

turn it into one of the wealthiest nonstate actors, now a proto-state with the aspiration of being a state, through a diversified war economy? To what extent is Baghdadi helped by the fraying state institutions in Iraq and Syria and by rival regional powers' fostering of sectarian mobilization and polarization? We cannot be confined to Baghdadi's personal experiences or a focused study in leadership or the great man himself. Baghdadi's rise to power coincided with increasing political and communal tensions in Iraq, where central government policies were widely seen as marginalizing and undermining the Sunni community. The chaos in Iraq and then Syria has inadvertently empowered Baghdadi's jihadist caravan.

ISIS is tied to the raging sectarian fires in Iraq and Syria and the clash of identities that is ravaging Arab countries, and, should ISIS be defeated, there is always the risk of another like-minded militant group, such as al-Nusra, filling a power vacuum in the region. If ISIS is a manifestation of the breakdown of state institutions, then the fragile authoritarian state system must be rebuilt on a more solid, legitimate foundation. This requires a transparent, inclusive, and representative government that delivers public goods, including jobs, and gives millions of young men and women, who feel forsaken, a stake in the future of their countries. A more complex challenge is to confront ISIS's Salafi-jihadist ideology and worldview. By portraying itself as the only alternative to a broken and corrupt political system, ISIS is trying to hijack agency from the people, yet in many ways, it uses the same tactics of the authoritarian regimes that it seeks to replace. The challenge is to provide hope to the millions of men and women who called for justice, freedom, and a life with dignity, as we saw during the Arab Spring uprisings, while simultaneously convincing them that there are nonviolent options that can bring about meaningful and substantive political change. Until we do, the menace of the "Islamic State" and similar Salafi-jihadist groups will remain a problem both for the Arab-Islamic world and for the international community.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO ISIS

Although the spectacular surge of ISIS must be contextualized within the social and material circumstances and conditions that exist in Iraq and Syria and beyond, its worldview and ideology must also be taken seriously. Ideology is a super-glue that binds Salafi-jihadist activists and combatants to each other and allows the movement to renew and revitalize itself after suffering setbacks. A traveling and expanding ideology, Salafi-jihadism has gained new converts and has taken hold of the imagination of small Sunni communities worldwide; it has developed its own rituals and references and produced its own iconic figures and theorists who provide intellectual guidance and theological sustenance. Historically a fringe social movement, now Salafi-jihadism vies for public influence and offers an alternative for both mainstream and radical Islamists. The movement's propagandists and preachers openly proselytize and boast that the tide of history has shifted in their favor. Whether it is on the cusp of victory or not, the ideology is here to stay and the challenge is to shine light on it and make sense of it. Researchers underestimate the power of the Salafi-jihadist ideology at their own peril. ISIS is first and foremost an extension of the global Salafi-jihadist movement. Baghdadi and his cohorts represent another wave, a new generation, of

Salafi-jihadists or revolutionary religious activists. (Chapters 2 and 8 examine in depth ISIS's ideological references and mindset as well as the similarities and differences between it and other Salafi-jihadist groups.) At present, ISIS—its ideology, as well as its state and security status—has successfully tapped into a fierce clash of identities between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims in the Middle East and beyond. Although ISIS is a Salafi-jihadist organization, it is fundamentally oriented toward a genocidal anti-Shia campaign conducted in the name of the romantic idea of resurrecting the caliphate.

In comparing the emergence of Al Qaeda's central organization to that of ISIS, it is possible to distinguish ideological threads that have provided ISIS with an advantage. Al Qaeda's central organization emerged from an alliance between ultra-conservative Saudi Salafism (or Wahhabism) and radical Egyptian Islamism known as Salafi-jihadism. ISIS was born of a marriage between an Iraq-based AQI (Salafi-jihadism) and an identity frame of politics. The group's ideological lineage of Salafi-jihadism forms part of the ideological impetus; the other part of its ideological nature is a hyper-Sunni identity driven by an intrinsic and even genocidal anti-Shia ideology. The US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 caused a rupture in an already fractured Iraqi society. America's destruction of Iraqi institutions, particularly its dismantling of the army and the Baathist ruling party, unleashed a fierce power struggle, mainly along sectarian lines, creating fissures in society. These growing ruptures provided the room necessary for non-state actors and armed insurgent militias, including Al Qaeda, to infiltrate the fragile body politic in post-2003 Iraq. The strategy of ISIS's planners is designed to exploit the Arab state identity crisis by claiming that they aim to implement a socioeconomic framework that can rival that of Western modernity. Despite ISIS's insistence that it operates within a different value system from that promulgated by Western liberalism, the group's rhetoric is anchored not in novelty but in identity politics whose main articulating pole is religious. Religion

can act as a potent framework for social identity, especially in war environments where insecurity runs high, and cultivates group loyalty by projecting itself as the truth and the right path to follow.¹ By providing a clear structure through strict sets of rules and beliefs and a worldview that encompasses life on earth and in the afterlife, ISIS presents individuals with the promise of an eternal group membership, which can prove particularly attractive for people prone to existential anxiety. Moreover, scholars point out that several factors feed into (Abrahamic) fundamentalist ideology, including dualism (absolute evaluations of good versus evil), authority (of a sacred book or leader), selectivity (choosing certain beliefs or practices over others), and millennialism (confidence in eschatology as God's will). Of all factors, however, one facet is thought to be vital: "reactivity,"² which takes the form of a hostility toward secular modernity that is directed not only toward people outside of the fundamentalists' religious in-group but also toward members of their own religious group who are not viewed as "true believers."

