

Profiles of Islamic State Leaders

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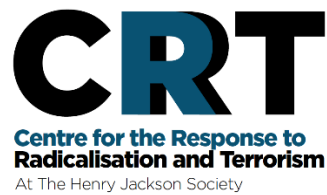
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Introduction

This paper is a comprehensive compilation of the leadership of the Islamic State (IS), the personnel and the structures by which they relate to one another within the territory governed by IS, and in its external wing that launches terrorist attacks around the world.

Two years on from its declaration of a caliphate in June 2014, IS has lost 45% of its territory in Iraq and between 16% and 20% of its territory in Syria.¹ But the foreign attacks continue to increase in scale and frequency. Since the speech given by Taha Falaha (Abu Muhammad al-Adnani), IS's spokesman, on 21 May 2016, there have been no less than a dozen terrorist attacks outside the territory of the caliphate that have been claimed by IS, from Baghdad and Bangladesh to the United States, France, and Germany.

The U.S.-led international coalition against IS is proceeding on the basis that the existence of the caliphate is driving IS's appeal, and therefore dismantling the statelet will diminish that appeal.² But it isn't working, as the director of the Central Intelligence agency recently explained: "Despite all our progress against [IS] on the battlefield ... our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach. In fact, as the pressure mounts on [IS], we judge that it will intensify its global terror campaign to maintain its dominance of the global terrorism agenda."³

IS has in fact been able to convert territorial losses into ideological legitimacy because of the way the campaign is being conducted, and this is allowing IS to mobilise foreign supporters.⁴

One of the central messages of IS's propaganda is that it is defending Sunni Muslims against a worldwide, sectarian conspiracy led on the ground by Iran, Bashar al-Assad's regime, and the Iraqi, Lebanese, Afghan and other foreign Shi'a jihadist proxies of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), who are supported, politically and militarily, by the United States-led West and Russia.⁵ (IS sometimes adds in Israel, but it is not a major theme of their messaging.) The actions of the U.S. have hardly helped dispel this idea.⁶ The U.S. has moved closer and closer toward a de facto alignment with the Assad regime,⁷ and has supported the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish Marxist organisation registered by many countries as terrorist, to take over territory from which IS is displaced in Syria. In Iraq, U.S. warplanes have provided direct air cover for Iranian proxy militias to take urban centres from IS.⁸ Then on 27 June 2016, after six months of a botched ceasefire that had allowed the Russian-backed pro-Assad

¹ 'ISIS has lost nearly half the area it once claimed in Iraq: Pentagon', *AFP*, 17 May 2016, available at: www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/isis-has-lost-nearly-half-the-area-it-once-claimed-in-iraq-pentagon, last visited: 6 July 2016.

² 'Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest and Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, Brett McGurk', *The White House*, 10 June 2016, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/10/press-briefing-press-secretary-josh-earnest-and-special-presidential>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

³ Sisk, R., 'CIA Director Says ISIS Will Intensify Global Terror Campaign', *Military.com*, 16 June 2016, available at: www.military.com/daily-news/2016/06/16/isis-represents-long-term-terror-threat-cia-director-says.html, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁴ Hassan, H., 'Washington's War on the Islamic State Is Only Making It Stronger', *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2016, available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/16/washingtons-war-on-the-islamic-state-is-only-making-it-stronger-syria-iraq-libya/>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁵ Winter, C., 'The Virtual "Caliphate": Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy', *Quilliam*, October 2015, available at: <https://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-virtual-caliphate-understanding-islamic-states-propaganda-strategy.pdf>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁶ Doran, M., 'Obama's Secret Iran Strategy', *Mosaic Magazine*, 2 February 2015, available at: <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2015/02/obamas-secret-iran-strategy/>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁷ Orton, K., 'How the Iran Entente Caused the Syria Crisis', *The Tower*, April 2016, available at: www.thetower.org/article/how-the-iran-entente-caused-the-syria-crisis/, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁸ Nissenbaum, D., 'Iraq Resumes Offensive in Tikrit After U.S. Airstrikes', *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 March 2015, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/iraq-resumes-offensive-in-tikrit-after-u-s-airstrikes-1427476639, last visited: 6 July 2016.

forces to advance and done nothing to halt the civilian casualties in Syria, America presented a plan for even closer coordination with Russia against listed terrorist organisations in exchange for pressure on Assad to cease attacks on U.S.-backed rebel groups⁹ – a promise Moscow could not deliver on, even if it wanted to.

With its narrative of being the Sunni protector increasingly ratified, IS is more and more able to call on its international sympathisers to act in its name. IS is able to pass off its territorial losses as a result of this global conspiracy, and incite terrorist attacks in the West and other countries as “punishment” for their “anti-Sunni” (i.e. anti-IS) policies. In this way, the West’s current policy plays directly into IS’s hands.

IS is also building the case that it recovered once – after the defeat in 2008 – and can do so again.¹⁰ IS was driven from the cities and into the deserts, but the West’s will gave way, they withdrew from Iraq. Through a mixture of offensive operations against their enemies and a drift in politics in Baghdad toward ever-more-extreme Shi’a supremacism and Iranian domination, IS found room to manoeuvre among Sunni communities that had previously ejected them. IS believes this is a war of attrition that it can win.

IS’s strategic vision is shaped by jihadi strategists like Mohammad Hasan Khalil al-Hakim (Abu Bakr Naji), the author of the infamous *Management of Savagery*,¹¹ and Mustafa Nasar (Abu Musab al-Suri)¹²: they understand that they are outmatched in military terms but their focus is to exhaust their enemies. And IS believes its strategy is working: the West’s reluctance to engage is increasing. Five years ago, there were Western ground troops in Iraq, now there are only “advisers” and the West’s main effort is from the air. The commitment will be even less next time around, in IS’s telling. In the meantime, the takeover of Sunni cities by the PKK and IRGC-controlled militias ensures that IS will have plenty of political space to work with.

A lot of analysis of the recent IS attacks abroad assumes that this is IS retaliating for their losses in Syria and Iraq, and doubtless IS is seeking to raise the cost to its enemies of rolling back their territorial control. But the global focus of IS – the external attacks and attracting foreign fighters – has been intertwined with its state-building project from the very beginning.

For IS, portraying momentum on the battlefield in the Fertile Crescent shows God’s favour, attracting foreign volunteers who are (as a category) the most ideologically motivated sector of IS’s recruits. Using its media apparatus, built under the direction of Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi), one of the organisation’s earliest and most crucial supporters to reach directly into foreign countries in their own local languages, IS is able to recruit these zealous foreign fighters, who have no connection to the local populations, and are therefore prepared to sacrifice themselves and commit atrocities unhesitatingly to fortify and expand the caliphate – which helps attract more

⁹ Rogin, J., ‘Obama proposes new military partnership with Russia in Syria’, *The Washington Post*, 30 June 2016, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/obama-proposes-new-military-partnership-with-russia-in-syria/2016/06/29/8e8b2e2a-3c3f-11e6-80bc-d06711fd2125_story.html, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹⁰ Muhammad al-Adnani, A., ‘That They Live By Proof’, *Al-Hayat Media Centre*, 21 May 2016, available at: <https://pietervanostacyen.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/al-hayat-that-they-live-by-proof.pdf>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹¹ Hassan, H., ‘The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context’, *Carnegie*, 13 June 2016, available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context/j1iy>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹² Ryan, M., ‘Dabiq: What Islamic State’s New Magazine Tells Us about Their Strategic Direction, Recruitment Patterns and Guerrilla Doctrine’, *Jamestown Foundation*, 1 August 2014, available at: www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42702#.V3zgp7grLIU, last visited: 6 July 2016.

foreign recruits. One way IS has maximised this flow of foreign fighters is by playing on the apocalyptic element in Islam, energising Jihadi-Salafists to join IS rather than al-Qaeda, which has not significantly drawn on End of Days theology. Whatever IS's leaders' true eschatological beliefs, as a recruitment pitch the promise of Armageddon "always works," as an IS jihadi noted.¹³

IS's view of the utility of foreign attacks was also shaped by its strategic defeat in Iraq and the grinding down of its leadership between 2008 and 2010, where one of its main problems was infiltration. IS not only improved its own internal counterintelligence structures but also determined on a pre-emptive course of infiltrating its foes – on the near-abroad of its caliphate, in Syrian rebel- and regime-held areas, in Iraqi government-held areas, and in Turkey, as well as further afield in Europe. "Don't hear about us, hear from us," is a phrase many IS recruits have used to describe this stratagem. IS fashioned a robust capacity to deter and punish its enemies as a central component of its state-building project.¹⁴ The foreign attacks were not reactive to IS's statelet coming under pressure; the foreign track had always been an integral part of IS's strategic vision, and its increased lethality throughout 2015 was a sign of the maturity of IS's foreign networks.

The evidence that has surfaced in the wake of the 13 November 2015 Paris attacks has underlined the fact that foreign terrorist attacks were always part of IS's plans: IS has been plotting terrorist attacks in Europe since at least January 2014¹⁵ – before the September 2014 call for lone-actor attacks, and before the U.S.-led coalition started airstrikes against IS on 7 August 2014. And this begins as early as 2007: within a year of IS declaring statehood they claimed responsibility for a terrorist attack in Britain.¹⁶

In assessing terrorist attacks in the West, the plots break down into three categories:¹⁷

1. **Command and Control or Directed:** Individuals travel to meet formal members of the jihadi group who transmit to them "specific guidance on means, timing, and targets", leaving "some field control ... for the conspirators", and remain in communication with them once they return to their home countries.
2. **Suggested or Endorsed:** Individuals travel to areas where the terrorist group is based and are given a concept for an attack or target – a city or a type of attack – and an endorsement to carry it out under the banner of the organisation, but with minimal communication or resources once the conspirator is back in his home country. In more recent times, the outreach from the individual to the organisation can be virtual – through cyberspace, rather than physical travel – where members of the terrorist group act as guides for attacks.
3. **Inspired:** Individuals might or might not travel to areas where the jihadi group operates; they receive no instructions or endorsement and act at their own initiative, perhaps inspired by media or online content, without the group's foreknowledge.

¹³ Malas, N., 'Ancient Prophecies Motivate Islamic State Militants', *The Wall Street Journal*, 18 November 2014, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/ancient-prophecies-motivate-islamic-state-militants-1416337441, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹⁴ Hassan, H. and Weiss, M., *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), p.170.

¹⁵ Callimachi, R., 'How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze', *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016, available at: www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹⁶ 'Al Muhajir Says Al Qaeda In Iraq Behind London And Glasgow Car Bombings', *CBS*, 24 October 2008, available at: www.cbsnews.com/news/al-muhajir-says-al-qaeda-in-iraq-behind-london-and-glasgow-car-bombings/, last visited: 6 July 2016.

¹⁷ Silber, M., *The Al Qaeda Factor: Plots Against the West* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp.3-5.

This framework holds for IS's campaign of attacks against Europe and America – as IS itself has said. “IS has allowed [its agents] the ability to deploy resources for three types of terrorist attacks,” an IS propaganda magazine explained in February 2016. There is “the ‘classic’ [attack that is] organized and ordered at the level of the leadership ... to isolated actions of self-radicalized people, who have absolutely no direct contact with IS, but who will nonetheless consciously act on its behalf,”¹⁸ and, implicitly, a category somewhere in between.

A lot of IS's attacks in Europe and America in 2014 and 2015 were classified as “lone wolf” attacks – category three above. This was a mistake; they tended to be category two incidents. But, in truth, there is a broader problem with the “lone wolf” descriptor, which is rapidly approaching a point of analytical demise. Such cases do exist in the terrorism field but they are increasingly rare and with IS the notion is somewhat misleading *ab initio*.

For al-Qaeda, the existence of Europeans who are sympathetic to its ideology is an achievement in itself. Al-Qaeda wishes to reshape the faith and these people are evidence that it is working. Such sympathisers are therefore seen as a valuable resource, to be expended only in select circumstances of necessity or reward. In no sense does al-Qaeda see these sympathisers as *within* the organisation, which remains elitist and vanguardist in structure. IS takes a different view. IS dispenses with al-Qaeda's elaborate justification for inflicting harm on civilians,¹⁹ stating outright that it owes no duty of protection to unbelievers, and it regards even those sympathisers with no direct connection to it as soldiers equivalent to those fighters inside its statelet. IS has incited its supporters to commit as many attacks as quickly as possible.²⁰ IS-“inspired” attacks, therefore, occur in the context of a strategic programme laid down by IS.

A more practical objection to the “lone wolf” designation is that almost all of IS's “inspired” attacks have, even when the attack itself is conducted by a single individual, involved networks, which is to say accomplices.

In the course of events, the misdiagnosis of the 2014 and 2015 European attacks as “lone wolf” incidents, when they were actually “suggested or endorsed,” having direct links to IS, transpired to be more than an academic error.

As attacks and attempted attacks mounted in Europe – the May 2014 shooting at the Jewish museum in Belgium by Mehdi Nemmouche; the January 2015 shootout that shut down a terrorist cell in Verviers, Belgium; the April 2015 murder by Sid Ahmed Ghlam of a schoolteacher in Villejuif, Paris, that was intended to lead onto attacks on Christian churches; and the August 2015 attempted shooting spree by Ayoub el-Khazzani aboard a high-speed Thalys train from Amsterdam to Paris – governments continued (with the slight exception of Verviers) to discount the evidence that these plots were connected to IS at its core, and overlooked the possibility they were interconnected.²¹

¹⁸ Islamic State, ‘Attentats Sur La Voie Prophetique (Attacks In The Prophetic Way)’, *Dar al-Islam* 8, 6 February 2016, available at: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/dacc84r-al-islacc84m-magazine-8.pdf>, last visited: 6 July 2016, p.94.

¹⁹ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2016). Pages 56-65.

²⁰ Hassan, H., ‘Isis rallies lone wolves to the jihadi cause’, *Financial Times*, 14 June 2016, available at: <https://next.ft.com/content/17c31bda-3216-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153>, last visited: 25 July 2016.

²¹ Callimachi, R., ‘How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze’, *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016.

By failing to ask why IS had been conducting these low-scale attacks at this tempo, European security services missed what was lurking behind them: the 13 November 2015 mass-killing in Paris. The infrastructure from that attack also carried out the 22 March 2016 bombings at the airport and the Metro station in Brussels. As a French official later explained, IS “kept security services busy and distracted with these mini-plots while preparing the real attack”.²²

The body behind these attacks was *Amn al-Kharji*, IS’s foreign intelligence service, one of the four branches of its intelligence apparatus, known as *Amn al-Dawla* (State Security). *Amn al-Kharji* is used to infiltrate areas outside the caliphate for the purposes of espionage and terrorism. *Amn al-Kharji* helps conquer territory – IS’s tradecraft has been more important (and more impressive) than its military prowess in expanding the borders of the caliphate – and allows IS to strike at its enemies, whether that is pre-emptively eliminating those who would resist its rule or attacking the citizens of foreign states as part of IS’s political warfare.²³

Not only had many terrorists in Europe who acted in IS’s name done so under IS’s guidelines and in collusion with others, making it difficult to describe them as “lone wolves,” but the attackers had often directly coordinated, online or through an encrypted platform like Telegram and WhatsApp, with a guide from *Amn al-Kharji*.

Amn al-Kharji is headquartered in al-Bab, a city in Syria’s northern Aleppo Province, about thirty miles from the Turkish border, and is believed to be led by a French citizen, known only as Abu Sulayman al-Firansi. Abu Sulayman is the highest-ranking Westerner within the organisation, and his role was attained after he conceived at least part of the November 2015 Paris attacks.²⁴

There is believed to be a Tunisian in a senior position within *Amn al-Kharji*, who was another of the “brains” behind the Paris attack.²⁵ A senior IS defector named the Tunisian as Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Tunisi, and said Abu Sulayman replaced Abu Abd al-Rahman at the head of *Amn al-Kharji* after the Paris atrocity became IS’s greatest “success” to date and Abu Sulayman’s contribution was adjudged the superior.²⁶

Fabien Clain, a Frenchman, was involved in both the planning and recruitment for the assault on Paris in November 2015. Clain read the IS claim of responsibility for the Paris attacks, and mentioned an attack in the eighteenth arrondissement that never took place, providing strong evidence that IS had detailed foreknowledge of the plot (one of the attackers backed out at the last moment). Clain is believed to have selected the Bataclan as one of the targets, having previously tried to attack the building because it was owned by Jews.²⁷ Clain was a recruiter for IS’s predecessor in the early 2000s when it was only based in Iraq, activity for which he was

²² Callimachi, R., Bennhold, K., and Fourquet, L., ‘How the Paris Attackers Honed Their Assault Through Trial and Error’, *The New York Times*, 30 November 2015, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/01/world/europe/how-the-paris-attackers-honed-their-assault-through-trial-and-error.html>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

²³ Weiss, M., ‘Confessions of an ISIS Spy’, *The Daily Beast*, 16 November 2015, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/longforms/2015/isis-weiss/confessions-of-an-isis-spy.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

²⁴ Weiss, M., ‘Is This Frenchman Running ISIS Terror Networks in the West?’, *The Daily Beast*, 2 May 2016, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/05/01/is-this-frenchman-running-isis-terror-networks-in-the-west.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

²⁵ Cruickshank, P., ‘Senior European official: ISIS wants to hit UK; trail for Salah Abdeslam is cold,’ *CNN*, December 5, 2015, available at: edition.cnn.com/2015/12/03/europe/salah-abdeslam-cold-trail-paris-attacks/, last visited: 25 July 2016.

²⁶ Weiss, M., ‘Is This Frenchman Running ISIS Terror Networks in the West?’, *The Daily Beast*, 2 May 2016.

²⁷ Guibert, N. and Seelow, S., ‘Fabien Clain, the “voice” of the Paris massacre,’ *Le Monde*, 18 November 2015, available at: www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2015/11/18/fabien-clain-la-voix-du-massacre-de-paris-avait-deja-menace-le-bataclan-en-2009_4812298_4809495.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

imprisoned. Clain had connections to Mohamed Merah, who murdered people in Toulouse in southern France in March 2012, including three Jewish children, and to Ghلام.²⁸

Though Clain has a higher public profile, evidence since the March 2016 Brussels attack has suggested that above him in the chain-of-command for IS's European network is another Frenchman, Salim Benghalem, who was talent-spotted for a role in the external operations division by IS while working as a prison guard in Syria.²⁹ Benghalem was named a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the U.S. State Department in September 2014. Benghalem was then "a Syria-based French extremist and [IS] member, who carries out executions on behalf of the group," according to State, which simultaneously designated al-Absi.³⁰ Benghalem was also directly tied to Nemmouche and to Cherif Kouachi, who with his brother, Said, carried out the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in January 2015.³¹ Nemmouche had trained with Benghalem in Syria, and Benghalem was said at the time of Nemmouche's attack, in mid-2014, to be based in al-Bab – which is suggestive – working as a policeman. Benghalem was a childhood friend of Cherif's, who gained training and instruction from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and helped radicalise his brother.³² Benghalem appeared in an IS propaganda video soon after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack to praise that attack, even though it was AQAP's, and the concurrent attack of IS's own by Amedy Coulibaly on the Jewish mini-mart.³³

The lead operative of the Paris attacks was Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a Belgian known to his comrades as Abu Umar al-Baljiki. Abaaoud was also the IS's operative who guided Nemmouche, the Verviers cell, Ghلام, and el-Khazzani. Abaaoud faked his death in October 2014 but showed up on the European security radar after the Verviers roll-up, the only attack where an IS role was admitted in real time. Abaaoud had been detected as in contact with the would-be killers in Verviers from his hideout in Greece. Abaaoud managed to flee Europe after the Verviers terrorists were killed,³⁴ showing up in IS's *Dabiq* magazine the next month to taunt the West.³⁵ Abaaoud had, unusually for a European, been given a position within IS's Amn al-Dawla, joining an elite squad known as Katibat al-Battar and being made a military emir in Syria's eastern province of Deir Ezzor.³⁶ Abaaoud was scouted during this time and moved to IS's external operations wing. "Abaaoud ... was the principal commander of future attacks in Europe," and "was in charge of vetting the applications of future candidates".³⁷ Abaaoud worked with Clain to select those who carried out the Paris attacks.³⁸

²⁸ 'Voice of Paris terror: seasoned French jihadist Fabien Clain,' *AFP*, November 17, 2015, available at: news.yahoo.com/voice-paris-terror-seasoned-french-jihadist-fabien-clain-010002949.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

²⁹ Gartenstein-Ross, D. and Barr, N., 'Bloody Ramadan: How the Islamic State Coordinated A Global Terrorist Campaign,' *War on the Rocks*, 20 July 2016, available at: warontherocks.com/2016/07/bloody-ramadan-how-the-islamic-state-coordinated-a-global-terrorist-campaign/, last visited: 25 July 2016.

³⁰ 'Designations of Foreign Terrorist Fighters,' *U.S. Department of State*, 24 September 2014, available at: www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232067.htm, last visited: 25 July 2016.

³¹ Harris, S., 'The Hunt for ISIS' French Chief Executioner', *The Daily Beast*, 14 November 2015, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/11/14/the-hunt-for-isis-french-chief-executioner.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

³² Callimachi, R. and Yardley, J., 'From Amateur to Ruthless Jihadist in France,' *The New York Times*, 17 January 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/world/europe/paris-terrorism-brothers-said-cherif-kouachi-charlie-hebdo.html, last visited: 25 July 2015.

³³ 'Paris attacks: Was Salim Benghalem the real ringleader?', *BBC*, 26 January 2016, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35399021, last visited: 25 July 2016.

³⁴ van Vlierden, G., 'Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud', *CTC Sentinel*, 15 December 2015, available at: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/profile-paris-attack-ringleader-abdelhamid-abaaoud>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

³⁵ Orton, D., 'Paris Attackers Had Already Appeared in the Islamic State's Propaganda', 25 January 2016, available at: <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/paris-attackers-had-already-appeared-in-the-islamic-states-propaganda/>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

³⁶ Gauthier-Villars, D., Meichtry, S., and Bradley, M., 'Abdelhamid Abaaoud, Alleged Ringleader of Paris Attacks, Was "Emir of War" in Syria', *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2015, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/alleged-mastermind-of-paris-attacks-was-emir-of-war-in-syria-1447907485, last visited: 6 July 2016.

³⁷ Callimachi, R. 'How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze', *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016.

³⁸ Cruickshank, P., 'Senior European official: ISIS wants to hit UK; trail for Salah Abdeslam is cold,' *CNN*, December 5, 2015.

Two operatives in IS's external operations division with ties to the Paris cell were killed in the wave of targeted killings by the Coalition in December 2015.³⁹ One of these operatives had a direct link to Abaaoud, Charaffe al-Mouadan (whose kunya is also, rather confusingly, Abu Sulayman al-Firansi), and another handled the forging of paperwork, Abdul Qader Hakim. Tashin al-Hayali, an external operations "facilitator," was among the slain, and the Coalition also struck down two British citizens involved in IS's external operations: Rawand Dishlan Taheer, a "trusted" IS member who "assisted with command and control and handling and transferring money and equipment," and Siful Haq Sujan, an operations "planner" who "supported" IS's hacking and counter-surveillance efforts, using his training as a computer systems engineer.

Two further known British nationals had been involved in IS's external plotting. Junaid Hussain, one of IS's best-known Western recruiters and its most prominent hacker, and Reyaad Khan, were killed in airstrikes in the summer of 2015 while "involved in actively recruiting [IS] sympathisers and seeking to orchestrate specific ... attacks against the West, including directing a number of planned terrorist attacks ... in Britain, such as plots to attack high profile public commemorations".⁴⁰ Hussain was the guide for Elton Simpson, who on 3 May 2015 partnered with Nadir Soofi to attempt to massacre the participants of a competition held in Garland, Texas, to draw the Prophet Muhammad.⁴¹ Hussain publicly expressed support for the attack on the "Draw Muhammad" event within minutes of it beginning via Twitter.⁴²

The overall leader of IS's foreign terrorist apparatus is Taha Falaha, the group's governor of Syria and official spokesman, who signs-off on the external operations and functions as the intermediary between foreign operatives and the caliph.⁴³ It took some time to identify Falaha in this role, but the evidence has continued to accumulate - from captured suspects and hints in IS's own output - that Falaha does indeed occupy this role. In June 2014, a French citizen, Faiz Bouchrane, was arrested as he tried to bomb a Shi'a target in Lebanon on behalf of IS, and revealed that he had been sent by Falaha.⁴⁴ In the issue of *Dabiq* released after the March 2016 Brussels bombings, IS claimed as martyrs for its cause Khalid el-Bakraoui (Abu Walid al-Baljiki), who blew himself up on the subway train, and Khalid's brother Ibrahim (Abu Sulayman al-Baljiki), who blew himself up (with Najim Laachraoui) at the airport. Among the items in these obituaries was a dream Khalid had had in which Falaha had appeared as the key figure in leading the celebration of Khalid's death by suicide bombing.⁴⁵ Belief in the predictive power of dreams is a mainstay of the culture of IS, and the interpretation of dreams is something jihadists spend considerable amounts of their spare time engaged in.⁴⁶

³⁹ Cronk, T.M., 'Coalition Killed 10 Senior ISIL Leaders in December', *U.S. Department of Defence*, 29 December 2015, available at: www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/639489/coalition-killed-10-senior-isil-leaders-in-december, last visited: 25 July 2016.

⁴⁰ Cameron, D., 'Syria: refugees and counter-terrorism - Prime Minister's statement,' *Oral statement to Parliament*, 7 September 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/syria-refugees-and-counter-terrorism-prime-ministers-statement>, last visited: 25 July 2015.

⁴¹ Shane, S., 'Texas Attacker Left Trail of Extremist Ideas on Twitter,' *The New York Times*, 5 May 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/05/06/world/middleeast/isis-texas-muhammad-cartoons.html, last visited 27 July 2016.

⁴² Ackerman, S., MacAskill, E., and Ross, A., 'Junaid Hussain: British hacker for Isis believed killed in US air strike,' *The Guardian*, 27 August 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/27/junaid-hussain-british-hacker-for-isis-believed-killed-in-us-air-strike>, last visited: 27 July 2016.

⁴³ Schmitt, E., 'Paris Attacks and Other Assaults Seen as Evidence of a Shift by ISIS', *The New York Times*, 22 November 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/11/23/world/europe/paris-attacks-isis-threatens-west.html, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁴⁴ Callimachi, R., 'How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze', *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016.

⁴⁵ Zelin, A., 'New issue of the Islamic State's magazine: 'Dabiq #14'', *Jihadology*, 13 April 2016, p.7, available at: <http://jihadology.net/2016/04/13/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-magazine-dabiq-14/>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁴⁶ Hegghammer, T., 'Why Terrorists Weep: The Socio-Cultural Practices of Jihadi Militants', 16 April 2015, available at: http://hegghammer.com/_files/Hegghammer_-_Wilkinson_Memorial_Lecture.pdf, last visited: 6 July 2016.

