its ability to transcend itself as an organization in its own territory as well as outside of it. Al-Qaeda doesn’t govern land, but has recruits and sleeper cells operating throughout the world. While Hamas governs territory they don’t have recruits outside of the Gaza Strip capable of attacking another country from within. Nonetheless, the “Islamic State” has both. They are currently governing over 8 million people throughout their territory in Iraq and Syria while simultaneously directing cells abroad. The group claims that they provide education, health services, salaries, and many more governmental essentials for the people living in their territory. Moreover outside of their territory the “Islamic State” is very popular. Whether individuals are “Islamic State” inspired, or are directly working for the “Islamic State,” they are incredibly capable of conducting attacks throughout the Western world. Just recently the “Islamic State” announced that they have over 71 recruits in 15 states in the United States ready to commit jihad against Americans (A New Era 2015), and this has been shown in the failed attack in Texas on May 5, 2015.

2.5- Is there a possible ending to the “Islamic State”?

As shown the “Islamic State” is an incredibly complex organization with multiple features that exhibit a sense of know-how, but how does an organization like this end? Do external actors influence their path or is the “Islamic State” in complete control over their future? Audrey Cronin attempts to answer the question of how terrorist groups end by examining six ways that essentially put an end to progress and mark the demise of a group (but not necessarily an ideology). The majority of these options involve counter terror policies by outside forces, but

sometimes a group can implode from within. Yet the “Islamic State” is entirely different and operates almost as a pseudo-state, so can Cronin’s theories really apply?

Cronin argues that “leaders of terrorist groups are often captured or killed in the final months of terrorist campaigns” which is meant to deal the fatal blow to any organization (2009, 14), but the “Islamic State” has lost leaders before. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, its founder, was killed in a 2006 airstrike by the United States. Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Zarqawi’s successor, was also targeted and killed by a United States led coalition in Iraq in 2010 (Waleed 2010). Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Abu Omar’s successor, has been critically injured by the United States in an airstrike to the point where he has passed off the leadership of the “Islamic State.” And yet despite all of their leaders being killed, the “Islamic State” seems stronger than ever and driven by a force greater than leadership. As mentioned previously regarding a true Islamic State, the *ummah* drive the state, not the leader. It seems as if this tactic is futile when targeting the “Islamic State.”

Any type of event that would include another nation-state actor working directly with the “Islamic State” is nearly impossible at this point. Cronin’s suggestion of negotiation will simply not work with the “Islamic State” due to their violent and untrustworthy actions. Cronin’s “repression: crushing terrorism with force” (2009, 115) tactic is also one to bypass for the “Islamic State” because both the Assad regime in Syria and the al-Abadi regime in Iraq have proven incapable of doing so. A reorientation of the “Islamic State” also seems unlikely due to their hardline ideology and proliferation of information that makes recruits hyperaware of what they are getting themselves into.

What is plausible however is that the “Islamic State” either succeeds or fails in their goals. Success for the “Islamic State” represents a continued expansion while Iraq continues to

unravel simultaneously. Iran must stop backing the Shiites, and Baghdad must ultimately fall. It is not entirely farfetched that this group can succeed given the current state of affairs. Failure however is what the United States and the coalition prefer to focus on. Failure represents the annihilation of the group as a whole, but it will be difficult to deny the spread of their ideology and copycat groups from forming. Regardless of how difficult it will be, failure appears to be the only option to destroy the “Islamic State” and the coalition must do everything in their power to accelerate this.

Chapter 3- United States Counter Terrorism Policy

“All we have to do is send two mujahedin...[and] raise a piece of cloth on which is written “al Qaeda” in order to make the generals race there, to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses.” –Osama bin Laden, videotaped message, 2004. (Cronin 2009, 167)

The United States faces a dire dilemma with devising policies to counter the “Islamic State’s” physical and psychological advance. The Obama Administration appears to have learned from their predecessor’s mistake. Instead of proclaiming an outright “War on Terror,” the administration has established a specific nine-prong attack to directly combat the “Islamic State.” Obama’s definitiveness falls in line with Richardson’s number one criteria for effectively countering terrorism: “have a defensible and achievable goal” (Richardson 2006, 203). Definition allows a government to proclaim successes or failures, while vagueness means fighting a war that can never be won. President Bush’s ‘War on Terror’ is an impossible feat because terrorism as a tactic can never be defeated. It is impossible to apply any of Cronin’s principles of how to end a terrorist organization to a ‘war on terror’ because of the ever-changing dynamics and actors involved using terrorism as a tactic. Regardless, Obama has taken the first step towards properly addressing the threat of the “Islamic State” while simultaneously setting up a counterterror plan that includes a variety of methods. The current U.S. counter terror program to target the “Islamic State” addresses the military side of the conflict as well as the propaganda and criminal side of the “Islamic State’s” appeal. Cronin’s appeal that “the debate over whether terrorism is a crime or an act of war is an old argument that is fundamentally artificial: **terrorism is both** [emphasis added]” (2004, 8) accurately describes the U.S. policy approach towards combating the “Islamic State” as involvement amplifies.

