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Comparing Islamic Extremist Media:
Understanding the Recruitment Tactics of The Islamic State and al-Qaeda

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Abstract

For many Americans, the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) became a recognized name after the August 2014 beheading of US Journalist James Foley. Most view the organization as simply a more violent brand of al-Qaeda jihadism, whose primary purpose is to destroy America and the West. A deeper analysis of the two organization's media outlets, however, reveals their divergent ideology and sources of legitimacy. While ISIS was initially an offshoot of al-Qaeda, its character is fundamentally defined by its territoriality in Syria and Iraq, as it works to establish its Caliphate, or Islamic State. Al-Qaeda, by contrast, strives to radicalize individual jihadists to attack Western states and Arab regimes that have been historically supported by Western states.

Yet for both groups recruitment is crucial, especially as they compete for the legitimacy and appeal associated with being the vanguard of transnational Islam and global jihadism. Through sophisticated media campaigns, both al-Qaeda and ISIS reach their potential members and equip them with the means to join their organizations. Both groups' media is multi-dimensional, and both groups have a digital English-speaking magazine whose primary purpose is recruitment. This paper analyzes and compares the specific recruitment tactics used by al-Qaeda and ISIS in their digital magazines, and explores the overall implications of the media campaign in light of growing competition between the two transnational jihadi organizations.

Through this analysis, I find that ISIS written media is created in relation to al-Qaeda media, and serves as a tool to differentiate ISIS from al-Qaeda. This is representative of the larger global civil war of jihad, where Islamic extremist organizations are increasingly competing over resources, recruits, and ideology. By better studying the written media of ISIS and al-Qaeda, counterterrorism experts can create a strong and nuanced counter-narrative to challenge Islamic extremist media.

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Introduction

The emergence of the Internet and social media has created a unique platform for groups and individuals to present their otherwise unheard voices. In recent years, and in light of the 2011 “Arab Spring” protests, much literature has been written on the revolutionary power of the Internet for facilitating political change. Books like Wael Ghonim’s *Revolution 2.0* track the use of Facebook and social networking sites as a catalyst for the January 25, 2011 protests in Egypt, as social media helped to gather popular voices and bring about a revolution that removed President Hosni Mubarak from power. These books advance a particular narrative that views the Internet as the “final frontier” for asserting a free voice amidst the backdrop of a media-censored autocratic regime. Undoubtedly, the Internet did play a salient role in creating crucial space for new voices to rise and challenge the status quo. Yet less attention has been brought to the harmful potential of these open platforms, where violent and hateful voices can dominate the center stage and recruit new members into their extremist organizations.

In recent months, this latter stance has been making headlines, specifically with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Shocking statistics have revealed the seemingly inexplicable draw that ISIS has on foreign recruits—thousands of new members are joining the organization from North Africa, Europe, Australia and America. While numerous psychological and sociological studies have revealed the various mindsets and attractions these recruits have for joining extremist groups, less have analyzed the specific rhetoric adopted by the extremist groups in their written media. Yet to fully grasp ISIS’ media distribution, it is necessary to also understand the media efforts of ISIS’ parent organization, al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda employs an extensive library of media used for recruitment, from visual/audio material, to digital magazines and brochures. Many scholars have argued that one of Al-Qaeda's most important decisions for the advancement of their organization and ideology was adapting to the development of new technology and the Internet. However, Dr. Abdel Bari Atwan points out the paradox of al-Qaeda's attachment to technology and cyber jihad. In one light, al-Qaeda is an organization "which has pitted itself so vehemently against the modern world." Yet simultaneously, al-Qaeda operates "on the ultra-hi-tech electronic facilities offered by the Internet to operate, expand, develop and survive."¹ The Internet has become a crucial tool of operation for the organization as it assists in the planning and training of its operatives and creates a stage for the organization's public declarations. Despite its Western origins, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri view the Internet as a tool to be adopted and altered for their agendas, and as a legitimate field of operation for jihad and propaganda of al-Qaeda.²

Al-Qaeda has adopted numerous uses of the Internet, from cyber hacking and virus creation to website and chatroom management.³ Additionally, al-Qaeda's numerous branches have operated in varying manners on the Internet, with some groups releasing violent compilations of suicide bombings, and others limiting their media campaigns to written propaganda. Nevertheless, official media from al-Qaeda's central administration keeps the organization's vision and mission intact, and provide necessary authority in the

¹ Abdel Bari Atwan, *The Secret History Of Al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 122

² Ibid, 123

³ Ibid, 122-123

midst of divisions and disagreements between different sectors of the organization.

As a research fellow at St. Andrews University's Centre for Terrorism and Political Violence, Donald Holbrook's primary research explores the evolution of al-Qaeda's public discourse—the "ideological doctrine of al-Qaeda."⁴ According to Holbrook, Bin Laden and Zawahiri's public statements can be seen as a "source of mobilizing ideology," as part of what Quintan Wiktorowicz calls "the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes."⁵ Ultimately, the public discourses of bin Laden and Zawahiri work to create an ideology that expands beyond the "physical life of the al-Qaeda leadership."⁶ To understand how al-Qaeda structures its media to produce its desired outcome, it is necessary to explore how media is framed to reach an accurate conclusion.

As depicted in Holbrook's study of al-Qaeda's public discourse, and Wiktorowicz's analysis of Islamic Activism, framing is a methodology where leaders adopt "interpretive schemata that offer a language and cognitive tools for making sense of experiences and events in the 'world out there'."⁷ As a result, al-Qaeda and ISIS media articulate specific experiences and events that both reinforce and reproduce the groups' ideologies. While it is dubious to assume that one's grievances will inherently lead to their full participation in a movement, it is still important to understand the motivations behind the formation of al-Qaeda and ISIS' ideology to understand their tactics of recruitment.⁸

⁴ As articulated by Holbrook, this includes "the set of ideas and beliefs, grievances, and ambitions that the al-Qaeda leaders [Osama bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri] have sought to communicate."