The 13 November Paris atrocity is the farthest from the caliphate that IS has conducted an attack over which it had command-and-control capabilities. These attacks tend to occur in Syria and Iraq, such as the 23 May suicide bombings in Tartus City and Jableh, and the 3 July mass-murder in Karrada, Baghdad, and also in Turkey. The IS team that stormed Atatürk airport on 28 June with firearms and suicide vests was dispatched from Raqqa and under the control of IS's leadership from conception to execution.⁴⁷

Once the attacks get further afield, IS “sacrifices some command and control over attacks,” but still maintains a direct hand via the Amn al-Kharji, which engages in “virtual planning,” connecting to its operatives and those who wish to volunteer themselves to the organisation in Europe and elsewhere to provide encouragement and direction. Direct connections between cells of IS loyalists and the organisation itself that don't quite reach the level of command-and-control are particularly noticeable in South and East Asia.⁴⁸

In July 2016, there were four IS-claimed terrorist attacks in Europe: a ramming attack with a truck in Nice, France, on 14 July that massacred eighty-four people; an attack with a knife and a hatchet on a train in Würzburg, Germany, on 18 July; a suicide bombing near a music festival in Ansbach, Germany, on 24 July; and a two-man attack with knives on a church in Normandy, France, which murdered a priest on 26 July. None of these were “lone wolf” incidents.

In the cases of Würzburg (Muhammad Riyad), Ansbach (Mohammed Daleel),⁴⁹ and Normandy (Adel Kermiche and the unnamed Algerian minor)⁵⁰ the terrorists had given videos of themselves pledging allegiance to the caliph to Amaq, IS's “news” agency, before the attacks, meaning they were in communication with the organisation ahead of their attacks. In the Nice case, the terrorist, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, was seen in the truck with accomplices just hours before the attack and had sent text messages immediately preceding his rampage in which assistance “load[ing] the truck” and with the provision of weapons was discussed.⁵¹ Bouhlel has not yet been found to have contacted an Amn al-Kharji official,⁵² but such investigations take many months and the encryption software by which these communications often take place can make it impossible to find them at all.

While the investigation is ongoing in Nice, it is clear that the other July 2016 attacks in Europe are examples of “suggested or endorsed” by IS, and Daleel's suicide attack in Ansbach appears to have been a directed attack.

Al-Naba, IS's weekly newsletter – produced in the territories on a Saturday, distributed online on a Tuesday – gave a profile of Daleel in its 23/26 July edition that claimed he had been a member

⁴⁷ Karimi, F., Almasy, S., and Tuysuz, G., ‘ISIS leadership involved in Istanbul attack planning, Turkish source says’, CNN, 1 July 2016, available at: edition.cnn.com/2016/06/30/europe/turkey-istanbul-ataturk-airport-attack/, last visited: 26 July 2016.

⁴⁸ Gartenstein-Ross, D. and Barr, N., ‘Bloody Ramadan: How the Islamic State Coordinated A Global Terrorist Campaign’, *War on the Rocks*, 20 July 2016.

⁴⁹ Joscelyn, T., ‘Attacks in France and Germany claimed by Islamic State propaganda arm’, *The Long War Journal*, 26 July 2016, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/07/attacks-in-france-and-germany-claimed-by-islamic-state-propaganda-arm.php, last visited: 28 July 2016.

⁵⁰ ‘WATCH: ISIS Video Shows Normandy Priest Killers Pledging Allegiance to Islamic State’, *Heavy*, 27 July 2016, available at: heavy.com/news/2016/07/isis-islamic-state-rouen-france-jacques-hamel-adel-kermiche-allegiance-video-full-uncensored-youtube-mp4-download/, last visited: 28 July 2016.

⁵¹ Breeden, A., ‘Attacker in Nice Plotted for Months and Had Accomplices, French Prosecutor Says’, *The New York Times*, 21 July 2016, available at: www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/world/europe/attacker-in-nice-plotted-for-months-and-had-accomplices-french-prosecutor-says.html, last visited: 28 July 2016.

⁵² McKirdy, E., ‘Nice attack: Ties to ISIS not yet established, official says’, CNN, 21 July 2016, available at: edition.cnn.com/2016/07/18/europe/nice-france-attack/, last visited: 28 July 2016.

of IS since it was called al-Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen in January 2006. Daleel had then returned to Syria and joined IS there, reaffirming his allegiance after it split from al-Qaeda. Wounded in Syria, Daleel went to Europe. Over the three months Daleel was building his bomb and plotting his attack, he was in contact with an IS operative.⁵³ In short, Daleel was a secret long-term agent of IS's and appears to have had contact with his Amn al-Kharji guide that was more extensive than merely "suggested or endorsed".

Other examples, whose outcomes are as-yet known, of IS's operating methods is Abaaoud having tried to infiltrate 60 trained operatives into Europe in late 2015,⁵⁴ and one of the men involved in the Paris-Brussels network, Mohamed Abrini, visiting Britain in July 2015.⁵⁵ Five Brits related to the Paris-Brussels network have since been arrested,⁵⁶ but how many more received instructions or resources from Abrini is unknown.

For as long as violence and instability continues in Syria and Iraq, IS and other Jihadi-Salafists will have space to recruit and plan attacks against the West. The current U.S.-led campaign against IS is deeply flawed in its failure to empower local, legitimate actors to displace IS's territorial holdings, in making no effort to restrain the spreading influence of Iran nor the atrocities of an Assad regime that it has been formal Western policy since the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 to transition out of power.

The leadership of IS has sustained serious losses in recent months; the core of the organisation remains intact, however. As IS retreats from overt control of urban centres, there will be a temptation to call this victory. But the flaws in the U.S.-led campaign are setting the stage for an IS revival, and in the short term there will be many more terrorist attacks in the West from an increasingly robust and autonomous infrastructure whose fate is not bound to IS's military fortunes in Syria and Iraq.⁵⁷ This paper offers a guide to those who will be directing these developments.

⁵³ Osborne, S., 'Ansbach suicide bomber Mohammed Daleel 'fought for Isis and al-Qaeda' before coming to Germany', *The Independent*, 27 July 2016, available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ansbach-explosion-germany-isis-suicide-bomber-mohammed-daleel-al-qaeda-a7157961.html, last visited: 28 July 2016.

⁵⁴ Taylor, P., O'Kane, J., and Isfryn, C., 'IS in Europe: The race to the death', *BBC*, 23 March 2016, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-35872562, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁵⁵ Dodd, V., Grierson, J., and Parveen, N., 'Five arrested in UK after inquiry linked to attacks on Brussels and Paris', *The Guardian*, 15 April 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/15/five-people-arrested-in-west-midlands-uk-over-planning-terrorist-acts>, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁵⁶ Flynn, A., 'Three More People Charged With Terrorism Offenses in Britain', *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 April 2016, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/three-more-people-charged-with-terrorism-offenses-in-britain-1461877180, last visited: 6 July 2016.

⁵⁷ Weiss, M. and Hassan, H., 'Everything We Knew About This ISIS Mastermind Was Wrong', *The Daily Beast*, 15 April 2015, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/15/everything-we-knew-about-this-isis-mastermind-was-wrong.html, last visited: 25 July 2016.

Background

Between April and June 2010, the predecessor organisation to the Islamic State (IS), known as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), lost 80% its leadership, who were either arrested or killed by the American-led Coalition forces or the government in Iraq.⁵⁸ The losses for IS included the emir, Hamid al-Zawi (Abu Umar al-Baghdadi), and his deputy, Yusuf al-Dardiri (Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), an Egyptian who had arrived in Baghdad with IS's founder, Ahmed al-Khalayleh (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), in May 2002.⁵⁹

ISI operated as a centralised command structure with decentralised operational cells, but its structure was not robust enough to prevent infiltration. Iraqi intelligence had an agent within al-Zawi's inner-circle who managed to get a listening device and GPS tracker into the ISI leader's hideout, which provided the information that led to the joint US-Iraqi raid that killed al-Zawi and al-Dardiri.⁶⁰

After ISI chose a new leader in May 2010, Ibrahim al-Badri (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), it restructured the organisation to insulate the leadership from spies, while allowing ISI/IS to continue to recruit relatively indiscriminately at the lower levels.⁶¹ This was accomplished by the strengthening or creation of councils tasked with various duties.

The structure has a fair amount of fluidity and some senior officials occupy more than one role, but open-source information, author's inquiries, leaked documents on IS's "cabinet" to *The Telegraph* in 2014,⁶² the accounts given by IS defectors, and the testimony of a prominent jihadi (Abu al-Waleed al-Salafi), recently compiled by Aymenn al-Tamimi,⁶³ among other things, allow the formulation of a rough outline of IS's lines of authority:

- **Shura Council:** On paper, the Shura Council is an advisory body that approves the caliph's appointments, conveys leadership directives down the chain of command and sees that they are implemented, ensures IS adheres to the shari'a – and can even remove the caliph if he fails in this duty – and decides on the caliph's successor. Varying in size as circumstances dictate, the Shura Council consists of between 9 and 11 members, almost all of them Iraqis, and is something like a coordination committee where the various heads of "departments" offer advice to the leader. As well as debating policy and recommending appointments, the Shura Council monitors other departments, helps get central directives down to the ground level, and is responsible for choosing the next

⁵⁸ Shanker, T., 'Qaeda Leaders in Iraq Neutralized, U.S. Says', *The New York Times*, 4 June 2010, available at: www.nytimes.com/2010/06/05/world/middleeast/05military.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁵⁹ Tenet, G., *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), chapter 18.

⁶⁰ Chulov, M., 'Isis: the inside story', *The Guardian*, 11 December 2014, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/sp-isis-the-inside-story, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁶¹ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), p. 211.

⁶² Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10956193/Revealed-the-Islamic-State-cabinet-from-finance-minister-to-suicide-bomb-deployer.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁶³ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016, available at: www.aymenjihad.org/2016/01/an-account-of-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-islamic-state, last visited: 14 June 2016.

leader.⁶⁴ Its other powers are largely theoretical, however.⁶⁵ In practice, the most powerful IS institution is the Military Council.

- Head of the Shura Council: Abu Arkan al-Ameri
 - Head of the Military Council and IS's overall deputy: Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli (Abu Ali al-Anbari)
 - Official Spokesman: Taha Falaha (Abu Muhammad al-Adnani)
 - Chief Religious Advisor: Turki al-Binali
 - Head of the Media Council: Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi)
 - Abdullah al-Ani
 - Younis al-Mashadani
- **Military Council:** The Military Council was formed in 2011 from a reorganisation of IS's military networks. Up until that point, IS had had a "war minister", who was invariably a foreigner. After al-Badri became leader, his deputy, Numan al-Zaydi (Abu Sulayman al-Nasser, a Moroccan), was the war minister. When al-Zaydi was killed in February 2011, the war minister post was abolished and the then chief of staff, effectively the war minister's deputy, Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), an Iraqi and a former intelligence officer in the Saddam Hussein regime, became the first head of the Military Council.⁶⁶ With one exception, every leader of the Military Council has been a former Saddam regime element. The Military Council is the maker and implementer of IS's military strategy and its most important and powerful institution.
 - Head of the Military Council and the Caliph's Deputy: Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli (Abu Ali al-Anbari)
 - Chief of General Staff: Waleed al-Alwani (Abu Ahmad al-Alwani)
 - Field Commander: Tarkhan Batirashvili (Abu Umar al-Shishani)
 - Field Commander: Shaker Wahib al-Fahdawi (Abu Wahib)
 - Logistics Minister: Fares al-Naima (Abu Shema)
 - Foreign Affairs Minister: Abdullah al-Mashadani (Abu Qassem)
 - Martyrs Minister: Abu Suja
 - Explosives Minister: Khairy al-Taey (Abu Kifah)
 - **Security and Intelligence Council (SIC):** Effectively a subcommittee of the Military Council but with considerable autonomy, the SIC was initially created by the same group of former Saddam regime intelligence officers who masterminded IS's expansion into Syria. The SIC functions both to provide personal security for the caliph and to enforce his will by ensuring that his underlings follow his commands and strategic vision. The SIC

⁶⁴ Abu Haniyeh, H., 'Daesh's Organisational Structure', Al-Jazeera, 4 December 2014, available at: studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/decipheringdaeshoriginsimpactandfuture/2014/12/201412395930929444.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁶⁵ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, available at: soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf, last visited: 14 June 2016, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁶ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

is also part of the counter-intelligence architecture that keeps the IS leadership separated from the rank and file and eliminates any plots to depose IS.⁶⁷ It is the SIC that conducts the kidnappings and assassinations that terrorise dissent even within IS's own ranks. The SIC also runs the caliphate's mailing system, coordinating and ensuring the security of the communications between the various IS provinces.⁶⁸

- Overall Head of the amniyat (security services): Iyad al-Jumaili
 - Sub-commander of the SIC: Abu Safwan al-Rifai
 - Minister of General/Public Security: Abdul Wahid Khutnayer Ahmad (Abu Luay)
- **Shari'a Council:** The Shari'a Council is split into two departments. Its mission is the "prevention of vice and the promotion of virtue". The department overseeing the "prevention of vice" handles the religious courts that both arbitrate disputes brought by private citizens and prosecute those who violate IS's interpretation of the Holy Law as enforced through the *hisba* (religious police). This part of the Shari'a Council is sometimes called the Judiciary Council. The Council's second department, dealing with the "promotion of virtue," engages in *dawa* (proselytisation), disseminating IS's worldview in books, videos, songs, and other media, and attempting to win converts and recruits.⁶⁹ The Shari'a Council is notable for the presence of foreigners in senior positions.
 - Chief Religious Advisor: Turki al-Binali
 - Chief Shar'i: Abdul Rahman al-Talabani
 - Abu Muhammad al-Ani
 - Hilmi Hashem
 - Abu Muslim al-Masri
 - Abu Bakr al-Qahtani
 - **Media and Communications Council:** Founded even before the "state" was declared, this council was initially led by Abu Maysara al-Iraqi, a Salafi activist who was released by Saddam regime just before its demise. Abu Maysara was 24-years-old when the regime collapsed,⁷⁰ and was killed sometime in early 2006. There have then been a series of changes since the statehood declaration.⁷¹ The first media director of the "state" was Abu Muhammad al-Mashadani (Abu Zayd al-Mashadani), who was announced as the Minister of Information when ISI released the names of its first "cabinet" in April 2007.⁷² At this time, ISI's official spokesman was Abu Abdullah al-Jibouri (Abd al-Latif al-Jibouri or

⁶⁷ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁸ Abu Haniyeh, H., 'Daesh's Organisational Structure', *Al-Jazeera*, 4 December 2014.

⁶⁹ Abu Hanih, H. and Mohammad Abu Rumman, 'The "Islamic State" Organization', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, 2015, p. 273-4.

⁷⁰ 'Biographies of the Prominent Martyrs - Number 46, Abu Maysarah al-Iraqi,' *Al-Furqan Media*, 18 August 2010, jihadology.net/2010/08/18/al-furqan-presents-biographies-of-the-prominent-martyrs-number-46-abu-maysarah-al-iraqi/

⁷¹ Abu Hanih, H. and Mohammad Abu Rumman, 'The "Islamic State" Organization', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, 2015, p. 274.

⁷² Nibras Kazimi, 'Al-Baghdadi Names Pseudonyms—for ministerial portfolios,' *Talisman Gate*, 19 April 2007, talismangate.blogspot.co.uk/2007/04/al-baghdadi-names-pseudonymsfor.html, last visited: 12 July 2016.

Muharib Abdullah al-Jibouri), filling the role Abu Maysara had held as the voice of the group in its media output. Abu Abdullah was killed in May 2007.⁷³ In September 2009, ISI's second cabinet named Ahmad al-Ta'i as the Information Minister,⁷⁴ and shortly after his release from prison in 2010 Taha Falaha became the official spokesman. Amr al-Absi would become the head of the Media Council as IS expanded into Syria.⁷⁵ The Media Council encompasses a web of institutions, from old outlets like Al-Furqan to radio stations in IS-held zones to websites, blogs, and online magazines half a world away in multiple languages, all pushing IS's political and ideological message.⁷⁶ It is through the Media Council IS has been able to call on its supporters to join the group in the Fertile Crescent and to carry out attacks in their home countries. Like the Shari'a Council, the Media Council is notably made up of foreign—i.e. non-Iraqi—members.

- Head of the Media Council: Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi)
 - Media Official: Bandar al-Shaalan
 - General Manager of Media: Dr. Wael al-Rawi
 - Nasser al-Ghamdi
-
- **Cabinet:**
 - Finance Minister: Muwafaq al-Kharmoush (Abu Saleh)
 - Prisoner Affairs Minister: Bashar al-Hamadani (Abu Mohamed)
 - Governor of Kirkuk: Nima al-Jibouri (Abu Fatima al-Ansari)
 - Governor of Baghdad: Ahmed al-Jazaa (Abu Maysara)
 - Governor of the South and Middle Euphrates: Ahmed al-Juhayshi (Abu Fatima)
 - Governor of Border Provinces: Rathwan al-Hamdani (Abu Jurnas)
 - General Provincial Coordinator: Mohammed al-Dulaymi (Abu Hajar al-Sufi)
 - General Manager: Shawkat al-Farhat (Abu Abd al-Kadr)

This compartmentalisation means IS can sustain significant damage in one combat theatre without very much effect on adjacent zones and virtually no impact on the central leadership. This also works in reverse: the removal of senior leaders has minimal impact on local zones because the broad strategic policy is already outlined, and its implementation is tasked to local leaders who will continue this work even if their superior is removed. It is conceivable that there could be a point where so many leaders would be removed so quickly that it could damage IS, but even with the apparent losses to IS's senior leadership in March 2016 this point is not in view yet.

The decentralisation of operational decisions is a key part of IS's military strategy, entrusting the execution of ordinances to local emirs who have better granular knowledge.

⁷³ "Islamic State of Iraq Denies The Killing Of Abu Omar Al-Baghdadi, But Confirms The Death Of Its Official Spokesman, Abu Abdullah Al-Jabouri," SITE Intelligence Group, 3 May 2007, <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/islamic-state-of-iraq-denies-the-killing-of-abu-omar-al-baghdadi-but-confirms-the-death-of-its-official-spokesman-abu-abdullah-al-jabouri.html>, last visited: 12 July 2016.

⁷⁴ Nibras Kazimi, "Islamic State of Iraq Undergoes Government 'Reshuffle'," *Talisman Gate*, 21 September 2009, talismangate.blogspot.co.uk/2009/09/islamic-state-of-iraq-undergoes.html, last visited: 12 July 2016.

⁷⁵ Barrett, R., "The Islamic State", *Soufan Group*, November 2014, pp. 52.

⁷⁶ Abu Hanieh, H. and Mohammad Abu Rumman, "The "Islamic State" Organization", Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015, p. 274-5.

IS begins its conquest of areas with espionage work, gathering lists of powerful local individuals, families, and armed groups, and marking them either for co-optation or elimination. Co-optation can take the form of inducements or bribes, of either money or power, and also of threats, both physical and blackmail – those engaged in “sins”, from homosexuality to alcoholism, are considered vulnerable.⁷⁷

IS’s strategy of neutralising even *potential* threats to its rule through intelligence work before moving its conventional military into new areas is reminiscent of the tactics used by the Soviet Union in conquering Eastern Europe.⁷⁸ This is not coincidental. Most of the IS military leaders who planned and directed the setting up of a statelet in Syria are former members of the military-intelligence apparatus of Saddam Hussein’s regime,⁷⁹ which was trained by the KGB and its East German protégé, the STASI.⁸⁰

With the recruitment of agents among the social elite and armed groups, the placement of sleeper cells, and the use of front groups, in many instances IS’s overt conquest is merely a formality since the village or town is already under such significant IS control.

Decentralisation is key not just to IS’s military expansion but also to its governance. By making people from within communities the visible administrators of captured territory, and keeping the hand of IS’s leadership as low-key as possible – especially in Syria, where the imposition of a repressive authority would be all the more offensive if flagrantly implemented by a largely Iraqi cadre – IS decreases resistance to its rule.

Moreover, because IS is governing a series of autonomous fiefs, with firewalls between them and where the duties of local leaders include spying on the local leaders of other areas, IS has been able to resist collapse from without, with losses at the periphery of its caliphate having minimal effect on its core. It has also been able to pre-empt what it fears most: a repeat of the *Sahwa* (Awakening), when local Sunni Arabs across a wide swathe of territory were able to coordinate a rebellion from within.

⁷⁷ Reuter, C., ‘The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State’, *Der Spiegel*, 18 April 2015, available at: www.spiegel.de/international/world/islamic-state-files-show-structure-of-islamist-terror-group-a-1029274.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁷⁸ Applebaum, A., *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–56* (Westminster: Penguin, 2013), pp. 8, 95.

⁷⁹ Orton, K., ‘Saddam’s Former Loyalists Are Leading ISIS – as True Believers’, *National Review*, 20 July 2015, www.nationalreview.com/article/421370/saddam-loyalists-running-isis-are-true-believers-not-secularists, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸⁰ Makiya, K., *Republic of Fear* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 12–13.

1. The Caliph

Previously known as Abu Dua or Abu Awad, Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai is now known throughout the world as **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi**.

Al-Badri was born in Samarra on 1 July 1971, the third of four boys. Al-Badri's was a lower middle-class, religious, and well-connected farming family. Two brothers were in Saddam Hussein's army; one of them was killed during the long war with the Iranian revolution. Two of al-Badri's uncles worked in the Saddam regime's security sector. Al-Badri's poor eyesight meant he never went into the military.⁸¹

In 1996, al-Badri enrolled on a master's course at the Saddam University for Islamic Studies, which required family connections to the Ba'ath Party for entry. Al-Badri had not achieved the necessary grades in law so he moved into shari'a, and then switched to Qur'an studies. While at graduate school, al-Badri joined the Muslim Brotherhood under the persuasion of his paternal uncle and his mentor Muhammad Hardan, a veteran of the Afghan jihad. Al-Badri quickly moved beyond the Brotherhood, however, seeing them as "people of words, not action". He graduated in 1999 and by 2000 was committed to Jihadi-Salafism in its most virulent form.⁸²

*Figure 1 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi*⁸³



He is said to have received a PhD in Islamic Studies, although it is unclear when. One account has al-Badri receiving his PhD in 2007, defending his thesis at a university in Baghdad despite the mayhem overcoming Iraq, which meant even his teacher could not make it to the appointment.⁸⁴ Evidence that might have been helpful to corroborate such an unlikely story is unavailable: all copies of the PhD dissertation have apparently been stolen.

When al-Badri was 18 years old (c. 1989), he moved from Samarra to Tobchi, a mixed neighbourhood on the western outskirts of Baghdad. Living in a room attached to a mosque, he remained in Tobchi until 2003.⁸⁵

⁸¹ McCants, W., *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2015), Kindle location 1240.

⁸² McCants, W., 'The Believer', Brookings Institute, 1 September 2015, available at: www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/thebeliever, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸³ Source: From a video of the first sermon of the 'caliph,' *IS's Al-Furqan Media*, 5 July, 2014, last visited: 27 June, 2016

⁸⁴ 'Al-Kashf an watha'iq hawla haqiqat Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi' (Disclosure of documents about the facts of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), All4Syria, 27 February 2015, available at: <http://all4syria.info/Archive/196498>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸⁵ Sherlock, R., 'How a talented footballer became world's most wanted man, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi', *The Telegraph*, 11 November 2014, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10948846/How-a-talented-footballer-became-worlds-most-wanted-man-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

1.1 *The Insurgency and American Prison*

Within months of the American-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, al-Badri had founded an Islamist insurgent group, *Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamaah* (The Army of the People of the Sunni Community), which operated around Samarra, Baghdad, and Diyala.⁸⁶

The exact nature of al-Badri's role in the insurgent group is unclear. His prison file indicates that he was a "civilian detainee", i.e. not assessed to be a member of an insurgent group, who was nonetheless held because he was believed to pose a danger to Iraq's security. Al-Badri's "civilian occupation" was listed as an administrator/secretary. Whether al-Badri deceived his captors or the deception is IS presenting al-Badri as being involved in the insurgency earlier than he really was might never be known. His prison records show that he was captured in Fallujah by the United States on 4 February 2004 and released on 8 December 2004.⁸⁷ He was held at several detention facilities, including the Imam Ali Airbase near Nasiriya, commonly known as Camp Adder, and the now-notorious Camp Bucca in Basra Province.

Some media reports claimed that al-Badri was released in 2009, saying to guards at Camp Bucca, "See you ... in New York," as he left.⁸⁸ These are mistaken. Al-Badri was imprisoned once, for ten months, in 2004.

When al-Badri was arrested he was "visiting a friend of his in Fallujah named Nessayif Numan Nessayif", according to Hisham al-Hashimi, an analyst who works closely with the Iraqi government and claims to have met al-Badri in the late 1990s. "With [al-Badri] was another man, Abdul Wahed al-Semayyir. The U.S. Army intelligence arrested all of them. Baghdadi was not the target - it was Nessayif."⁸⁹ In prison, al-Badri was treated by the authorities as something of a problem-solver.

Al-Badri is said to have met with numerous former regime elements (FREs), the soldiers and spies of the Saddam regime, in prison, and to have met up again with them outside the wire. How reliable this is, given the briefness of al-Badri's stay, is difficult to say. Samir al-Khelifawi (Haji Bakr) was imprisoned between 2006 and 2008,⁹⁰ and had been a major figure in the group before the pledge to al-Qaeda; this is strongly indicative that al-Khelifawi was not radicalised in prison. Adnan al-Suwaydawi (Abu Muhammad al-Suwaydawi or Haji Dawood) was said by IS in his eulogy to have taken part in both battles in Fallujah in 2004 - it is likely therefore that he did not overlap with al-Badri in prison. Al-Suwaydawi is additionally said to have been very close to Adnan al-Bilawi (Abu Abdulrahman al-Bilawi), who was a childhood friend, and both al-Suwaydawi and al-Bilawi were supposedly close to IS's founder, Ahmed al-Khalayleh (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi).⁹¹ Other sources agree with this, placing al-Suwaydawi's prison term between 2007 and 2010.⁹²

⁸⁶ Van Ostaeyen, P., 'Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi - a Short Biography of the ISIS Sheikh', 15 July 2013, available at: <https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2013/07/15/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-a-short-biography-of-the-isis-sheikh/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸⁷ Walker, H., 'Here is the Army's declassified Iraq prison file on the leader of ISIS', *Business Insider*, 18 February 2015, available at: www.businessinsider.com/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-declassified-iraq-prison-file-2015-2, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸⁸ Daly, M., 'ISIS Leader: "See You in New York"', *The Daily Beast*, 14 June 2014, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/14/isis-leader-see-you-in-new-york.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁸⁹ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, pp. 118-119.

⁹⁰ Reuter, C., 'The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State', *Der Spiegel*, 18 April 2015.

⁹¹ U-Khilafah, A., 'Who is Sheykhul Mujahid Abū Muhammad As-Sweidāwi?', 21 May 2015, available at:

<https://ansarukhilafah.wordpress.com/2015/05/21/who-is-sheykhul-mujahid-abu-muhammad-as-sweidawi/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁹² 'Faces of ISIS: Adnan Latif Hamid al-Sweidawi', *CBS News*, available at: www.cbsnews.com/pictures/faces-of-isis/16/, last visited: 18 June 2016.

Again, a role for al-Badri in radicalising either al-Suwaydawi or al-Bilawi is hard to detect by the timeline.

Al-Badri was in prison when al-Khalayleh publicly swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden on 17 October 2004, changing the name of his organisation from *Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (The Monotheism and Holy War Group) to *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (The Base of Jihad Organisation in the Land of the Two Rivers (Mesopotamia), more commonly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)).⁹³

Al-Badri had been free for nearly three weeks when bin Laden accepted al-Khalayleh's pledge of allegiance on 27 December 2004, in an audio message distributed by Al-Sahab Institute for Media Productions and published by al-Jazeera.⁹⁴

1.2 Jaysh al-Mujahideen and joining al-Qaeda in 2005

The lead shari'a official and emir of Jaysh al-Mujahideen, Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Mansour, has claimed that al-Badri was a member of his organisation from sometime in 2005 to the end of that year.⁹⁵

Jaysh al-Mujahideen was a Ba'athi-Salafist faction of a particularly hardline kind, strongly emphasising its Salafism and anti-Shi'ism, and committed to the total destruction of the Iraqi government. If al-Badri, a committed Jihadi-Salafist since 2000, was going to join a non-AQI faction, Jaysh al-Mujahideen would be a good candidate.