3.1- Department of Defense Policy Actions

While military engagement in the region began in early August 2014, Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) wasn't announced until October 15, 2014. OIR is a combination of military actions by the Department of Defense (DoD) in Iraq and Syria to combat the "Islamic State."

The United States directly targets the "Islamic State" by concluding that:

"The United States, with its coalition partners, has committed to degrade and destroy the terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This group poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and to the broader Middle East, as well as to U.S. persons, allies, and interests in the region. This terrorist organization has killed innocents, including captured American journalists. If left unchecked, ISIL could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States" (Inspector General 2015, 1).

The United States systematically acknowledges the current and future problems that the "Islamic State" brings to U.S. interests in the Middle East and domestically. The U.S. government also goes further to combat the "Islamic State" through Richardson's suggestion of 'knowing the enemy' and how they are funded and recruit (2006, 206). The nine-pronged strategy that the United States supports directly targets these aspects through:

"Effective Governance in Iraq, Denying ISIL Safe Haven, Building Partner Capacity, Enhancing Intelligence Collection on ISIL, Disrupting ISIL's Finances, Exposing ISIL's True Nature, Disrupting the Flow of Foreign Fighters, Protecting the Homeland, and Humanitarian Support" (Inspector General 2015, 4).

The most effective tactics thus far have involved targeted airstrikes to counter the financial freedom of the "Islamic State." Similar to how the United States was able to constrict funding to al-Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. has been somewhat successful in attempting to stop finances flowing to the "Islamic State." With the "Islamic State" operating domestically and abroad, money was flowing through charitable donations and Western Union money transfers (Levitt 2014, 5-6). Once the U.S. started sanctioning countries and targeting individuals that utilized these systems for sending money to the "Islamic State," the deposits dropped (Levitt

2014, 6). Additionally Operation Inherent Resolve has systematically targeted multiple oil fields throughout “Islamic State” controlled territory in order to limit financial gains from the illegal sale of this oil. Since the beginning of the U.S. led coalition began targeting financial hubs of the “Islamic State,” oil revenue has fallen considerably for the group from a once height of \$2 million profit a day down to less than 70% of their original capacity (however this number varies greatly over time, but regardless the airstrikes have suppressed their income) (Phillips 2014). This has led the “Islamic State” to adapt to the U.S. campaign of limiting their finances by looking for alternative ways of continuing their financial splendor. Kidnapping ransoms, the pillaging and selling of antiques from throughout the Middle East, and extreme taxation on their domestic citizenry has increased (Levitt 2014, 11).

Although the United States has seen success in limiting the finances of the “Islamic State,” they have failed in their strategy of supporting the Iraqi government and military to become more effective as a government and militarily. Furthermore the United States’ on-again, off-again policy of arming and training moderate Syrian rebels and rearming Iraqi forces has proven problematic. Despite the DoD’s best efforts of keeping the weapons supplied to the moderate Syrian rebels to fight both the Assad regime and the “Islamic State,” a recent report by the Conflict Armament Research (CAR) group has collected convincing evidence that these arms are in fact reaching the “Islamic State” in large numbers (2014). Approximately 1/3 of all weaponry found in their analysis of battlefield weapons, from Northern Iraq and Northern Syria throughout July and August 2014, used by the “Islamic State” were produced in the United States (2014, 6). As mentioned earlier the United States has been somewhat successful in limiting the “Islamic State’s” finances, but the “Islamic State” is also still very capable of buying weaponry and arms from third-party providers. This is clear as the vast majority of weapons

found in CAR's study are of Russian and Chinese origin (2014, 5-7). Notwithstanding the arms leakage by rebels, what is most troublesome is the continued arming of Iraqi forces that have lost battles to the "Islamic State" where their original weaponry was captured. On September 18, 2014 the DoD had Congress pass H.J. Resolution 124 which allows the DoD to not only continue to arm "appropriately vetted elements of Syrian opposition," but also trains and arms the Iraqi military complex that has consistently failed in combating the "Islamic State" (2014, Sec. 149). The lack of traceable control mechanisms to track arms once they enter the hands of both the Iraqi Army or the Syrian rebels is a policy flaw that the "Islamic State" likes to take advantage of. Abu Safiyya, a Chilean "Islamic State" spokesperson, addresses this very issue in a video released at the end of June 2014. He is standing in front of a fleet of cars and weapons from a recently taken over Iraqi border checkpoint. Abu Safiyya directs his message to America and states that the West should "...just keep giving and we will keep taking *in sha Allah*... look at how much money America spends at fighting Islam, instead it just ends up being in our pockets" (Islamic State 2014, 6:30-7:45). "Islamic State" videos across the web continue to flaunt their – stolen- American-made cars, tanks, weapons, and even humanitarian aid. It seems likely that this will continue so long as there is no alternative policy on providing aid to rebel groups in the region and even the Iraqi military.