Donald Holbrook, *The Al-Qaeda Doctrine* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), xvi

⁵ Ibid 40-41;

Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4

⁶ Holbrook, *Al-Qaeda Doctrine*, 41

⁷ Ibid, 41

⁸ Ibid 41

Among the options of written media, the specific choice of using magazines to distribute information is an intentional one by both al-Qaeda and ISIS. Compared to other forms of media, magazines have a particular influence on attitudinal change. As discussed by Susan Sivek, magazines are unique in their ability to “draw readers into their content and often encourage lifestyle changes.”⁹ The magazines encourage readers to identify with the images presented, and articles written in the second person can simulate a dialogue, rather than simply list statements; this also pressures the reader to act upon the magazine’s messages.¹⁰ Additionally, studies have revealed an attitudinal effect of magazines on their readers whereby “the magazine content and advertising can motivate purchasing decisions and online information seeking.”¹¹ By adopting similar styles and tones of Western magazines, both al-Qaeda’s magazine *Inspire*, and the ISIS magazine *Dabiq*, might similarly alter attitudes among engaged readers.¹²

The contents of *Inspire* and *Dabiq* are presented within the framework of specific master narratives utilized by al-Qaeda and ISIS. As defined by Jeffrey Haverston et al, a master narrative is a “transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture.”¹³ Master narratives are presented in a systematic manner that connects stories under a common theme. Additionally, the narratives relate to reality by “establishing

⁹ Susan Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration: Al Qaeda’s Digital Magazine *Inspire* In The Self-Radicalization Process,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 589.

¹⁰ Ibid 589;

See also: D. Machin and T. Van Leeuwen, “Language Style And Lifestyle: The Case Of A Global Magazine,” *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 4 (2005): 577-600.

¹¹ Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration,” 589; Association of Magazine Media, (2012)

¹² Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration,” 589

¹³ Jeffrey R. Halverson, H. Lloyd Goodall, and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives Of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

archetypical characters, relationships, and standard actions that rationalize” specific issues presented at the core of the narrative.¹⁴ For example, one commonly articulated master narrative focuses on the *Jahiliyyah*, or the “age of ignorance” that existed before the revelations of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵ Through this narrative, Islamic extremist groups present an ideology that dichotomizes present day society into two groups: those currently living in the “truth” of Islam, and those living within the ignorance of *Jahiliyyah*. The archetypical nature of the narrative is an effective tool for “othering” perceived enemies while creating an insider status for the members of the extremist organization. The cultural component of master narratives makes them more effective than other types of narrative. The specific use of culture allows the narrative to “be deeply layered in a social system so that it is ‘chronically reproduced,’ told again and again over time, and extremely resistant to change.”¹⁶ This unique cultural and historic component of master narratives makes them effective tools to be utilized by extremist organizations, and add a level of legitimacy and effectiveness in convincing the reader of an extremist viewpoint. As a result, it is important to recognize the master narratives adopted by both ISSI and al-Qaeda in the creation of their written media.

A nuanced comparison of the written media of al-Qaeda and ISIS will not only reveal the groups’ immediate methods of recruitment, but also their larger ideological vision. I argue that the unique recruitment tactics and rhetorical devices used to engage readers reveal differing sources of legitimacy for these groups: while al-Qaeda attempts

¹⁴ Ibid, 24

¹⁵ Ibid, 37

¹⁶ Ibid, 25;

“The Propaganda War: War of Words,” *Islamist Magazine* (January 2009)

to radicalize its readers to carry out “lone wolf” attacks, ISIS is more focused on territorial expansion and readers’ citizenship and participation in the larger Islamic State. I believe that these findings have significant implications for the formulation of a comprehensive and sustainable counter-narrative to the expansion of both al-Qaeda and ISIS.

I begin this thesis by providing a historical overview for the growth of al-Qaeda and ISIS, and the development of the groups’ ideologies. In Chapter Two, I provide an outline for al-Qaeda media and specifically *Inspire* magazine, before providing a summary and analysis of *Inspire*’s reoccurring articles and content. I conclude by exploring the implications of *Inspire*’s contents, and what they suggest about al-Qaeda’s overall agenda for the magazine. In Chapter Three, I discuss the development of ISIS’ media campaign before outlining and analyzing the recurring contents in the magazine *Dabiq*, and close by discussing the primary implications of *Dabiq*. In Chapter Four, I compare *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, focusing on specific contents that are both similar and different in the magazines, and suggest what these comparisons say about the tactics, motivations, and goals of recruitment for the two groups. I close by discussing what the magazines say about their respective organizations, and discuss the primary differences in the agendas of ISIS and al-Qaeda. In the Conclusion, I explore the implications of al-Qaeda and ISIS written media in light of the groups’ competition within what Brookings expert Daniel Byman has deemed, “Jihadism’s global civil war.”¹⁷ I provide a summary

¹⁷ Daniel Byman and Jennifer Williams, “ISIS vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism’s Global Civil War,” *The Brookings Institution*, February 24, 2015, Accessed March 17, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2015/02/24-byman-williams-isis-war-with-al-qaeda>.

of actions taken by Western officials to create a counter-narrative to the extremist media, and close by suggesting policy recommendations in responding to the differences between both organizations' use of media.