Interestingly, Jaysh al-Mujahideen contained a notable Fedayeen Saddam contingent.⁹⁶ Indeed, according to Malcolm Nance, a former naval intelligence officer who has worked the Iraq file since 1987 and spent a lot of time in post-Saddam Iraq dealing with the insurgency, Jaysh al-Mujahideen was an "armed insurgent wing formed by Saddam Fedayeen, SRG [Special Republican Guard], and former intelligence agencies".⁹⁷ Jaysh al-Mujahideen was rooted in al-Karma, ten miles northeast of Fallujah, where it had good connections with the local tribes.⁹⁸ Jaysh al-Mujahideen remained important in al-Karma right up to August 2014, when it was expelled by IS.

What is known of al-Badri's profile makes it plausible that he joined Jaysh al-Mujahideen – and possible that al-Badri joined Jaysh al-Mujahideen as an agent of then AQI, or was recruited as an AQI agent while remaining within Jaysh al-Mujahideen's ranks.

⁹³ Pool, J., 'Zarqawi's Pledge of Allegiance to al-Qaeda: From Mu'asker al-Battar', Jamestown Foundation, 15 December 2004, available at: www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=27305#.VvjHbcIrLIV, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁹⁴ Raphaeli, N., 'The Sheikh of the Slaughterers': Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi and the Al-Qaeda Connection', *MEMRI*, 1 July 2005, available at: www.memri.org/report/en/print1406.htm, last visited: 14 June 2016.

⁹⁵ Al-Tamimi, A., 'A Jaysh al-Mujahideen Amir's Testimony on Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi', 12 December 2014, available at: <http://www.aymenjawad.org/2014/12/a-jaysh-al-mujahideen-amir-testimony-on-abu-bakr>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

⁹⁶ Hallums, R., *Buried Alive: The True Story of Kidnapping, Captivity, and a Dramatic Rescue* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 2010), p. 45.

⁹⁷ Nance, M. W., *The Terrorists of Iraq: Inside the Strategy and Tactics of the Iraq Insurgency 2003-2014, Second Edition* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2014), p. 81.

⁹⁸ Al-Tamimi, A., 'Key Updates on Iraq's Sunni Insurgent Groups', *Brown Moses*, 11 May 2014, available at: brown-moses.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/key-updates-on-iraqs-sunni-insurgent.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

Not long after al-Khalayleh was killed, al-Badri was made chief shar'i for al-Karma and soon all of al-Anbar Province.⁹⁹ Thus, al-Badri was based in and around the area in which Jaysh al-Mujahideen was operating as late as 2006. When al-Badri wanted to join an insurgent faction after leaving prison, in other words, Jaysh al-Mujahideen was close to hand.

As to where al-Badri's actual allegiances were - i.e. when he joined AQI - there is suggestive evidence that by May 2005 he had already joined AQI, so if al-Mansour is correct that al-Badri was "with us 'till the end of 2005",¹⁰⁰ it is likely al-Badri was working for AQI for some time before he joined them publicly.

The U.S. arrested AQI's "emir of Rawa" (a town in Anbar about 50 miles from the Syrian border), Ghassan Muhammad Amin al-Rawi, on 26 April 2005. Ghassan Amin was an associate of al-Khalayleh's who helped "arrange meetings" for AQI and "move foreign insurgents" into Iraq.¹⁰¹ Amin gave up Abu Dua, identified by the United States as a foreign fighter facilitator and the head of a local AQI cell - a "tier-three" AQI leader, below tier-one, which had direct access to al-Khalayleh, and tier-two, consisting of men who "plan and facilitate operations in a region of Iraq" and "are responsible for flow of money, for flow of information, for flow of munitions, and flow of foreign fighters".¹⁰² Abu Dua was al-Badri's kunya before he became caliph.

On 26 October 2005, using information gleaned from Amin, the U.S. demolished a building in Ushsh with an airstrike and believed they had killed Abu Dua, Amin's successor as "emir of Rawa" and a foreign fighter facilitator, though the U.S. did not recover a body. Assuming there are not two Abu Duas and that the man targeted in this raid was al-Badri, that was obviously wrong.

The elements of Abu Dua's biography that the U.S. gave suggest that the targeted Abu Dua was al-Badri. Abu Dua "held religious courts to try local citizens charged with supporting the Iraqi government and coalition forces", the Pentagon statement said,¹⁰³ which tracks closely with al-Badri's verifiable role as a shari'a leader in AQI/ISI between 2006 and 2010. In this role, Abu Dua had overseen the intimidation, kidnapping, torture, and murder of Iraqi civilians who had in some way irked AQI, the Pentagon added.

According to the Pentagon, Abu Dua was "a senior al-Qaeda member" and "a known close associate" of Amin's, thus if this Abu Dua is al-Badri and al-Badri was still within Jaysh al-Mujahideen, he had already gone over to AQI. Abu Dua also "set up and ran a system that funnelled foreign fighters from Syria into the Qaim area", fighters who "were then sent to local terrorist cells". These "ratlines" were supervised by Syrian intelligence, and Abu Dua cannot have been unaware of that fact. If Abu Dua is al-Badri it means he had some degree of collaborative contact with the Assad regime.

⁹⁹ Warrick, J., *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), chapter 19.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Tamimi, A., 'A Jaysh al-Mujahideen Amir's Testimony on Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi', 12 December 2014.

¹⁰¹ '2 Americans among 22 killed in Baghdad', *MSNBC*, 8 May 2005, available at: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/7721003/ns/world_news-mideast_n-africa/t/americans-among-killed-baghdad, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁰² Cordesman, A. H., 'The Islamists and the "Zarqawi Factor"', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 23 June 2006, available at: <http://online.flphml5.com/tcbl/enzl/#p=1>, last visited: 20 June 2016, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰³ 'Al Qaeda Facilitator Likely Dead in Coalition Air Strike', U.S. Department of Defense, 26 October 2005, available at: archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=17963, last visited: 14 June 2016.

If the Abu Dua described by the Pentagon – Amin’s successor as emir of Rawa, imposing the shari’a on the local population, and the facilitator of foreign jihadists coming into Iraq from Syria – is al-Badri, then it means al-Badri was also involved in the murder of the governor of al-Anbar Province in May 2005.¹⁰⁴

1.3 The Islamic State

Al-Qaeda in Iraq joined with five other insurgent groups – some of them probably fronts for AQI itself – on 15 January 2006 to form *al-Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen* (The Mujahideen Shura Council or MSC). At the time, this was interpreted as AQI putting an Iraqi face on a foreign-led group that was provoking more and more resistance even in Sunni Arab areas of Iraq. Al-Badri’s militia, Jaysh Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jamaah, joined MSC about a week after it was formed, and al-Badri served on the shari’a committee.¹⁰⁵ AQI had something more ambitious in mind, however.

Al-Khalayleh had appeared in an AQI video, showing his face for the first time, in April 2006, and announced that MSC was “the starting point for establishing an Islamic state”.¹⁰⁶ The U.S. had killed al-Khalayleh in June 2006, but his vision was realised nonetheless. On 12 October 2006, MSC joined with three more insurgent groups and the six Anbar tribes (out of 31) who had not joined with the Iraqi government to hunt down AQI/MS, took a pledge, *Hilf al-Mutayyabin* (Oath of the Scented Ones).¹⁰⁷ Three days later, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was announced, and *Hilf al-Mutayyabin* was invoked as helping to meet the criteria for the foundation of a caliph state – namely, consensus.¹⁰⁸ In November 2006, AQI dissolved itself within ISI.

Al-Badri was made the head of religious affairs in Anbar Province at the foundation of ISI, and in early 2010 was made head of all the shari’a committees in ISI’s “provinces”, making him technically the third highest official in the organisation.¹⁰⁹

There is much controversy and propaganda surrounding al-Badri’s role in ISI during the period before he became the group’s leader – and indeed afterwards. One oft-told story is that al-Badri, while officially rather senior in the organisation, was in fact a mere functionary who helped ISI move its mail around, and when the emir of ISI, Hamid al-Zawi (Abu Umar al-Baghdadi), and his deputy were killed in April 2010, ISI’s chief of staff, Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), a former intelligence official in Saddam’s regime, tricked the Shura Council into electing al-Badri.¹¹⁰ The problem is that there is no evidence for this – or, more exactly, the evidence offered is deeply suspect.

An ostensible ISI defector, “Abu-Ahmad”, is the originator of the story that al-Khlifawi wrote to each of the 11 members of the Shura Council and told them that all the others had voted for al-

¹⁰⁴ Madhani, A., ‘Anbar leader found dead after assault’, 1 June 2005, available at: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2005-06-01/news/0506010261_1_rajana-waf-farhan-al-mahalawi-foreign-fighters-turbulent-province, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Zelin, A., ‘Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Islamic State’s driving force’, *BBC News*, 31 July 2014, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28560449, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Bunzel, C., ‘From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State’, Brookings, March 2016, page 16, available at: www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf, last visited 18 June 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Roggio, B., ‘al Qaeda’s Grand Coalition in Anbar’, *The Long War Journal*, 12 October 2006, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/10/alqaedas_grand_coali.php#, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Kazimi, N., ‘The Caliphate Attempted: Zarqawi’s Ideological Heirs, Their Choice for a Caliph, and the Collapse of Their Self-Styled Islamic State of Iraq’, *Hudson Institute*, 1 July 2008, available at: www.hudson.org/research/9854-the-caliphate-attempted-zarqawi-s-ideological-heirs-their-choice-for-a-caliph-and-the-collapse-of-their-self-styled-islamic-state-of-iraq, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Warrick, J., *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS*.

¹¹⁰ McCants, W., *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, Kindle location 1322.

Badri, ultimately securing nine votes for al-Badri's appointment.¹¹¹ It does appear that al-Badri's home was a node in ISI's communications network, but while Abu-Ahmad claims that al-Badri "did not know ... the sender and the receiver", a senior official in IS in late 2014 said that al-Badri was "the closest aide" to al-Zawi, whose letters "always started" al-Badri, and al-Badri "sometimes drafted" al-Zawi's letters to bin Laden.¹¹²

Al-Badri's personal closeness to al-Zawi is suggestive that narratives portraying him as a mere cut-out for other actors within the organisation are untrue, and documents captured when ISI's number three, Mohamed Moumou (Abu Qaswarah), was killed in October 2008 list al-Badri as ISI's emir in Mosul, its most important stronghold.¹¹³

Though al-Badri comes to power in the context of the rapid elimination of a large percentage of ISI's most senior leadership, he ascends to the helm of an organisation that is actually recovering.¹¹⁴ A lot of the gains of the Surge have been whittled down by a massive campaign of assassination against the Awakening leaders, the Sunni tribesmen who rose against ISI and worked with the U.S. and the Iraqi government.¹¹⁵ The Iraqi government's descent into authoritarian sectarianism, the eruption of a rebellion in neighbouring Syria and Damascus's decision to respond with indiscriminate violence and a cynical gambit to empower jihadis within the insurgency, and the U.S. political disengagement from and then military withdrawal at the end of 2011 presented al-Badri with a very favourable operating environment to expand his group's power.

During the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq, the Assad regime's collaboration with AQI and ISI had provided the organisation a hinterland. As late as 2010, named senior ISI officials were receiving medical treatment in Damascus, for example. (Al-Badri tried to get one of these officials to assassinate his old mentor, Hardan, who was also based in Damascus by this time.¹¹⁶) The mobilisation of this old infrastructure allowed ISI to insert itself into the developing dynamics of Syria's war quickly in 2011. In addition, Assad freed hundreds of jihadi prisoners at the outset of the uprising, who joined numerous groups and helped - as the regime desired - tarnish the uprising with terrorism and extremism. Among the terrorists Assad freed from Sednaya who went on to help IS become a threat to global security were Awad al-Makhlaf (Abu Hamza), IS's emir in Raqqa;¹¹⁷ Abu Sarah al-Ansari, an IS field commander;¹¹⁸ and, most importantly of all, Amr al-Absi (Abu al-Atheer).¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ English translation of Abu-Ahmad's 'Testimony on the Concealed Truths About al-Baghdadi's State', available at: <http://fundforfallenallies.org/news/2014/09/25/here-finalized-osc-translation-aq-loyalist-abu-ahmads-account-isis-and-its-origins>, last visited: 14 June 2016. Original statement (Arabic) available at: <http://justpaste.it/da3shtrue>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹¹² Chulov, M., 'Isis: the inside story', *The Guardian*, 11 December 2014.

¹¹³ Johnston, P. B., Jacob N. Shapiro, Howard J. Shatz, Benjamin Bahney, Danielle F. Jung, Patrick K. Ryan, and Jonathan Wallace, 'Foundations of the Islamic State: Management, Money, and Terror in Iraq, 2005-2010', RAND Corporation, 19 May 2016, available at: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1192.html, last visited 18 June 2016, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ Wing, J., 'Who Was Al Qaeda In Iraq's Abu Omar al-Baghdadi? Interview With Naval War College's Prof Craig Whiteside', *Musings on Iraq*, 13 June 2016, available at: musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/who-was-al-qaeda-in-iraqs-abu-omar-al.html, last visited 18 June 2016.

¹¹⁵ Whiteside, C., 'War, Interrupted, Part I: The Roots of the Jihadist Resurgence in Iraq', *War on the Rocks*, 5 November 2014, available at: warontherocks.com/2014/11/war-interrupted-part-i-the-roots-of-the-jihadist-resurgence-in-iraq/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹¹⁶ Lund, A., 'As Rifts Open Up in Syria's al-Qaeda Franchise, Secrets Spill Out', *Carnegie*, 10 August 2015, available at: carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60973, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹¹⁷ Al-Bahri, A., 'ISIS Restructures Raqqa Under its New Ruling System', *Syria Deeply*, 17 November 2014, available at: <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2014/11/17/isis-restructures-raqqa-under-its-new-ruling-system/>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹¹⁸ Ali, A. S., 'IS continues attacks on Tabqa airport in Raqqa', *Al-Monitor*, 22 August 2014, available at: www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/security/2014/08/islamic-state-attack-tabqa-airport-fail.html, last visited 18 June 2016.

¹¹⁹ Orton, K., 'Obituary: The Islamic State's Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi)', 10 March 2016, available at: <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2016/03/10/obituary-the-islamic-states-amr-al-absi-abu-al-atheer/>, last visited 18 June 2016.

In addition to the pre-existing Assad-overseen infrastructure and the prisoners freed by the Assad regime, ISI's then deputy, al-Khlifawi, dispatched agents into Syria in the summer of 2011 to help bring together these threads into an ISI front organisation, Jabhat al-Nusra.¹²⁰

Jabhat al-Nusra would eventually split from its parent organisation and join al-Qaeda, which formally severed all links with ISI in February 2014. After a concerted effort at state building in northern and eastern Syria in late 2013, and a public invasion of Iraq, conquering Mosul and other areas in central Iraq where ISI had long exerted considerable de facto governing authority,¹²¹ ISI declared it was now simply "the Islamic State" and that the caliphate had been re-established on 29 June 2014.

Five days after the caliphate declaration, on 4 July 2014, al-Badri made his first public appearance at the Great Mosque in Mosul, giving a sermon while dressed in a way clearly meant to be reminiscent of the Abbasid caliphs. In February 2016, undated images were circulated of al-Badri making a public appearance in Fallujah.¹²² To date these are al-Badri's only public appearances. Al-Badri was said to have been severely injured by a coalition airstrike in March 2015,¹²³ and, while this remains unconfirmed, it does now appear to be true.¹²⁴ From the vantage point of mid-2016, when it appears that the demise of IS's statehood project is merely a matter of time, the possible impact of al-Badri's death has taken on a new salience.

The caliph is by no means a figurehead, but the structure of the caliphate is not dependent on individuals. Al-Badri's control is more strategically influential than micro-management, though he can arrange local operations when needed. It would be a considerable blow to morale if IS lost al-Badri at this point, but the group would survive, as would its territorial control. IS's institutions are mature enough that a replacement would be selected relatively quickly.

But what if al-Badri is left a caliph without a caliphate? There is an argument that this would "represent a catastrophe for [IS's] strategy, core ideological tenets, and propaganda campaign which is built on projecting strength and success as a manifestation of divine sanction". On the other hand, if al-Badri falls with the caliphate, he will be spared the need to explain himself – including his decision to break with al-Qaeda and hastily declare the caliphate in the first place, which provoked a reluctant United States to re-engage with the organisation – and the group can more easily morph into a new form.¹²⁵

It is likely that this is true, and for IS the best outcome would be that when it loses Mosul and Raqqa it also loses al-Badri. IS, indeed, is already preparing the ground for such a scenario,¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Orton, K., 'The Riddle of Haji Bakr', *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015, available at: <https://kylcorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/11/10/the-riddle-of-haji-bakr/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹²¹ Lister, C., 'Profiling the Islamic State', *Brookings Institution*, November 2014, available at: www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf, last visited: 14 June 2016, pp. 18–19.

¹²² Withnall, A., 'Isis leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi "photographed in second public appearance" at Fallujah mosque', *The Independent*, 11 February 2016, available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-photographed-in-second-public-appearance-at-fallujah-mosque-a6867576.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹²³ Chulov, M., 'Isis leader incapacitated with suspected spinal injuries after air strike', *The Guardian*, 1 May 2015, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/01/isis-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-incapacitated-suspected-spinal-injuries-iraq, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹²⁴ Chulov, M., and Spencer Ackerman, 'Inside the hunt for Isis leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi', *The Guardian*, 27 May 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/27/inside-the-hunt-for-isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹²⁵ Ingram, H. J., and Whiteside, C., 'Don't Kill the Caliph! The Islamic State and the Pitfalls of Leadership Decapitation', *War on the Rocks*, 2 June 2016, available at: <http://warontherocks.com/2016/06/dont-kill-the-caliph-the-islamic-state-and-the-pitfalls-of-leadership-decapitation/>, last visited 18 June 2016.

¹²⁶ Al-Adnani, A. M., 'That They Live By Proof', *Al-Hayat Media Centre*, 21 May 2016, available at: <https://pietervanostacyen.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/al-hayat-that-they-live-by-proof.pdf>, last visited 15 June 2016.

explaining its loss of territory as a cyclical phenomenon.¹²⁷ After it was defeated in 2008, then ISI was driven into the deserts of western Iraq, and from those sanctuaries it waged a shadow war against the tribes who had driven it from its urban areas and brought many of the tribes back to its banner. Helped by political developments in Baghdad, ISI returned to its old haunts and became more powerful than ever within five years. The manner in which the caliphate is being unravelled has given IS a greater degree of legitimacy as the region's Sunni vanguard.¹²⁸ In other words, IS's claim that its defeat this time around will be merely the resetting of the cycle is not solely a means of consoling itself.

¹²⁷ Bunzel, C., 'The Islamic State of Decline: Anticipating the Paper Caliphate', *Jihadica*, 15 June 2016, available at: www.jihadica.com/the-islamic-state-of-decline/, last visited 18 June 2016.

¹²⁸ Hassan H., 'Washington's War on the Islamic State Is Only Making It Stronger', *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2016, available at: foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/16/washingtons-war-on-the-islamic-state-is-only-making-it-stronger-syria-iraq-libya/, last visited: 18 June 2016.

2. The Shura Council

2.1 *Abu Arkan al-Ameri*

Al-Ameri leads the Shura Council, which is an important administrative role in IS.¹²⁹ Al-Ameri is a former army officer in the Saddam Hussein regime and held a military role when recruited to IS. Pro-government media in Iraq reported that al-Ameri was killed in December 2015 and, although there has been no confirmation, he was allegedly replaced by **Abu Bakr al-Khatouni**,¹³⁰ who was once the head of the shari'a committees when IS was still al-Qaeda in Iraq and was led by Ahmed al-Khalayleh (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi).

Al-Khatouni's real name is **Abdullah Youssef** and he is an Iraqi from Mosul. In addition to leading the Shura Council, if indeed he does, Youssef is IS's Governor of Mosul. In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi tried to have Youssef, his mentor Mohammed Hardan, and two other Iraqi jihadists, Mohammed Hussein al-Jibouri and Saadoun al-Qadi, from the al-Qaeda-linked Ansar al-Islam (which was at various times known as Ansar al-Sunna) assassinated in Damascus.¹³¹

2.2 *Abd al-Rahman Mustafa al-Qaduli*

Figure 2 *Abu Ali al-Anbari*¹³²



2.2.1 *Initial Confusion*

The Islamic State's deputy had been known as **Abu Ali al-Anbari**, and his profile was very murky. His real name unknown, he was also known by a string of other pseudonyms: Ali Qurdash al-Turkmani, Abu Jasim al-Iraqi, and Abu Umar Qurdash.¹³³

A lot of what was thought to be known about al-Anbari came from an IS defector to al-Qaeda calling himself "Abu-Ahmad".¹³⁴

According to Abu-Ahmad, al-Anbari was born in Mosul and was an ethnic Turkoman. This was plausible. Ninawa Province was a centre of cross-border activity for the smuggling operations organised by Saddam Hussein's deputy, Izzat al-Douri, to evade the sanctions and provide an internal patronage network to prop up the regime, particularly by helping it resist a renewed Shi'a revolt. A lot of this patronage took the form of religious subsidies, to mosques and clerics. The Turkoman tribes in the areas around Tal Afar and Mosul were an especially important part of al-Douri's operations. After the regime fell, a lot of these networks went over to IS, and the Turkomen form an important part of IS's financial councils.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, pp. 29-30.

¹³⁰ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

¹³¹ Lund, A., 'As Rifts Open Up in Syria's al-Qaeda Franchise, Secrets Spill Out', *Carnegie*, 10 August 2015.

¹³² Source: From a video put out by IS's *Wilayat Ninawa*, *Al-Furqan Media*, 24 May 2016, last visited: 27 June, 2016

¹³³ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State,' *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 28.

¹³⁴ English translation of Abu-Ahmad's 'Testimony on the Concealed Truths About al-Baghdadi's State'.

¹³⁵ Author conversation with Colonel Derek Harvey, deputy to General David Petraeus, 15 July 2015.

But there were other¹³⁶ reports¹³⁷ that suggested al-Anbari was an Arab tribesman from Anbar Province named Kazem Rachid al-Jibouri. A lot of the details in these reports proved to be true, particularly that it was al-Anbari who was overseeing the Security and Intelligence Council as it took shape in IS-held areas of Syria in 2013 and 2014.¹³⁸

Abu-Ahmad reported that al-Anbari had been a physics teacher and a Ba'ath Party activist who had served in Saddam's military in the 1990s. Independent analysts also reported that al-Anbari was a former regime element (FRE), a Major-General in Saddam Hussein's intelligence services.¹³⁹ It seemed unlikely, however, that al-Anbari had been a physics teacher. It was doubtful that he would have had time to be a physics teacher *and* an intelligence officer. Moreover, another of IS's senior leaders, Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli, better known as **Abu Alaa al-Afri**, was also reported as having been a physics teacher.¹⁴⁰ The chances of there being two Ninawan physics teachers among IS's most senior leaders seemed slim. As it transpired, this supposition was correct.

Al-Anbari *is* al-Qaduli.¹⁴¹ This meant he had additional pseudonyms, **Haji Iman** and **Dar Islami**, and that basically everything it was believed was known about al-Anbari – specifically his background in the security services of the Saddam regime – was incorrect.

2.2.2 Under Saddam

Though al-Qaduli had taken the pseudonym *al-Afri* (from Tal Afar), he had only worked there. Al-Qaduli was born in Mosul in the late 1950s.¹⁴²

After Saddam invaded Iran in 1980, he began to align with Islamists in his foreign policy. This began in 1983,¹⁴³ and by 1986 had evolved into a fully fledged reorientation of policy.¹⁴⁴ The secularism of Saddam's early days continued to erode, notably during the first part of the Gulf War in 1990–91, with regime rhetoric being Islamised and a series of measures enacted that introduced the shari'a into the Iraqi legal and political system. In 1993, the regime's secularism would give way entirely with the onset of the Faith Campaign that sought to capture and direct the increasing piety of the Iraqi population into a religious movement under Saddam's leadership.¹⁴⁵ Alongside the Ba'athi-Salafists loyal to the regime, the "pure" Salafi Trend that had long opposed the regime was empowered by Saddam's policies: against the warnings of his intelligence chief, Saddam extended the alliance with the religious trend that had started in foreign affairs to domestic affairs.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁶ 'Inside ISIS's Covert Ops', Intelligence Online, 18 November 2015, available at: www.intelligenceonline.com/government-intelligence/organizations/2015/11/18/inside-isis-s-covert-ops,108111796-ART, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹³⁷ 'The first moves of the secret services of ISIS', *Look Out*, 18 July 2014, available at: www.lookoutnews.it/isis-servizi-segreti/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹³⁸ Schmitt, E., 'A Raid on ISIS Yields a Trove of Intelligence', *The New York Times*, 8 June 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/06/09/world/middleeast/us-raid-in-syria-unveils-details-on-isis-leadership-and-finances.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹³⁹ Lister, C., 'Islamic State Senior Leadership: Who's Who', Brookings Institute, November 2014, available at: www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling-islamic-state-lister/en_whos_who.pdf?la=en, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Moore, J., 'ISIS Replace Injured Leader Baghdadi With Former Physics Teacher', *Newsweek*, 22 April 2015, available at: europe.newsweek.com/isis-replace-injured-leader-baghdadi-former-physics-teacher-324082, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴¹ Weiss, M. and Hassan Hassan, 'Everything We Knew About This ISIS Mastermind Was Wrong', *The Daily Beast*, 15 April 2016, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/15/everything-we-knew-about-this-isis-mastermind-was-wrong.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴² 'Profiles of wanted "Islamic State leaders"', *BBC News*, 6 May 2015, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-32612898, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴³ Helfont, S., 'Saddam and the Islamists: The Ba'thist Regime's Instrumentalization of Religion in Foreign Affairs', *The Middle East Journal*, Summer 2014, available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/551178>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴⁴ 'Saddam and Ba'ath Party Members Discussing the Status of the Party in the Arab World and Potential Cooperation with the Muslim Brotherhood', Wilson Center Digital Archive, 24 July 1986, available at: digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110091, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁴⁵ Baram, A., *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968–2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 318–321.

¹⁴⁶ Rayburn, J., *Iraq after America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2014), p. 103.

Two things are notable. First, how well it worked. Tensions with the Islamists lowered to the point that some of them agreed to serve in the government – including at very high levels of the military.¹⁴⁷ Second, how obvious was the trapdoor in the policy, namely multiplying the ranks of the irreconcilables.

With the army shattered by DESERT STORM, under sanctions, and falling back on a core of Sunni clans and other loyalists because of the shock of the Shi'ite revolt in 1991, the regime's capacity was weakened and the legitimacy of its ruling Ba'ath ideology was spent. In this context, intelligence officers sent to infiltrate mosques often ended up becoming “more loyal to Salafism than to Saddam”.¹⁴⁸ Saddam was empowering an independent trend – the “pure” Salafis – by both omission (he couldn't restrain it) and commission (greater freedom for religious extremists and the production of many more by a government apparatus that was inculcating a Salafised version of Islam in the population) that was charting a path beyond his regime.