Unlike previous wars in the region, the Gulf War and War in Iraq, the United States has in comparison devoted little resources to fighting the "Islamic State." This has lead to a perpetual tug-of-war between the American-back Iraqi military and the "Islamic State" in both terms of territorial gains as well as psychological gains. It appears as if the Obama administration's 'Iraq First' policy has therefore ultimately failed in holding the "Islamic State's" territorial line to a minimal. As of writing the "Islamic State" has taken the city of Ramadi, which is only 70 miles

west of Iraq's capital, Baghdad. While the "Islamic State" has been fighting for Ramadi since 2013, the sheer takeover is extremely significant for the coalition moving forwards. Defense Secretary Ash Carter spoke a few days after Ramadi's fall, May 24, 2015, to explain his hesitation in moving forward with the current policy towards fighting the "Islamic State" through supporting the Iraqi military. Carter believes that the Iraqi military is not a strong ally as "what apparently happened was that the Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight... They were not outnumbered. In fact, they vastly outnumbered the opposing force, and yet they failed to fight, they withdrew from the site, and that says to me, and I think to most of us, that we have an issue with the will of the Iraqis to fight ISIL and defend themselves" (Starr 2015). While Carter is correct in his disappointment with the Iraqi military, the "Islamic State's" battle tactics are difficult to counter and morale is impossible to buy.

3.2- Department of State Policy Actions

The Department of State supports the DoD's strategy towards countering the "Islamic State," but there is a difference by focusing on the root causes of radicalization rather than the outcomes of said radicalization. John R. Allen, the Department of State's Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, is relying on providence of humanitarian assistance to those affected by the "Islamic State" in an effort of good faith as well as maintaining an extensive online campaign to counter the "Islamic State's" propaganda war (State Dept. 2015).

The Department of State's counter propaganda war reaches all areas of the web via the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication (CSCC) that was established in 2011 under the order of Executive Order 13584 (Executive Order 13584 2011). Their mission is

divided into different areas of expertise but primarily focuses on disseminating extremist ideologies and narratives in the following ways:

“The integrated analysis component leverages the Intelligence Community and other substantive experts to ensure CSCC communicators benefit from the best information and analysis available. The plans and operations component draws on this input to devise effective ways to counter the terrorist narrative. The Digital Outreach Team actively and openly engages in Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi, and Somali to counter terrorist propaganda and misinformation about the United States across a wide variety of interactive digital environments that had previously been ceded to extremists” (State Department).

The most attention-grabbing piece of the DoS’ policy that directly targets the “Islamic State’s” message is the Think Again Turn Away video campaign, which was established in 2013 as a component of the CSCC. The Department of State over the past nine months has created and released multiple videos in English directly depicting the “Islamic State” in an extremely negative fashion in an effort to curb radicalization of Westerners. In addition to an English campaign their anti-radicalization campaign in Arabic and Urdu began back in 2011 (Katz, Rita, and Tessa Berenson 2014). Their most famous video is ‘Welcome to the “Islamic State” Land (ISIS/ISIL)’ where graphic images and sarcastic overtones are played to bombard the viewer with the negatives of the “Islamic State” (Think Again Turn Away 2014). Although the intention is valiant, the majority of viewers and reporters see this campaign as embarrassing and an ultimate failure of the Department of State to properly target the root causes of radicalization and why people join the “Islamic State.” Another major problem with the Department of State’s campaign is the ability for critical and active engagement with jihadis online and giving them a platform to voice their opinions directly to the Think Again Turn Away Twitter account. The Twitter account is known to engage in outlandish debates with known jihadi accounts over everything from crucifixions to American foreign policy (Katz, Rita, and Tessa Berenson 2014). The sheer numbers of pro-“Islamic State” accounts in comparison to anti-“Islamic State”

accounts creates a problem for Department of State officials in strictly practical efforts. While Twitter is actively taking down “Islamic State” affiliated accounts, the “Islamic State” is extremely proficient at creating bots and utilizing hash tags to significantly outnumber their adversaries (Porter 2015).

Both the DoD and DoS policy programs are reactionary to whatever the “Islamic State” does or doesn’t do. However the United States must develop a appropriate program in order to truly combat the “Islamic State” online and on the ground—or else she faces gridlock with a non state actor. Addressing root issues such as Sunni and Shiite current and future tensions may be more beneficial to the region as a whole. Additionally the present situation of mutual dependence of the Sunnis on the “Islamic State” for both financial security and ethnic protection is of critical importance. This mutual dependence is not going away until the very fabric of the relationship changes, or there is a promise of future stability in an Iraq and Syria free of the “Islamic State.”

3.3- Action and Reaction Cycle

The “Islamic State’s” incredible territorial and military advancements have caused the world to react. When Operation Inherent Resolve began the “Islamic State” was already conducting massive bombings, propaganda videos, and creating laws for its territory, but the United States’ involvement elevated the conflict with the “Islamic State.” Each actor is trying to provoke the other, and each actor is trying to achieve a drastically different end.