Chapter 1

The Background of al-Qaeda and ISIS

The Ideology of al-Qaeda (“The Base”)

Osama bin Laden was born in 1957 Riyadh, Saudi Arabia as the 43rd of 53 siblings in a wealthy family. After six months, his family moved to the western *Hijaz* region of the Kingdom, near the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, which he frequently visited in childhood and adolescence. Attending King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah, Osama bin Laden encountered a radical form of Islam from two influential mentors: Abdullah Azzam and Muhammad Qutb—teachers who would lead bin Laden to become the leader of one of the most infamous terrorist organization of the 21st century.¹⁸

In his perceptive 2009 Foreign Policy article titled “Think again: al-Qaeda,” policy analyst Jason Burke describes al-Qaeda as “less an organization than an ideology,” arguing that attempts to eliminate the organization’s leadership would not stop extremist Islamic militancy from growing. Analyzing the effects of al-Qaeda’s worldview, which he deems “al-Qaedaism,” Burke states that there are “many individuals and groups, [... who] act in the style of al-Qaeda, but [...are] only part of al-Qaeda in the loosest sense.”¹⁹ However, al-Qaeda’s ideology was not developed in a vacuum, but was rather established from an evolving web of historical and modern interpretations of political Islam and *jihad*. Bin Laden’s exposure to *jihadist* ideology began from mentors at the

¹⁸ Atwan, *Secret History*, 40-42

¹⁹ Jason Burke, “Think Again: Al Qaeda,” *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2009, Accessed March 3, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/27/think-again-al-qaeda-4/>

university—specifically Abdullah Azzam and Muhammad Qutb.

Bin Laden’s first mentor, Abdullah Azzam, was a Palestinian-born lecturer at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. Focusing on the 1980s Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Azzam emphasized the need to liberate the Muslim homeland from foreign occupation—especially that of the “godless” Soviet communists. For Azzam, the greater struggle of Islam was against *Jahiliyyah*, the secular world of ignorance that opposed the Prophet’s teachings²⁰—a medieval theology that was adopted and promoted by the 20th century Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, Sayyid Qutb (d.1966).

Qutb’s definition of *Jahiliyyah* derives from the Medieval Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Taymiyya was born a decade after the 1258 conquest of Baghdad by the Mongols—one of the most disruptive moments of Islamic history.²¹ Born into a family of refugees in Damascus, Ibn Taymiyya was both a religious scholar and political activist. Desiring to purify the Islam that he believed had become tainted by the Mongol invaders, he announced a *fatwa* (Islamic ruling) against the unbelievers (*kufirs*) who were excluded (*takfir*) from Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of Islam.²² By emphasizing the dichotomy of the land of belief (dar al-Islam) versus the land of unbelief (dar al-harb), Ibn Taymiyya announced that the *kufirs* were no better than polytheists living in pre-islamic *Jahiliyyah*, stating that Muslim subjects had the duty to wage jihad against them.²³

The Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb was born in Egypt in 1906. After studying for

²⁰ Atwan, *Secret History*, 73;

Holbrook, *Al-Qaeda doctrine*, 15;

Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 32

²¹ John L. Esposito, *Unholy War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 45

²² *Ibid*, 46

²³ *Ibid*, 46

two years at a college in America, Qutb was turned away from Western liberalism, viewing the Western lifestyle as dangerous, and prohibited within Islam.²⁴ Qutb's radical teachings emphasized a moral, political, and religious dichotomy by dividing the world into two categories—those following the “truth” as revealed by the Prophet Muhammad, and those living in *Jahiliyyah*, as portrayed in Qutb's Magnum Opus, *Milestones*.

This *Jahiliyyah* is based on rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth. It transfers to man one of the greatest attributes of God, namely sovereignty, and makes some men lords over others. It is now not in that simple and primitive form of the ancient *Jahiliyyah*, but takes the form of claiming that the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without regard to what God has prescribed. The result of this rebellion against the authority of God is the oppression of His creatures. Thus the humiliation of the common man under the communist systems and the exploitation of individuals and nations due to greed for wealth and imperialism under the capitalist systems are but a corollary of rebellion against God's authority and the denial of the dignity of man given to him by God.²⁵

[...]

It is therefore necessary—in the way of the Islamic movement—that in the early stages of our training and education we should remove ourselves from all the influences of the *Jahiliyyah* in which we live and from which we derive benefits. We must return to that pure source from which those people derived their guidance, the source which is free from any mixing or pollution. We must return to it to derive from it our concepts of the nature of the universe, the nature of human existence, and the relationship of these two with the Perfect, the Real Being, God Most High. From it we must also derive our concepts of life, our principles of government, politics, economics and all other aspects of life.²⁶

For Qutb, *Jahiliyyah* was a threat to the Islamic world and life as a Muslim. But even more, it was a direct rebellion against God, and therefore should not be tolerated in any form. By reinforcing the “us vs. them” dichotomy promulgated through the theology

²⁴ Atwan, *Secret History*, 42

²⁵ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*. Retrieved from:

http://www.izharudeen.com/uploads/4/1/2/2/4122615/milestones_www.izharudeen.com.pdf, 6.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 14

of *Jahiliyyah*, Qutb's writing reflects a viewpoint that prevents any form of inclusion for those not considered "true" Muslims. While not explicitly condoning violence against those living in *Jahiliyyah*, Qutb's dichotomy creates the theological space for extremism to develop, and provides the justification required to commit violence in the name of God.

As a means of fighting against *Jahiliyyah*, Qutb emphasized the need for a strict adherence to Islamic Law as described in the Qur'an. This led Qutb to become a leading member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood²⁷—an organization that worked to transform the Egyptian political system into one that rejected Western influences and strictly enacted Shariah Law. Imprisoned in 1954 after an alleged attempt to assassinate Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser, Qutb spent his time writing some of the most influential Islamic texts of the 20th century.²⁸ Qutb's radical teachings came from his experience of marginalization by the Nasserite regime, which he viewed as secular and illegitimate.²⁹ Yet while Qutb detested the corruption and impurities of the West, his primary emphasis was on highlighting the hypocrisies of Arab leaders who "conspired with Islam's external enemies and allowed them to infiltrate Muslim lands."³⁰

Qutb's teachings became popular as the Muslim Brotherhood grew and gained influence, eventually making Qutb a threat to the Egyptian government's power, which led to his execution in 1966.³¹ By killing Qutb, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser

²⁷ Wright, *Looming Tower*, 19

²⁸ Atwan, *Secret History*, 73

²⁹ *Ibid*, 73

³⁰ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Rise And Fall Of Al-Qaeda*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32

³¹ Atwan, *Secret History*, 73

intended to eliminate his sizable following and the legitimacy of his teachings. However, Qutb's death solidified his status as a martyr within the circles of his followers, only further supporting the teachings that Nasser tried to silence.