With the Salafis and Islamists growing in strength, partly in and partly out of the government, some were prepared to wait it out as the regime decayed, confident they would be the successor force. The jihadi-minded Salafis, however, had no patience for this, and began – years before Saddam fell – attacking government installations in Baghdad and elsewhere with car bombs and other means that would become infamous after the regime was overthrown.¹⁴⁹

IS's founder, Ahmed al-Khalayleh (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), upon arrival in Iraq in the spring of 2002,¹⁵⁰ was pleasantly surprised at how extensive the underground Salafi infrastructure was, and how deeply it reached into the regime.¹⁵¹ The Ba'athi-Salafists undoubtedly gave IS more to work with and helped to fortify it in the early days, and would rise all the way to the top later. It is noticeable, though, that it was the “pure” Salafis who had begun their *jihad* while Saddam was still in power that formed key parts of al-Khalayleh's network in the aftermath of the regime.

The outstanding case of an irreconcilable Salafi who went on to lead IS in the early years of the insurgency is Umar Hadid (Abu Khattab al-Falluji), al-Khalayleh's key deputy in Fallujah during the crisis in 2004. Hadid had attacked and closed down a brothel and a wine store in his native Fallujah before killing a Saddam regime security official and going into internal exile in the late 1990s.¹⁵² Al-Qaduli was another: a jihadi agitator since the late 1980s,¹⁵³ he was arrested several times under Saddam because of his religious militancy,¹⁵⁴ and then left Iraq for Taliban Afghanistan in 1998.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁷ Stevenson, W., *The Weight of a Mustard Seed* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009).

¹⁴⁸ Rayburn, J., *Iraq after America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁹ Rayburn, J., *Iraq after America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁰ 'Postwar Findings about Iraq's WMD Programs and Links to Terrorism and How they Compare with Prewar Assessments', U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, released 8 September 2006, as 'phase II' of the July 2004 'Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq', p. 109.

¹⁵¹ Orton, K., 'Saddam's Former Loyalists Are Leading ISIS – as True Believers', *National Review*, 20 July 2015.

¹⁵² 'Al-Qaeda's distinguished Martyrs in Mesopotamia', *IslamicForum.net*, 1 April 2006, available at: islamic-forum.net/index.php?showtopic=2792, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁵³ Hassan, H., 'Does the removal of top jihadists weaken ISIL?', *The National* (U.A.E.), 10 April 2016, available at: www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/does-the-removal-of-top-jihadists-weaken-isil#full, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁵⁴ Chmaytelli, M., Isabel Coles, and Stephen Kalin, 'Islamic State dealt hefty body blow with death of top aide: officials', *Reuters*, 26 March 2016, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-syria-usa-idUSKCN0WS0FR, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁵⁵ Moore, J., 'ISIS Replaces Injured Leader Baghdadi With Former Physics Teacher', *Newsweek*, 22 April 2015.

1998 was a time of activity in Saddam's relationship with al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's then deputy (now leader) Ayman al-Zawahiri had visited Baghdad in February 1998 and met with Iraq's vice president, Taha Yassin Ramadan.¹⁵⁶ At least one al-Qaeda representative was hosted by the Saddam regime in March 1998,¹⁵⁷ probably two, and an Iraqi delegation went to Afghanistan – possibly arranged by al-Zawahiri – to meet the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.¹⁵⁸ Iraq's external head of intelligence met again with bin Laden in Afghanistan in December 1998.¹⁵⁹ One motive was al-Qaeda's strained relations with the Taliban and Saddam's offer of sanctuary to bin Laden, which the latter was considering.¹⁶⁰ But Saddam was also maintaining relations with the Taliban through multiple channels,¹⁶¹ including a former Iraqi intelligence officer, Jawad Jabbar Sadkhan al-Sahlan (Mullah Abdullah), who had deserted the Iraqi army in 1997 and joined the Taliban. Sadkhan had become a senior Taliban official in 1998 and began moving supplies from Saddam's Iraq to the Taliban.¹⁶² Vice president Ramadan hosted a Taliban representative in Baghdad in July 1998.¹⁶³ There was, therefore, traffic between Iraq and Afghanistan, under quasi-official auspices, during the period al-Qaduli moved to Afghanistan.

2.2.3 The Post-Saddam Insurgency

Al-Qaduli moved from Afghanistan to Sulaymaniya in 2000 to join Ansar al-Islam.¹⁶⁴ While Ansar was only formally founded in December 2001 as a merger of various Kurdish jihadi groups, as a concept and an initiative it had begun in the late 1990s. Led on the ground in northern Iraq by loyalists of al-Khalayleh, who had already founded the group that would become IS, Jund al-Sham, in Taliban Afghanistan, and financed by al-Qaeda,¹⁶⁵ the Ansar forerunner had seized 500 square kilometres of territory and 200,000 people, ruling over an “emirate” or pseudo-state that looked a lot like IS-held territory in the present.¹⁶⁶

After the Taliban was overthrown in late 2001, al-Khalayleh and some of his lieutenants entered Iraq via Ansar-held territory in Kurdistan in April 2002.¹⁶⁷ After an attempt to assassinate the Kurdish Prime Minister,¹⁶⁸ al-Khalayleh moved to Baghdad in May 2002 and then went to Lebanon and Syria to recruit in the summer. Al-Khalayleh returned to Ansar-held territory in November 2002 and took direct charge of Ansar in Kurdistan. Al-Khalayleh and 300 of his Ansar followers fled to Iran in late March 2003.¹⁶⁹ Al-Qaduli has to be assumed to have been among their number. Al-Khalayleh and Ansar's other fighters were smuggled back into Iraq with help from the fallen Saddam regime and the complicity of the Iranian regime over the summer of

¹⁵⁶ Hayes, S., *The Connection: How al Qaeda's Collaboration with Saddam Hussein Has Endangered America* (New York City: HarperCollins, 2004), p. 103.

¹⁵⁷ Author interview with *The Toronto Star's* Mitch Potter, who found the documents with independent journalist Inigo Gilmore, 8 June 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Kean, T., Lee Hamilton et al., 'The 9/11 Commission Report' (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004), p. 66, available at: www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁵⁹ Hayes, S., *The Connection: How al Qaeda's Collaboration with Saddam Hussein Has Endangered America*, p. 121.

¹⁶⁰ Kean, T. et al., 'The 9/11 Commission Report', p. 134.

¹⁶¹ Orton, K., 'Saddam and the Taliban', *The Syrian Intifada*, 29 June 2015, available at: <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/06/29/saddam-and-the-taliban/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁶² 'JTF-GTMO Detainee Assessment', Department of Defense, 14 March 2008, available at: <https://wikileaks.org/gitmo/pdf/iz/us9iz-000433dp.pdf>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁶³ Robison, R., 'Terror Links to Saddam's Inner Circle', *FoxNews*, 12 June 2006, available at: www.foxnews.com/story/2006/06/12/terror-links-to-saddam-inner-circle.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁶⁴ Weiss, M. and Hassan Hassan, 'Everything We Knew About This ISIS Mastermind Was Wrong', *The Daily Beast*, 15 April 2016.

¹⁶⁵ Schanzer, J., 'Ansar al-Islam: Iraq's al-Qaeda Connection', The Washington Institute, 15 January 2003, available at: www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/ansar-al-islam-iraqs-al-qaeda-connection, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ Wing, J., 'Iran's Ties With Al Qaeda In Iraq's Abu Musab al-Zarqawi', *Musings on Iraq*, 2 February 2016, available at: musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2016/02/irans-ties-with-al-qaeda-in-iraqs-abu.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁶⁸ Schanzer, J., 'Ansar al-Islam: Back in Iraq', *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2004, available at: <http://www.meforum.org/579/ansar-al-islam-back-in-iraq>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹⁶⁹ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, p. 16.

2003.¹⁷⁰ Once back in Iraq, Ansar reasserted its autonomy and maintained an independent channel to al-Qaeda¹⁷¹ – until it formally merged into IS in August 2014¹⁷² – but maintained coordination with al-Khalayleh’s network, Jamaat at-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ), which became al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in October 2004.

Abu-Ahmad and various anti-IS Syrian and Iraqi insurgents claimed¹⁷³ that al-Anbari remained at his post as an intelligence official of the Saddam regime right to the end and had then joined Ansar before being expelled for corruption in 2003 or 2004. After this, al-Anbari had supposedly joined JTJ. This story played to a wider narrative that al-Anbari was impious. But it was always dubious. JTJ/AQI was, in 2004, a small, foreign-led organisation within an insurgency dominated by Ba’athi-Salafist insurgent groups, staffed by capable FREs and lavishly supported with the looted treasury of the fallen Iraqi regime.¹⁷⁴ If al-Anbari was a corrupt Ba’athist whose main interest was practical – i.e., returning to power – there were many other groups he could have joined; JTJ/AQI was an ideological choice. The incentives on the other side tell against the corruption story, too. Al-Khalayleh did not overlook “un-Islamic” behaviour. JTJ/AQI made ex-Ba’athists repent of their ideological and behavioural past before joining. As late as December 2006, when the situation for IS might have dictated some leniency on the conditions for letting in those with military skills, Hamid al-Zawi (Abu Umar al-Baghdadi) used his inaugural address as proto-caliph to call on “officers of the former Iraqi Army ... to join the army of the Islamic State on condition that the applicant must know, at a minimum, three sections of the Holy Qur’an by rote and must pass an ideological examination by a clerical commission ... to make sure that he is not beholden to the idolatry of the Ba’ath and its tyrant”.¹⁷⁵ While it is now clear this does not apply to al-Qaduli, this reasoning does apply to the other senior “Ba’athists” within IS’s leadership, who almost invariably joined in 2003 or 2004.

What had in fact happened with al-Qaduli was that he had, on return to Iraq in 2003, founded his own independent Islamist insurgent group, Saraya al-Jihad (The Jihad Squads), in Tal Afar.¹⁷⁶ Before the end of 2004, al-Qaduli had joined AQI, becoming one of al-Khalayleh’s most senior deputies, AQI’s emir of Mosul (always its most important city), and head of the shari’a committees across all of northern Iraq. Al-Qaduli was also AQI’s representative to al-Qaeda “Central” (AQC) and even travelled to Pakistan in February 2006 to convey messages between AQI and AQC.¹⁷⁷

When al-Qaduli was arrested is unclear, but he was released in “early 2012”, according to U.S. Treasury sanctions.¹⁷⁸ The most notable prison break of IS detainees in that period was in March

¹⁷⁰ ‘Kurdish deputy security chief killed by Ansar al-Islam’, *Middle East Times*, 29 August 2003, available at: www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/973801/posts, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷¹ Bin Laden, O., ‘Letter from Osama bin Laden to Atiyya Abd al-Rahman [born Jamal al-Misratil]’, SOCOM-2012-0000019, Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point, 6 July 2010, available at: <http://www.jihadica.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/SOCOM-2012-0000019-Trans.pdf>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷² Halevy D. and Ari Yashar, ‘Iraqi Jihadist Group Swears Allegiance [sic] to Islamic State’, *Israel National News*, 29 August 2014, available at: <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/184544#.Vj2Pu7fhDIV>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷³ Gorman, S., Nour Malas, and Matt Bradley, ‘Brutal Efficiency: The Secret to Islamic State’s Success’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 2014, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/the-secret-to-the-success-of-islamic-state-1409709762, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Orton, K., ‘Izzat ad Douiri, and ISIS’, *Baghdad Invest*, 4 July 2015, available at: www.baghdadinvest.com/izzat-ad-douiri-isis/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Kazimi, N., ‘Would-Be Caliph’s Inaugural Address to the Islamic “Ummah [sic]’, *Talisman Gate*, 23 December 2006, available at: <http://talismangate.blogspot.no/2006/12/would-be-caliphs-inaugural-address-to.html>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Weiss, M. and Hassan Hassan, ‘Everything We Knew About This ISIS Mastermind Was Wrong’, *The Daily Beast*, 15 April 2016.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Treasury Designates Al-Qa’ida Leaders In Syria’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 14 May 2014, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2396.aspx>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Treasury Designates Al-Qa’ida Leaders In Syria’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 14 May 2014.

2012 from al-Tasfirat prison in Kirkuk City.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps al-Qaduli was freed at this time or in some other, smaller and unreported incident. It is also possible that Treasury has the time frame wrong and al-Qaduli was freed later in the year after IS's Operation **BREAKING DOWN THE WALLS** began in July 2012, with its first prominent success being a mass jailbreak of more than 100 men in Tikrit on 27 September 2012.¹⁸⁰

Either way, al-Qaduli was out of harm's way when IS was at its nadir, having been forced underground in 2008 via the Awakening and the Surge, and nearly decapitated in 2010 – the events that tipped the balance of power within IS's leadership away from the foreigners and to the Iraqi FREs, who were the last men standing.¹⁸¹

2.2.4 In Syria

Soon after his escape from jail in 2012, al-Qaduli went to Syria.¹⁸² In December 2012, the caliph's deputy, Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), a former officer in an elite intelligence unit of the Saddam regime, travelled to Syria and led the state-building effort IS undertook after it publicly announced its expansion into Syria in April 2013.¹⁸³ Al-Khlifawi headed the Military Council, responsible for expanding IS-held territory.

Alongside al-Khlifawi and al-Qaduli was Adnan al-Suwaydawi (Abu Muhammad al-Suwaydawi or Haji Dawood), who had been in the same intelligence unit as al-Khlifawi. Another of IS's leaders in setting up this authoritarian statelet in Syria was Adnan al-Bilawi (Abu Abdulrahman al-Bilawi), a former Special Forces operative in Saddam's regime who, like al-Khlifawi and his close friend al-Suwaydawi, had been associated with al-Khalayleh in the early days of the Iraqi insurgency, and all had become major figures in JTJ before it became AQL.¹⁸⁴

Al-Qaduli was charged with setting up the Security and Intelligence Council (SIC), the subset of the Military Council that enforces the writ of IS's leader in the territory IS holds via the *amniyat* (security units), keeping IS's local leaders under control, and where necessary eliminating spies or dissidents.¹⁸⁵ Al-Qaduli was responsible for the personal security of the caliph, being “rarely separate” from him.¹⁸⁶ Al-Qaduli is therefore responsible for some of IS's most ruthless conduct against its own members. He was also IS's public interface in recruiting from other insurgent groups inside Syria at this time,¹⁸⁷ almost certainly because of his religious authority.

Al-Qaduli was the governor of Syria after the caliphate declaration in June 2014.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Death row inmates in Iraq prison break’, *AlJazeera*, 24 March 2012, available at: www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/03/201232472617803768.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁸⁰ Roggio, B., ‘Al Qaeda in Iraq claims credit for Tikrit jailbreak’, *The Long War Journal*, 12 October 2012, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/al_qaeda_in_iraq_cla_3.php, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁸¹ Orton, K., ‘The Islamic State: Between Al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein’, *The Syrian Intifada*, 22 September 2015, available at: <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/09/22/the-islamic-state-between-al-qaeda-and-saddam-hussein/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁸² ‘Treasury Designates Al-Qa’ida Leaders In Syria’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 14 May 2014.

¹⁸³ Orton, K., ‘The Riddle of Haji Bakr.’ *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Caillet, R., ‘From the Ba’th to the Caliphate: the former officers of Saddam and the Islamic State’, *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*, 16 June 2015, available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/191720/E5c22a17e65138debb9d5d9c74ecde73.pdf>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Barrett, R., ‘The Islamic State,’ *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 31.

¹⁸⁶ Sherlock, R. and Magdy Samaan, ‘Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s close aide killed in US air strike’, *The Telegraph*, 9 November 2014, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11219630/Islamic-State-leader-Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadis-close-aide-killed-in-US-air-strike.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁸⁷ Chivers, C. J., ‘Behind the Black Flag: The Recruitment of an ISIS Killer’, *The New York Times*, 20 December 2015, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/21/world/middleeast/isis-recruitment-killer-hassan-aboud.html>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

The Iraqi government claimed that al-Qaduli was killed in an airstrike by the U.S.-led Coalition near Tal Afar on 13 May 2015, but the Coalition said it did not launch a strike in that area at that time,¹⁸⁸ and the video that Baghdad claimed showed al-Qaduli's demise was actually taken on 4 May.¹⁸⁹ Given that al-Qaduli gave the Friday sermon at the Zangi Mosque in Mosul – the same one where Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made his dramatic public appearance after the caliphate declaration in June 2014 – on 8 May 2015,¹⁹⁰ this seems to be another example of unreliable reporting from the Iraqi government. Al-Qaduli's death would be wrongly reported four times before he was actually killed.

With the death of Fadel al-Hiyali (Haji Mutazz or Abu Muslim al-Turkmani), the governor of Iraq, head of the Military Council, and the caliph's deputy, in August 2015, al-Qaduli assumed the leadership of the Military Council and the de facto number two spot in IS. He handed over responsibility for the SIC to Iyad al-Jumaili, another former intelligence officer, and Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi) became the governor of Syria.¹⁹¹

Al-Qaduli reportedly went to Libya in late 2015 to meet with the leaders of IS's increasingly-powerful branch in that country.¹⁹² This would make sense, since al-Qaduli's duties also included overseeing IS's "provinces" – its foreign branches.¹⁹³

Al-Qaduli was killed in a U.S. raid into Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria, on 25 March 2016. U.S. Special Forces had tracked him from two helicopters, intending to descend as he travelled in a car, stop the vehicle, and arrest him. But at the last moment something went wrong and the U.S. was forced to open fire from the helicopters.¹⁹⁴

Al-Qaduli was undoubtedly important to IS's security infrastructure, but those institutions are structured to make the leaders effectively expendable. The main legacy al-Qaduli leaves is ideological: 40 hours of lectures recovered after his death show him to have been the primary voice in defining IS's *aqeedah* (creed).¹⁹⁵ All the things that have marked IS as so unique even in the Jihadi-Salafist field – the enslavement of Yazidis and the wide-scale use of *takfir* (excommunication) against even individuals and groups that some consider extreme, like the Muslim Brotherhood, for example – can be traced, at least in part, to al-Qaduli. Any participation in democratic procedures, even to further Islamist goals, was judged by al-Qaduli as straying outside the bounds of the faith, a crime that carries the death penalty. IS has been remarkable for its ideological rigidity; where many insurgents meld their ideology to their surroundings, IS has proceeded on the assumption it can do the opposite, and can transform the populations over which it rules to its ideology. In keeping IS on this path, al-Qaduli was essential – and will continue to be long after his death.

¹⁸⁸ 'Islamic State deputy leader "killed in Iraq air strike"', *BBC News*, 13 May 2015, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-32726646, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁸⁹ Youssef, N., 'Iraq's B.S. About Killing ISIS Bosses', *The Daily Beast*, 13 May 2015, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/13/iraq-s-b-s-about-killing-isis-bosses.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁹⁰ Cruickshank, P., Tim Lister, and Michael Weiss, 'Who might lead ISIS if al-Baghdadi dies?' *CNN*, 3 July 2015, available at: edition.cnn.com/2015/07/11/middleeast/isis-leadership/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁹¹ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

¹⁹² Kirkpatrick, D., Ben Hubbard, and Eric Schmitt, 'ISIS' Grip on Libyan City Gives It a Fallback Option', *The New York Times*, 28 November 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/middleeast/isis-grip-on-libyan-city-gives-it-a-fallback-option.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁹³ Hassan, H., 'Does the removal of top jihadists weaken ISIL?', *The National* (U.A.E.), 10 April 2016.

¹⁹⁴ Starr, B., Ryan Browne, and Laura Koran, 'Pentagon: ISIS finance minister killed', *CNN*, 25 March 2016, available at: edition.cnn.com/2016/03/25/politics/isis-no-2-in-command-killed-u-s-believes/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁹⁵ Hassan, H., 'The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context', *Carnegie*, 13 June 2016, available at: carnegieendowment.org/2016/06/13/sectarianism-of-islamic-state-ideological-roots-and-political-context/j1iy, last visited 18 June 2016.

2.3 Taha Subhi Falaha

A Syrian, born near Aleppo in 1977,¹⁹⁶ Falaha is usually known by his kunya, **Abu Muhammad al-Adnani**. The official spokesman of the Islamic State, Falaha has acquired the label of “attack dog” because of his virulent style, especially in the war of words with al-Qaeda.

Figure 3 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani¹⁹⁷



The group that would evolve into IS was founded by a Jordanian, Ahmed al-Khalayleh (Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), in Taliban Afghanistan in early 2000 with al-Qaeda seed money. Known as Jund al-Sham, al-Khalayleh’s organisation fled Afghanistan after 9/11 to Iran, and al-Khalayleh moved into northern Iraq in April 2002. In May 2002, al-Khalayleh arrived in Baghdad.¹⁹⁸ Al-Khalayleh had with him “more than a dozen al-Qa’ida-affiliated extremists” and more followed, including his successor, Yusuf al-Dardiri (Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), Thirwat Shehata,¹⁹⁹ Iyad al-Tubaysi (Abu Julaybib),²⁰⁰ and Abu Hammam al-Suri.²⁰¹ Between May and October 2002, al-Khalayleh was “relatively free to travel within Iraq proper”, and used this freedom of action to set up sleeper cells in Baghdad in advance of the American invasion.²⁰²

After two American requests for al-Khalayleh’s arrest were forwarded to Baghdad via Jordan, and rebuffed, al-Khalayleh left Baghdad in July 2002²⁰³ and went to Lebanon and then Syria to recruit and set up the “ratlines” that would bring the foreign Jihadi-Salafists into to post-Saddam Iraq through Syria.

Al-Khalayleh went to Ayn al-Hilweh, the Palestinian camp in southern Lebanon, where a group called Asbat al-Ansar offered its cooperation, and soon began sending jihadi volunteers to Iraq.²⁰⁴ Asbat maintained extensive ties to Syrian intelligence.²⁰⁵ Moving to Syria, al-Khalayleh organised the assassination of USAID worker Laurence Foley in Amman in October 2002, with the complicity of the Bashar al-Assad regime, working through Shaker al-Absi, a Palestinian jihadi with a long record of near-open collaboration with Syrian intelligence.²⁰⁶ Al-Absi was almost certainly a Syrian intelligence asset and would later emerge as a leader of another Lebanon-based

¹⁹⁶ ‘Terrorist Designation of Abu Mohammed al-Adnani’, U.S. Department of State, 18 August 2014, available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/230676.htm>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

¹⁹⁷ Source: ‘The Flood,’ *Islamic State’s Al-Hayat Media Center, Dabiq Issue 2*, 27 July, 2014, media.clarionproject.org/files/09-2014/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-2-the-flood.pdf, last visited: 24 June, 2016

¹⁹⁸ ‘Postwar Findings about Iraq’s WMD Programs and Links to Terrorism and How they Compare with Prewar Assessments’, U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, released 8 September 2006, as ‘phase II’ of the July 2004 ‘Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq’, p. 109.

¹⁹⁹ Tenet, G., *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, chapter 18.

²⁰⁰ Tønnessen, T. H., ‘Heirs of Zarqawi or Saddam? The relationship between al-Qaida in Iraq and the Islamic State’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 2015, available at: www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/443/html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰¹ Joscelyn, T., ‘Al Qaeda veteran reportedly targeted in Syria’, *The Long War Journal*, 6 March 2015, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/syrian-mil-targets-aq-vet.php, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰² ‘Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction’ (a.k.a. ‘Butler Review’), British Parliamentary committee, 4 July 2004, p. 120.

²⁰³ Dakss, B., ‘Al Qaeda Eyes U.S. Troops’, *CBS News*, 8 March 2003, available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/al-qaeda-eyes-us-troops/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰⁴ Gebara, K., ‘Ain al-Hilweh: al-Qaeda’s Foothold in Lebanon’, Jamestown Foundation, 3 November 2004, available at: www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27105#.VwIoROIrLIU, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰⁵ Lister, C., *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2015), p. 40.

²⁰⁶ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, p. 106.

jihadi faction, this time in the north, called Fatah al-Islam,²⁰⁷ two of whose members testified, after their arrest by the Lebanese government, to receiving orders from Assad's brother-in-law and military-intelligence chief Assef Shawkat.²⁰⁸ It was Shawkat who later oversaw the training camps and safe houses for IS's predecessor in eastern Syria.²⁰⁹

Al-Khalayleh gathered pledges of allegiance from numerous individuals and groups on his tour of the Levant. One of the very first groups to pledge themselves to al-Khalayleh, consisting of about 35 people in Aleppo, contained Falaha.²¹⁰ Al-Khalayleh moved back into Iraq and settled in an area of Kurdistan controlled by Ansar al-Islam in November 2002, taking direct leadership of Ansar. In early 2003, Falaha relocated to this Ansar-controlled enclave in advance of the American-led invasion.²¹¹

While there is no documentary evidence, it seems very likely that Falaha moved with al-Khalayleh into Iran after Ansar abandoned its positions and fled across the border on 29 March 2003.²¹² Over the summer of 2003, Ansar and associated forces returned to Iraq with the complicity of the Iranian regime²¹³ and the assistance of the fallen Saddam regime.²¹⁴ Once back in Iraq, Ansar would reassert its autonomy and al-Khalayleh would coalesce his forces into Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTJ), which became al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in October 2004, and would become the Islamic State (in various formats and names) in November 2006. Falaha was a member of both JTJ and AQI.

Falaha was arrested on 31 May 2005 in al-Anbar Province and imprisoned, at least some of the time in Camp Bucca, until 2010.²¹⁵

Falaha, though a Syrian, was not used by IS in the early stages of the infiltration of that country after the 2011 uprising broke out. In a speech released in November 2012, Falaha celebrated the "Breaking the Walls" campaign that was freeing so many of IS's most competent and dangerous commanders from Iraqi prisons. Vowing "relentless war", Falaha said that "the Islamic State has known that right is retrieved only by force", and under the leadership of the "mujahid shaykh" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "the State" was continuing to "spread its influence once again in the regions (of Iraq) that it withdrew from". Syria was not mentioned.²¹⁶

In early 2013, Falaha's speeches were focused on trying to take advantage of the Sunni protest movement against the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki and kindle it into a sectarian war.²¹⁷ But

²⁰⁷ Neumann, P., 'Suspects into Collaborators', *London Review of Books*, 3 April 2014, available at: www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n07/peter-neumann/suspects-into-collaborators, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰⁸ 'Report: Fatah al-Islam linked to Bashar Assad's Brother-in-Law', *Naharnet*, 18 July 2007, available at: http://www.cedarsrevolution.net/jtphp/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=217&Itemid=30, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁰⁹ Gordon, M. and Bernard Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 230.

²¹⁰ Lister, C., *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, pp. 147–148.

²¹¹ Bunzel, C., 'From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State', Brookings Institute, March 2015, p. 24.

²¹² Rubin, M., 'Ansar al-Sunna: Iraq's New Terrorist Threat', *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, May 2004, available at: https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0405_iraq1.htm, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²¹³ 'Kurdish deputy security chief killed by Ansar al-Islam', *Middle East Times*, 29 August 2003.

²¹⁴ 'Official: Saddam confidant linked to terrorist group', *The Associated Press*, 30 October 2003, available at: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-10-29-iraq-attacks_x.htm, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²¹⁵ 'United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance, United Nations Sanctions Ordinance and List of Names for Suspicious Account Reporting', Hong Kong Monetary Authority, 29 August 2014, available at: <http://www.hkma.gov.hk/media/eng/doc/key-information/guidelines-and-circular/2014/20140829e2.pdf>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²¹⁶ 'Stormings are more painful', Al-Furqan Media, November 2012, available at: <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/shaykh-abc5ab-mue1b8a5ammad-al-adnc481nc4ab-22the-incursions-are-deadlier22-en.pdf>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²¹⁷ 'Iraq Sunnis rally against Shia-led government', Al-Jazeera, 2 February 2013, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/02/20132193645300257.html>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

Falaha had moved to Syria in December 2012 in the company of Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), the caliph's deputy, as part of the effort to regain control of Jabhat al-Nusra, formally IS's Syrian wing but becoming increasingly independent, and when that didn't work to subvert the group.²¹⁸

By the summer of 2013, Falaha had taken up the role that would make him famous: IS's most ferocious public advocate, especially against other Islamist militants.