In this light, ISIS's development of a pure ideology can be seen as part of a strategy to feed its members' fundamentalism by emphasizing their exclusivity while projecting a universalist vision. For example, the widespread use of suicide bombers by Salafi-jihadist groups such as ISIS constitutes a recent modus operandi in Islam rather than a return to the roots. A convincing argument can be made that Muslims are currently entangled in a war of subjectivities that stems from a series of ruptures that started with the Enlightenment and that takes the form of an Islamic-Islamic civil war over the Muslim identity itself.³ Meanwhile, Arabs are also involved in an interpretative dispute about their beings-in-the-world in which both the Arab world and the world at large are being questioned and contested. The current rise of Salafi-jihadism and terrorism represented by groups such as ISIS is the result of not only creeping sectarianism or a crisis of the modern state, but also a growing nihilism that signals the collapse of peace and progressive values in its conception of humanity.⁴

Nevertheless, far from being sui generis, genealogically and ideologically ISIS belongs to the Salafi-jihadist family, or global jihadism, although it marks another stage in the evolution or, rather, mutation of the ideological gene pool. Its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, not only inherited the bloody legacy of his predecessor, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of Al Qaeda in Iraq, but also models himself on Osama bin Laden, who is for Salafi-jihadists a “martyr” and remains the undisputed, charismatic leader of the global jihadist movement. Over the past half century, the global jihadist movement has developed a repertoire of ideas, a frame of reference, theorists, thousands of followers, and “martyrs” who provide inspiration for new volunteers and ensure the movement’s survival. ISIS has been able to draw from this repertoire, rearticulating old concepts and presenting them as new or revolutionary. Its rhetoric makes use of religious ideology to articulate identity politics. Indeed, religion has for some time been the glue that maintains the cohesion, if not the unity, of various factions and divisions, and the rationale for vicious and flamboyant violence. Time and again, Salafi-jihadists from various movements have cited verses from Qur’anic scripture to portray their offensive jihad as blessed.

The world according to ISIS is frozen in time and space, incorporating the rules and laws of seventh-century Arabia into the twenty-first century. Baghdadi and his associates depict themselves as battling the “antichrist” and paving the way for the ultimate triumph of the “Mahdi” and Islam (in Arabic, the Mahdi means “the Guided One,” the central crowning element of all Islamic end-time narratives, or an expected spiritual and temporal ruler destined to establish a reign of righteousness throughout the world). This millenarian thinking is at the heart of ISIS’s caliphate ideology and the global jihadist movement in general. The problem is not to know whether ISIS is Islamic—of course it is, though Muslims worldwide disavow it and distance themselves from its actions—but rather to understand how this organization borrows heavily but se-

lectively from the Islamic canon and imposes the past on the present wholesale. Baghdadi and his propagandists overlook centuries of Islamic interpretations and counterinterpretations and rely on a narrow, strict, and obsolete textual reading of the Islamic doctrine, a move that is very controversial and deeply contested by the religious community and *al-Islam al-Sha’bi* (lived Islam). Despite its sound and fury, ISIS remains a fringe phenomenon that is too extreme for mainstream Muslim opinion but sounds like a sweet melody to the ears of its social base. This base continues to replenish the ranks of ISIS and similar organizations with willing combatants and suicide bombers. Time and again politicians and observers have penned the obituary of the global jihadist movement only to be shocked by its resilience and capacity for self-renewal. Ideology is a significant factor in this process of regeneration, and it confers legitimacy on ISIS’s actions. By tracing ISIS’s social and ideological origins and comparing it with the first two jihadist waves of the 1970s–1990s, we can gauge the extent of continuity and change and account for the group’s notorious savagery.

Under ISIS, there is no breathing space for social mobilization and political organization, including by like-minded Salafi-jihadist activism. ISIS possesses a totalitarian, millenarian worldview that eschews political pluralism, competition, and diversity of thought. Baghdadi and his associates criminalize and excommunicate free thought, and the idea of the “other” is alien to their messianic ideology. Any Muslim or co-jihadist who doesn’t accept ISIS’s interpretation of the Islamic doctrine is an apostate who deserves death. In the same vein, any Muslim or co-jihadist who refuses to submit to the will of the new caliphate faces either expulsion from the land or death. One here needs to recall the words uttered by ISIS’s chief propagandist and official spokesman, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, following the establishment of the Islamic State. In a communiqué, Adnani, whose real name is Taha Sobhi Falaha, demanded that all jihadist factions everywhere pledge allegiance

to the new caliph, Baghdadi, as the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations was now null and void. He said, "The land now submits to his order and authority from Aleppo to Diyala."⁵ Adnani made it clear that there is only one Islamic state and one caliphate, with no room for dissent: "Indeed, it is the state. Indeed, it is the *khilafah* [caliphate]. It is time for you to end this abhorrent partisanship, dispersion, and division, for this condition is not from the religion of Allah at all. And if you forsake the State or wage war against it, you will not harm it. You will harm yourselves."⁶ He also warned that all Muslims must obey the commander of the faithful, including former and current aspirants to the title, and ordered his fighters to "split the head" and "strike the neck" of anyone who breaks the ranks and does not submit to the will of the new caliphate.⁷

In ISIS's worldview, then, the caliphate is not just a political entity but also a collective religious obligation (*wajib kifai*), a means to salvation: Muslims have sinned since they abandoned the obligation of the caliphate, and, ever since, the umma has not tasted "honor" or "triumph." ISIS's repeated message to Muslims is that they must pledge allegiance to a valid caliph, Baghdadi, and honor that oath and live a fully Islamic life.

Behind the romantic idea of the caliphate, however, lies identity politics, as the core of ISIS's ideological framework is the affirmation of its "Sunni Islamic" identity and its redefinition of true Islam. Adnani's orders might have given the illusion that the establishment of the Islamic State entails a real rupture from the present state system, but, just like under Saddam Hussein, under ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq is headed by an absolute leader who tolerates no dissent. In fact ISIS's conception of sovereignty does not break away from the autocratic mode of governance that has plagued Arab countries for decades: for example, both Hussein in Iraq and the Assad in Syria have used identity politics as a pillar for their policies—albeit an ethnic rather than a religious version.