Two key events show the direct connection between “Islamic State” actions that provoke or respond to actions by the West. In early 2015 the “Islamic State” captured Haruna Yukawa and Kenji Goto, two Japanese journalists, and multiple videos were released demanding a \$200 million ransom for their safe release. The amount that the “Islamic State” was asking for is significant. Just weeks prior to their capture the government of Japan announced it would be

committing \$200 million towards the U.S. coalition against the “Islamic State.” When it became clear that Japan was not going to pay, both journalists were promptly executed with the videos posted online to dissuade further coalition involvement. Another event occurred where the “Islamic State” had to address their own population in response to a Western action. In early March 2015 the United States proactively dropped leaflets from the skies over Mosul warning residents to evacuate the city and to stay away from “Islamic State” gathering points for fear of airstrikes. The very next day the “Islamic State” proclaimed to Mosul’s residents that if they were to make any attempt to flee the city that prompt execution would occur as a result of their betrayal (Yusuf 2015).

Both events represent the tit-for-tat approach that the “Islamic State” and the United States take in this war. When one actor makes a move, the other is soon to follow. The symbolism with the Japanese ransom payments portray the “Islamic State” in a position to force Western powers to come to terms with the groups strength, and yet the “Islamic State” must be careful with keeping its population in tact. A continuous airstrike campaign by the United States will undoubtedly kill civilians in throngs, which never bodes well for a public relations campaign. There are signs that the “Islamic State” is adapting to the United States’ approach to this war. Recently men throughout the territory that the “Islamic State” holds must be subject to growing a beard (Islamic State 2015). This can be interpreted under religious pretenses, however a much more pragmatic explanation bears greater relevance. “Islamic State” militants are known for not trimming their beards (as it is forbidden to do so), so they stand out—however if the entire male population grew a beard then the “Islamic State” has a much easier time blending in with residents. The “Islamic State’s” adaption makes a strict air campaign even more difficult for the United States. As the “Islamic State” adapts, so too must the Western coalition.

Chapter 4- Methodology

“99 percent of all statistics only tell 49 percent of the story.”

Research Question:

How does the United States’ counter terror policy program affect the “Islamic State’s” actions?

My objective in designing this quantitative analysis is to find an unbiased assessment of how much influence and headway the United States is having in their current counter-terror campaign against the “Islamic State.” These findings can provide alternative avenues for U.S. counter terror policies or can reinforce the current campaign if it is found to be successful. Additionally I hope to find out if the “Islamic State” is becoming more violent, or relying on suicide attackers more, because that has implications for the group’s success and future as a whole based on Richardson’s analysis of experienced fighters and group cohesion (2014). Therefore quantitative data is the most practical way of obtaining this information due to the security concerns and relative media-black hole in territory controlled by the “Islamic State” where interviews are impossible, and security information is heavily guarded by both the United States and/or the “Islamic State.”

4.1- Research Background

In order to test my hypothesis regarding the United States’ influence on the “Islamic State’s” actions, I utilized quantitative methods to evaluate the recent events. The research involved a self-started data collection of “Islamic State” events as well as United States’ operations in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and online in an effort to counter the “Islamic State’s” proliferation on the Internet. “Islamic State” activities were collected from the time period April 8, 2013- April 21, 2015. April 8th was chosen as the starting point due to the fact that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi merged the group The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) with Jabhat al-Nusra (in Syria) to form The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS/ISIL), which further emphasized the prophetic

connection to the establishment and expansion of ISIS/ISIL (MEMRI 2013). The end date was chosen in consideration to writing time of this thesis. The starting point for collection of United States' coalition data was chosen as June 15, 2014 because that is when President Obama announced that the United States sending advisors to Iraq to protect U.S. interests in the region therefore announcing the beginning of the public involvement in the fight against the "Islamic State". The end date was also chosen as the end of April due to time constraints of this thesis.

I collected my data by going back throughout these time ranges and selecting case events and then further categorizing them. Events are considered actions by either party that range from domestic bombings, propaganda videos, military engagement, cyber attacks or significant cyber announcements, airstrikes, U.S. Special Forces operations, and humanitarian/aid missions. Events were derived primarily from news articles online, in English, due to the authentication troubles when focusing on what the "Islamic State" claims versus what western governments claim. As a result news articles were the least bias in terms of factual evidence regarding attack types, casualties, location, and targets. "Islamic State" events were categorized with a number of variables, as were United States' policies. The most important variable for my hypothesis was *impact*. *Impact* was categorized on an ordinal scale based on what I catalogued the impact of said event was. An *impact* score of 1 was classified as having a minimal effect on the other side. An *impact* score of 2 was classified as having a noteworthy effect on the other side. An *impact* score of 3 was classified as having a significant effect on the other side. While an *impact* score of 4 was reserved for special events that the other side acknowledged, and therefore was classified as having an extremely significant effect on the other side. Other variables ranged from place of occurrence to which the intended targets were to type of attack. These were all nominal categories.

The “Islamic State” has almost twice as many data points (events) as the United States does, 49 to 26 respectively, due to the fact that the “Islamic State” date range is considerably longer, and the security aspects of listing every United States event was taken into consideration. While the “Islamic State” openly claims events online to the world, the United States does not advertise its bombing targets or events therefore making it much more difficult to find a substantial amount of events to use as data. I realize the limiting factor of secrecy that the United States government may hold over certain events in this conflict. Some events may not be publicized or may be altered before official releases, however this is a necessary evil of conducting research on an ongoing conflict. I hope to have circumvented this possible bias by choosing a wide range of events from both parties in order to have a proper sample. Also due to the larger N count for both the United States and the “Islamic State”, the discrepancy in data amounts should not be an impacting factor for the data and tests overall. The main bias is my assessment of *impact* score, but as a student focusing on “Islamic State” for quite some time I believe my assessment of their events is generally accurate.