In June 2013, Ayman al-Zawahiri's ruling – dated 24 May 2013 – was leaked to al-Jazeera.²¹⁹ Al-Zawahiri said that IS should return to Iraq and leave Jabhat al-Nusra under the leadership of Abu Muhammad al-Jolani to wage the *jihad* in Syria as al-Qaeda's official affiliate. Five days after the leak, on 14 June, al-Baghdadi released an audio statement that, while remaining largely respectful to al-Zawahiri, firmly rejected his command. "I chose the command of God over the command that runs against it in the letter," al-Baghdadi said.²²⁰ It was left to Falaha, in a statement six days later, to savage al-Zawahiri.

"No one will stop us from aiding our brethren in Syria!" Falaha announced on 19 June 2013, and listed seven points in refutation of al-Zawahiri's order that IS return to Iraq. Falaha accused al-Zawahiri of upholding the Sykes-Picot division of the Muslims by the imperialist Crusaders and validating the "disobedient renegades" in al-Nusra whose disloyalty could set an awful precedent for splitting the ranks of the *mujahideen*. "Our objective is the formation of an Islamic State on the prophetic model that acknowledges no boundaries, distinguishes not between Arab and non-Arab," concluded Falaha. This State's "loyalty is exclusively to God: it relies on only Him and fears Him alone," Falaha added, with the implication that al-Zawahiri's order contradicted God's will.²²¹

In August 2013, Falaha condemned those – namely al-Qaeda – who said IS should focus on Iraq and leave Syria to the indigenous forces. Those offering this advice were supporting the "projects of degenerates and immoral agents in the hotels of Turkey and Qatar", said Falaha, backing the "national and secular projects", while being "deaf to the project of the Islamic State".²²²

The war of words would escalate and finally erupt into violence. Over the second half of 2013, IS had repeatedly committed violations – kidnappings and killings against rebels, takeovers of important infrastructure like flour mills on dubious pretexts. IS had also consistently refused to submit to an independent shari'a court because, as Turki al-Binali explained, "We are a State, so how could you compel us to submit to the judgment of an independent court?"²²³ With the torture and murder of a popular rebel commander on New Year's Day 2014,²²⁴ ISIS had gone too far,

²¹⁸ Orton, K., 'The Riddle of Haji Bakr', *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015.

²¹⁹ Atassi, B., 'Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger', *Al-Jazeera*, 9 June 2013, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013699425657882.html>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

²²⁰ The Associated Press, 'Al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq defies boss over Syria fight', *The Washington Post*, 15 June 2013, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/al-qaedas-leader-in-iraq-defies-boss-over-syria-fight/2013/06/15/05a92b92-d5e8-11e2-8cbe-1bcbee06f8f8_story.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²¹ Bunzel, C., 'The Islamic State of Disobedience: al-Baghdadi Triumphant', *Jihadica*, 5 October 2013, available at: <http://www.jihadica.com/the-islamic-state-of-disobedience-al-baghdadis-defiance/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²² 'Full text of "Al Adnani May Allah Be With You O Oppressed State"', Fursan Al-Balagh Media, August 2013, available at: https://archive.org/stream/AlAdnaniMayAllahBeWithYouOOppressedState/Al-Adnani-%20They%20Shall%20by%20no%20means%20Harm%20you_djvu.txt, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²³ McCants, W., *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*, chapter 4, Kindle location 120.

²²⁴ 'ISIL tortured to death Ahrar Al Sham commander in Aleppo', *Zaman al-Wasl*, 1 January 2014, available at: <https://en.zamanalwsl.net/news/3111.html>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

and the Syrian rebellion – including, reluctantly, hardline groups like Ahrar al-Sham – plus al-Nusra itself went to war with ISIS, driving it from positions in seven provinces over eight weeks.

Al-Zawahiri expelled ISIS from al-Qaeda on 3 February 2014. Al-Qaeda “has no links to the ISIS group. We were not informed about its creation ... [and] we ordered it to stop. ISIS is not a branch of al-Qaeda and we have no organizational relationship with it,” al-Zawahiri said.²²⁵ So began the “war of the narratives”, with al-Qaeda claiming that while it had had formal command over ISIS since 2004, IS had long been a problem child, and IS countering that they had not been under al-Qaeda’s command since the 2006 creation of the Islamic State of Iraq when al-Dardiri’s allegiance switched from Osama bin Laden to Hamid al-Zawi (Abu Umar al-Baghdadi).

Al-Zawahiri made his first major statement on the split with IS in May 2014, making reference to several documents captured in the Abbottabad raid and purportedly referencing other internal al-Qaeda memos to make the point that IS had considered itself subordinate to his command right up until he had disowned it.²²⁶ It was Falaha who issued IS’s response.

IS had never been a branch of al-Qaeda, Falaha said, and this could be demonstrated by IS’s refusal to cease and desist from mass-casualty attacks on Shi’a civilians, despite al-Qaeda “Central” (AQC) repeatedly telling IS that this was counterproductive. But, said Falaha, IS had been “abiding by the advices and directives of the shaykhs and figures of jihad” with respect to foreign policy, which is why IS had never attacked Iran. IS had “kept its anger all these years and endured accusations of collaboration with its worst enemy, Iran, for refraining from targeting it, leaving the Rawafid [a bigoted term for Shi’ites] there to live in safety, acting upon the orders of al Qaeda to safeguard its interests and supply lines in Iran. ... Let history record that Iran owes al-Qaeda invaluablely.”²²⁷

The U.S.-led Coalition began airstrikes against IS in Syria on 23 September 2014. The day before, Falaha had issued IS’s statement calling for “lone wolf” attacks in the West:²²⁸

Your state is facing a new campaign by the crusaders. So O muwahhid [monotheists], wherever you may be, what are you going to do to support your brothers? ...

O muwahhid, do not let this battle pass you by wherever you may be. You must strike the soldiers, patrons, and troops of the tawaghit [illegitimate governments, i.e. Western democracies and the Arab autocracies fighting IS]. Strike their police, security, and intelligence members, as well as their treacherous agents. ... If you can kill a disbelieving American or European – especially the spiteful and filthy French – or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone’s advice and do not seek anyone’s verdict. Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling. Both of them are disbelievers. ... Both of their

²²⁵ Lucas, S., ‘Syria Document: Al Qaeda Disavows Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham’, *EA WorldView*, 3 February 2014, available at: <http://eaworldview.com/2014/02/syria-document-al-qaeda-disavows-islamic-state-iraq-sham/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²⁶ Van Ostacyen, P., ‘Dr. Ayman az-Zawahiri - Testimonial to Preserve the Blood of Mujahideen in as-Sham’, 3 May 2014, available at: <https://pietervanostacyen.wordpress.com/2014/05/03/dr-ayman-az-zawahiri-testimonial-to-preserve-the-blood-of-mujahideen-in-as-sham/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²⁷ Roggio, B., “Iran owes al Qaeda invaluablely,” *ISIS spokesman says*, *The Long War Journal*, 12 May 2014, available at: http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/05/iran_owes_al_qaeda_invaluably.php, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²²⁸ Van Ostacyen, P., ‘Abū Muhammad al-ʿAdnānī ash-Shāmī - Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful’, 25 September 2014, available at: <https://pietervanostacyen.wordpress.com/2014/09/25/abu-muhammad-al-adnani-ash-shami-indeed-your-lord-is-ever-watchful/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

blood and wealth is legal for you to destroy, for blood does not become illegal or legal to spill by the clothes being worn. ... The only things that make blood illegal and legal to spill are Islam and a covenant (peace treaty, dhimma, etc). Blood becomes legal to spill through disbelief. So whoever is a Muslim, his blood and wealth are sanctified. And whoever is a disbeliever, his wealth is legal for a Muslim to take and his blood is legal to spill. His blood is like the blood of a dog. ...

If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman, or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him. Do not lack. Do not be contemptible. ... If you are unable to do so, then burn his home, car, or business. Or destroy his crops. If you are unable to do so, then spit in his face. If your self refuses to do so, while your brothers are being bombarded and killed, and while their blood and wealth everywhere is deemed lawful by their enemies, then review your religion.

With this public incitement, Falaha, who had been listed as a global terrorist by the U.S. State Department just a month earlier,²²⁹ became one of IS's most internationally recognisable leaders. Two further statements, in June 2015²³⁰ and May 2016,²³¹ would echo this message, and all three statements were followed by a notable increase in attacks in the West.

As the caliphate has come under pressure, it is Falaha who has been given the role of preparing IS's supporters for the loss of territory. In his May 2016 statement, Falaha said:

You will never be victorious. ... Or do you think, O America, that victory is by killing one leader or another? ... Were you victorious when you killed Abu Musab [al-Zarqawi], Abu Hamza [al-Muhajir], Abu Umar [al-Baghdadi], or Osama [bin Laden]? ... Or do you, O America, consider defeat to be the loss of a city or the loss of land? Were we defeated when we lost the cities in Iraq and were in the desert without any city or land? And would we be defeated and you be victorious if you were to take Mosul or Sirte or Raqqa or even take all the cities and we were to return to our initial condition? Certainly not!

Falaha's assessment might even be correct. The loss of territory would open a difficult chapter for IS, however, and might include the loss of the leader. If the caliph were to be killed, then Falaha, one of the men in the caliph's inner circle and one of the most long-standing members of the organisation, would be in line as a successor.

As the official spokesman of the group, Falaha is involved with IS's media production and is a long-time member of the Shura Council. A senior defector from IS's security services said Falaha was now the overall IS governor of Syria - not in a military capacity, but in the appointment of security and political personnel.²³² With the deaths of IS's senior leaders that has led to the previous Syria governor, Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli (Abu Ali al-Anbari), becoming the overall

²²⁹ 'Terrorist Designation of Abu Mohammed al-Adnani', U.S. Department of State, 18 August 2014.

²³⁰ Van Ostaeeyen, P., 'O Our People Respond to the Caller of Allah' ~ Audio Statement by Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani as-Shami', 23 June 2015, available at: <https://pietervanostaeeyen.wordpress.com/2015/06/23/o-our-people-respond-to-the-caller-of-allah-audio-statement-by-shaykh-abu-muhammad-al-adnani-as-shami/>, last visited 15 June 2016.

²³¹ al-Adnani, A. M., 'That They Live By Proof', 21 May 2016.

²³² Weiss, M., 'How ISIS Picks Its Suicide Bombers', *The Daily Beast*, 17 November 2015, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/11/16/how-isis-picks-its-suicide-bombers.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

leader of the Military Council, and his apparent successor as Syria governor, Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi),²³³ being killed, this is plausible. Falaha also oversees IS's foreign attacks.²³⁴

In January 2016, the Iraqi government claimed it had seriously wounded Falaha in Anbar Province.²³⁵ There has been no confirmation of this.

2.4 Abdullah al-Ani

Born in or around 1954, al-Ani is a veteran Jihadi-Salafist and associate of al-Qaeda who joined IS in 2004 when it was a branch of al-Qaeda. A close advisor to the caliph, of the Quraysh tribe, and respected even by al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Ani is among the most likely replacements should Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi be killed.²³⁶

2.5 Younis al-Mashadani

Born in Baghdad in or around 1950, al-Mashadani joined IS's predecessor in 2006, can trace his lineage through the Quraysh tribe to the Prophet, is a known and respected religious scholar with a PhD, and serves on the Shura Council.²³⁷ These qualifications mean that few are better positioned than al-Mashadani to replace Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi if he were to be killed. Interestingly, al-Mashadani received his PhD from the same institution – the Saddam University for Islamic Studies – as al-Baghdadi received his.

²³³ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

²³⁴ Schmitt, E., 'Paris Attacks and Other Assaults Seen as Evidence of a Shift by ISIS', *The New York Times*, 22 November 2015, available at: www.nytimes.com/2015/11/23/world/europe/paris-attacks-isis-threatens-west.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²³⁵ Botelho, G. and Hamdi Alkhshali, 'Iraq says ISIS leader Abu Mohammed al-Adnani wounded in airstrike', *CNN*, 8 January 2016, available at: edition.cnn.com/2016/01/07/middleeast/isis-leader-abu-mohammed-al-adnani/, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²³⁶ Cruickshank, P., Tim Lister, and Michael Weiss, 'Who might lead ISIS if al-Baghdadi dies?' *CNN*, 3 July 2015.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

3. The Military Council

3.1 *Waleed Jassem al-Alwani*

Commonly known as **Abu Ahmad al-Alwani**, al-Alwani is a former commander in Saddam Hussein's army and went on to become a member of IS's Military Council.²³⁸

There is a claim that al-Alwani was – with Samir al-Khelifawi (Haji Bakr) and Adnan al-Suwaydawi – one of the ex-“Ba’athists” that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi met at Camp Bucca and who were inducted into IS to help it revive after the Surge.²³⁹ There is a problem with this, however: it is unknown if or when al-Alwani was imprisoned, but it is known that Abu Bakr was imprisoned between February and December 2004, while al-Khelifawi was imprisoned between 2006 and 2008,²⁴⁰ and al-Suwaydawi was imprisoned between 2007 and 2010.

*Figure 4 Abu Ahmad al-Alwani*²⁴¹



There were reports from the time of the Mosul offensive that al-Alwani was actually the head of the Military Council,²⁴² but these reports were mistaken. Al-Suwaydawi replaced the slain Adnan Ismail Najem al-Bilawi as the head of IS's Military Council in June 2014²⁴³ and remained there until his own death in May 2015.

The confusion seems to have arisen because al-Alwani was made head of *Hay'at al-Arkan* (General Staff Command) around mid-2014.²⁴⁴ While it is unclear exactly what role the head of the General Staff plays, as distinct from the head of the Military Council, it appears to be a revival of the Chief of Staff position that was abolished when the Military Council was founded in 2011.

Reports circulated in February 2015 in British tabloids^{245,246} that al-Alwani had been killed in late 2014 – probably in the 7 November 2014 airstrike that appeared to hit some kind of IS gathering – but no confirmation has been forthcoming, even in Baghdad. When the Iraqi Security Forces and the Shi'a militias, the most powerful of them beholden to Iran, entered Ramadi on 27

²³⁸ 'Exclusive: Top ISIS leaders revealed', *Al-Arabiya*, 13 February 2014, available at: english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2014/02/13/Exclusive-Top-ISIS-leaders-revealed.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²³⁹ Hashem, A., 'The many names of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi', *Al-Monitor*, 23 March 2015, available at: www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/isis-baghdadi-islamic-state-caliph-many-names-al-qaeda.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁴⁰ Reuter, C., 'The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State', *Der Spiegel*, 18 April 2015.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² <http://www.sahafah.net/show1491958.html>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁴³ Hubbard, B. and Eric Schmitt, 'Military Skill and Terrorist Technique Fuel Success of ISIS', *The New York Times*, 27 August 2014, available at: www.nytimes.com/2014/08/28/world/middleeast/army-know-how-seen-as-factor-in-isis-successes.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁴⁴ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

²⁴⁵ Phillips, R. and David Willetts, 'Half of I.S. chiefs are wiped out in air raids', *The Sun*, 2 February 2015, available at: www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/6317660/EXCLUSIVE-Half-of-Islamic-State-chiefs-are-wiped-out-in-air-raids-The-Sun-reveals.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁴⁶ Hall, J., 'The Kill List: Half of ISIS top commanders believed to be dead... but executioner-in-chief Jihadi John is still free to commit barbaric slaughter', *The Daily Mail*, 2 February 2015, available at: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2936231/The-Kill-List-Half-ISIS-commanders-believed-dead-executioner-chief-Jihadi-John-free-commit-barbaric-slaughter.html, last visited: 14 June 2016.

December 2015, after clearing IS from large parts of the city, the Iraqi Interior Ministry claimed that it had killed al-Alwani.²⁴⁷

A well-placed observer, who has revealed numerous details of IS's evolution, claimed in early 2016 that al-Alwani was indeed dead, and had been replaced at Hay'at al-Arkan by Abu Umar al-Hadithi, about whom nothing is known.²⁴⁸

3.2 Tarkhan Batirashvili

Born on 11 January 1986 in the republic of Georgia to a Christian father and a Muslim mother, Batirashvili is often described as a “Chechen” and has taken a kunya, **Abu Umar al-Shishani**, suggesting this (“al-Shishani” means “the Chechen”). Batirashvili is from the village of Birkiani, in the Pankisi Gorge area, and is from a minority group of about 5,000, the Kists, “a Chechen and Ingush sub-ethnic group who migrated to the region from lower Chechnya in the 1830s. (Local legend has it that the first Chechen migrants ended up in Pankisi after their sheep wandered into Georgia. Finding it lush and pleasant, they stayed).” This has led to a (heavily politicised) questioning of whether Batirashvili can rightfully call himself a Chechen.²⁴⁹

The Pankisi Gorge became known as a throughway for Islamists and other insurgents during the wars in Chechnya. Batirashvili was reported by his father to have fought with the terrorist group of Ruslan Gelayev, a known asset of Russian intelligence, at the age of 14, during a little-remembered crisis in Abkhazia in October 2001 when Gelayev's forces invaded Abkhazia from the Georgian side.²⁵⁰ But in another interview, Batirashvili's father said that it was Tamaz, the middle brother (Tarkhan is the youngest) who fought in the 2001 war.²⁵¹

According to his father, Batirashvili began helping Chechen rebels cross secretly into Russia, and even engaged in fighting against Moscow-supported forces while working as a shepherd in Birkiani.²⁵² In 2006,²⁵³ after high school, Batirashvili “joined the Georgian army and distinguished himself as master of various weaponry and maps, said [Malkhaz] Topuria, his former commander, who recruited him into a special reconnaissance group”.²⁵⁴

America began training Georgian military forces in 2002, and Batirashvili seems to have been a beneficiary of the U.S. training programme.²⁵⁵ “He was a perfect soldier from his first days, and everyone knew he was a star,” according to a former colleague of Batirashvili. “We were well trained by American Special Forces units, and he was the star pupil.”²⁵⁶

²⁴⁷ <http://www.iraqkhair.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B3/>, last visited: 14 June 2016.

²⁴⁸ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines’, 24 January 2016.

²⁴⁹ Paraszczuk, J., “Umar Is Not Even A Real Chechen, Anyway” – The Politics Of “Shishani” In IS And Syria’, *RFE/RL*, 5 November 2014, available at: www.rferl.org/content/blog/26675969.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁵⁰ Hage Ali, M., ‘Meet ISIS’ new breed of Chechen militants’, *Al-Arabiya*, 31 August 2014, available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2014/08/31/Meet-ISIS-new-breed-of-Chechen-Militants-.html>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

²⁵¹ ‘Georgian sergeant became the leader of the jihad in Iraq’, *BBC*, 8 July 2014, available at: www.bbc.com/russian/international/2014/07/140704_isis_shishani_father_interview, last visited: 15 June 2016.

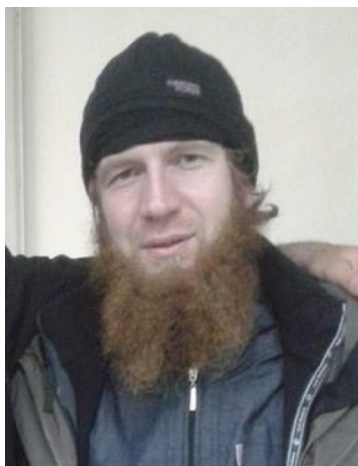
²⁵² Cullison, A., ‘Meet the Rebel Commander in Syria That Assad, Russia and the U.S. All Fear’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2013, available at: www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303309504579181962177007316, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁵³ Cathcart, W., Vazha Tavberidze, and Nimo Burchuladze, ‘The Secret Life of an ISIS Warlord’, *The Daily Beast*, 27 October 2014, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/10/27/the-secret-life-of-an-isis-warlord.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁵⁴ Cullison, A., ‘Meet the Rebel Commander in Syria That Assad, Russia and the U.S. All Fear’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2013.

²⁵⁵ ‘Green Berets Land in Georgia For 2-Year Training Program’, *The New York Times*, 20 May 2002, available at: www.nytimes.com/2002/05/20/world/green-berets-land-in-georgia-for-2-year-training-program.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁵⁶ Prothero, M., ‘U.S. training helped mold top Islamic State military commander’, *McClatchy*, 15 September 2015, available at: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article35322882.html>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

*Figure 5 Abu Umar al-Shishani*²⁵⁷

Batirashvili would be transferred to the employment of the Constitutional Security Department (KUDI) within the Interior Ministry, which oversees Georgia's Special Forces or SPETSNAZ. Working for an intelligence unit of the SPETSNAZ, Batirashvili partook in the Georgia-Russia war of August 2008, specifically tasked with spying on the movement of Russian tank divisions.²⁵⁸

After the war, Batirashvili “appeared to be helping Islamist rebels inside Russia, and asked [his] former commander for help finding some military-grade maps of Chechnya”.²⁵⁹

Batirashvili was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 2010; he received no medical assistance from the government. In September 2010, he was arrested for possession of illegal weapons and imprisoned for 16 months. It is not clear whether he was pushed out of the army after his tuberculosis diagnosis or was dismissed after his conviction. It is also unclear whether he was directly involved in weapons' smuggling in the specific case that landed him in jail, but he was within the network that the government disbanded.²⁶⁰

3.2.1 In Syria

Batirashvili's father claims that “before Tarkhan went to prison, he wasn't religious at all”.²⁶¹ But by the time he was released from prison – either in January or February 2012 – he had been radicalised. “I promised God that if I come out of prison alive, I'll go fight jihad for the sake of God,” Batirashvili later recalled. Almost immediately upon release, he set out for Istanbul, where an older brother (very likely Tamaz) had gone months before.²⁶² Batirashvili arrived in Syria in March 2012.²⁶³ (Batirashvili himself has said he entered Syria in March 2012.²⁶⁴)

Turkey was home to a large exile community of Chechens, Dagestanis, and other Caucasians, some of whom had fought in the Chechen wars. It was from these Russian-speaking communities that the first notable contingent of anti-regime foreign fighters arrived in Syria in the first half of 2012.

In January 2012, Jabhat al-Nusra announced its existence in Syria, the first Jihadi-Salafist group to do so. Al-Nusra was set up as the secret Syrian wing of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), the predecessor to the Islamic State (IS). ISI was at this time perceived as being the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda.

²⁵⁷ Source: Charles Lister (@Charles_Lister), Twitter post, 28 March, 2016, https://twitter.com/Charles_Lister/status/714525587034009601, last visited: 24 June, 2016

²⁵⁸ Cathcart, W., Vazha Tavberidze, and Nino Burchuladze, “The Secret Life of an ISIS Warlord,” *The Daily Beast*, 27 October 2014.

²⁵⁹ Cullison, A., ‘Meet the Rebel Commander in Syria That Assad, Russia and the U.S. All Fear’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2013.

²⁶⁰ Cathcart, W., Vazha Tavberidze, and Nino Burchuladze, “The Secret Life of an IS Warlord”, *The Daily Beast*, 27 October 2014.

²⁶¹ Cathcart, W., Vazha Tavberidze, and Nino Burchuladze, “The Secret Life of an IS Warlord”, *The Daily Beast*, 27 October 2014.

²⁶² Cullison, A., ‘Meet the Rebel Commander in Syria That Assad, Russia and the U.S. All Fear’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2013.

²⁶³ ‘Treasury Designates Twelve Foreign Terrorist Fighter Facilitators’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 24 September 2014, available at: www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2651.aspx, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁶⁴ Zelin, A., ‘New issue of Sanā al-Shām Newsletter #1’, *Jihadology*, 28 November 2013, available at: jihadology.net/2013/11/28/new-issue-of-sana-al-sham-newsletter-1/, last visited: 18 June 2016.

The second jihadi group announced in Syria was Katibat al-Muhajireen, which appeared in the early summer of 2012. The rank and file was mostly Libyan, but the leadership was largely “Chechen”, and Batirashvili was quickly made emir. Katibat al-Muhajireen was formed in Latakia and had areas of operation in Aleppo, which were expanded once the war for the city began in July 2012. The death of 24-year-old Rustam Gelayev, son of Ruslan, in Aleppo on or about 12 August 2012,²⁶⁵ highlighted the growing presence of militants from the Caucasus inside Syria, and played particularly strongly *in* the Caucasus as a spur to jihadis moving to Syria.²⁶⁶

3.2.2 Joining the Islamic State

In April 2013, ISI tried to publicly assert its authority over al-Nusra. ISI’s and now IS’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the merger of ISI and al-Nusra into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and al-Nusra’s leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, rejected it, instead pledging allegiance – for the first time in public but allegedly only “reaffirming” what had been said in private – to al-Qaeda’s leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.²⁶⁷ In January 2014, the schism between IS and Nusra erupted into open warfare, and in February 2014 al-Qaeda disowned IS.²⁶⁸ Al-Nusra was now al-Qaeda’s sole official branch in Syria, and ISIS would become the Islamic State (IS) after its offensive into Iraq and declared a caliphate in June 2014.

The 2014 fighting came after a build-up of tensions as IS(IS) tried to impose itself as a sole authority in insurgent-held areas – contending it was a “State”, and therefore could not share legitimacy with others. Initially, however, IS(IS) took a much softer and more cooperative approach in public, while working behind-the-scenes to weaken and subvert its rivals.

Batirashvili’s mostly foreign Katibat al-Muhajireen joined with the mostly Syrian Katibat al-Khattab and Jaysh al-Muhammad²⁶⁹ to form Jaysh al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA) in March 2013.²⁷⁰ JMA, which was designated by the U.S. as a terrorist organisation in September 2014,²⁷¹ was headquartered in Hraytan, north-west of Aleppo City. By the time JMA was formed, Batirashvili had already been secretly recruited by IS, though in public JMA was affiliated with al-Nusra.

IS’s tensions with al-Nusra were already well advanced by 2013, and al-Baghdadi knew that al-Jolani would not heed his order. Al-Baghdadi had already prepared the way to cut the ground from beneath al-Jolani. Al-Baghdadi’s deputy, Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), a former intelligence specialist in the Saddam regime who personally moved into Syria in December 2012, had prepared a “track two” of IS(IS) influence in Syria, separate from al-Nusra, which included, most

²⁶⁵ Gutterman, S., ‘Son of late Chechen warlord reported killed in Syria’, *Reuters*, 23 August 2012, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-russia-chechen-idUSBRE87M0RD20120823, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁶⁶ Lister, C., *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, p. 81.