ISIS has used its messianic ideology to brutally suppress both Islamists and nationalists (Baathists) in areas under its

domination. Its *raison d'être* is to convert everyone to its cause, including rival jihadists who share a similar vision. For example, in a severe rebuttal, Adnani harshly criticized Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of Al Qaeda Central and the most senior living jihadist, for daring to side with the chief of Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Mohammed al-Joulani, against Baghdadi in the power struggle for Syria. ISIS's chief spokesman bluntly reminded Zawahiri that should he make it to the territories of the Islamic State, he would have to swear *bay'at* (fealty) to Baghdadi and serve as one of his foot soldiers. As Baghdadi pledged allegiance to Zawahiri in 2010, this open attack represents the ultimate insult.⁸ ISIS's hard-line stance has caused much havoc within the global jihadist movement, even leading to a split between ISIS and al-Nusra, which was originally constituted on Baghdadi's orders. A key cause of the rift between the two organizations was that Joulani rejected an order by Baghdadi in April 2013 to annex his front to ISIS. Baghdadi considered Joulani's snub treacherous and ever since has waged all-out war against al-Nusra and its Islamist and nationalist Syrian allies. The intra-jihadist confrontation in Syria has killed thousands of skilled fighters from both camps and has seen atrocities committed by each side, including wholesale rape, beheadings, and crucifixions. The war within the jihadist tribe is as savage as the war with outsiders. Islamic State followers and those of Al Qaeda Central excommunicate one another and marshal religious discourse to show that they are the real jihadist vanguard, while their rivals are pretenders. In Syria ISIS could not coexist with al-Nusra or any other Islamist group because that would have challenged its monopoly on the scared and on the global jihadist project as well. As a totalitarian-religious movement, ISIS will ultimately self-destruct, not because it commits evil deeds, but because it lacks a political imagination and its ideology is deeply at odds with the values and ways of life of local communities (more on this point in the conclusion). In addition to mastering the art of making enemies of all regional and global powers, ISIS eliminates politics altogether and aspires

to organize society along puritanical lines of seventh-century Arabia, a worldview that imposes the distant past on the present.

It is no wonder, then, that ISIS engages in cultural cleansing, purifying the Islamic lands of all alien and infidel influences, including traditional Sunni practices that clash with its fundamentalist and timeless interpretation of the Islamic doctrine. The idea of purifying the Islamic lands is deeply ingrained in the imagination of radical religious activists, but ISIS is the first social movement to attempt to operationalize this ideology. As Islamic State militants swept across Syria and Iraq, they destroyed, damaged, or looted numerous cultural sites and sculptures, condemning them as idolatry. Celebrating their cultural cleansing in spectacular propaganda displays, Islamic State fighters show by deeds, not words, their intent to purify the lands and resurrect the caliphate. While ISIS's propaganda is abhorrent to the outside world, it is greedily devoured by its social base. Its slickly produced recruitment films about cultural cleansing not only reinforce its strategic message of triumph and expansion but also divert attention from battlefield setbacks.⁹

For an authentic Islamic state to be erected, the Sunni militants of ISIS feel that the Islamic lands must be cleansed of apostasy and heretics, regardless of the human or civilizational costs. In fact ISIS's fighters are keen on displaying an ideological zeal and purity. For example, in an attempt to cleanse Sunni society of other cultural influences, ISIS has sought to dismantle the diverse social fabric made up of Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, Yazidis, and Christians that has developed and persevered since the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia, today's Iraq. Broadly, their wrath is directed at minorities whom they view as infidels without human rights. A case that illustrates ISIS's ideology of ethnic cleansing is its extraordinary punishment of the Yazidis, a tiny religious minority, representing less than 1.5 percent of Iraq's estimated population of thirty-four million, whom ISIS considers heretics. After the capture of Mosul and its outlying towns in summer 2014, including Sinjar, near the Syrian border, home to tens of thousands of Yazidis, ISIS engaged in

systemic cultural cleansing, forcing hundreds of thousands of minorities from their homes and using sexual violence as a weapon by indiscriminately raping Yazidi girls and women. ISIS viciously attacked the Yazidis, killing men and boys of fighting age and abducting a total of 5,270 Yazidi girls and women (at least 3,144 of whom are still being held at the time of writing), who were subsequently forced into sexual slavery, according to human rights organizations, United Nations figures, and community leaders. To handle the modern sex trade, ISIS has set up a Department of "War Spoils" and a detailed bureaucracy of sex slavery, including sales contracts notarized by its Islamic courts, according to a cache of documents seized by US Special Operations Forces in a May 2015 raid in Syria that killed top ISIS financial official Aby Sayyaf.¹⁰ And systemic rape has become an established and increasingly powerful recruiting tool for ISIS to lure men from deeply conservative Muslim societies, where casual sex is taboo and dating is forbidden.¹¹ According to the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and investigative reports by the media, ISIS has destroyed hundreds of Yazidi women's lives.¹² Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's senior crisis response adviser, spoke to forty Yazidi women who had managed to escape from ISIS captivity, and said that what ISIS had done to them amounted to war crimes. "Hundreds of Yazidi women and girls have had their lives shattered by the horrors of sexual violence and sexual slavery in IS captivity," she said.¹³ Zainab Bangura, a UN envoy investigating sexual violence in the conflict, has confirmed that an ISIS pamphlet that gives prices for the purchase of women is real and that "the girls get peddled like barrels of petrol." Bangura notes that prices for boys and girls aged one to nine are about \$165. Adolescent girls cost about \$124, and it's less for women over twenty. "They have a machinery, they have a program," she told *Bloomberg News*. "They have a manual on how you treat these women."¹⁴ According to ISIS's ideology, Yazidis are seen as polytheists and, worse, devil worshippers, and they are not even entitled to be treated like "People of the Book," Christians and Jews, who can atone for their sins by paying a

tax known as *jizya* to be set free. In contrast, ISIS either kills or converts Yazidis by force and enslaves their women, a punishment sanctioned, they say, by their experts of Islamic jurisprudence. ISIS's involvement in the sex trade and its enslavement of girls and women from the tiny Yazidi religious community are driven not only by power and male (patriarchal) domination but also by ideological zealotry. Baghdadi and his *shura* council (cabinet) want to distinguish themselves from Islamist rivals by attempting to revive traditions, rituals, and practices that have been dormant for over a thousand years in Muslim history. They have made emulation of the Prophet Mohammed a strict duty, a tool to display their religious purity and authenticity.¹⁵ For example, citing sayings of the Prophet, a booklet entitled "From Creator's Rulings on Capturing Prisoners and Enslavement" calls for both kindness and cruelty to captives by ISIS. Enslaved women should not be separated from their children, the booklet says, but the rules allow the group's combatants to have sex with female slaves.¹⁶ ISIS has also publicly boasted about its enslavement of Yazidi women in their magazine called *Dabiq* and in their propaganda videos. ISIS has justified its actions on religious grounds by juxtaposing the distant past with the present and selectively citing verses from the scripture or the Sunna (the traditions based on the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed) to justify their sex slavery. In an October 2014 article titled "The Revival of Slavery before the Hour," the group argues that the Yazidi women "could be enslaved unlike female apostates [the Shia], who the majority of the *fuqaha'* [experts in Islamic jurisprudence] say cannot be enslaved and can only be given an ultimatum to repent or face the sword. . . . After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the *Shari'ah* [Islamic law] amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's authority to be divided as *khum*s [the one-fifth of booty or spoils that goes to the state]."¹⁷