4.2- Research Design and Results

With the completion of data collection, I further categorized my thesis question of (*how*) *does the United States’ counter terror policy program affect the “Islamic State’s” actions?* This was initially tested on a general date range continuum to determine if the increased involvement over time has any correlation to an increase in *impact*. Next I wanted to test if Richardson’s theory regarding suicide bombers is correct in the sense that an organization will rely more on suicide bombers towards the end of their reign because they have lost more experienced fighters (Richardson 2006). And finally I wanted to evaluate who are the “Islamic State” targets because that analysis will allow the United States to more precisely pinpoint their policies.

I initially ran a bivariate correlation between *date* and *impact* in order to see if there was any relationship between an increase in activity for both the United States and the “Islamic State.” This was in order to assess whether or not there existed a linear relationship between an increase of the conflict intensity over time for both the United States and the “Islamic State.” Since the United States did not get directly involved in the conflict until after the “Islamic State” had been operating, this assumption makes sense in terms of direct fighting as both sides would be more invested in their respective outcomes. Quantitatively the independent variable in my first analysis was *date* while the dependent variable was *impact*. This is because I wanted to test whether or not the intensity of events over time increased or not. This assumes that the United States’ involvement in the conflict would ultimately increase *impact* due to events being more prevalent and deadly. Therefore my null and alternative hypotheses are as follows:

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between date of incident and a progressive increase in impact of events for both the United States and the “Islamic State.”

Alternative hypothesis: There is a relationship between date of incident and a progressive increase in impact of events for both the United States and the “Islamic State.”

Table 4.2.1:

Correlations		Impact	Date
Impact	Pearson Correlation	1	.111
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.345
	N	75	75
Date	Pearson Correlation	.111	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345	
	N	75	75

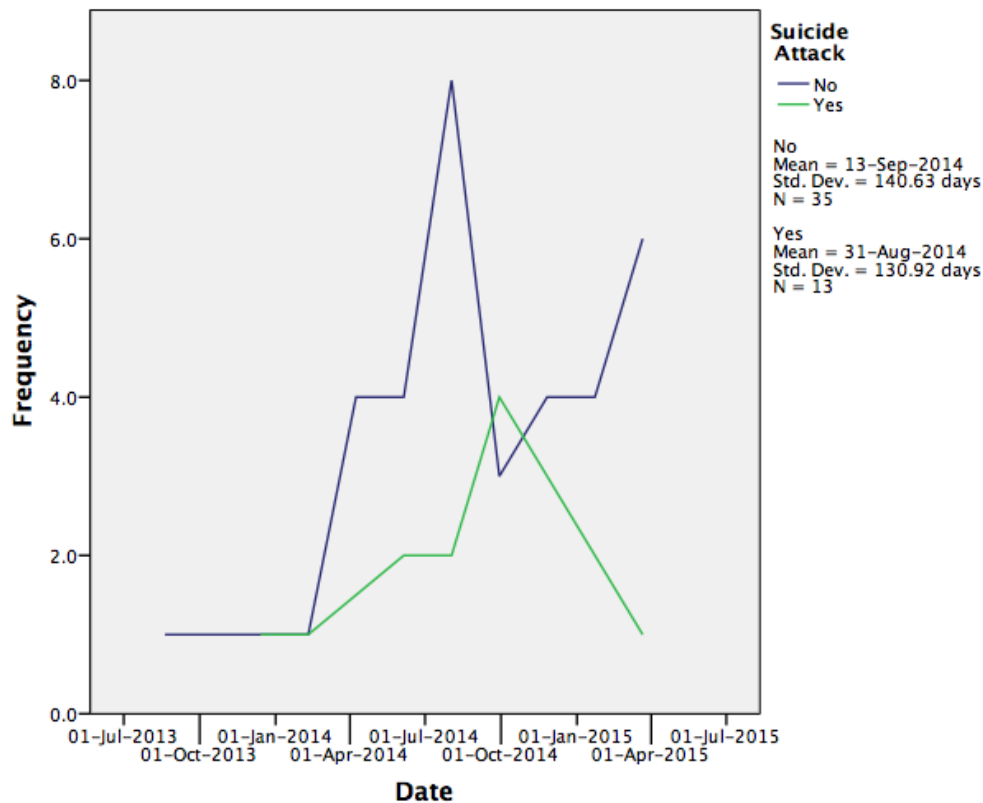
Source: author generated

My findings claim that I do not have enough evidence to reject my null hypothesis due to the high significance level. Therefore I must state that I have not found a relationship between the date of an event and the progressive increase in impact of events for both the United States and the “Islamic State.”

I also ran an ordinal logistic regression to determine the relationship between *impact*, *date*, and *Islamic State/United States*. I found that my model suggesting date as an independent variable continuous variable and IS affiliation as a nominal independent variable does not affect the dependent ordinal variable of *impact* whatsoever. My results were not even close to being statistically significant. This suggests that my model describing the relationship between United States’ and Islamic States’ *impact* of events over time in relation to each other have no bearing.