²⁶⁷ Joscelyn, T., ‘Al Nusra Front leader renews allegiance to al Qaeda, rejects new name’, *The Long War Journal*, 10 April 2013, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/04/al_nusrah_front_lead.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁶⁸ Van Ostacayen, P., ‘al-Qaeda disavows ISIS in Syria’, 3 February 2014, available at: <https://pietervanostacayen.wordpress.com/2014/02/03/al-qaeda-disavows-isis-in-syria/>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁶⁹ Roggio, B., ‘Chechen commander forms “Army of Emigrants,” integrates Syrian groups’, *The Long War Journal*, 28 March 2013, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/03/chechen_jihadist_for.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁰ Batal al-Shishani, M., ‘“Obligated to Unite under One Banner”: A Profile of Syria’s Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa’l-Ansar’, *The Jamestown Foundation*, 19 April 2013, available at: www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40749&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=684&no_cache=1#_VpPtMfmLTIV, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷¹ ‘Designations of Foreign Terrorist Fighters’, U.S. Department of State, 24 September 2014, available at: www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/09/232067.htm, last visited: 15 June 2016.

prominently, Batirashvili²⁷² and the Absi family in Aleppo,²⁷³ one of whose number, Amr al-Absi (Abu al-Atheer), a notable extremist even within IS and the jihadi prison at Sednaya from which the Assad regime released him early in the uprising, went on to be one of the most vociferous proponents of the caliphate declaration and one of the people who did the most to forge the connections that made it possible.²⁷⁴

Batirashvili initially wavered in publicly declaring support for then ISIS. Hearing of this, al-Khlifawi dispatched IS's then-senior shar'i, Abu Bakr al-Qahtani, to make the religious argument to Batirashvili for the acceptability of breaking his *baya* (pledge of allegiance) to al-Jolani. When Batirashvili remained hesitant, al-Khlifawi sent a message to Batirashvili informing him that he would be assassinated if he defected to al-Qaeda. With Atheer – who had a reputation as an assassin – based close by, Batirashvili had good reason to take the threat seriously. Batirashvili made sure al-Khlifawi heard that he was loyal to IS.²⁷⁵ He was able to recover enough footing to resist issuing a public *baya*, but in May 2013 Batirashvili was made the northern emir of ISIS, a de facto statement of loyalty.²⁷⁶

This ambiguity of Batirashvili serving as an ISIS commander while leading JMA, which formally remained part of al-Nusra, was resolved in November 2013. On 21 November, Batirashvili publicly announced his *baya* to ISIS (which had been given on 10 October, according to ISIS's propaganda²⁷⁷). Noting that many of the rest of JMA's fighters refused to abandon their *baya* to al-Qaeda's Caucasus Emirate, Batirashvili left JMA with a pro-IS faction²⁷⁸ that included Emwazi. In September 2015, JMA gave *baya* to al-Qaeda,²⁷⁹ becoming formally what it had long been: a unit within Jabhat al-Nusra.

3.2.3 Position Within the Islamic State

While IS has largely confined foreigners to the Shari'a Council and its attendant media committees, Batirashvili has been presented as an exception. In a video released just hours before the caliphate declaration on 29 June 2014, Batirashvili was identified as “the military commander”. Many took this to mean *over Syria*, but that was not specified and led to some speculation that Batirashvili would replace the recently deceased Adnan al-Bilawi as head of the Military Council *in toto*, a job all the more meaningful since the two theatres – Iraq and Syria – were rapidly converging.²⁸⁰ That proved not to be the case: al-Bilawi was replaced by Adnan al-Suwaydawi.²⁸¹

²⁷² Orton, K., ‘The Riddle of Haji Bakr’, *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015.

²⁷³ Taub, B., ‘Journey to Jihad’, *The New Yorker*, 1 June 2015, available at: www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/01/journey-to-jihad, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁴ Orton, K., ‘How Syria's Assad gave rise to one of the most senior IS leaders’, *Middle East Eye*, 10 March 2016, available at: www.middleeasteye.net/columns/how-syrias-assad-gave-rise-one-most-senior-leaders-412885798, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁵ Bin Tashfin, Y., ‘English Translation of @WikiBaghdady’, 30 January 2014, available at: justpaste.it/e90q, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁶ ‘Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili’, Rewards for Justice, 5 May 2015, available at: https://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/tarkhan_batirashvili.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁷ Zelin, A., ‘New issue of Sanā al-Shām Newsletter #1’, *Jihadology*, 28 November 2013.

²⁷⁸ Joscelyn, T., ‘Chechen-led group swears allegiance to head of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham’, *The Long War Journal*, 27 November 2013, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/muhajireen_army_swea.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁷⁹ ‘Insurgent group pledges allegiance to al Qaeda's Syria wing’, *Reuters*, 23 September 2015, available at: www.reuters.com/article/2015/09/23/us-mideast-crisis-syria-nusra-idUSKCN0RN1Z920150923, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸⁰ Mroue, B., ‘Chechen in Syria a rising star in extremist group’, *The Associated Press*, 2 July 2014, available at: news.yahoo.com/chechen-syria-rising-star-extremist-group-074119012.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸¹ Hubbard, B. and Eric Schmitt, ‘Military Skill and Terrorist Technique Fuel Success of IS’, *The New York Times*, 27 August 2014.

Batirashvili was a member of the Military Council by mid-2014, according to the sanctions notice levied against Batirashvili in September 2014 by the U.S. Treasury Department, naming him a global terrorist.²⁸² Batirashvili “previously oversaw an IS prison facility in al-Tabqa where IS possibly held foreign hostages” and “worked closely” with IS’s Financial Committee, Treasury added. Batirashvili was also a member of the Shura Council by this point, according to the Treasury, but there is reason to doubt this.²⁸³

Batirashvili has been referred to by U.S. officials as IS’s “minister of war”.²⁸⁴ IS has never referred to Batirashvili as its war minister, and it is likely he has never held the post. Numan al-Zaydi (Abu Sulayman an-Nasser) succeeded Abu Hamza al-Masri – IS’s first war minister – in May 2010, and held the post until his death in February 2011.²⁸⁵ (IS initially denied al-Zaydi was dead²⁸⁶, but later confirmed it.²⁸⁷) During this period, al-Zaydi was also al-Baghdadi’s deputy. After al-Zaydi’s demise, IS formed the Military Council, with al-Khlifawi, then the chief of staff, as its first leader, and abolished the post of war minister. This is a crucial moment in IS’s history because it was when the “foreign-led” description of IS definitively ceased to be true. Abu Hamza was an Egyptian and al-Zaydi was a Moroccan,²⁸⁸ and they both had considerable influence within IS. The Military Council would be led by Iraqis, specifically the “repentant military commanders” from Saddam’s regime²⁸⁹ – those who had given up Ba’athism and proved themselves as Islamists. It is possible IS has revived this position for Batirashvili, but there is no evidence for this so far.

The deputy of Batirashvili’s unit, Islam Seit-Umarovich Atabiyev (Abu Jihad), is from a Turkic minority in the Northern Caucasus, the Karachay, and studied at al-Azhar University in Egypt until he returned to Karachay-Cherkessia, a small republic within the Russian Federation of fewer than half a million people on the Georgian border. According to Russian sources, Atabiyev was arrested in 2010 for militant activity but only received a year at a penal colony because he had informed on his comrades. By this account, Atabiyev was in Syria by the end of 2011, basing himself in Atma.²⁹⁰ Atabiyev gave *baya* to al-Baghdadi in December 2013 and is in charge of IS’s Russian-language media operations, according to U.S. sanctions in October 2015 naming Atabiyev a global terrorist.²⁹¹ Atabiyev was part of a trend of Islamist clerics moving from the Caucasus to Syria. It is probable, with Atabiyev’s apparent military skill and his known recruitment capability, that he would replace Batirashvili.

²⁸² ‘Treasury Designates Twelve Foreign Terrorist Fighter Facilitators’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 24 September 2014.

²⁸³ Barrett, R., ‘The Islamic State’, *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 32.

²⁸⁴ ‘Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on Syria Airstrike’, U.S. Department of Defense, 8 March 2016, available at: www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/688810/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-syria-airstrike, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸⁵ ‘Al-Qaeda “military leader” Abu Suleiman killed in Iraq’, *BBC News*, 25 February 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12581313>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸⁶ ‘ISI Denies Death Of Its Minister Of War’, *MEMRI*, 1 March 2011, available at: www.memrijtm.org/isi-denies-death-of-its-minister-of-war.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸⁷ The State of Islam – Mujahid Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, 8 July 2011, available at: <https://archive.org/details/IraqIslam1>, last visited: 15 June 2016. The reading of the “martyrs” starts at 12:50; “Numan Salman az-Zaydi” is mentioned at 14:05.

²⁸⁸ ‘Al-Qaida: severing the heads will not necessarily cut the lifeline’, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 26 July 2010, available at: icsr.info/2010/07/al-qaida-severing-the-heads-will-not-necessarily-cut-the-lifeline/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁸⁹ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines’, 24 January 2016.

²⁹⁰ Paraszczyk, J., ‘Kavkaz Press Names Umar Shishani’s Sidekick Abu Jihad’, *From Chechnya to Syria*, 2 December 2014, available at: <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=23003>, last visited: 18 June 2018.

²⁹¹ ‘Treasury Sanctions Individuals Affiliated With Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and Caucasus Emirate’, U.S. Department of Treasury, 5 October 2015, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/j10199.aspx>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

3.2.4 Increased Public Profile

Batirashvili “arrived” as a media phenomenon in August 2013 during the capture of Menagh airbase in Aleppo,²⁹² one of the few operations in which the Free Syrian Army (FSA)-branded rebels and IS directly collaborated. The airbase had been besieged by the rebellion for almost exactly a year, but it was IS that provided the suicide bombers to break the regime’s final resistance. In the aftermath, amid the crowd of insurgents, the red-bearded Batirashvili stood out, and there would be much sensational coverage of him – East and West – from that time onwards.

After IS attacked into Iraq, taking Mosul on 10 June 2014, and swept across central Iraq, it then poured resources captured from the Iraqi army back into eastern Syria, leading to the fall of Deir Ezzor on 5 July. This was something the Syrian armed opposition – which had by this time been fighting IS for six months – had warned the United States would happen if their position in the province was not fortified.²⁹³ It was Batirashvili that was (at least publicly) the face of IS’s eastern front offensive in the summer of 2014.²⁹⁴

IS launched an offensive against the regime’s Regiment 121 artillery base in Hasaka, just north of al-Khamal, on 24 July. After the base fell, IS released a video on 5 August in which Batirashvili was presented as the commander who had led IS in this capture of a considerable amount of weaponry and ammunition.²⁹⁵

A further video produced on 15 August 2014 showed Batirashvili giving a speech in preparation for another offensive operation in Hasaka. The video was produced by a faction calling itself *Katibat al-Aqsa*, and the video opened with the group giving *baya* to the caliph. The former military emir of JMA, Abdullah Shishani, was featured as one of *Katibat al-Aqsa*’s prominent members. This suggests that *Katibat al-Aqsa* consisted of at least some of Batirashvili’s IS-aligned breakaway from JMA.²⁹⁶

There is no doubt that by October 2014 *Katibat al-Aqsa* was involved in IS’s attempt to take Kobani from the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG).²⁹⁷ Where exactly Batirashvili was during the September–October period of 2014 is contested: he was variously reported as being in western Iraq and northern Syria,²⁹⁸ and this might actually be accurate since *Katibat al-Aqsa* seems to have operated as a mobile, Special Forces-type unit that shored up IS frontlines.

Batirashvili was credited with IS’s counter-offensive against the Iraqi government around Fallujah in September 2014. IS had been losing ground, but IS turned this to its advantage. IS was still aligned at this time with the General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries (GMCIR), a front group for Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-Naqshbandiya (JRTN), the Sufi-Ba’athist organisation run by

²⁹² Lister, C., *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, pp. 159–160.

²⁹³ Rogin, J., ‘U.S. Ignored Warnings Before ISIS Takeover of a Key City’, *The Daily Beast*, 10 July 2014, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/10/u-s-ignored-warnings-before-isis-takeover-of-a-key-city.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁹⁴ Lake, E., Jamie Dettmer, and Nadette De Visser, ‘Iraq’s Terrorists Are Becoming a Full-Blown Army’, *The Daily Beast*, 11 June 2014, available at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/06/11/iraq-s-terrorists-are-becoming-a-full-blown-army.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁹⁵ Roggio, B., ‘Islamic State overruns Syrian artillery regiment in Hasakah’, *The Long War Journal*, 6 August 2014, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/08/islamic_state_overru_1.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁹⁶ Paraszczuk, J., ‘Evidence Suggests Chechens Linked To Umar Shishani Fighting For IS In Kobani’, *RFL/RE*, 20 October 2014, available at: www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-chechens-umar-shishani-kobani/26646451.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁹⁷ Grossman, L., ‘Chechen unit from Islamic State reportedly fighting at Kobane’, *The Long War Journal*, 2 October 2014, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/10/chechen_unit_from_islamic_stat.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

²⁹⁸ Paraszczuk, J., ‘Where In The World Is Umar Shishani?’, *RFL/RE*, 14 October 2014, available at: www.rferl.org/content/isis-leader-shishani-georgia-iraq-syria/26636610.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

Saddam's former deputy Izzat al-Douri, and Harith al-Dari's Hayat al-Ulama al-Muslimeen (Muslim Scholars Association), which had been the "spiritual leadership" of the Iraqi insurgency and was connected with various Islamist insurgents of a more nationalist outlook.²⁹⁹ IS allowed the Iraqi forces to advance and to fully engage GMCIR, using up ammunition and stretching their lines, at which point IS began a counter-attack. For six days, between 18 and 24 September, IS besieged the Iraqi army, including several elite Special Forces units. IS then used chlorine and captured government vehicles for a final assault that concluded with the massacre of between 300 and 500 Iraqi soldiers and the capture of 180 more who were taken to Fallujah. From 2 October, apparently under Batirashvili's leadership, a series of offensives were begun to shore up IS's position north of Ramadi.³⁰⁰ According to Kurdish media,³⁰¹ it was only in the last week of October that IS moved Batirashvili to the Kobani front.

Batirashvili's military utility is contested. Some analysts credit Batirashvili as a "brilliant field commander" and a "tactical genius",³⁰² who uses a more insurgent-style warfare with a smaller unit, emphasising agility and speed over numbers and raw power, which has led to him not repeating the errors IS made in Kobani where it poured in massive numbers of fighters in a very conventional way.³⁰³

In November 2014, Khalid Shishani, a member of Batirashvili's IS unit who defected to al-Qaeda, said that it was "only the infidel [i.e. Western] mass media that has written about Umar Shishani's military genius. They have greatly inflated his identity and presented him as a genius military specialist, which is the complete opposite of the real picture. This person only knows how to send mujahedeen as cannon fodder." According to Khalid, who allegedly fought with Batirashvili at Menagh, there was nothing tactical in Batirashvili's decision to take Menagh; he just wanted the *ghanima* (war booty). And there was no great military skill from Batirashvili involved since he had sent hyper-fanatical men, prepared to either commit suicide bombings directly or die in droves running at Syrian regime guns, in attacks not very different from "human wave"-style assaults seen at Stalingrad or during the Iran-Iraq War.³⁰⁴

Batirashvili's father and a Georgian military official have suggested that although Batirashvili is the public face, the real driving force behind the success of Batirashvili's unit is his brother, Tamaz.³⁰⁵ It is known that Tamaz has much more experience than Tarkhan in militant circles and activity, and it would be effective operational security to draw the focus to Tarkhan while it is Tamaz who makes the difference in IS's war.

²⁹⁹ Al-Tamimi, A., 'General Military Council for Iraq's Revolutionaries: 20 September Statement: Translation and Analysis', 24 September 2014, available at: www.aymenjawad.org/2014/09/general-military-council-for-iraq-revolutionaries, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁰ Gertz, B., 'Islamic State Commander Key Figure Behind Recent Military Gains', *Washington Free Beacon*, 14 October 2014, available at: freebeacon.com/national-security/islamic-state-commander-key-figure-behind-recent-military-gains/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰¹ 'ISIS sends Chechen commander to Kobane', *Rudaw*, 26 October 2014, available at: rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/261020141, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰² Gartenstein-Ross, D., 'The Islamic State's Anbar Offensive and Abu Umar al-Shishani', *War on the Rocks*, 9 October 2014, available at: warontherocks.com/2014/10/the-islamic-states-anbar-offensive-and-abu-umar-al-shishani/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰³ Wing, J., 'A Discussion Of The Islamic State's Strategy, Tactics And Commanders In Iraq And Syria With Georgetown's Daveed Gartenstein-Ross', *Musings on Iraq*, 21 October 2014, available at: musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/a-discussion-of-islamic-states-strategy.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁴ Paraszczuk, J., 'Military Prowess Of IS Commander Umar Shishani Called Into Question', *RFE/RL*, 6 November 2014, available at: www.rferl.org/content/umar-shishani-military-prowess-islamic-state/26677545.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁵ Cathcart, W., Vazha Tavberidze, and Nimo Burchuladze, 'The Secret Life of an IS Warlord', *The Daily Beast*, 27 October 2014.

3.2.5 Foreign Operations

There are at least 2,400 Russian citizens waging jihad in Syria,³⁰⁶ and the Islamic State's Egyptian branch has already taken down a Russian airliner. Russia's intervention in Syria, beginning in September 2015, overwhelmingly targeted anti-IS rebels for six months,³⁰⁷ after which Russia supported a politically motivated operation in March 2016 in which a pro-Assad coalition of Iranian-controlled ground forces, mostly foreign Shi'a jihadists, captured Palmyra.

As Batirashvili's public profile increased in late 2014, it coincided with "growing concern" that Chechen and other IS foreign fighters were "being trained to commit terrorist attacks on their return [to their home countries]".³⁰⁸ From the vantage point of early 2016, this concern was clearly warranted.

In January 2015, Belgian police rolled up an IS cell, directed by Abdelhamid Abaaoud,³⁰⁹ who later led the Paris attacks, and consisting of returnees from Syria in Verviers on the verge of a "major terrorist attack".³¹⁰ Evidently planning for this attack cannot have begun long after the 22 September 2014 call by IS's spokesman for Muslims everywhere to "kill a disbelieving American or European",³¹¹ and evidence now suggests IS had sent cells into Europe in January 2014 at the latest,³¹² not long after it had a public presence in Syria.

Batirashvili was very important in IS's efforts to attract foreign fighters, and his deputy, Atabiyev, used IS's media apparatus to spread IS's influence in the Russian Caucasus at the expense of al-Qaeda,³¹³ but there is no indication – despite reportedly saying that he would "come home and show the Russians"³¹⁴ – that Batirashvili had any serious role in IS's foreign operations.

3.2.6 Dead or Alive?

The United States announced on 8 March 2016 that on 4 March it was "likely" that Batirashvili had been killed in a Coalition airstrike in Shadadi, north-eastern Syria.³¹⁵

In 2014 and 2015, it was claimed no fewer than seven times that Batirashvili had been killed:

1. May 2014: Pro-Assad media claimed Batirashvili had been killed by al-Nusra in Syria.³¹⁶
2. June 2014: Kurdish Peshmerga claimed to have killed Batirashvili in Kirkuk, Iraq.³¹⁷

³⁰⁶ 'Foreign Fighters', *Soufan Group*, December 2015, available at: soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁷ Czuperski, M. et al., 'Distract, Deceive, Destroy: Putin at War in Syria', *The Atlantic Council*, April 2016, available at: publications.atlanticcouncil.org/distract-deceive-destroy/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁸ Dearden, L., 'Chechen Isis fighters under Omar al-Shishani threaten to take fight to Putin', *The Independent*, 10 October 2014, available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/chechen-isis-fighters-under-omar-al-shishani-threaten-to-take-fight-to-putin-9787809.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁰⁹ Cruickshank, P., 'Inside the ISIS plot to attack the heart of Europe', *CNN*, 13 February 2015, available at: edition.cnn.com/2015/02/13/europe/europe-belgium-isis-plot/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹⁰ Traynor, I., Julian Borger, and Alexandra Topping, 'Two dead in Belgium as police foil "grand scale" terrorist plot', *The Guardian*, 16 January 2015, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/15/three-killed-belgium-counter-terror-raids-reports-verviers, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹¹ Van Ostaeyen, P., 'Abū Muhammad al-'Adnānī ash-Shānī – Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful', 25 September 2014.

³¹² Callimachi, R., 'How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze', *The New York Times*, 29 March 2016, available at: www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹³ Paraszczuk, J., 'Umar Shishani's Right-Hand Man Calls On North Caucasian Jihadis To Join IS In Dagestan & Chechnya', *Jihadology*, 21 April 2015, available at: jihadology.net/2015/04/21/guest-post-umar-shishanis-right-hand-man-calls-on-north-caucasian-jihadis-to-join-is-in-dagestan-chechnya/, last visited: 18 June 2016.

³¹⁴ Winfrey, M., 'How Islamic State Grooms Chechen Fighters Against Putin', *Bloomberg*, 9 October 2014, available at: www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-10-08/how-islamic-state-grooms-chechen-fighters-against-putin, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹⁵ Stewart, P. and Warren Strobel, 'Islamic State's "minister of war" likely killed in U.S. air strike: officials', *Reuters*, 8 March 2016, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-airstrike-idUSKCN0WA2GG, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹⁶ Sourri, A., 'abu omar al shishani dead', *Syria News*, 21 May 2014, available at: www.syrianews.cc/abu-omar-al-shishani-dead/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

3. August 2014: The Peshmerga claimed (again) to have killed Batirashvili, this time near Mosul, Iraq.³¹⁸
4. 17 October 2014:³¹⁹ The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) – the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) – claimed to have killed Batirashvili in Kobani, and offered in evidence the same picture that had been used by the Peshmerga when they claimed to have killed Batirashvili two months earlier.³²⁰
5. 12 November 2014: Ramzan Kadyrov, the ruler of Chechnya, claimed on Instagram that Batirashvili had been killed. Kadyrov’s evidence was a picture of a dead man that, on examination, turned out to be more than a year old.³²¹
6. 30 June 2015: Iranian-controlled Shi’a militias in Iraq claimed to have killed Batirashvili in Saladin Province.³²²
7. 14 October 2015: Russian and Syrian State media claimed that a Russian airstrike had killed Batirashvili.³²³

There was also the claim in Russian media, on 27 December 2015, that Batirashvili had been arrested in Kirkuk City, Iraq.³²⁴

Announcements of Batirashvili’s demise, therefore, have an in-built reason for scepticism. But the fallout of the March 2016 claim – which was by far the most credible – has been the most convoluted yet.

On 10 March, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that Batirashvili was injured but alive and had been taken for treatment to Raqqa City.³²⁵ SOHR added on 13 March that Batirashvili was “not able to breathe on his own and is using machines. He has been clinically dead for several days.”³²⁶ Two U.S. officials told CNN they were sure Batirashvili had died on 14 March.³²⁷

Confusion arose when IS, on 15 March, denied that Batirashvili had even been wounded, let alone killed,³²⁸ and on 28 March distributed two pictures of Batirashvili as “proof of life”.³²⁹

³¹⁷ Sengupta, K., ‘Iraq crisis: Umar al-Shishani – the face at the forefront of the new terror wears a chilling smile’, *The Independent*, 16 June 2014, available at: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-umar-al-shishani-the-face-at-the-forefront-of-the-new-terror-wears-a-chilling-smile-9542071.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹⁸ ‘Kurdish Peshmerga forces kill ISIS minister of war Tarkhan Batirashvili’, *Ekrud Daily*, 7 August 2014, available at: ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/8/state8276.htm, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³¹⁹ Paraszczuk, J. (@joaska_), Twitter post, 17 October 2014, available at: https://twitter.com/joaska_/status/522981463533174784, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁰ Paraszczuk, J., ‘The Chechen Leader With A Grudge And The IS Commander With Nine Lives’, *RFE/RL*, 14 November 2014, available at: www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-why-kadyrov-claims-shishani-killed/26692100.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²¹ Taylor, A., ‘How a Chechen leader’s obsession with Instagram and the Islamic State turned awkward’, *The Washington Post*, 14 November 2014, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/11/14/how-a-chechen-leaders-obsession-with-instagram-and-the-islamic-state-turned-awkward/>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²² ‘The (Alleged) Death of al-Shishani, the Georgian Commander of ISIS’, *Panorama* (Italian), 9 March 2016, available at: www.panorama.it/news/esteri/la-morte-di-al-shishani-il-comandante-georgiano-dellisis/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²³ ‘Key Terrorist Leader Reportedly Killed by Russian Airstrike in Syria’, *Sputnik News*, 15 October 2015, available at: sputniknews.com/middleeast/20151015/1028579120/key-warlord-destruction-report.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁴ Watkinson, W., ‘War on Isis: Daesh warlord Abu Umar al-Shishani reportedly captured in Kirkuk’, *The International Business Times*, 28 December 2015, available at: www.ibtimes.co.uk/war-isis-daesh-warlord-abu-umar-al-shishani-reportedly-captured-kirkuk-1535122, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁵ ‘IS commander Shishani “survived US air strike in Syria”’, *BBC News*, 10 March 2016, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35772380, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁶ ‘Islamic State’s “war minister” Umar al-Shishani “clinically dead”’, *AFP*, 14 March 2016, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/islamic-states-war-minister-umar-al-shishani-clinically-dead, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁷ Starr, B., ‘U.S. assesses ISIS operative Umar al-Shishani is dead’, *CNN*, 15 March 2016, available at: edition.cnn.com/2016/03/14/politics/u-s-confirms-death-of-isis-operative-umar-al-shishani/index.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³²⁸ ‘Islamic State’s Shishani unhurt: Amaq news agency’, *Reuters*, 15 March 2016, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-shishani-idUSKCN0WG2KN, last visited: 15 June 2016.

While the pictures by themselves prove nothing, it is difficult to conceive of a motive for IS to continue saying Batirashvili is alive, except that it is true. Perhaps, after spate of losses of senior leaders in the spring of 2016, IS saw an advantage in concealing the death of one of its most telegenic commanders. But the cost of lying, relative to any potential short-term gains, is very high. IS can replace its leaders with relative ease and the death of a commander will soon leak, so a denial from IS damages its credibility to *its own audience*, most importantly of potential recruits.

On 13 July 2016, IS's Amaq "news" agency appeared to confirm that Batirashvili was dead, killed "in Shirqat,"³³⁰ IS's last major urban holding in Saladin Province, Iraq. The Pentagon has since said that Batirashvili was the main target in an airstrike near Mosul on 10 July, implicitly conceding that he had survived the March airstrike.³³¹

Whatever the reality of Batirashvili's military competency and whether or not he is alive, he was never seriously in line to succeed the caliph for at least two reasons: his lack of religious training, and his not being an Arab. IS's senior leadership is largely confined to the hands of Iraqis, and while it could dispel accusations of "nationalism" by appointing a caliph from abroad, IS insists on the traditional qualification: descent from the Quraysh tribe.

3.3 Shaker Wahib al-Fahdawi

Born in 1986,³³² al-Fahdawi was arrested in 2006 in the middle of a computer studies course at the University of Anbar for his membership in IS's predecessor. Al-Fahdawi, who goes by the *nom de guerre* **Abu Wahib** (Father of the Generous), was imprisoned until 2009 in Camp Bucca and thereafter in Tikrit Central Prison.³³³ Al-Fahdawi "managed to escape in 2012 during an attack executed by his organization on the prison gate as a rebellion raged inside. This plot led to the flight of 110 detainees."³³⁴

Figure 6 Abu Wahib³³⁵



This almost certainly means al-Fahdawi was freed in the 27 September 2012 jailbreak at Tasfirat prison in Tikrit,³³⁶ the first major success the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) had in Operation BREAKING THE WALLS, which began in July 2012, and was an important factor in ISI's post-2008 revival. ISI gradually pushed toward Baghdad with waves of car bombs and jailbreaks,³³⁷ culminating in the 22 July 2013 attack on Taji and Abu Ghraib, which freed anywhere between 500

³²⁹ Lister, C. (@Charles_Lister), Twitter post, 28 March 2016, available at: https://twitter.com/Charles_Lister/status/714525587034009601, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³³⁰ 'Islamic State confirms key commander Omar Shishani dead,' *BBC*, 13 July 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36789635, last visited: 14 July 2016.