Christians do not fare much better. After capturing Mosul and other cities in Iraq and Syria, ISIS presented Christians in

both countries with a stark choice: convert to Islam, pay a special tax (*jizya*), or get out immediately and be disinherited from everything you own. Recent evidence shows that despite paying the special tax, Christian girls and women have been victims of ISIS's practice of systemic rape. In light of this ultimatum, the ISIS surge has triggered another wave of exodus by Christians, an exodus that began in earnest when its forerunner, Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, also commonly known as Al Qaeda in Iraq, forced 1 million of Iraq's surviving 1.5 million Christians to flee the country between 2003 and 2010. There is a real danger that Baghdadi could finish the job of his predecessor, Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006 by the United States—a job that would entail ridding Iraq of its ancient Assyrian community, nearly two thousand years old. Moreover, ISIS's totalitarian ideology also openly targets Muslims. Trying to distinguish themselves theologically from like-minded Islamist radicals, including Al Qaeda Central, Baghdadi and his cohorts are super *taqfiri* who have no qualms about excommunicating Muslims at will. ISIS considers Shia Muslims to be apostates, sanctioning the shedding of their blood as well as that of Sunnis who oppose their vision (more on this later). While it can be argued that Arab authoritarian rulers such as President Bashar al-Assad and former Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki have not done enough to protect the region's minorities against ISIS, these sectarian-based regimes created fertile conditions that allowed Salafi-jihadist groups like ISIS to build a popular base of support among Sunnis and surge. Indeed, ISIS is the main beneficiary of the divisive and destructive policies of the central governments of Iraq and Syria and the breakdown of state institutions in the Arab arena in general. From the beginning Baghdadi and his cohorts depicted themselves as the sole defenders of excluded and aggrieved Sunni communities against Shia-dominated regimes, first in Baghdad and then in Damascus. As explained in the introduction, ISIS is a near-enemy revolutionary movement, focusing on the Arab-Islamic world, not a far-enemy organization targeting the Western powers, even though it has recently devoted more resources to

carrying out attacks against the far enemy, including Russia, Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. It is an ideational, hyper-Sunni movement that harbors a genocidal ideology against the Shia, which means that roughly 120 Shias are marked for death. After it burst out of its original home in Iraq, ISIS expanded to Syria in 2012, with grand ambitions to spread to neighboring countries. In his second address to the world in November 2014, Baghdadi confirmed that his imperial ambitions were not limited to Iraq and Syria but also included Libya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and beyond.¹⁸

THEORIST ENABLERS OF ISIS

Although ISIS does not have its own scholars or theorists, it has mined Salafi-jihadists' repertoire of ideas and selectively borrowed whatever fits its unique worldview. At times, the organization has even been accused of falsely appropriating the works of extremist Salafi theorists. For example, a prominent Salafi-jihadist scholar, Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, lashed out angrily against Baghdadi's cohorts for stealing his writings and claiming them as their own. Maqdisi, however, is not a major inspiration for ISIS, as the organization is nourished on a bloodier and deadlier diet. Baghdadi and his inner circle rely particularly on three Salafi-jihadist manifestos to rationalize and justify what they do.¹⁹ The most well-known of the three is *The Management of Savagery*. Circulated in PDF format under the pseudonym Abu Bakr al-Najji in the early 2000s, the manifesto provides a strategic road map of how to create an Islamic caliphate that differs dramatically from similar efforts by Salafi-jihadists in earlier decades. The second book is *Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihad* by Abu Abdullah al-Muhajjer, which calls on Salafi-jihadists to do whatever it takes to establish a purely unified Islamic state. The final book is *The Essentials of Making Ready [for Jihad]* by Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, aka Abdel-Qader Ibn Abdel-Aziz or Dr. Fadl. This massive work focuses

on the theological and practical meanings of jihad in Islam, and it has become a central text in jihadi training. Dr. Fadl admitted that he wrote the book in 1987–1988 in order for it to be a manual for training camps of what subsequently became known as Al Qaeda.²⁰

While Najji's identity remains unconfirmed, both Muhajjer and Dr. Fadl were close associates of Zawahiri. Muhajjer is an Egyptian national who fought in Afghanistan alongside Osama bin Laden and Zawahiri. After graduating from the Islamic University in Islamabad and teaching at jihadist camps in Kabul, Muhajjer mentored fighters at Zarqawi's camp in Herat, and he was seriously considered as a candidate for the scientific and scholarly committee of Al Qaeda Central.²¹ After the collapse of the Taliban rule in 2001, he escaped to Iran and was held by the authorities there till his release to Egypt just after the January 25, 2011, revolution. Dr. Fadl was an early associate of Zawahiri. The two first met in the late 1960s in Cairo, where they both attended Cairo University's medical school. In the early 1980s their paths crossed again in Pakistan-Afghanistan, where they worked together to rebuild Egyptian Islamic Jihad, a Salafi-jihadist group. After September 11, 2001, Dr. Fadl and Zawahiri parted ways, engaging in a public feud over ideology and the future direction of the global jihadist movement. While serving a life sentence in an Egyptian prison, Dr. Fadl subsequently disowned his ideas and called for the demilitarization and deradicalization of the Salafi-jihadist camp. The story and journey of the three theorists show the enduring intellectual impact of the pioneers or the first generation of Salafi-jihadists on the movement as a whole. As a traveling ideology, Salafi-jihadism is nourished on ideas that can be tailored to fit the predilections and whims of every wave, providing nourishment, sustenance, and motivation to new converts and adherents.