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, known as Osama bin Laden's deputy and the current leader of al-Qaeda, is also one of the primary ideologues of al-Qaeda. As someone who served as an influential leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Zawahiri was intimately familiar with Qutb's teachings. Additionally, bin Laden studied with Sayyid Qutb's brother, Muhammad Qutb, while at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah. However, despite this connection and familiarity with Qutb and his teachings, both Zawahiri and bin Laden "twisted Qutb's ideas to suit their purposes."³² For example, within his teachings, Qutb never called for attacks against the West, but rather put blame on the Arab rulers, who "conspired with Islam's external enemies and allowed them to infiltrate Muslim lands."³³ Qutb emphasized this "enemy within," calling for a reformation of the Arab states to defend against outside influence.³⁴

While the immediate goal of Zawahiri and bin Laden is to overthrow corrupt Arab regimes and replace them with true Islamic governments, their primary enemy is the United States, which they view as the root cause of the Middle East's problems.³⁵ Because corrupt leaders in the Middle East rely heavily on US support, Zawahiri and bin Laden believe that by targeting the US, they will "eventually force the United States to withdraw its support for these regimes and pull out of the region altogether, thus leaving

³² Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 31

³³ Ibid, 32

³⁴ Ibid, 32

³⁵ Byman and Williams, "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda"

the regimes vulnerable to attack from within.”³⁶ This fundamental distinction is what separates al-Qaeda doctrine from past jihadist ideology. Ultimately, the development of al-Qaeda’s ideology comes from a combination of Egyptian radical Islamism and Saudi ultra-conservatism.³⁷ The former stems from Zawahiri’s first-hand involvement with Sayyid Qutb’s organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and its teachings; the latter stems from bin Laden’s Islamist studies at the university and mentorship from Muhammad Qutb, Sayyid Qutb’s brother, and Abdullah Azzam.

Another important ideologue of al-Qaeda is Abu Mus’ab al-Suri. Born as Mustafa Setmariam Nassar, al-Suri is a Syrian-born Islamist who was a member of the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood until his exile from Syria in 1982. Al-Suri arrived in Spain as a refugee from the Hama rebellion in the mid 1980s, becoming a citizen through marriage in 1987.³⁸ Traveling frequently to Peshawar, Pakistan, al-Suri became a student of Abdullah Azzam and joined the effort to eradicate Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Al-Suri grew close to Osama bin Laden around 1992, and quickly became one of the primary ideologues of al-Qaeda.

As an intellectual who systematically studied and wrote on the structure of global jihadism, al-Suri has arguably had a very significant impact on the development of al-Qaeda’s policies. Many of his ideas were formulated years before being implemented,

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 34

³⁸ Steven Stalinsky, “Al-Qaeda Military Strategist Abu Mus'ab Al-Suri's Teachings on Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW), Individual Jihad and the Future of Al-Qaeda,” *The Middle East Research Institute*, June 22, 2011, Accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5395.htm>; CNN. “Officials: Al Qaeda operative captured.” *CNN*, November 5, 2005. Accessed April 8, 2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/11/04/pakistan.terrorarrest/index.html>

such as his 1991 concept that “a global terrorist campaign against the West would rely on diffuse, decentralized and non-hierarchical networks.” This suggestion that only began to be implemented with bin Laden’s global declaration of war against the West seven years later.³⁹ Al-Suri’s most influential work, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, was published online in January 2005. A mammoth document of 1600 pages, al-Suri’s book provides a historical account of jihadist movements, and “became the most significant written source in the strategic studies literature on al-Qaeda.”⁴⁰ Although he was arrested in 2005 in Quetta, Pakistan, al-Suri’s legacy continues through the numerous documents he published that are still in online circulation. Additionally, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, al-Suri also played an important background role in the development of *Inspire*, as excerpts from his past writings make a consistent appearance in the magazine’s issues.

History of al-Qaeda

The roots of al-Qaeda’s organizational development can be traced to the Cold War, specifically to the nearly decade-long Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In December 1979, the USSR invaded Afghanistan to bolster a communist revolution there. Afghanistan quickly became a proxy-war battlefield, as the United States began funding the under-equipped Afghan *Mujahidin* through Pakistan. Focusing more on the pragmatic goal of preventing a successful Soviet capture of this strategically important country, the US liberally supported the rebel forces, with little accountability for the distribution and

³⁹ Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab al-Suri*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 6

⁴⁰ Ibid, 7

allocation of arms. However, the rebels, or self-declared *Mujahidin* “Freedom Fighters,” did not only consist of native peoples attempting to defend their country, since thousands of Arab foreign fighters came to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet forces. For more religiously extreme fighters, Afghanistan became the perfect location to defend Islam against the “new *Jahiliyyah*.” This opportunity attracted thousands of Arabs from across the Middle East to develop the predominately spiritual understanding of *jihād* into modern practice. Encouraging bin Laden to act upon the ideology of *Jihad* in Afghanistan, Abdullah Azzam began organizing secret trips to Pakistan in 1979, where bin Laden met with leaders of Afghan Islamist groups in Peshawar and Karachi.⁴¹ By 1982, bin Laden formally moved to Afghanistan, becoming engrossed in the political and military struggle against the communist invasion.