³³¹ 'Department of Defense Press Briefing by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook in the Pentagon Briefing Room,' *U.S. Department of Defense*, 14 July 2016, www.defense.gov/News/News-Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/839181/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-in, last visited: 14 July 2016.

³³² 'New generation of al-Qaida warlords make deadly mark,' *UPI*, 12 February 2014, available at: www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2014/02/12/New-generation-of-al-Qaida-warlords-make-deadly-mark/63391392204340/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³³³ Abbas, M., 'Has al-Qaeda found Zarqawi's successor?,' *Al-Monitor*, 15 January 2014, available at: www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/iraq-isis-shaker-wahib-zarqawi.html#, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³³⁴ Abbas, M., 'Has al-Qaeda found Zarqawi's successor?,' *Al-Monitor*, 15 January 2014.

³³⁵ Source: Sarhan, A., 'ISIS senior leader Shaker Waheeb dead says Anbar Operations Command,' *Iraqi News*, 6 October, 2014, www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/isis-senior-leader-shaker-waheeb-dead-says-anbar-operations-command/, last visited: 24 June, 2016

³³⁶ Roggio, B., 'Al Qaeda in Iraq claims credit for Tikrit jailbreak,' *The Long War Journal*, 12 October 2012.

³³⁷ Lewis, J., 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part II', *The Institute for the Study of War*, October 2013, available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/JessVBIED_PartII_3Oct.pdf, last visited: 15 June 2016.

and 1,000 inmates, according to the Iraqi government.³³⁸ One of those released was Adnan al-Bilawi, a former senior officer in Saddam Hussein's army who was personally acquainted with Saddam and his deputy, Izzat al-Douri. Al-Bilawi succeeded Samir al-Khelifawi (Haji Bakr) as head of IS's Military Council and planned the Mosul offensive in June 2014, which went ahead despite the fact that he was killed two days beforehand.

Not only were the most competent and dedicated members of ISI restored to the battlefield by **BREAKING THE WALLS**; it also helped to discredit the Iraqi State as a source of protection, forcing populations to give ISI legitimacy as a governing authority by cutting Mafia-style deals with it, and provoking a Shi'ite overreaction that could be further used to position ISI as the Sunnis' last line of defence.³³⁹ (The follow-on Operation **SOLDIERS' HARVEST** would begin on 29 July 2013 and lasted until the fall of Mosul.)

By the time al-Fahdawi was sprung, ISI was well into its revival: in Iraq, ISI had more than doubled its fighters (from 1,000 to 2,500) and nearly doubled its attacks (from 75 to 140) since the U.S. withdrawal in December 2011,³⁴⁰ while in Syria ISI had carried out 27 suicide attacks,³⁴¹ some of them quite complex, under the banner of its then denied franchise, Jabhat al-Nusra.

Al-Fahdawi first appeared in an online video in March 2013 reading a poem at an anti-government protest in Fallujah. However, the 27-year-old al-Fahdawi came to international attention for a video released on 25 August 2013 of an event on 2 July.³⁴² In the video, al-Fahdawi stopped several trucks on the Baghdad–Anbar highway and asked the three drivers various questions about Islam, which they answered incorrectly because they were Alawites. Al-Fahdawi made them kneel in the middle of the road and shot them dead.

This incident with the Alawi truck drivers has become infamous even among IS supporters. On 8 August 2015 a couple from Starkville, Mississippi, Jaelyn Young and Muhammad Dakhllalla, were arrested as they tried to travel to the caliphate. The pair had engaged, since May 2015, in online conversations with people they believed to be IS facilitators but who were in fact FBI officers. Dakhllalla, just days before their attempted departure, had a last-minute panic, telling his FBI interlocutor he was “worried about what if an IS member tests us to see if we are Sunni. We want to know if there are questions they may ask that would be difficult. Some people called this ‘the Abu Wahib test’. Wallahi [I promise by God] we are Sunnis, but we don't want to be mistaken because of some test.”³⁴³

Al-Fahdawi was the ostensible leader of a not-formally IS unit, Usood al-Anbar (Lions of Anbar), before he was formally signed up and became known as an important IS field commander – similar (but lesser) in stature to Tarkhan Batirashvili (Abu Umar al-Shishani).

³³⁸ Abbas, M., ‘Al-Qaeda Militants Raid Iraq's Abu Ghraib, Taji Prisons’, *Al-Monitor*, 25 July 2013, available at: www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/07/iraq-al-qaeda-prison-raid-abu-ghraib.html#, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³³⁹ Lewis, J., ‘Al-Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, Part I’, *The Institute for the Study of War*, September 2013, available at: www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/AQI-Resurgent-10Sept_0.pdf, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴⁰ Jakes, L. and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, ‘Al-Qaida making comeback in Iraq, officials say’, *The Associated Press*, 9 October 2012, available at: news.yahoo.com/al-qaeda-making-comeback-iraq-officials-165659290.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴¹ Roggio, B., ‘Al Nusrah Front launches complex suicide assault on Syrian Air Force intelligence HQ’, *The Long War Journal*, 9 October 2012, available at: www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/10/al_nusrah_front_laun.php, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴² ‘The new face of al Qaeda in Iraq’, *AFP*, 30 August 2013, available at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20130829-iraq-al-qaeda-fahdawi-youtube-video-anbar-execution-truck-drivers>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴³ ‘United States of America v. Jaelyn Delshaun Young and Muhammad Oda Dakhllalla’, United States District Court, 15 August 2015, www.justice.gov/opa/file/705906/download, last visited: 15 June 2016, p. 19.

On 6 October 2014, al-Fahdawi, by that time IS's "emir of Anbar",³⁴⁴ was reported to be dead,³⁴⁵ but eight months later he reappeared. When al-Fahdawi re-emerged in June 2015 he showed clear injuries, namely burns to his hands.³⁴⁶

The fact that al-Fahdawi appears unmasked in IS propaganda means they were grooming him for a public leadership position, whether or not he has any significance in real military terms. This has led to unintended consequences, such as the March 2015 dissemination of a picture of al-Fahdawi by Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, an anti-IS activist network based in IS's de facto capital, in which al-Fahdawi, between the colour of his uniform and his portly visage, bore an uncanny resemblance to a shawarma rack.³⁴⁷

Al-Fahdawi was killed on 6 May 2016 by a Coalition airstrike. There was initially some doubt over this,³⁴⁸ but it was soon confirmed by the Pentagon,³⁴⁹ and an Islamic State fighter said that he had spoken to somebody at the funeral and seen al-Fahdawi's second wife, confirming his death.³⁵⁰

3.4 Fares Reif al-Naima

Al-Naima, who uses the kunya **Abu Shema**, was imprisoned in Camp Bucca for a time by the Americans in Iraq.³⁵¹ A member of IS's Military Council, al-Naima is in charge of logistics, which most notably includes protecting and distributing IS's supplies from their warehouses.³⁵²

3.5 Abdullah Ahmed al-Mashadani

Born either in the late 1950s or early 1960s,³⁵³ al-Mashadani – who uses the kunya **Abu Qassem** – was a military officer in the Saddam Hussein regime³⁵⁴ and was detained at Camp Bucca by the American-led Coalition after the collapse of the regime.³⁵⁵ Al-Mashadani is a member of Islamic State's Military Council³⁵⁶ and their Minister for Foreign Affairs, managing the arrival of foreign jihadis, specifically from Arab States, providing resources for them to live on and overseeing their shelter in guest houses. He is also IS's logistics coordinator for moving those foreign volunteers who wish to become suicide bombers to their designated location.³⁵⁷

³⁴⁴ <http://www.vetogate.com/1262388>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴⁵ Sarhan, A., 'ISIS senior leader Shaker Waheeb dead says Anbar Operations Command', *Iraqi News*, 6 October 2014, available at: www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/isis-senior-leader-shaker-waheeb-dead-says-anbar-operations-command/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴⁶ 'ISIS leading militant appears in Iraqi Anbar after reports of his death', *ARA News*, 8 June 2015, available at: aranews.net/2015/06/isis-leading-militant-appears-in-iraqi-anbar-after-reports-of-his-death/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴⁷ 'ISIS commander mocked online for "shawarma" outfit', *Al-Arabiya*, 18 March 2015, available at: english.alarabiya.net/en/variety/2015/03/18/ISIS-commander-mocked-online-for-doner-kebab-outfit.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁴⁸ Hadid, H., (@HamidHadeed), Twitter post, 9 May 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/HamidHadeed/status/729748194662453248>, last visited: 20 June 2016.

³⁴⁹ 'Islamic State leader in Iraq's Anbar killed, Pentagon says', *BBC News*, 9 May 2016, available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36252776, last visited: 20 June 2016.

³⁵⁰ Author interview, 9 May 2016.

³⁵¹ Thompson, A. and Jeremi Suri, 'How America Helped ISIS', *The New York Times*, 1 October 2014, available at: www.nytimes.com/2014/10/02/opinion/how-america-helped-isis.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁵² Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 33.

³⁵³ Moubayed, S., *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp. 110-111.

³⁵⁴ Hall, J., 'Saddam Hussein's revenge from beyond the grave: How ISIS's land grab across the Middle East is being orchestrated by former Iraqi dictator's generals', *The Daily Mail*, 7 April 2015, available at: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3028529/Saddam-Hussein-s-revenge-grave-ISIS-s-land-grab-Middle-East-orchestrated-former-Iraqi-dictator-s-generals.html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁵⁵ 'From Bucca to Kobani: The Hybrid Ideology of the Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, 24 October 2014, available at: soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-from-bucca-to-kobani-the-hybrid-ideology-of-the-islamic-state/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁵⁶ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 33.

³⁵⁷ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

Figure 7 Abu Shema³⁵⁸



Figure 8 Abu Qassem³⁵⁹



3.6 Abu Suja

Abu Suja is revealed in leaked documents to be IS's martyrs or social services "minister", the leader on the Military Council³⁶⁰ who is responsible for paying salaries, specifically to the families of IS fighters who are killed.³⁶¹

There has been confusion about who Abu Suja is. In the documents leaked to *The Telegraph* in the summer of 2014, Abu Suja was identified as Abd al-Rahman al-Afri, presumed to be Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli. But the picture of Abu Suja is not al-Qaduli, and Abu Suja was reported to have been killed in November 2014 – including by his own family in Mosul, according to an advisor to the Iraqi government,³⁶² though his death remains unconfirmed by IS – and al-Qaduli was not killed until March 2016. It is therefore likely that Abu Suja and al-Qaduli are two separate people, and that al-Qaduli's responsibilities never including caring for the wives and children of fallen IS fighters.

The real name and biography of Abu Suja, therefore, is almost wholly opaque. The only known detail is that Abu Suja was one of those who was detained at Camp Bucca.³⁶³

3.7 Khairy Abed Mahmoud al-Taey

Very little is known about al-Taey. He uses the kunya **Abu Kifah**, he is a member of the Military Council, and he is IS's explosives "minister": he is in charge of creating, directing the use of, and actually rigging improvised explosive devices (IEDs).³⁶⁴

³⁵⁸ Source: al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State 'cabinet', from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer,' *The Telegraph*, 9 July, 2014, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10956193/Revealed-the-Islamic-State-cabinet-from-finance-minister-to-suicide-bomb-deployer.html, last visited: 24 June, 2016

³⁵⁹ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

³⁶⁰ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 33.

³⁶¹ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

³⁶² Sherlock, R. and Magdy Samaan, 'Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's close aide killed in US air strike', *The Telegraph*, 9 November 2014.

³⁶³ Thompson, A., and Jeremi Suri, 'How America Helped ISIS', *The New York Times*, 1 October 2014.

³⁶⁴ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

*Figure 9 Abu Suja*³⁶⁵



*Figure 10 Abu Kifah*³⁶⁶



³⁶⁵ Source: Ibid. Figure 7
³⁶⁶ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

4. The Security and Intelligence Council

4.1 *Iyad Hamid Khalaf al-Jumaili*

A Fallujah native and former intelligence officer of the Saddam Hussein regime, al-Jumaili now leads the Islamic State's *amniyat* (security units),³⁶⁷ which are in charge of internal security and counter-intelligence for the caliphate and the caliph.

Al-Jumaili is the head of the Security and Intelligence Council (SIC). The SIC was previously led by the head of the Military Council, Adnan al-Suwaydawi (Abu Muhammad al-Suwaydawi or Haji Dawood), until he was killed in May 2015, at which point Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli, who had played a key role in setting up the SIC and the *amniyat* in Syria, took over on an interim basis. After the head of the Military Council Fadel al-Hiyali was killed in August 2015 and al-Qaduli replaced him, the SIC/*amniyat* portfolio was handed to al-Jumaili.³⁶⁸

The *amniyat* undoubtedly draw on the intellectual capital of the Saddam regime's intelligence services.³⁶⁹ There are reports from local activist media that the *amniyat* "consist mainly of former agents of Saddam's secret service",³⁷⁰ and travellers have been told by victims and their relatives that at least some of the Iraqis who conducted IS's interrogations were intelligence officers under the Saddam regime.³⁷¹

Al-Jumaili was the one who took the decision for the *qisas* (retribution) video on 23 June 2015, which showed IS burning men alive in a car with an RPG, drowning men in a cage, and beheading prisoners by explosive collars.

4.2 *Abu Safwan al-Rifai*

Al-Rifai is a former military officer in the Saddam Hussein regime, and worked closely with Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr).³⁷² Al-Khlifawi, Adnan al-Suwaydawi, and Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli – all except al-Qaduli former intelligence officers of the Saddam regime – were the key personnel in IS's expansion into Syria in 2012–13, and in the creation of a security system to maintain control of its authoritarian statelet.³⁷³ Al-Qaduli was tasked with setting up the SIC and the *amniyat* (security units) that were charged with the personal protection of the caliph and the enforcement of his will on subordinates. The SIC and its *amniyat* (security units) now operate in all IS-held areas, but initially it was a very small organisation, said to control fewer than two-dozen men. Al-Rifai, as al-Qaduli's deputy, is believed to have been integral to that process.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁷ Coles, I. and Ned Parker, 'How Saddam's men help Islamic State rule', Reuters, 11 December 2015, available at: www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-iraq-islamicstate/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁶⁸ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

³⁶⁹ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, pp. 211–212.

³⁷⁰ Neurink, J., 'Dark details emerge from ISIS-occupied Mosul', *Rudaw*, 30 September 2015, available at: rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/300920151, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁷¹ Author's interview, 30 September 2015.

³⁷² Barber, M., 'New ISIS Leaks Reveal Particulars of al-Qaida Strategy', *Syria Comment*, 12 January 2014, available at: www.joshualandis.com/blog/new-isis-leaks-reveal-particulars-of-al-qaida-strategy/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁷³ Orton, K., 'The Riddle of Haji Bakr', *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015.

³⁷⁴ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 31.

4.3 *Abdul Wahid Khutnayer Ahmad*

Known as **Abu Luay**, during the American regency in Iraq, Khutnayer spent time in an American detention facility.³⁷⁵ Khutnayer is now IS's Minister of General/Public Security³⁷⁶ and a member of the Security and Intelligence Council.³⁷⁷

IS's *Amn al-Dawla* (State Security) and its *amniyat* (security units) are divided into four branches. "*Amn al-Dakhili ... is tantamount to ISIS's interior ministry,*" according to an IS defector. "It's charged with maintaining security for each city."³⁷⁸ This is likely the section of IS's security services overseen by Khutnayer, making him IS's de facto Interior Minister.

IS's internal security and counter-intelligence branches are significantly modelled on, and staffed by elements of, the fallen Saddam Hussein regime.³⁷⁹

*Figure 11 Abu Luay*³⁸⁰



Khutnayer is said to have been in Saddam's military, and also to have been engaged in regime-approved foreign trade during the 1990s, something that was illicit under the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the Kuwait War in 1990–91. Khutnayer allegedly worked with Bashar al-Hamadani (Abu Mohamed), the Prisoners Minister: Khutnayer exported vegetables and al-Hamadani managed the import and sale of cars.³⁸¹

This role in the military and economic elite would place Khutnayer (and al-Hamadani) within the caste of former regime elements that formed the core around which the insurgency gathered in the immediate aftermath of the Saddam regime.³⁸²

³⁷⁵ 'From Bucca to Kobani: The Hybrid Ideology of the Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, 24 October 2014.

³⁷⁶ Lister, C., 'Islamic State Senior Leadership: Who's Who', Brookings Institution, 20 October 2014.

³⁷⁷ Barrett, R., 'The Islamic State', *Soufan Group*, November 2014, p. 31.

³⁷⁸ Weiss, M., 'How ISIS Picks Its Suicide Bombers', *The Daily Beast*, 17 November 2015.

³⁷⁹ Hassan, H. and Michael Weiss, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, p. 211.

³⁸⁰ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

³⁸¹ Moubayed, S., *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*, pp. 110–111.

³⁸² Orton, K., 'Izzat ad Douiri and ISIS', *Baghdad Invest*, 4 July 2015.

5. The Shari'a Council

5.1 Turki ibn Mubarak al-Binali

Known for a long time only by his online pseudonym, **Abu Humam al-Athari**, and later by another pseudonym, **Abu Sufyan al-Sulami**, al-Binali has for a long time been one of IS's most ferocious propagandists. By November 2014, al-Binali was IS's "chief religious advisor", according to the U.S. government.³⁸³ In practical terms, al-Binali was the second-most-important religious authority in IS, but, unlike Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli, al-Binali only held religious posts and never had security portfolios. With al-Qaduli's demise, al-Binali is now IS's pre-eminent religious authority.³⁸⁴ Al-Binali's formal relationship with the Shari'a Council is murky, however. It is reported that Abdul Rahman al-Talabani formally leads the Council.³⁸⁵ Al-Binali is also believed to be a member of the Shura Council.

IS's training manual, the book all recruits must learn and be tested on to "graduate" from IS's training camps, *Muqarrar fi al-Tawhid* (Course in Monotheism), is written by al-Binali.³⁸⁶ A prominent IS defector claimed that al-Binali had replaced IS's chief shar'i, Abu Bakr al-Qahtani, in late 2014.³⁸⁷ Numerous witnesses who went through IS's training at this time described al-Binali as "the head of the apparatus for commanding right and forbidding wrong", and being in charge of issuing books, fatwas, and other materials propagating IS's worldview.³⁸⁸ This is very strongly suggestive of al-Binali being a member of the dawa wing of IS's Shari'a Council – the department that lays down laws and disseminates IS's message of how to live in utopia, rather than the department that oversees the courts and the *hisba* (religious police) that enforce these decrees.

Figure 12 Abu Sufyan al-Sulami⁶⁸⁹



Born in September 1984 in Bahrain, al-Binali is a young man – he was only 29 when Mosul fell in June 2014. Al-Binali has been important to IS, despite being a relative novice theologically, as a source of legitimacy within the wider Jihadi-Salafist movement. Al-Binali's mentor was Issam al-Barqawi, who is far better known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, perhaps the premier Jihadi-Salafist ideologue,³⁹⁰ who has sided with al-Qaeda in the jihadi civil war.

Al-Binali was given permission to produce fatwas on al-Maqdisi's website *after* he had been expelled from the

³⁸³ 'Treasury Sanctions Key ISIL Leaders and Facilitators Including a Senior Oil Official', *U.S. Department of Treasury*, 11 February 2016, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0351.aspx>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁸⁴ Hassan, H., 'The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context', *Carnegie*, 13 June 2016.

³⁸⁵ Cruickshank, P., and Tim Lister, and Michael Weiss, 'Who might lead ISIS if al-Baghdadi dies?', *CNN*, 3 July 2015.

³⁸⁶ Al-Tamimi, A., 'Islamic State Training Camp Textbook: "Course in Monotheism" – Complete Text, Translation and Analysis', 26 July 2015, available at: www.aymenjawad.org/17633/islamic-state-training-camp-textbook-course-in, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁸⁷ 'Factbox – Gulf Arabs on the rise in Islamic State', *Reuters*, 29 June 2015, available at: reuters.com/article/uk-kuwait-blast-islamicstate-gulf-factbo-jdUkkCN0P929920150629, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁸⁸ Bunzel, C., 'Bin'ali Leaks: Revelations of the Silent Mufiti', *Jihadica*, 15 June 2015, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151217164430/http://www.jihadica.com/binali-leaks/>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁸⁹ 'ISIS Leader Al-Binali: A terrorist who moves freely' *The Bahrain Mirror*, 17 November, 2014 <http://mirror.noip.org/news/20325.html>, last visited: 24 June, 2016

³⁹⁰ Kazimi, N., "A Virulent Ideology in Mutation: Zarqawi Upstages Maqdisi," *Hudson Institute*, 2005, available at: www.hudson.org/content/researchattachments/attachment/1368/kazimi_vol2.pdf, last visited: 15 June 2016.

United Arab Emirates, where he was studying, for sectarian incitement. It makes it more difficult for al-Qaeda to attack al-Binali as a theological ignoramus and an extremist when it can be pointed out that its favourite cleric gave al-Binali a platform when he was even younger than he is now, and did so once al-Binali's religio-political leanings were clear.

Al-Binali's first public dispute with al-Maqdisi came in May 2014 after the latter penned an article criticising the tendency of younger jihadi clerics to refuse to render unto their elders in matters of jihadi theology and to dismiss the corpus of jihadi jurisprudence that has been built up in the last few decades. Al-Binali rejected the notion that age has anything to do with his ability to be a religious authority. Indeed, al-Binali suggested that if age mattered, it was only as an explanation for Umar Mahmoud Othman (Abu Qatada al-Filistini), who is second only to al-Maqdisi as a source of jihadi spiritual guidance, having rejected IS's claims to have founded a caliphate and effectively superseded al-Qaeda. Abu Qatada's seniority had likely led to his "confusion", al-Binali said. This notion is a long-standing one for al-Binali, who at 23, while awaiting deportation in the U.A.E., told a Saudi investigator - who was shocked at al-Binali's self-presentation as a shari'a scholar - that Islam has no restriction on the age at which a man can become a jurist.³⁹¹

The final breakdown of relations between al-Binali and al-Maqdisi came after IS betrayed al-Maqdisi in the matter of the Jordanian pilot, Muaz al-Kasasbeh. Contact had been re-established between the two in October 2014 during the attempt to negotiate the release of Peter (Abdul Rahman) Kassig. Al-Binali and al-Maqdisi had a "very warm" exchange over WhatsApp on 24 October, and it looked as if Kassig would be released; Jordan arrested al-Maqdisi on 27 October and the chance was gone.³⁹² Contact was renewed later in the year. IS captured al-Kasasbeh on Christmas Eve 2014 and Amman used al-Maqdisi as an intermediary to try to negotiate his release. Al-Maqdisi realised on 3 February that he had been betrayed when IS sent him a video ostensibly providing proof-of-life for al-Kasasbeh and the password included the phrase "al-Maqdisi the pimp". The video showed al-Kasasbeh being burned alive, something that had happened a month prior. Three hours later the entire world saw the video.³⁹³

Before al-Binali clarified his identity in April 2014, he had already acquired a reputation as one of the most vocal supporters of IS. While endeavouring to shoot down every argument made against IS online, al-Binali became actively involved in recruitment, spearheading the effort to pull al-Qaeda's networks into IS's fold.³⁹⁴ The idea was to have a number of groups secretly ready to pledge allegiance to IS from all around the world on the day it announced its caliphate. In service of that, al-Binali went to Sirte, Libya, in March 2013 and then again in 2014.³⁹⁵ By March 2014 - within weeks of his arrival in IS-held territory³⁹⁶ - al-Binali was leading a network of recruiters on the Gulf to encourage migration of fighters and others to IS in Syria, according to Treasury sanctions that were inexplicably only issued against al-Binali in February 2016.³⁹⁷

³⁹¹ Bunzel, C., 'The Caliphate's Scholar-in-Arms', *Jihadica*, 9 July 2014, <http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate%E2%80%99s-scholar-in-arms/>, last visited: 18 June 2016.

³⁹² Malik, S., Ali Younes, Spencer Ackerman, and Mustafa Khalili, 'The race to save Peter Kassig', *The Guardian*, 18 December 2014, available at: www.theguardian.com/news/2014/dec/18-sp-the-race-to-save-peter-kassig, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁹³ Malik, S., Mustafa Khalili, Spencer Ackerman, and Ali Younis, 'How Isis crippled al-Qaida', *The Guardian*, 10 June 2015, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/10/how-isis-crippled-al-qaida, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁹⁴ Bunzel, C., 'The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic States', *Carnegie*, 18 February 2016, available at: carnegieendowment.org/2016/02/18/kingdom-and-caliphate-duel-of-islamic-states/iu4w, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁹⁵ Hassan, H., 'Five Years Later, Libya is Becoming a Jihadist Academy', *The Tahrir Institute*, 17 February 2016, available at: timep.org/commentary/five-years-later-libya-is-becoming-a-jihadist-academy/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

³⁹⁶ Bunzel, C., 'Bin'ali Leaks: Revelations of the Silent Mufiti', *Jihadica*, 15 June 2015.

³⁹⁷ 'Treasury Sanctions Key ISIL Leaders and Facilitators Including a Senior Oil Official', *U.S. Department of Treasury*, 11 February 2016.

Al-Binali is the author of the only authorised biography of the caliph, produced in August 2013.³⁹⁸ It was this document, entitled “Extend Your Hands and Pledge Loyalty to al-Baghdadi”, that made the earliest call for the formal establishment of a caliphate.³⁹⁹ (IS had claimed to be a State since 2006 and had – at least – dropped very broad hints that this State was the long-awaited restoration of the caliphate.⁴⁰⁰) The document would be re-issued in late 2014.⁴⁰¹ Al-Binali’s task was to refute the arguments against al-Baghdadi being worthy or legitimate in claiming to be the caliph. Among other things, al-Binali argued that al-Baghdadi not controlling territory did not mean he did not deserve pledges of allegiance since the Prophet Muhammad did not control any territory when he first announced he was the leader of the Muslim community.⁴⁰²

On 31 January 2015, al-Binali was stripped of citizenship by the Bahraini government.

5.2 Abdul Rahman al-Talabani

Al-Talabani was a long-time member of al-Qaeda and is now said to head the Shari’a Council.⁴⁰³

5.3 Abu Muhammad al-Ani

Nothing is known of al-Ani except that he is a senior official of the Shari’a Council, and according to some⁴⁰⁴ sources head of it.⁴⁰⁵

5.4 Hilmi Hashem

In the mid-1980s, Hashem was expelled from the military in his native Egypt – where he attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel – for extremist activity.⁴⁰⁶ Hashem is a member of the Shari’a Council⁴⁰⁷ and a theological advisor to the caliph.⁴⁰⁸

*Figure 13 Hilmi Hashem*⁴⁰⁹



³⁹⁸ Bunzel, C., ‘From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State’, *Brookings Institute*, March 2015, p. 23.

³⁹⁹ Bunzel, C., ‘From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State’, *Brookings Institute*, March 2015, pp. 26–27.

⁴⁰⁰ Kazimi, N., ‘The Caliphate Attempted’, *Hudson Institute*, 1 July 2008.

⁴⁰¹ Dziadosz, A., ‘Islamic State lays out case for “allegiance” to its leader’, *Reuters*, 2 October 2014, available at: www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-baghdadi-idUSKCN0HR19820141002, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁰² Wagemakers, J., ‘The Concept of *Bay’a* in the Islamic State’s Ideology’, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 2015, available at: www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/448/html, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁰³ Cruickshank, P., and Tim Lister, and Michael Weiss, ‘Who might lead ISIS if al-Baghdadi dies?’, *CNN*, 3 July 2015.

⁴⁰⁴ Abu Hanieh, H. and Mohammad Abu Rumman, ‘The ‘Islamic State’ Organization’, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015, p.273.