While collecting data on the events for the “Islamic State” I found it important to note whether or not each event included a suicide attack. This is because Richardson believes that an increase in suicide attackers as a means of conducting attacks may suggest that the group utilizing this method is weakening. This is because suicide attackers are much easier to use, are expendable, and most importantly rely on the least amount of training and experience possible. A group that can plan and execute attacks without the need for suicide bombers, as Richardson argues, is much more experienced and can rely on that experience for longevity. Henceforth I wanted to see if the “Islamic State” has been relying more on suicide attackers in response to the increased U.S. coalition actions over time. Since suicide attacks were denoted as a ‘no’, 0, or ‘yes’, 1, this variable was strictly nominal. I did not look at the number of suicide attackers involved for fear of misrepresenting the data due to faulty reported numbers.

Figure 4.2.1:

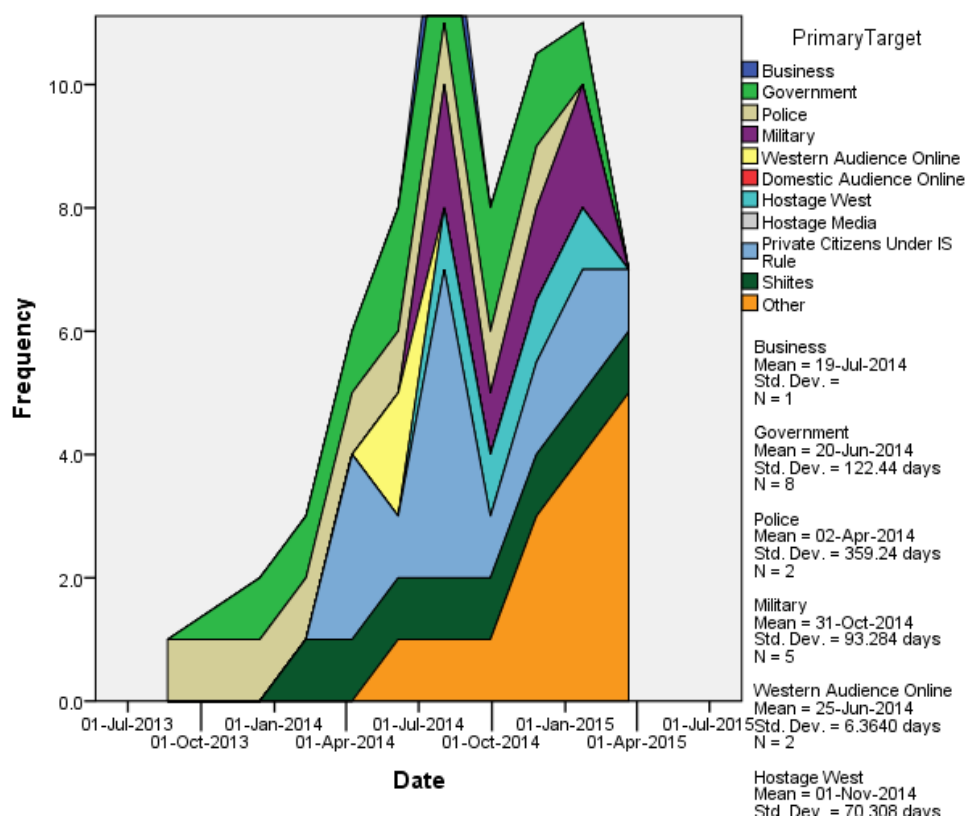


Source: author generated

What this graph shows is a decrease in suicide bombing rates over time since the data was collected. The data seems to spike from July-October 2014 and then continues on a downward trend until April 2015.

The “Islamic State” is an incredibly diverse organization fighting on multiple fronts in a war against whom? Expansion. Yet who exactly does the “Islamic State” target? During data collection I categorized each event into having a primary target and a secondary target in order to determine who is suffering the most at the hands of the “Islamic State.”

Figure 4.2.2:



Source: author generated

As we can see in figure 4.2.2, private citizens under “Islamic State” rule, Shiites, and ‘other’ are targeted the most by “Islamic State” events. This is significant because it shows that the “Islamic State” is not always on the offensive against military or government forces, but in fact commits atrocities against its own people at a much higher rate. Additionally Shiites being a primary target goes along with their ideological lines and further increases the Sunni-Shiite divide in Iraq and Syria. **Table 4.2.2:**

Correlations		Fatalities	Impact
Fatalities	Pearson Correlation	1	.268
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.066
	N	33	33
Impact	Pearson Correlation	.268	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.066	
	N	33	75

Source: author generated

Additionally I ran another correlation to test whether or not *impact* and *fatalities* are related.

While my significant level is not at $<.05$, it is very close. This can imply further research and more data points to suggest that as *impact* level increases, so does the amount of fatalities.

4.3- Findings and Implications

The implications of my findings are immense. The data allows us to make several conclusions about the “Islamic State” and the U.S. led coalition.