Osama bin Laden played an active, although less violent, role among the Afghan *Mujahidin*. While acting as more of an administrator than a soldier, his experience verified and developed his thoughts on using political violence as a means to defend Islam. Following the USSR’s retreat from Afghanistan in 1989, bin Laden and his associates gathered near Peshawar, Pakistan, brainstorming the possibility of a global jihad movement. These gatherings mark the true beginning of al-Qaeda—a name meaning “The Base” or “The Principle”—which, according to bin Laden, was given as the name of training camps.⁴² Most notable among his associates was Ayman al-Zawahiri, who became bin Laden’s second in command, and the primary ideologue for

⁴¹ Wright, *Looming Tower*, 109;
Atwan, *Secret History*, 43

⁴² Thomas R. Mockaitis, *Osama Bin Laden*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 58

the organization.

In the early 1990s, bin Laden relocated his center of operations to the country of Sudan, building networks with various extremist Islamists throughout the Middle East and North Africa. “The Base” continued to build its legitimacy and reputation as bin Laden provided funds for the Sudanese Islamist leader, Hassan Turabi, and initiated various attacks in the region. Bin Laden also began attacks abroad, notably the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, which killed seven people, and injured over 1000.⁴³ Exiled from Sudan in 1996, bin Laden returned to Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan before formally launching al-Qaeda in 1998.⁴⁴ Viewing the United States as the “head of the snake,”⁴⁵ he issued a fatwa against the United States in 1998, which led to bombings against the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed 291 individuals.⁴⁶ In 1998, plans for the September 11th, 2001 attack began to be formulated.

The Base Branches Out: *Arabian Peninsula*

Al-Qaeda became a household name following the devastating attack against the World Trade Center in Manhattan on 9/11/2001. After the Afghan Taliban refused to meet the demands of the US to extradite bin Laden, joint US and British military forces entered Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Driven underground, the majority of al-Qaeda

⁴³ The Guardian. “Timeline: al-Qaida.” <http://www.theguardian.com/alqaida/page/0,12643,852377,00.html>. Accessed January 28, 2015

⁴⁴ Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 64-67

⁴⁵ For bin Laden, this language describes the United State’s role in corrupting Arab states—bin Laden viewed the US as the “head of the snake,” and corrupt Arab states as the “body of the snake.” By eliminating the head, the US support of Arab State would cease, and larger institutions of corruption would fall.

⁴⁶ Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 67

fled into Pakistan to regroup and plan future actions and attacks.

In an effort to expand its influence and following, al-Qaeda began to splinter into branches in May 2003. The first of these branches was al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which allowed the organization to launch a sustained insurgency against Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden continued to criticize his homeland for the United States military presence within the Kingdom. The initial creation of AQAP was made possible by an influx of fighters from Afghanistan, although the movement dwindled in size and influence over the following three years. Bin Laden likely “overestimated popular resentment of the US military presence in Saudi Arabia and underestimated the Saudi public’s aversion to domestic unrest.”⁴⁷ Additionally, AQAP was seen as an outsider force by Saudi Islamist movement, further preventing this group from gaining traction after their initial attacks. Although the group’s attacks killed hundreds of citizens between 2003-2006, Saudi security forces effectively stopped the organization, with the branch dying out in 2006.⁴⁸

The Base Branches Out: *Iraq*

As al-Qaeda grew in popularity following 9/11, various Islamist extremists pledged allegiance to the international terror group, most notably the Iraqi Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in October 2004. Responsible for violent terrorist attacks during the Iraq War, Zarqawi became the founder and leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), expanding bin Laden’s direct

⁴⁷ Thomas Hegghammer, “The Failure Of Jihad In Saudi Arabia,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Occasional Paper Series*, 2010: https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/CTC_OP_Hegghammer_Final.pdf, 4

⁴⁸ Ibid, 6

influence to the US war in Iraq. Zarqawi's fear-based tactics emphasized suicide bombings and mass killings, with the AQI leader becoming infamous for his released video recordings of beheadings.⁴⁹

However, Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's deputy within the al-Qaeda core network in Pakistan, became increasingly worried about Zarqawi's extreme tactics potentially alienating supporters, and specifically criticized the televised beheading videos. Writing a 6,300 word letter to the leader of AQI in July 2005, Zawahiri expressed his concern that Zarqawi's actions could lose the "media battle...for the hearts and minds of [the] Ummah." In addition, he stated that al-Qaeda is "jihad, and that more than half of this jihad is taking place in the battlefield of the media."⁵⁰ This letter clearly reveals al-Qaeda's understanding of the strategic importance of media in forming the group's public persona. It also highlights a lack of direct control between the al-Qaeda core and its affiliates, hinting at a growing tension in creating a consensus for acceptable actions due to the lack of adequate bylaws for the international organization.

The Base Branches Out: *Yemen*

In February 2006, 26 al-Qaeda affiliates escaped from a Yemeni prison in the capital city of Sana'a. After spending weeks digging a 140-foot tunnel that ran underneath the high-security prison, the convicts crawled to their freedom through the tunnel and out of a nearby mosque. After joining the morning prayers, the escaped convicts walked out the main entrance of the mosque and disappeared into the tribal

⁴⁹ Gerges, *Rise and Fall*, 107-108

⁵⁰ Ayman Al-Zawahiri, 2005, "Zawahiri's Letter To Zarqawi," PDF, 1st ed, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Translation.pdf>, 10

territory outside the city. In an effort to “resurrect al-Qaeda from the ashes,”⁵¹ the convicts immediately attacked major oil and gas fields in the country, eventually committing more sophisticated attacks in 2007 through the assassinations of key officials.⁵² Gaining momentum and popularity in their attacks, the al-Qaeda core officially announced al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQY) in summer 2007, with Nasser al-Wuhawayshi, one of the escaped convicts and a close friend to bin Laden, as the group’s leader.