⁴⁰⁵ Nance, M., *Defeating ISIS: Who They Are, How They Fight, What They Believe*, (Skyhorse Publishing: New York, 2016). Page 51.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Egypt: 16 arrested in Sharqia for alleged contact with IS’, *NSNBC*, 30 August 2015, available at: nsnbc.me/2015/08/30/egypt-16-arrested-in-sharqia-for-alleged-contact-with-is/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines’, 24 January 2016.

⁴⁰⁸ Taheri, A., ‘The ugly attractions of ISIS’ ideology’, *The New York Post*, 2 November 2014, available at: nypost.com/2014/11/02/the-ugly-attractions-of-isis-ideology/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁰⁹ Source: al-Shafey, M. ‘Four Egyptians behind ISIS takfirist ideology: sources’, *Asharq al-Awsat*, 12 October, 2014, english.aawsat.com/2014/10/article55337461/four-egyptians-behind-isis-takfirist-ideology-sources, last visited: 24 June, 2016

5.5 Abu Muslim al-Masri

An Egyptian and a senior member of the Shari'a Council,⁴¹⁰ Abu Muslim has been a part of IS since its predecessor was loyal to al-Qaeda, i.e. between 2004 and 2006.⁴¹¹

5.6 Abu Bakr al-Qahtani

A Saudi, during IS's expansion in Syria in 2012-13, al-Qahtani was IS's most senior shar'i and one of the most important instruments IS had for connecting to jihadi communities outside of Syria and Iraq to try to garner public statements of support that could legitimise the caliphate project - and delegitimise al-Qaeda and other jihadi and Islamist opposition.

Two⁴¹² defectors⁴¹³ have told this story, which includes al-Qahtani's involvement in sending one of IS's most important secret recruits, Amr al-Absi (Abu Atheer al-Absi),⁴¹⁴ to Saudi Arabia to visit jihadi clerics, including Sulayman al-Alwan.⁴¹⁵ Another Saudi national, Othman al-Nazeh al-Asiri, was important in IS's early clerical establishment.⁴¹⁶

But al-Nazeh was killed in Kobani in January 2015, and before the end of 2014 al-Qahtani had been removed and replaced with Turki al-Binali.⁴¹⁷ This came during a period where IS was limiting the public statements of its clerics; even the voluminous output of al-Binali ceased during late 2014 and early 2015.

⁴¹⁰ Al-Shafey, M., 'Four Egyptians behind ISIS takfirist ideology: sources', Asharq al-Awsat, 12 October 2014, available at: english.aawsat.com/2014/10/article55337461/four-egyptians-behind-isis-takfirist-ideology-sources, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴¹¹ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

⁴¹² 'Here is the finalized osc translation of AQ loyalist Abu Ahmad's account of ISIL and its origins', available at:

<http://fundforfallenallies.org/news/2014/09/25/here-finalized-osc-translation-aq-loyalist-abu-ahmads-account-isil-and-its-origins>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴¹³ Bin Tashfin, Y., 'English Translation of @Wikibaghdady', 30 January 2014.

⁴¹⁴ Orton, K., 'How Syria's Assad gave rise to one of the most senior IS leaders,' *Middle East Eye*, 10 March 2016.

⁴¹⁵ Winter, C. (@charliewinter), Twitter post, 5 March 2016.

⁴¹⁶ 'Factbox - Gulf Arabs on the rise in Islamic State', *Reuters*, 29 June 2015.

⁴¹⁷ 'Quilliam Exclusive - Alleged Leaks From Islamic State Reveal International Network Of Bribery', *Quilliam Foundation*, 14 November 2014, available at: <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/blog/quilliam-exclusive-alleged-leaks-from-islamic-state-reveal-international-network-of-bribery/>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

6. The Media Council

6.1 Amr al-Absi

Going by the pseudonym **Abu Atheer al-Absi** and often simply **Atheer**, Amr al-Absi is one of IS's most important operatives in promoting and creating the caliphate.

Figure 14 Abu Atheer al-Absi⁴¹⁸



At the outset of the Syrian uprising, a mere eleven days after it began as a peaceful movement of street protests, the Assad regime released 246 Islamists from Sednaya prison.⁴¹⁹ Subsequent releases of jihadists followed in May and June 2011. Sednaya was the Assad regime's prison for religious militants, and was notorious as a *source* of radicalization.⁴²⁰ Among its detainees, Sednaya housed Jihadi-Salafists who had once been weaponized by the regime, in Iraq and Lebanon, and then been betrayed, leading them to harbour deep resentments against the regime.⁴²¹ Assad now turned these men loose, hoping they would swamp the peaceful, secular activists with violent extremism,

switching “the narrative of the newborn Syrian revolution to one of sectarianism, not reform” that would allow “Assad to present himself as an ally in the global war on terror, granting him license to crush civilians with impunity.”⁴²² Assad's security services did everything they could to ensure this outcome. As one defector explained: “The regime did not just open the door to the prisons and let these extremists out, it facilitated them in their work, in their creation of armed brigades.”⁴²³

One of the men who had once served Assad's foreign policy before finding himself in Sednaya, and who was then released in the 2011 amnesties was Amr al-Absi, an ultra-extremist even within the milieu of the infamous Sednaya prison.⁴²⁴ Al-Absi had gone into Iraq via the Assad-facilitated “ratlines” to join IS's predecessor organization, but had then been arrested during the crackdown in 2007.⁴²⁵ Once freed, al-Absi proved very useful to the Assad regime.

⁴¹⁸ Romain Caillet (@RomainCaillet), Twitter post, 4 March 2016, <https://twitter.com/RomainCaillet/status/705586715117928449>

⁴¹⁹ Fadel, L., ‘Syria’s Assad moves to allay fury after security forces fire on protesters,’ *The Washington Post*, 26 March 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/syrias-assad-moves-to-allay-fury-after-security-forces-fire-on-protesters/2011/03/26/AFFoZDdB_story.html, last visited 13 July 2016.

⁴²⁰ Hassan, H. and Weiss, M., *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), p.145.

⁴²¹ Orton, K., ‘The Assad Regime’s Collusion With ISIS and al-Qaeda: Assessing The Evidence,’ 24 March 2014, <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/assessing-the-evidence-of-collusion-between-the-assad-regime-and-the-wahhabi-jihadists-part-1/>, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴²² Barabandi, B. and Thompson, T.J., ‘Inside Assad’s Playbook: Time and Terror,’ *The Atlantic Council*, 23 July 2014, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/inside-assad-s-playbook-time-and-terror, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴²³ Sands, P., Vela, J., and Maayeh, S., ‘Assad regime set free extremists from prison to fire up trouble during peaceful uprising,’ *The National* (U.A.E.), 22 January 2014, www.thenational.ae/world/syria/assad-regime-set-free-extremists-from-prison-to-fire-up-trouble-during-peaceful-uprising, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴²⁴ Hassan, H. and Weiss, M., *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), p.159-60.

⁴²⁵ Lovelock, L., ‘Senior Isil operative responsible for murder of Western journalists killed in Aleppo air strike,’ *The Telegraph*, 4 March 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12183713/Senior-Isil-operative-responsible-for-murder-of-Western-journalists-killed-in-Aleppo-air-strike.html, last visited: 13 July 2016.

Al-Absi set up an insurgent group, *Katibat Usood al-Sunna (KUS)*, in Homs in February 2012, which rather conspicuously used symbols with the words “Islamic State” on them,⁴²⁶ and his brother, Firas, had founded a group called *Majlis Shura Dawlat al-Islam (MSDI)* that raised al-Qaeda’s banner over the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in July 2012.⁴²⁷ This incident was caught on video and attracted media attention when it led to the closing of the Turkish border, disseminating an impression of an extremist-dominated insurrection. The rebellion killed Firas and put the border back under the control of the mainstream armed opposition in late 2012.⁴²⁸ This led to the merger of KUS and MSDI under Atheer's leadership; his network, now spanning Homs and Aleppo, was rebranded *al-Majlis Shura Mujahideen (MSM)*, not coincidentally the name of one of IS’s predecessors.

In the summer and autumn of 2012, Firas and Atheer had begun a wave of kidnappings against foreign journalists, including John Cantlie, Peter Theo Curtis, and James Foley, earning Atheer the moniker “kidnapper-in-chief”.⁴²⁹ In combination with the regime directly killing journalists, notably Marie Colvin and Remi Ochlik, the crucial impact was to shut down independent sources of information, leaving only the Assad regime and IS, who were both pushing the same message: the only alternative to the regime is the jihadists.

Atheer and his group had been nominally loyal to *Jabhat al-Nusra*, which was set up as the secret Syrian wing of the Iraq-based IS. *Al-Nusra* was formed from the IS networks still on Syrian soil from the time Assad was sheltering and dispatching IS jihadists into Iraq,⁴³⁰ from those released from Sednaya, and from a secret delegation sent into Syria in the summer of 2011.⁴³¹ IS was at this time believed by most to be an affiliate of al-Qaeda; while there are ideological and practical reasons why that is mistaken, it is nonetheless true that in letters exchanged between IS’s leadership and al-Qaeda’s, the former addresses the latter as if they are their superior.

Al-Nusra and its leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, had increasingly operated independently, and in late 2012 an effort was made by IS, specifically its deputy, Samir al-Khlifawi (Haji Bakr), to bring *al-Nusra* back under control. Understanding the effort to have failed no later than December 2012, al-Khlifawi began recruiting *al-Nusra* commanders and members, targeting the foreign fighters (most of whom would defect to IS), in preparation for the public schism. *Al-Khlifawi* had a running start in this programme.

A former senior intelligence officer in Saddam Hussein's regime, al-Khlifawi had directed IS's expansion into Syria in conformity with the practice of somebody trained by the KGB,⁴³² which is to say: competing lines of authority, compartmentalization, spies spying on spies, and the systematic elimination of foes, real and potential, inside and outside the organisation.⁴³³ Within al-

⁴²⁶ Engsaecid1000 [pseudonym], ‘الجيش السوري الحر - حمص تشكيل كتيبة اسود السنة’, 23 February 2012, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYd8W6tMs-o>, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴²⁷ SyrianDaysOfRage [pseudonym], ‘(07-19-12) Bab Al-Hawa, Sarmada | Idlib | FSA Frees Syria / Turkey Border from Regime Forces’, 19 July 2012, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W13i_Nbj3q8, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴²⁸ Kirkpatrick, D.D., ‘Assassination Highlights Rifts Facing Syria Rebels,’ *The New York Times*, 6 September 2012.

⁴²⁹ www.nytimes.com/2012/09/07/world/middleeast/killing-of-rebel-with-qaeda-links-opens-debate-on-syrian-opposition.html, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴³⁰ ‘Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Names of Four Individuals and Two Entities to Its Sanctions List,’ *United Nations Security Council*, 29 September 2015, www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12063.doc.htm, last visited: 16 July 2016.

⁴³¹ Brisard, J.C., *Zarqawi: The New Face of Al-Qaeda*, (Other Press: New York, 2005). P. 190-91.

⁴³² Abouzeid, R., ‘The Jihad Next Door,’ *Politico*, 23 June 2014, www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/06/al-qaeda-iraq-syria-108214?paginate=false, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴³³ Orton, K., ‘The Riddle of Haji Bakr’, *The Syrian Intifada*, 10 November 2015.

⁴³⁴ Reuter, C., ‘The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of Islamic State’, *Der Spiegel*, 18 April 2015.

Nusra, a “track two” had been set up by al-Khlifawi: a number of individuals and groups that were loyal directly to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as represented by al-Khlifawi, rather than to al-Jolani and only ultimately to al-Baghdadi. Atheer was one such individual, and Atheer was able to ensure that Tarkhan Batirashvili (Abu Umar al-Shishani), who was another, did not lose his nerve when the split between IS and al-Nusra went public in April 2013.

The Absi family in Aleppo and the foreign fighters, who included Abdelhamid Abaaoud,⁴³⁴ that Atheer had been recruiting and organising in Kafr Hamra, west of Aleppo City, had formed a core part of al-Nusra's presence in northern Syria.⁴³⁵ Unfortunately for al-Nusra, they also formed the backbone of al-Khlifawi's “track two,” and this entire infrastructure defected. (It is for this reason that al-Nusra remains so weak in Aleppo City and northern Aleppo Province to this day: al-Nusra's forces defected to IS, which was then completely expelled by moderate opposition groups in early 2014.⁴³⁶ Al-Nusra had to try to begin again from scratch, but could not even start rebuilding for some time as it was so badly damaged and under assault by IS.)

Throughout the second half of 2013, as IS set about state-building in rebel-held areas – which naturally caused conflicts with the rebels, who rejected IS's ideology, but did not cause any problems with the regime, which largely left IS alone⁴³⁷ – it was Atheer more than anyone else who helped them find ways into the society. Atheer acted as a “roving ambassador across much of northern Syria,” pulling the foreign jihadists decisively into IS's camp and securing a number of defections from other Jihadi-Salafi groups,⁴³⁸ and promoting the idea of a caliphate, laying the groundwork for the caliphate declaration in June 2014.

Atheer was at the head of the IS Media Council by late 2014, a continuation of his role in recruiting foreign fighters and spreading IS's ideology, and had long been a member of the Shura Council.⁴³⁹ Atheer also seems to have picked up a military role in eastern Syria in 2015,⁴⁴⁰ and became the governor of Syria in August 2015.⁴⁴¹ The U.S. killed IS's governor of Iraq and IS's number two, Fadel al-Hiyali (Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, Haji Mutazz), on 18 August 2015,⁴⁴² and this led to the reassignment of the Syria governor, Abd al-Rahman al-Qaduli (Abu Ali al-Anbari), to become the caliph's deputy.

Atheer was killed by a U.S. airstrike on 3 March 2016. His replacement at the Media Council is unclear; he appears to have been replaced as IS's Syria governor by Taha Falaha (Abu Muhammad al-Adnani).⁴⁴³

⁴³⁴ Guy van Vliet, ‘Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud,’ *CTC Sentinel*, 15 December 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/profile-paris-attack-ringleader-abdelhamid-abaaoud>, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴³⁵ Taub, B., ‘Journey to Jihad,’ *The New Yorker*, 1 June 2015.

⁴³⁶ Hassan, H., ‘An Opportunity in Aleppo,’ *Tahrir Institute*, 6 May 2016, timep.org/commentary/an-opportunity-in-aleppo/, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴³⁷ Henman, M., ‘Syrian military and ISIS have been ‘ignoring’ each other on the battlefield,’ *IHS Janes*, 11 December 2014, www.janes.com/article/46898/syrian-military-and-isis-have-been-ignoring-each-other-on-the-battlefield, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴³⁸ Lister, C., *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*, pp. 134.

⁴³⁹ Barrett, R., ‘The Islamic State’, *Soufan Group*, November 2014, pp. 52.

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Syria, Daesh makes changes in Deir Ezzor after those in Raqqa,’ *Yallasouriya*, 10 July 2015, <https://yallasouriya.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/syria-daesh-makes-changes-in-deir-ezzor-after-those-in-raqqa/>, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines’, 24 January 2016.

⁴⁴² Starr, B. and Acosta, J., ‘U.S.: ISIS No. 2 killed in U.S. drone strike in Iraq,’ *CNN*, 26 August 2015, edition.cnn.com/2015/08/21/middleeast/isis-no2-believed-killed/index.html, last visited: 13 July 2016.

⁴⁴³ Weiss, M., ‘How ISIS Picks Its Suicide Bombers’, *The Daily Beast*, 17 November 2015.

6.2 Dr. Wael al-Rawi

Very little is known of Dr. Wael – his name has even been reported in discrepant forms (rather than al-Rawi it might be Wael Adel Hussain) – but he has been named as the head of the media section of IS’s Shari’a Council both by knowledgeable non-IS Salafi sources⁴⁴⁴ and by pro-Baghdad sources.⁴⁴⁵

6.3 Bandar al-Shaalan

During IS’s secret formative period in Syria, from late 2012 to April 2013, when it was trying to subvert its own nominal Syrian wing, Jabhat al-Nusra, because al-Nusra had become too independent, and then during the state-building that led up to the caliphate declaration in June 2014, IS’s leaders worked to gather pledges of allegiance from abroad. A particular focus was Saudi Arabia, where IS’s then most senior shar’i, himself a Saudi, Abu Bakr al-Qahtani, worked tirelessly to recruit through the extremist networks of preachers and donors on the Gulf.⁴⁴⁶ Another of the earliest defectors to IS, Amr al-Absi, a Syrian born in Saudi Arabia who had been released by the Assad regime at the beginning of the uprising,⁴⁴⁷ A even visited Saudi Arabia, with al-Qahtani’s help, trying to gain a favourable word from known jihadi clerics, including the imprisoned Sulayman al-Alwan, who is sometimes known as the “mufti of al-Qaeda”.⁴⁴⁸

Al-Shaalan, a former military officer, was IS’s representative in Saudi Arabia during this period and even allegedly expanded his activism to Bahrain, coming into contact there with Turki al-Binali.⁴⁴⁹ Al-Shaalan is now one of the most senior figures the Media Council, promoting IS’s worldview and message and trying to win converts.⁴⁵⁰

6.4 Nasser al-Ghamdi

A Saudi, al-Ghamdi is said to oversee al-Furqan, IS’s oldest and most important media institution, which has moved from Iraq to Syria.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁴ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines’, 24 January 2016.

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Hashimi, H. (@iirakii73), Twitter post, 27 January 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/iirakii73/status/692428194440421381>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁴⁶ Bin Tashfin, Y., ‘English Translation of @Wikibaghdady’, 30 January 2014.

⁴⁴⁷ Orton, K., ‘How Syria’s Assad gave rise to one of the most senior IS leaders’, *Middle East Eye*, 10 March 2016.

⁴⁴⁸ Winter, C. (@charliewinter), Twitter post, 5 March 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/charliewinter/status/705920707260190720>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁴⁹ Mortada, R., ‘Al-Qaeda Leaks: Baghdadi and Golani Fight Over the Levant Emirate’, *Al-Akhbar*, 10 January 2014, available at: english.al-akhbar.com/node/18186, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Tamimi, A., ‘An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Line’, 24 January 2016.

⁴⁵¹ ‘Media arsenal of ISIS PART I: Media Institutions and Forums,’ *Iraq Media House*, www.imh-org.com/media-arsenal-of-isis-parti-media-institutions-and-forums, last visited: 12 July 2016.

7. The Cabinet

7.1 *Muwafaq Mustafa Mohammed al-Kharmoush*

Al-Kharmoush uses the kunya **Abu Saleh**. He was the Finance Minister for the IS-held areas of Iraq as of 2014.⁴⁵² Whether al-Kharmoush's role was expanded when his Syrian counterpart, Fathi al-Tunisi (Abu Sayyaf al-Iraqi), was killed in May 2015 is unclear.

Al-Kharmoush was a “*mukhabarat* (intelligence) officer during Saddam's time ... who turned to religion in the late 1990s”⁴⁵³ during Saddam's Faith Campaign, which promoted Salafism and deeply affected the security services. When the regime fell, al-Kharmoush was already radicalised and joined IS quickly in 2003 or 2004. Al-Kharmoush manages the extortion networks that IS uses to “tax” the populations under its rule, and coordinates the smuggling operations, internally and to the outside world, for oil and antiquities.⁴⁵⁴

Figure 14 Abu Saleh⁴⁵⁵



Al-Kharmoush was named as a terrorist by the U.S. Treasury Department in September 2015,⁴⁵⁶ and the U.S.-led Coalition reported that it believed it had killed him in an airstrike in late November 2015.⁴⁵⁷ This remains unconfirmed.

Al-Kharmoush's alleged demise came amid a series of strikes targeting IS's financial networks within its territory, the mafia-like structures that allow IS to maintain territorial control and which al-Kharmoush oversees. The Coalition claims that along with al-Kharmoush, it killed Abu Mariam, a senior enforcer of the extortion networks, and Abu Waqman al-Tunisi, who coordinated the transfer of resources for IS – namely fighters and weapons. Abu Waqman was also allegedly an IS courier.

7.2 *Bashar Ismail al-Hamadani*

Al-Hamadani, whose kunya is **Abu Mohamed**, is IS's Minister for Prisoner Affairs, responsible for tracking and where possible securing the release of IS jihadists detained by other parties in Syria and Iraq.⁴⁵⁸

Al-Hamadani is said to have been in Saddam Hussein's military and to have been engaged in the attempt by the Saddam regime to undermine the United Nations sanctions imposed on it after the annexation of Kuwait was reversed in 1991. Collaborating with Abdul Wahid Khutnayer Ahmad

⁴⁵² Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

⁴⁵³ Kazimi, N., 'The Islamic State's Sovereign Wealth Fund', *Talisman Gate, Again*, 11 December 2015, available at: talisman-gate.com/2015/12/11/the-islamic-states-sovereign-wealth-fund/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁵⁴ Ali, J. and David Alexander, 'The US claims to have killed ISIS' finance minister and two other senior leaders', *Business Insider (Reuters)*, 10 December 2015, available at: businessinsider.com/isis-finance-minister-reportedly-killed-in-us-airstrike-2015-12?r=US&IR=T, last visited: 15 June 2016. Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁵⁵ 'Counter Terrorism Designations', U.S. Department of the Treasury, 29 September 2015, available at: <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20150929.aspx>, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁵⁶ 'Islamic State Finance Chief "Killed In Air Strikes"', *Channels Television*, 11 December 2015, available at: www.channelstv.com/2015/12/11/islamic-state-finance-chief-killed-in-air-strikes/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁵⁸ Abu Hamieh, H. and Mohammad Abu Rumman, 'The "Islamic State" Organization', Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015, p. 284.

(Abu Luay), who is now the effective Interior Minister of the Islamic State, al-Hamadani allegedly imported cars with proceeds garnered from Khutnayer's export of vegetables.⁴⁵⁹

Figure 15 Abu Mohamed⁴⁶⁰



The Saddam regime set up an essentially criminal economy in the 1990s to smuggle across Iraq's borders and provide for a patronage network - increasingly distributed through mosques as the Islamisation of the Saddam regime intensified - that could give the regime some pillars of support in resisting an internal revolt of the kind that followed the Gulf War. It was this dispossessed Sunni elite of military intelligence officers, bureaucrats, clerics, and tribes that formed the core around which other insurgents gathered after Saddam fell.⁴⁶¹

7.3 Nima Abed Nayef al-Jibouri

Also known as **Abu Fatima al-Ansari** and **Abu Fatima al-Juhayshi**, al-Jibouri was IS's governor of Kirkuk at the time IS took Mosul and conquered areas of central Iraq. Al-Jibouri was in charge of IS's operations in southern Iraq before he was moved north.⁴⁶² A former military officer in the Saddam Hussein regime, it has been claimed that al-Jibouri is now the overall IS governor in Iraq after the death of Fadel al-Hiyali (Haji Mutazz or Abu Muslim al-Turkmani) in August 2015.⁴⁶³

7.4 Ahmed Abdulqadeer al-Jazaa

Al-Jazaa is IS's Governor of Baghdad and uses the kunya **Abu Maysara**.⁴⁶⁴

7.5 Ahmed Muhsin Khalal al-Juhayshi

Not to be confused with Nima al-Jibouri, with whom he shares a kunya (**Abu Fatima**), al-Juhayshi is IS's Governor for the South and Middle Euphrates.⁴⁶⁵ The zone covered by this - southern Iraq up to Baghdad - was previously overseen by al-Jibouri, who has now been moved north to be IS's Governor of Kirkuk.

⁴⁵⁹ Moubayed, S., *Under the Black Flag: At the Frontier of the New Jihad*, pp. 110-111.

⁴⁶⁰ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁶¹ Orton, K., 'Izzat ad Douri and ISIS', *Baghdad Invest*, 4 July 2015.

⁴⁶² 'Exclusive: Top ISIS leaders revealed', *al-Arabiya*, 13 February 2014.

⁴⁶³ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Line', 24 January 2016.

⁴⁶⁴ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

Figure 16 Abu Fatima al Ansari⁴⁶⁶



Figure 17 Abu Maysara⁴⁶⁷



Figure 18 Abu Fatima⁴⁶⁸



7.6 Rathwan Talib Hussein Ismail al-Hamdani

Al-Hamdani, who goes by **Abu Jurnas**, was a detainee at the American detention facility, Camp Bucca.⁴⁶⁹ Al-Hamdani serves as the Governor of the Border Provinces, those areas where IS's statelet meets with the outside world.⁴⁷⁰ There were rumours that al-Hamdani had been killed in a Coalition airstrike in November 2014, but nothing was ever substantiated.⁴⁷¹

7.7 Mohammed Hamid al-Dulaymi

Also known as **Abu Hajer al-Sufi**, al-Dulaymi is the General Coordinator between IS's Provinces – in effect its chief courier, taking messages from the local leadership in one area to the leadership in another, including requests for resources.⁴⁷² Al-Dulaymi is a former member of Saddam Hussein's military.⁴⁷³ While al-Dulaymi was reportedly killed by the Iraqi government on 5 September 2014, there was no confirmation of this either from the United States or from IS.⁴⁷⁴

7.8 Shawkat Hazem al-Farhat

IS's General Manager, al-Farhat – known as **Abu Abd al-Kadr** – provides advice to the caliph on IS's internal governance.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁶⁶ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁶⁷ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁶⁸ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁶⁹ Thompson A., and Jeremi Suri, 'How America Helped ISIS', *The New York Times*, 1 October 2014.

⁴⁷⁰ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

⁴⁷¹ Hall, J., 'The Kill List: Half of ISIS top commanders believed to be dead... but executioner-in-chief Jihadi John is still free to commit barbaric slaughter', *The Daily Mail*, 2 February 2015.

⁴⁷² Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

⁴⁷³ Al-Tamimi, A., 'An Account of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi & Islamic State Succession Lines', 24 January 2016.

⁴⁷⁴ 'Senior ISIS figure killed in U.S. airstrike in Iraq?', *CBS News*, 5 September 2014, available at: www.cbsnews.com/news/top-isis-lieutenant-abu-hajar-al-sufi-may-have-been-killed-in-u-s-airstrike-in-iraq/, last visited: 15 June 2016.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Hashimi, H., 'Revealed: the Islamic State "cabinet", from finance minister to suicide bomb deployer', *The Telegraph*, 9 July 2014.

Figure 19 Abu Jurnas⁴⁷⁶



Figure 20 Abu Hajar al-Assafi⁴⁷⁷



Figure 21 Abu Abd al-Kadr⁴⁷⁸



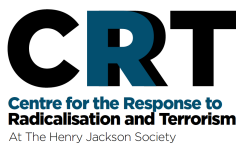
⁴⁷⁶ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁷⁷ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

⁴⁷⁸ Source: Ibid. Figure 7

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The Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) at The Henry Jackson Society provides top-quality, in-depth research and delivers targeted, tangible and impactful activities to combat the threats from radical ideologies and terrorism at home and abroad.



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The Islamic State has been holding territory and administering it as an ersatz state authority for three years and more, in areas of Syria and Iraq. This report looks at the individuals who oversee IS's statelet—the leader, his senior deputies, and the military and religious officials responsible for defending IS-held territory and administering IS's version of Islamic governance. As the recent tragedy in Orlando reminded the world, IS also maintains the capacity to launch and inspire terrorist attacks from the zones under its control as part of a strategic planning for a durable caliphate. The report also looks at those involved in overseeing this foreign terrorist apparatus.

**'If you believe in the cause of freedom, then proclaim it,
live it and protect it, for humanity's future depends on it.'**

Henry M 'Scoop' Jackson
(May 31, 1912 - September 1, 1983)
US Congressman and Senator for
Washington State from 1941 - 1983

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