Primarily we have learned from the data that United States’ policy towards the “Islamic State” is fundamentally ineffective at curbing “Islamic State” events in both their frequency and *impact*. This result begs the question of what actually does affect the “Islamic State.” While the United States air campaign against the “Islamic State” has eliminated some key leaders, their military and government structure is made to withstand a lack of central leadership. Additionally other factors like recruitment, pillaging of towns taken over, weather conditions, and the strength of the Iraqi and Syrian militaries undoubtedly affect the “Islamic State” proving that United States’ counter terrorism actions are not solely responsible. The “Islamic State” is resourceful and utilizes natural resources such as dams that they have taken over to restrict water to towns and farmers in pro-government held areas (Almada Press 2015). This has a much larger impact on the war than killing someone as an example of sharia law would. Also the way in which the “Islamic State” operates is counterproductive for an exclusively air campaign due to their heavy reliance on a guerilla-like war, vehicles, and small cells that blend in with the general population. The United States will, hypothetically, run out of bombs before the “Islamic State” runs out of trucks. Plus there are targets that the United States just cannot destroy, like the dams mentioned above or “Islamic State” training and recruitment camps in the middle of cities, due to further

humanitarian disaster. Therefore we can conclude that the current air campaign against the “Islamic State” may not be the best option for the United States if their goal is truly to eliminate the “Islamic State” from the region.

Secondly we know that the use of suicide bombers spiked during the “Islamic State’s” summer offensive expansion and now is trending downwards. Since Baghdadi’s announcement of a complete “Islamic State” on June 29th, the group had ample opportunity to expand throughout Iraq and Syria. This occurrence of increased suicide bombings was indisputably fueled by “martyrs” utilizing SVBIEDs to clear the road through eliminating checkpoints, city border guards, and military bases. The downward trend could be a result of a stagnating “Islamic State” due to the lack of further territorial expansion. This stagnation was prominent during the early months of 2015 with the “Islamic State’s” loss of Kurdish-held Kobani, and with the ongoing battle between government and rebel forces against the “Islamic State” in Aleppo. However it should be noted that following the collection of my data the “Islamic State” was able to take the strategically located city of Ramadi, only 70 miles west of Baghdad and a major city in the 2003 Iraq War, due to the fact that they used multiple SVBIEDs at various entry points of the city in order to cause Iraqi soldiers to flee. The “Islamic State” clearly uses SVBIEDs and suicide bombers as a tactical weapon to not only instill fear in their opponent but also to set up the battlefield for success. Tactically the “Islamic State” is not faltering like Richardson’s theory of suicide bombers would suggest. In fact the “Islamic State’s” waiting list (Standish 2015) for martyrdom proves that being a suicide bomber is held in the highest regard in battle and more suicide bombers could possibly mean a stronger, more extreme narrative pushed by the “Islamic State.” We expect that there will be variation in the amount of suicide bombers used in relation to ongoing battles and territorial expansion.

Thirdly we know that the “Islamic State” targets its own citizenry just as much as it targets the Iraqi and Syrian military and government. This piece is critical as it means that the “Islamic State’s” governing style is based upon an authoritarian-like model. The “Islamic State” mandates everything in its territory from school curriculum to marriage laws therefore if a citizen is found going against the law the “Islamic State” makes an example of them—generally in the middle of a crowded square. Since the “Islamic State” is in a perpetual war with the two countries it is mainly operating in, it makes sense for the numbers to represent their clashes with military, government, and police. What is missing is targeting business. Unlike jihadis in the Maghreb, the “Islamic State” is not targeting any sort of energy producing factory. The “Islamic State” knows that it must keep the highly skilled workers in oil refineries and dams in order to continue experiencing economic prosperity. Taxes on farmers and individual business owners are vital for the “Islamic State” to continue funding its soldiers, therefore we can be certain that attacks against their tax base will not happen.

And finally we can somewhat claim that there *could be* a relationship between *impact* and fatalities. This finding isn’t too nonsensical due to the fact that the greater the fatalities the more attention an event gets. However what is noteworthy is that we didn’t have the proper significance to find a relationship. The “Islamic State” feeds off of propaganda and by publically executing one Westerner and posting it online they are able to get a much larger *impact* score than taking over a village. This could be the bias of the research however, but from a Western perspective there is a much larger response to any sort of hostage situation than military advances.

Regardless of what the media makes the “Islamic State” out to be they are an incredibly diverse organization that can sustain a U.S. led air coalition. They are driven by a resilient ideology that overtakes nearly every part of life.

Chapter 5- Policy Recommendations

Fighting the “Islamic State” includes a multitude of facets that must be addressed. The “Islamic State” has not only taken over territory in military fashion, but they have also created a humanitarian disaster with the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq and Syria that enter into neighboring countries that are not equipped to handle such an influx. An equally important issue to address is the manufactured rift between Sunnis and Shiites. The “Islamic State” relies on the mutual dependence from the Sunni population throughout Iraq and Syria. Some Sunnis choose the “Islamic State” because it is the lesser evil compared to a repressive Shiite government that would act in retaliation against Sunnis due to their support for the “Islamic State.” Geopolitics also play an important role with Iran actively engaging in the battle against the “Islamic State” and the United States supporting rebel groups in an effort to overthrow the Assad regime. These issues are incredibly complex, but will be addressed solely in relation to the fight against the “Islamic State.” And lastly the way in which the coalition fights the “Islamic State” must change in response to the strategy and tactics of the “Islamic State.” Therefore as a result of my findings I believe that four policy options should be enacted by the United States and the coalition in order to stop the “Islamic State’s” advance.