As AQY continued its attacks in Yemen, a significant crackdown by the Saudi security forces led the remnants of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia to flee to the adjacent Yemen. The branches merged in 2009 under a new version of AQAP, leading to the re-emergence of the previously decimated organization under the leadership of al-Wuhayshi.

The Base Branches Out: *North Africa*

On the fifth anniversary of 9/11, Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the merger of al-Qaeda and the Group for Preaching and Combat, a *Salafi* organization that had roots in the Algerian civil war during the 1990s.⁵³ Within four months, this organization was renamed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), specifically conducting attacks in Algeria. Over the next seven years, the organization spread, with a strong presence in

⁵¹ CFR.org staff, “*Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)*,” Last modified March 19, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>, Council on Foreign Relations, CFR Backgrounders, Accessed January 28, 2015.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Zachary Laub, and Jonathan Masters, “Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),” Last modified March 27, 2015, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>, Accessed January 28, 2015.

Niger, Mauritania, and northern Mali by 2012.⁵⁴

As The Branches Grow, The Core Loses Control

As al-Qaeda attempted to spread globally in both ideology and action, the organization's core leadership had to rely more on its branches to carry out operations on the local level. However, bin Laden and Zawahiri had difficulty in maintaining direct control over the branches' actions, leading to an increasingly decentralized organization. The extent of this problem is shown in a letter written on bin Laden's orders in 2010, which demands that all al-Qaeda affiliates consult with al-Qaeda central before conducting operations.⁵⁵ This written mandate confirmed the assumption that the al-Qaeda core was increasingly losing control over its affiliates—a dangerous situation for a group that desires to maintain primary control over the global jihad movement. The 2011 death of bin Laden further encouraged groups to splinter from the al-Qaeda core.

Al-Qaeda After Bin Laden, and the Emergence of ISIS

While al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was officially a branch of the al-Qaeda core, it operated and reacted independently to events on the ground in Iraq. Due to AQI's violent tactics against civilians, the organization had difficulty recruiting Iraqi Sunni nationalists to fight against the US presence in Iraq.⁵⁶ In an effort to regain support from Sunni insurgents, AQI joined a jihadi umbrella organization called the Mujahideen Shura

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ty McCormick, 2014, "Al Qaeda Core: A Short History," *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/17/al-qaeda-core-a-short-history/>. Accessed January 28, 2015.

⁵⁶ Zachary Laub and Jonathan Masters, "The Islamic State," Last modified April 1, 2015, CFR Backgrounders, Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>, Accessed March 15, 2015

Council (MSC), which included at least six groups active in the Iraqi insurgency against the US.⁵⁷ In 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of AQI, was killed by a US airstrike in Iraq and Abu Ayyub al-Masri, an Egyptian Islamist militant, assumed primary leadership of AQI.⁵⁸

On October 2006, the MSC declared the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which initially intended to cover the six primarily Sunni governorates within central and western Iraq.⁵⁹ Abu Omar al-Baghdadi became the self-declared Emir of ISI, with the mission to establish Sharia law and fight the American presence in the country. By late 2007, ISI lacked popular support due to its violence against civilians. With the backing of local Sunni militias called “Sons of Iraq,”⁶⁰ US troops continued to weaken ISI’s grip in Iraq, driving the al-Qaeda affiliate out from many of their home bases, including the ISI’s stronghold in al-Anbar province. In April 2010, a US-Iraqi raid killed both al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, ISI’s top two officials, and the following month, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed the new leader of ISI.⁶¹ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s history is different from other Sunni insurgents, as he was reportedly detained in 2004 at Camp Bucca in Baghdad. Interviews with the heads of US-run detention centers claim that this time in prison for al-Baghdadi and other Islamists only deepened their extremism and resentment against

⁵⁷ The ABC News Investigative Unit, “Pressure Grows On Al Qaeda In Iraq,” *ABC News*, January 30, 2006, Accessed March 13, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=1557349&singlePage=true>.; Jessica Stern, *ISIS: The State Of Terror*, (New York: Ecco Press, 2015), 26

⁵⁸ Laub and Masters, “The Islamic State.”

⁵⁹ Stern, *ISIS*, 26

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 27

⁶¹ The Soufan Group, pg 10-11

America.⁶² Following his release from prison and subsequent ascension in the ranks of ISI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi began to recruit former Baathist military officers to join ISI, effectively providing a secure base for those harmed by the US-backed government of Iraq.

ISI Crosses Borders

Similar to the case in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, protests began in Syria in 2011 as its citizens demanded institutional reform from the Bashar al-Assad regime. Unlike in other countries, Assad retaliated against the protests with massive amounts of force, causing widespread instability and civil war throughout the country. In September 2012, while the country was in turmoil, Ayman al-Zawahiri saw the disjointed opposition and widespread violence as an opportunity for al-Qaeda to exploit Syria's instability and establish the al-Qaeda ideology throughout the country. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi began sending ISI fighters across the border in August 2011 to expand the al-Qaeda affiliated organization. Starting as a grassroots movement, the group formally announced its identity in January 2012 as *Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl as-Sham* (Support Front for the People of Syria). Under the leadership of Abu Mojammad al-Julani, Al-Nusra's primary public goal in Syria was to fight in opposition to the Assad government. Julani's leadership made it one of the most successful and organized *Salafi* opposition groups operating in

⁶² Stern ISIS, 34-37;

Thompson, Andrew, and Jeremi Suri, "How America Helped ISIS," *The New York Times*, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/02/opinion/how-america-helped-isis.html?_r=0.

According to Thompson and Suri's NY Times Op-Ed titled "How America Helped ISIS:"

"At Camp Bucca, for example, the most radical figures were held alongside less threatening individuals, some of whom were not guilty of any violent crime. Coalition prisons became recruitment centers and training grounds for the terrorists the United States is now fighting."