The three manifestos represent the most extreme thinking within the movement and the degeneration of the Salafi-jihadist ideology into *Fiqh al-Damaa* (the jurisprudence of

blood). Although most analysts focus mainly on *The Management of Savagery*, the other two manifestos are as important in providing intellectual and ideological motivation and inspiration for Baghdadi and his ideologues. Despite differences, there are common conceptual threads among the three manifestos that offer theoretical guidance for ISIS's actions. First, the three books call for all-out war and advocate offensive jihad as opposed to defensive jihad in order to bleed the *kuffar* (infidels) or the enemies of Islam, thus creating chaos and fear. At the heart of this rationalization lies the belief that Salafijihadists must rid themselves of the illusion that the establishment of an Islamic state is possible through gradual electoral means or the political process. The authors poke fun at fellow Islamists who call for a reformist approach, arguing that it is impossible to build the institutions of an Islamic state under a system of apostasy. Second, although this total war should target both the near enemy and the far enemy, they prioritize the fight against tyrannical Muslim rulers who do not apply *shariah* (Qur'anic law). Finally, all three manifestos call on the movement's planners and lieutenants to kill with impunity, to observe no limits and follow in the footsteps of the Prophet's companions, who, in their opinion, brutally punished dissenters and rivals. They cite selective cases of early Islamic history to prove their claim that excessive violence produces the desired effect: submission. According to their logic, viciousness is the secret to success and victory, while softheartedness is a recipe for failure and defeat. They also argue that the ends—reclaiming Islam's golden age and establishing the Islamic state—justify the means—viciousness and savagery.

TOTAL WAR = VICTORY

Although all three Salafijihadist theorists advocate offensive jihad rather than defensive jihad, Najji explicitly makes the case for all-out war. According to Najji, in the past Salafijihadists lacked a strategic blueprint and carried out isolated acts of vio-

lence with no comprehensive "military strategy" or master plan. He harshly criticizes fellow Islamists for squandering precious time and effort on "preaching" jihad rather than doing jihad.²² Instead, Najji offers an expansive plan with three stages in which violence would be escalated qualitatively and strategically rather than in an ad hoc and random way. In the first stage, *al-Nikaya wal-Tamkeen* (vexation and empowerment), the will of the enemy must be broken by carrying out attacks against vital economic and strategic targets such as oil facilities and the tourism infrastructure. As security forces would rush in and mobilize resources to protect these sensitive targets, the state would be weakened and its powers would wither away, a condition conducive to "savagery and chaos." Salafijihadists would then take advantage of this security vacuum, notes Najji, by launching an all-out battle on the thinly dispersed security forces.²³ Once the rulers are overthrown, a second phase would commence, *Idrarat al-Tawhush* (the administration or management of savagery), and the third and final stage, *Shaukat al-Tamkeen* (empowerment), would see the establishment of the Islamic state. This Islamic state, Najji explains, should be ruled by a single leader who would then unify diffuse and scattered groups and regions of "savagery" in a caliphate.²⁴ According to Najji, this third stage employs a mixture of persuasion and coercion to win hearts and minds and gain legitimacy and recognition for the Islamic rule.

Although Najji does not directly acknowledge the influence of Sayyid Qutb, the master theorist of contemporary revolutionary Islamism, he borrows some of his terminology and Islamist references, such as *al-Qilla al-Mumtaza* (the vanguard) and *Zulm al-Jahiliyya* (the darkness of ignorance of divine guidance).²⁵ However, he explicitly professes inspiration from an influential fourteenth-century radical Islamic scholar and theologian called Ibn Taymiyya, whose fatwas (religious edicts) have provided motivation for multiple waves of Salafijihadists, including ISIS. Unsurprisingly, Najji emphasizes the significance of the media and propaganda as an ideological tool to mobilize and recruit the Muslim masses to the side of

Salafi-jihadists during the first and second stages of the long war, and then to control them and pacify them during the final stage under a centralized Islamic rule.

TARGETING THE NEAR AND THE FAR ENEMIES

In *The Management of Savagery* Najji's sole preoccupation is with the near enemy, secular and renegade Muslim rulers. He lists a few countries as a potentially fertile ground, mainly Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, North Africa, Nigeria, and Pakistan. However, Najji qualifies his shopping list by saying that it is temporary and that it would be more effective to apply his master plan to two or three countries before targeting the other cases.²⁶ Similarly, in *The Essentials of Making Ready [for Jihad]*, Dr. Fadl contends that although jihad should target both the far enemy and the near enemy, the latter should take precedence. According to Dr. Fadl, the near enemy is those "infidel rulers" who "apply infidel laws and infidel democracy."²⁷ He argues that attacking these rulers, whom he called *Murtadeen* (apostates), should even take priority over the other "jihad against Jews," because they "are closer to us and they have abandoned and renounced Islamic beliefs."²⁸ He depicts these Muslim rulers as more dangerous than kuffar—Christians and Jews.²⁹ Like Najji and Muhajjer, Dr. Fadl draws on Ibn Taymiyya's fatwas to justify war against the near enemy, claiming that jihad against "apostate leaders" is *Fard Ayn* (an obligation) of every Muslim who has reached the age of fifteen.³⁰ Citing Ibn Taymiyya and being inspired by Qutb without naming him, he expands the list of apostates to "include anyone who rules by positivist [secular] laws."³¹ During this phase of jihad, Muslims should "display animosity and hatred towards those living infidels," "disavow their infidel principles such as communism and democracy," and "isolate themselves even by migration from the infidels' land."³² Dr. Fadl even argues that jihad against the enemy in its homeland should take place "at least once a year," although he cites other Muslim scholars who argued that "there are no time limits to this Jihad."³³ The Muslim umma, he

notes, must prioritize this offensive jihad, and both its internal and external policies, including agriculture, industry, commerce, and housing, must be geared to support this sacred mission.³⁴ He warns Muslims that anyone who avoids "jihad for the sake of God" would "betray Allah, his prophet and the religion itself."³⁵ The key goal, notes Dr. Fadl, is to create *Hakimiyya* (the rule of God) on earth; this would occur "when Muslims defeat their enemies and apply Islam's rules in the conquered lands."³⁶ The concept of the vanguard is essential to the success of Dr. Fadl's jihadist project, and he first and foremost calls on Salafi-jihadists to "form a Jama'a Muslima [Muslim group]" whose task is to recruit others to join the mission described in the manual.³⁷ The significance of Dr. Fadl's manual is that it provides doctrinal justification in the fight against the near enemy, which ISIS prioritizes over that against the far enemy—the Western powers.³⁸