- Support a tribunal between Sunnis and Shiites. Fixing the sectarian distrust is absolutely essential to rebuilding the Middle East. This requires an effort by the governments in Iraq and Syria as well as the individual citizens living there. Although the Assad regime is still enduring a civil war, progress can start in Iraq. A communicative tribunal is necessary to bridge the gap between Sunni tribal leaders and the Shiite majority in Syria and ruling government in Iraq. Without accurately addressing this conflict discrimination and

retaliation will still occur and individuals will face prosecution for their role in complacency with the “Islamic State.”

- Strengthen neighboring countries like Lebanon and Jordan. Both of these countries are dealing with the vast influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq without the proper infrastructure or legal system to handle them. Refugees in Jordan alone now constitute for over 10% of Jordan’s population, while Lebanon’s delicate religious balance is becoming unhinged with a burgeoning Sunni refugee population. A stable Jordan and Lebanon is necessary to continue to focus fighting in just Iraq and Syria. If these countries were to fall into chaos it would be difficult to keep our interests and allies in the region safe.
- Stop arming the rebels against the Assad regime. As mentioned earlier in the text, arming rebels to fight the Assad regime has only helped the “Islamic State.” Both the rebels and the “Islamic State” desire the demise of the Assad regime, but the “Islamic State” is undoubtedly stronger than any rebel faction. Not only would the “Islamic State” take control if Assad was to fall, but they also benefit from the lethal and non-lethal aid that the United States sends. In order to stop the illegal flow of American made weapons to the “Islamic State” we must stop arming rebel factions we know little about.
- Enhance security measures to match “Islamic State” tactics. Since we know that the “Islamic State” heavily relies on SVBIEDs the coalition can take action against this battle tactic. Checkpoints are by and large the best defense against having SVBIED enter a city or military base. By properly staffing checkpoints and utilizing defensive tactics, such as street spikes at over 500m away, SVBIEDs will come to a halt before entering the checkpoint. The Iraqi military’s reliance on anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) for protecting against SVBIEDs has been effective, but only when the environment allows

so. ATGMs need open space and a long distance in order to hit a SVBIED. In urban settings sometimes line of sight is down to a few hundred meters, which is not enough for a ATGM to be effective. Therefore by enhancing checkpoints in conjunction with ATGMs, the defending militaries have a chance at stopping the “Islamic State’s” most effective weapon, the SVBIED.

This list is not meant to be exclusive and should be adjusted according to the ongoing battle developments in the region.

Conclusion

“In a very short time the Islamic State has become the most compelling and attractive organization for Muslim fighters around the world, more so than al-Qaeda ever was.” –Sunny Hundal, Al Jazeera Reporter

This study has hopefully enlightened the reader to the difficulties of creating a counter terror policy to combat the “Islamic State.” By examining the history, ideology, and military strategy of this terrorist group we can develop more targeted policies to impede their advance throughout the Middle East. Examination of current United States’ counter terror policies allow us to conclude on their effectiveness and overall message to the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. The primary data collection on recent events by the “Islamic State” and United States allowed research on the effectiveness of these counter terror policies. By bridging the gap between terrorism theory and actuality of counter terror policies on the ground in an ongoing conflict we are able to obtain an accurate view of success or lack thereof.

Our findings show that there is no significant relationship between an increase in U.S. engagement with the “Islamic State” and an increase in *impact* of said events. Additionally our model cannot explain why the “Islamic State” acts in the way it does. By examining battle tactics, like suicide bombing rate and targets, we can conclude that the “Islamic State” is a highly trained organization with an overall battle strategy that even United States’ coalition bombing cannot deter. By evaluating this data we can also draw conclusions as to how to counter the “Islamic State’s” advance through pinpointing the root problems they try to exploit.

Further research is absolutely vital to understanding this group and its motivations. While this study provided an overview of the group as a whole, a more thorough analysis of events by outside actors other than the United States could be of benefit. It would also be beneficial to have

access to secret information by the United States regarding attacks against the “Islamic State” due to the assumption that not all attacks are publicized and especially ones with consequence.

Regardless of the limitations of the research, important findings have been presented with adequate solutions that may stop the progression of the “Islamic State” at the time of writing. The future of the “Islamic State” is unclear as is the future of the United States’ coalition against them. However what is clear is the message that the “Islamic State” is able to portray. As Anwar al-Awlaki said in a video message to fellow extremists, it does not matter whether or not the “Islamic State” survives in its current state or is destroyed, it is still a monumental event for it represents a move of the idea from the theoretical realm into the real world. This real world is something that the United States and her western allies must face in the coming years and only a properly targeted counter terror policy program can correctly stop it.

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