Syria.⁶³

As Jabhat al-Nusra continued to grow in success and popularity, al-Baghdadi publicly disclosed in April 2013 that the roots of al-Nusra were based in ISI, with most of the financing still coming from the al-Qaeda affiliated organization in Iraq. Due to the fundamental connection between these groups, al-Baghdadi announced their merger into the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). Immediately al-Julani released a statement denying this merger, saying that Jabhat al-Nusra was not notified of it. As tensions grew, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released a letter revealing his disapproval of the merger, saying that the two groups should operate as separate entities.⁶⁴ Soon afterwards, al-Baghdadi publicly rejected al-Zawahiri's statements, declaring a continuation of the merger.⁶⁵ Al-Zawahiri responded, ordering the dismantling of ISIS and emphasizing that Jabhat al-Nusra would remain an independent jihadi organization in Syria. Since al-Baghdadi continued to disagree with al-Zawahiri's ruling, ISIS continued to operate in Syria under the connection with al-Qaeda until February 2014, when al-Qaeda officially divorced itself from ISIS. ISIS responded by stating that they still represent al-Qaeda under bin Laden, and not al-Qaeda under al-Zawahiri.⁶⁶

⁶³ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Qaeda In Syria: A Closer Look At ISIS (Part I)," September 10, 2013, *The Washington Institute*, Accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-in-syria-a-closer-look-at-isis-part-i>.

⁶⁴ Basma Atassi, "Qaeda Chief Annuls Syrian-Iraqi Jihad Merger," *Al Jazeera English*, June 9, 2013, Accessed February 23, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013699425657882.html>.

⁶⁵ Basma Atassi, "Iraqi Al-Qaeda Chief Rejects Zawahiri Orders," *Al Jazeera English*, June 15, 2013, Accessed February 3, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/06/2013615172217827810.html>.

⁶⁶ Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State," *The Soufan Group*, November, 2014, Accessed November 1, 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>, Timeline 3

The eight-month power struggle between ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra highlights the primary differences between the two *Salafi* organizations. Since its creation, al-Nusra's primary agenda has been to overthrow the Assad government, with military actions primarily focused against government forces in Syria. Yet ISIS is far more concerned with capturing and ruling territory, and is considered more ruthless in its military tactics, targeting all groups, government and opposition, who are unwilling to cooperate with its agenda. Additionally, ISIS plays a greater role in the sectarian divide within Syria and Iraq, targeting specific groups for its own agenda, rather than following a traditional role in the civil war. While Jabhat al-Nusra follows a more traditional understanding of opposition within a civil war, ISIS views the instability of Syria as an opportunity to enact its own agenda, as revealed in Summer 2014 with the announcement of the Caliphate.

The Return of the Khilafah

On June 29, 2014, the first day of Ramadan, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi rebranded ISIS as simply The Islamic State, declaring a caliphate over all Muslims in the world.⁶⁷ Before this announcement, the organization also conquered significant and highly publicized territories in Iraq, most notably when on June 10, ISIS captured Mosul, Iraq's second largest city.⁶⁸ The traditional justification for al-Baghdadi's announcement of a caliphate was not unfounded—he allegedly meets all the conditions required to be a caliph

⁶⁷ Stern, *ISIS*, 46-47

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 44

according to Sunni law,⁶⁹ and possesses land that grants him authority. The political instability of Syria and Iraq allowed ISIS to implement its own brand of Shariah law in territory under its control, thus solidifying the Islamic rule of the caliphate. Additionally, as will be discussed in the formation of the group's ideology, the establishment and expansion of the caliphate was founded on a systematic eschatological worldview. Due to their larger vision of territorial rule under the Caliphate, the sustainability and expansion of ISIS is intimately connected to its control of territory.

The Implications of al-Qaeda's Ideology

Donald Holbrook finds value in viewing al-Qaeda as a “*self-conceived* social movement, where al-Qaeda sympathizers [...] perceive themselves to be members of a representative and pioneering vanguard leading efforts to change the overall status quo.”⁷⁰ Within al-Qaeda's public discourses, Osama bin Laden has described some aspects of the organization as an instigator force, which can be used as a catalyst to stir up jihadi actions in other areas, rather than limit all their influence and actions to the directions of al-Qaeda central. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the al-Qaeda leadership has utilized media in creating and perpetuating a militant jihadi movement that extends beyond the organization's boundaries, but is highly focused on ideology and radicalizing its followers to carry out attacks.

⁶⁹ Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>. According to Wood, requirements include “being a Muslim adult man of Quraysh descent; exhibiting moral probity and physical and mental integrity; and having *'amr*, or authority.” Possessing authority requires the caliph to possess land to enforce Islamic law.

⁷⁰ Holbrook, *al-Qaeda Doctrine*, 22

For Holbrook, the ideological framework of al-Qaeda is its most important element, as it works to bring more isolated elements, such as “different groups, suborganizations, and individuals” together under the broader ideological goals of al-Qaeda.⁷¹

Regardless of the al-Qaeda core leadership’s involvement in individual plots, the success of the movement has always depended on wider mobilization and support and the development of an ideological doctrine as a public discourse that would sustain the movement beyond the life of its founders. This perspective draws attention to the ability of the al-Qaeda leadership to generate such a narrative in order to create a wider support base and nurture a new generation of young jihadists.⁷²

Al-Qaeda’s media is a crucial component of the organization’s broader campaign to generate a narrative that supports younger jihadists for the continuation of al-Qaeda’s movement. Al-Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine works to spread the organization’s beliefs and ideas through written articles, and works to radicalize its readers with tools to carry out attacks. Yet al-Qaeda’s magazine is not simply a venue for the organization to spread its ideology, but a necessary component that sustains al-Qaeda’s larger jihadi movement.