Prioritizing the fight against the far enemy, Muhajjer calls on Salafi-jihadists to launch war on kuffar. In *Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihad*, he opposes the consensus among jurists over the centuries and asserts that "killing kuffar and fighting them in their homeland is a necessity even if they do not harm Muslims."³⁹ Muhajjer does not distinguish between "civilians" and "combatants" among non-Muslims because he bluntly confesses that the main reason for "killing them and confiscating their property" is the fact that "they are not Muslims."⁴⁰ Moreover, the writer who earned the pseudonym Faqih al-Damaa (jurisprudent of blood) expanded the definition of *Dar al-Kuffar* (land of apostasy) to include countries inhabited by a majority of Muslims; these states do not apply shariah or Islamic law and thus are legitimate targets for attacks by Salafi-jihadists.⁴¹

SAVAGERY: A MEANS TO AN END

Whether they prioritize the fight against the near enemy, as Najji does, or insist that attention should be paid to both the near enemy and the far enemy, as Dr. Fadl and Muhajjer (to

a lesser extent) do, all three authors argue that the existing system of *Kufr* (apostasy) must be overthrown, incinerated, regardless of the inherent cost or sacrifice. In fact, the authors' key argument is that Salafi-jihadists must hasten social and institutional disintegration of the state system and induce mayhem and be prepared to manage this cataclysm. The goal is to kill and terrorize not for the sake of killing or terrorism but for a higher moral purpose: cultural cleansing and the imposition of God's laws on *kuffar*. For example, in *The Management of Savagery*, Najji points out that "the worst chaotic condition is by far preferable to stability under the system of apostasy,"⁴² thus turning the received wisdom of the mainstream religious establishment on its head. He depicts Salafi-jihadists as the vanguard best equipped to trigger an apocalypse or an end to apostasy, an end to the world as we know it, and a religious rebirth. "We must drag all the people to battle and bring the temple down on the heads of everyone," Najji states. Even "if the whole umma perishes, they would all be martyrs," he adds, justifying the death of millions of Muslims as for a worthy cause.⁴³

As to their favorite methods of violence, it seems that the authors have a preference for beheading and burning, which they see as effective in instilling fear and deterring others from resisting. Such vicious methods, they insist, can also be used to attack economic targets, particularly petroleum. Requiring sacrifice and pain, this confrontation must use shock-and-awe tactics to overwhelm the enemy, make him "think one thousand times before attacking us . . . and keep him on the defensive and off balance."⁴⁴ Najji advocates attacking the population and infrastructure in order to terrorize the enemy and maximize levels of savagery.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Muhajjer advocates the use of gruesome methods such as beheading, a favorite tactic of his. In *Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihad*, he devotes a whole chapter to beheading, arguing that it will "convey a gory picture" by "strengthening the hearts of Muslims and terrorizing the apostates" by deterring them.⁴⁶ Muhajjer even provides theological justification for grotesque forms of punish-

ment such as transporting and displaying the heads of those non-Muslims killed in battle from one country to another in order to boost the deterrence power of Salafi-jihadists.⁴⁷ He dedicates another chapter to suicide bombings, claiming that killing oneself is theologically legal because it is designed to boost religion. Going beyond Najji's guidelines, Muhajjer advises Salafi-jihadists to obtain weapons of mass destruction, which he sees as a "necessity" in this total war.⁴⁸ Although he says that weapons of mass destruction must only be used in defense against an invasion by *kuffar*, he qualifies this by insisting on other measures of punishment if that would benefit Muslims.⁴⁹

There is a sober, realist, cold-bloodedness to the guidelines offered by Najji, Muhajjer, and Dr. Fadl, a businesslike attitude that belies the dark, sinister, and vile ideological message. Their point of departure is that the Islamic State can only be nourished on "blood" and erected on "skeletons and human remains"; the whole society must be transformed into a war society prepared to wage a prolonged battle that will produce historical leaders. Although these leaders, caution the authors, will sustain deep wounds and suffer great personal losses, they are necessary to build a jihadist generation, a Qur'anic generation baptized by blood and fire.⁵⁰ There is an existential fight between faith and *Kufr*, Islam and apostasy, and only total war against enemies near and far will bring about the Islamist utopia.

ISIS BEYOND IDEOLOGY: STATE, GOVERNANCE, AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES

While ISIS's repeated displays of brutality point to a movement that rules by force and terror, it has steadily built its capacity to govern through the introduction of services such as policing, a shariah-based justice system, identity cards for residents, consumer watch programs, garbage collection, and day care centers.⁵¹ Local residents in al-Raqqa, Mosul, and other cities say that ISIS is acting like a rudimentary functioning state and providing security, a precious commodity in short supply in

war-torn Iraq and Syria. Residents are left alone if they obey ISIS's rules and commands and its severe and narrow interpretation of shariah. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan in the 1990s, ISIS is welcomed and feared by Sunni communities who have lived through decades of repression, tyranny, corruption, and violence. Baghdadi and his foot soldiers are not seen as monstrous and evil, as they are seen from the outside, a testament to the breakdown of state institutions and the fraying of the social fabric in Iraq and Syria. Like the Taliban, if ISIS retains control over territory and populations and delivers services, it will likely consolidate its hegemony and gain the implicit acquiescence of the governed. This makes ISIS radically different from and more dangerous than Al Qaeda Central, which never controlled territory or people or had immediate designs to create a state of its own. In contrast, ISIS is building a rump state in both countries and offers a subversive vision that dates back to seventh-century Arabia. Given the breakdown of Middle Eastern politics and raging civil wars, the organization threatens the foundation of the Arab state system in a more fundamental way than other nonstate actors have done before.

The rise of ISIS has triggered an intense public debate about the disintegration of the Arab state system and the bitter legacy of Sykes-Picot, a secret agreement made in 1916 between the French and British that divided the spoils of the defeated Ottoman Empire between them. That secret deal drew a new set of borders for the former Arab provinces of the empire that more or less have survived till now. Baghdadi and his cohorts made it clear that they want to tear down the "colonialist" borders that divide the Arab-Islamic world into separate states and replace them with a caliphate, a pan-Islamist state. To show their resolve after they seized Mosul in June 2014, ISIS's fighters bulldozed the official border between Syrian and Iraq after seizing contiguous territories in both countries, an act designed to display their revolutionary credentials and appeal to an Arab constituency that still views the Sykes-Picot agreement as illegitimate, a Western plot to divide, weaken, and conquer the

Arab world. In contrast to existing nonstate actors in the region, ISIS is more ambitious and revolutionary, presenting itself as a more authentic, identity-driven alternative to the Middle Eastern state system. Its propagandists go further by comparing their nascent state to that of the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia and by imposing the past on the present as a means to invest their state project with religious legitimization. What sets ISIS apart from other nonstate actors, including Al Qaeda Central, is its possession of material capability, willpower, and ideological capital, which it has combined to deadly effect. Ideology, masquerading as radical theology, has been used to rationalize and justify ISIS's violent deeds, with Baghdadi reminding Muslims that their "Prophet . . . was dispatched with the sword" to make God's laws supreme. ISIS's enduring threat lies in its combination of lethal military force with a totalitarian ideology that observes no limits.⁵² Thus, the capabilities and resources of Baghdadi and his cohorts are effective and their numbers larger than any other insurgency group in the greater Middle East, though the group has monstrously miscalculated by overextending itself and turning the entire world against it. By the end of 2015, ISIS appears to be losing territory in Iraq and Syria and bleeding.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THE SECURITY DILEMMA

Western governments worry that ISIS's swift conquests in the Arab heartland, an arena of strategic and economic significance, represent a threat to the security of their Arab allies. They also fear the potential spillover effects of the expansion of ISIS's power on their own national security. The images of ISIS's beheadings of American, British, Japanese, and Egyptian hostages as well as its deadly attacks in Beirut, Paris, and San Bernardino, California, heightened anxieties in Western capitals. Particularly alarming is the fact that, as stated by Nick Rasmussen—director of the US National Counterterrorism Center—during testimony for a hearing of the House of

Representatives Committee on Homeland Security in February 2015, more than 20,000 foreign fighters from more than ninety countries have traveled to Syria, with at least 3,400 of them coming from Western countries.⁵³ The number of foreign fighters has increased steadily, reaching 36,500 foreign fighters, including at least 6,600 from Western countries, at the beginning of 2016, according to James Clapper, the director of National Intelligence, and UN sources.⁵⁴ Not since the Afghan jihad against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s have so many foreign religious activists traveled to fight in distant lands. In fact, today Syria and Iraq attract many more Western recruits than did either Afghanistan or Iraq after the US-led invasion of the country in 2003, a phenomenon that deserves critical scrutiny. "The rate of foreign terrorist fighter travel to Syria . . . exceeded the rate of foreign fighters who travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen or Somalia at any point in the last 20 years," concluded the State Department's annual terrorism report in 2015.⁵⁵

European and American leaders are particularly anxious that the foreign fighters radicalized and militarized in Iraq and Syria could return home and carry out terrorist attacks, a nightmarish scenario that security officials say keeps them awake at night. Abdelhamid Abaaoud is a case in point. A foot soldier turned lieutenant in ISIS's platoons in Syria, Abaaoud, a twenty-eight-year-old Belgian, was sent back to Belgium where he organized a network of nine militants who carried out massive suicide bombings in Paris in November 2015, the deadliest terrorist assaults in France in fifty years.⁵⁶ The anxieties of Western governments had already been heightened after a terrorist attack in Paris that targeted the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015, killing twelve people; it was followed by a related attack on a kosher supermarket in east Paris two days later, resulting in four more deaths. The terrorist network in Paris included three suspects: two brothers, Said Kouachi, thirty-four, and Cherif Kouachi, thirty-two, who allegedly belonged to an offshoot of Al Qaeda Central in Yemen called Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); and Amedy Coulibaly, thirty-

two, a self-proclaimed ISIS foot soldier. The trauma caused by the Paris attacks in January and November 2015 not only affected the French nation; its reverberations were felt on every European street. The significance of these attacks led to an increasing recognition that the recruitment of young men in the West creates security risks across Europe and North America. This point was driven home when in February 2015 a copycat attack took place in Copenhagen, Denmark, where two individuals were killed. A climate of fear and panic has taken hold of the European and American imagination. The terrorist threat, though real, has been blown up out of proportion with British Prime Minister saying that ISIS poses an "existential" threat to his country, a statement that mischaracterizes a limited menace with a strategic.⁵⁷ In the US, in an attempt to reduce the danger to the homeland, Republican presidential candidates have called for banning Muslims from entering the country and for bombing civilians in Iraq and Syria, a recipe that aides Salafi-jihadists like ISIS.⁵⁸

Although the phenomena of foreign fighters, wannabe jihadists, and lone wolves are not new, ISIS's counternarrative has had a wider appeal than that of its co-jihadists, including Al Qaeda Central. In July 2015, FBI director James B. Comey told the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado that ISIS poses a more challenging threat within the US homeland than Al Qaeda Central. It is much more effective at recruiting impressionable and "troubled souls" through social media than other groups, Comey said, adding, "It's currently the threat that we're worrying about in the homeland most of all."⁵⁹ The White House is also increasingly alarmed by what Lisa Monaco, Obama's homeland security and counterterrorism adviser, recently called ISIS's "unique threat" to the United States. In contrast, the US national security establishment, led by the Pentagon, intelligence agencies, and the National Counterterrorism Center, is more anxious about Al Qaeda Central overseas. These agencies warn that Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen and Syria are capitalizing on the turmoil in those countries to plot much

larger “mass-casualty” attacks, including bringing down airliners carrying hundreds of passengers.⁶⁰ As the *New York Times* implicitly cautioned, the debate within US government agencies is not academic; it will influence how the Obama administration allocates about \$15 billion in counterterrorism funds, and how it will assign thousands of officers to combat evolving and shifting threats to national security.⁶¹ The debate on terrorism in the US cannot be separated from the business side of “selling” counterterrorism which is a big business in Washington. According to a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the US spends \$124.9 billion a year on the overall fight against terrorism, a massive sum that reflects panic, opportunism, and gross overreaction to the threat.⁶²

ISIS’s efficacy in attracting young recruits from around the world lies in its sophisticated outreach campaign and strategy. The group appeals to disaffected and disadvantaged Sunni youths around the world, who are often dealing with issues concerning their identities. More than its like-minded predecessors, ISIS is a youth movement. By presenting the group as a powerful vanguard movement capable of delivering victory and salvation, ISIS’s propagandists offer alienated Muslim youths a utopian worldview and a political project: resurrecting the lost caliphate.⁶³ The idea of the caliphate, a political institution that was disposed of in the 1920s with the emergence of the Republic of Turkey, has taken hold of the imagination of many Sunni Islamists who see it as redemptive, a means to salvation, and a worthy cause to do jihad for. At the heart of this utopian longing for the imagined caliphate is the feeling of some Muslims that the modern nation-state has failed to build a just and inclusive order.

In addition to targeting individuals who feel disaffected and playing on the desire for a more inclusive political system, ISIS also capitalizes on each of its territorial gains in Iraq and Syria. With their seizure of Mosul and their growing military momentum in the summer of 2014, Baghdadi’s battalions seemed unstoppable and unbeatable, fired with a “faithful ideology.”

More than any other factor, ISIS’s swift expansion attracts recruits from near and far. As a victorious vanguard, ISIS appeals to politicized Sunnis who feel disfranchised by Shia-led regimes and who aspire to regain power and implement a cultural renewal. ISIS’s ideologies and propagandists used this impetus to strike fear and terror in the hearts of their enemies and “scar their consciousness,” as they put it, and to encourage euphoria and a feeling of inevitability among their supporters, which allowed ISIS to defeat bigger formations of the Iraqi and Syrian armies and recruit thousands of foreign fighters. The group seemed to be on a roll in Iraq and Syria, with neighboring Arab countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia feeling anxious about the potential security reverberations of ISIS’s spectacular expansion. The Obama administration faced pressure at home and in the region to intervene and stop the ISIS blitzkrieg.

Initially, to blunt ISIS’s swift advances, Obama ordered “limited” airstrikes to protect Americans in Irbil and to help thousands of civilians, mainly Yazidis, trapped on Mount Sinjar after an ISIS offensive. Within days, the US mission broadened, with Obama saying that it would now “provide military assistance and advice to the Iraqi government and Kurdish forces as they battle these terrorists, so that the terrorists cannot establish a permanent safe haven.” After ISIS beheaded two American hostages in September 2014, Obama again expanded the airstrikes beyond Iraq to targets in Syria. The brutal murder of two American citizens, combined with the near collapse of the Iraqi armed forces and a lackluster performance by the Kurdish Peshmerga, forced Obama’s hand. He vowed to “degrade and ultimately destroy” the organization, marking a turning point in US policy regarding ISIS. As the threat emanating from ISIS continued to grow, reaching Western capitals, including the US homeland at the end of 2015, Obama authorized the deployment of Special Operations contingents in Iraq and Syria and deepened American involvement in the war in Iraq and Syria. To reassure a nervous nation and anxious allies abroad, the US president vowed to “destroy” ISIS through relentless airstrikes

and building up local forces to spearhead the fight against the group. Obama's basic strategy of avoiding a ground war has not changed,⁶⁴ though at the time of writing, at the beginning of 2016, his aides say the US is willing to deploy "boots on the ground" to help Iraqi and Syrian forces liberate Mosul and al-Raqqa, an important shift in tactics.

ISIS's downing of a Russian jet and its attacks in Beirut, Paris, and California brought a convergence of interests between the rival global powers of the United States and Russia; both signaled their willingness to indirectly coordinate the fight against the Islamic State in Syria, though they still differ on the future of Assad. Importantly, the United States found itself aligned with Iran on the issue of ISIS and started to coordinate with Shia militias in Iraq, which are directly under Iran's umbrella. The new alignment between Iran and the United States was formalized in a historical nuclear deal after months of intense negotiations, a deal that both Israel and the US Republican Party strongly opposed but failed to scuttle. At least for the time being, ISIS has managed to change the geostrategic environment, notably pushing the interests of the Obama administration closer in line with those of Iran.⁶⁵

Although the United States is now leading a broad anti-ISIS coalition made up of sixty-two countries, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, the alliance is disunited and lacks an effective plan to defeat ISIS. Twenty-one states provide air and military support, but just thirteen have launched airstrikes. Nearly four out of five airstrikes on ISIS territories have been conducted by the United States. After carrying out more than ten thousand airstrikes (and counting) against ISIS and killing more than twenty-two thousand of its operators according to the independent monitoring group Airwars, the US-led coalition has only rolled back some of the military gains made by the group so far.⁶⁶ By the beginning of 2016, ISIS has lost approximately 40 percent of the territory they once held in Iraq and between 5 and 20 percent in Syria since the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014.⁶⁷ American

officials and strategists say that ISIS is replacing its combatants in Iraq and Syria as fast as the United States and its allies are killing them there, and the CIA estimates that ISIS still maintains a mini-army of thirty-one thousand fighters. Other groups such as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claim that ISIS may field as many as one hundred thousand combatants.⁶⁸ ISIS remains well funded—earning close to \$1 billion a year in oil revenues, taxes, and criminal activities, according to Treasury Department estimates—and has expanded to other regions, including Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.⁶⁹

Senior American and British officials acknowledge that it would take years to recapture all the cities and towns seized by ISIS in Iraq, though they are more optimistic about the fight in Syria. The group does not appear to have as large of a social constituency in Syria as it does in Iraq. Critics are skeptical that Western and Middle Eastern governments have a winning "strategy" in Iraq and Syria, which, in their opinion, has only helped empower ISIS. Although the United States and its European allies say they are committed to degrading ISIS and eventually destroying the group, they are unwilling to deploy a large contingent of ground troops lest they play into the group's apocalyptic narrative and suffer casualties. For now the gap between Western objectives and means bolsters ISIS's narrative of invincibility, allowing it to draw thousands of recruits, though as the group fights for its survival by the end of 2015, it is attracting fewer recruits. Baghdadi and his planners have also exploited the regional rivalry between the Saudi-led bloc of Sunni Arab states and Shia-dominated Iran, a discord that has taken sectarian overtones and has become a zero-sum contest for influence.⁷⁰ While the fragility of the state structures in Iraq and Syria is the key cause of ISIS's swift and spectacular surge, regional and global rivalries sustain and prolong its existence. As long as these conditions and cleavages exist, it is going to be difficult to defeat ISIS and dislodge it from Iraq and Syria.