The Implications of ISIS Ideology

While the overall purpose of al-Qaeda can be seen as a social movement based on ideology, the sustainability of ISIS is intimately connected to its control of territory.⁷³ ISIS differs from al-Qaeda in its implementation of a tangible, contemporary Caliphate. While al-Qaeda leaders ultimately support a caliphate as a long-term goal, which would theoretically be achieved through a top-down control of territory with popular support,

⁷¹ Ibid, 32

⁷² Ibid, 32

⁷³ E.M. Saltman and Charlie Winter, *Islamic State: The Changing Face Of Modern Jihadism*, Quilliam, November 2014, Accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/islamic-state-the-changing-face-of-modern-jihadism.pdf>, 31-33

ISIS is working to annex territory and impose Caliphate rule upon the people living in the region.⁷⁴ While, in many ways, al-Qaeda and ISIS share a similar ideological goal of implementing a more “pure” political Islam, fundamental differences in strategy are the biggest division between the organizations.

Additionally, while ISIS and al-Qaeda agree on most doctrinal matters, ISIS is a proud proponent of more rigid *takfir* (ostracism), and possesses a systematic eschatological framework to justify its actions.⁷⁵ Both of these key ideological components are emphasized throughout ISIS media, and are further explored in Chapter Three.

Due to its emphasis on the revival of the Islamic Caliphate, ISIS’s current actions are focused on the military acquisition of territory and strong governance. This is consistently seen throughout its written media campaign, which includes articles detailing its ideology and theologically arguing for its legitimacy, but also includes news updates that shed light on the effective governance ISIS has over its people. Additionally, while media for al-Qaeda is necessary for the continuation of its movement, I argue that media for ISIS is necessary as a justification for its very existence, and is used as a tool to build momentum for its larger goals. However, before analyzing ISIS written media and the differences between it and al-Qaeda’s media, it is necessary to provide an overview and analysis of al-Qaeda’s written magazine, *Inspire*, and its overall tactics and implications for recruitment.

⁷⁴ Byman and Williams, “ISIS vs. Al Qaeda”

⁷⁵ Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants.”

Chapter 2

Analyzing *Inspire*: al-Qaeda's English Magazine

“And inspire the believers to fight...” [Sūrat al-Anfāl: 65]⁷⁶

Background of al-Qaeda Media

Media has become a central aspect of al-Qaeda's overall political mission. Before al-Qaeda's rise to global fame after 9/11, the organization “adapted with ruthless efficiency to the rise of satellite television and the Internet, grasping before virtually anyone else the political possibilities inherent in new media technologies,” says Marc Lynch.⁷⁷ It was the al-Qaeda central leadership's ability to recognize the importance of media, and its willingness to shift organizational structures to creatively invest in propaganda, that allowed the group to thrive in the midst of changing realities. After being forced underground post-9/11, the pre-existent propaganda infrastructure allowed al-Qaeda to continue spreading its ideology and influence potential recruits. As will be discussed below, whether capitalizing upon Arab media or creating propaganda of its own, al-Qaeda's evolving and adaptive strategy toward media has granted the organization a tool to spread its ideology among the thousands in its audience base—this is certainly a form of recruitment in itself.

In organizing this chapter, I begin by discussing Susan Sivek's 2013 article on assessing the self-radicalizing agenda behind *Inspire*. From this initial argument, I

⁷⁶ The quote presented in every issue of *Inspire* from the Qur'an's Sūrat al-Anfal, from which *Inspire* derives its name

⁷⁷ Marc Lynch, “Al-Qaeda's Media Strategies,” *The National Interest* (Spring 2006): 50-56, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/al-qaedas-media-strategies-883>, 50

provide an overview of the history and structure of the *Inspire* magazine, and summarize and analyze specific reoccurring sections of the magazine that provide the core content of *Inspire*. I close by connecting Sivek's findings to my analysis, arguing that recruitment for al-Qaeda through *Inspire* is based on specific rhetoric, imagery, and narrative used to uniquely disseminate its ideology and radicalizing its readers to carry out individual attacks in various parts of the world.

Susan Sivek views *Inspire* as a tool for al-Qaeda to encourage the self-radicalization process in its readers. Using the framework for measuring self-radicalization presented by Scott Helfstein at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Sivek connects the content of *Inspire* to Helfstein's four steps of self-radicalization: Awareness, Interest, Acceptance, and Implementation.⁷⁸ Sivek's thesis argues that *Inspire* is not simply a device for al-Qaeda to propagate its message among a specific audience, but rather functions as an intentional tool created by al-Qaeda leaders to radicalize and encourage its readers to carry out attacks against the West. As a result, Sivek encourages counter-terrorism experts to understand the frames within al-Qaeda's media, and thus develop campaigns to counter them.⁷⁹

The increased divisions of post-9/11 al-Qaeda also created a divided consensus of how to best use media. On one hand Osama bin Laden found value in mirroring the "al-Jazeera narrative" of hotly discussed topics, such as Palestine, Iraq, and corrupt Arab regimes. By working within a more traditional media framework and maintaining a more

⁷⁸ Scott Helfstein, "Edges of Radicalization: Individuals, Networks and Ideas in Violent Extremism," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. 2012: 1-71, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/edges-of-radicalization-ideas-individuals-and-networks-in-violent-extremism>, 18

⁷⁹ Sivek, "Packaging Inspiration," 19

neutral public image, the al-Qaeda core attempted to reach a mass Arab audience.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), rejected cooperation with mainstream television as a route for broadcasting the views of his organization, and released violent videos of the beheadings of Shi'a Muslims and other opponents. Ayman al-Zawahiri famously fought against this alienating strategy, writing Zarqawi that "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media...[W]e are in a media battle for the hearts and minds of our *umma* [sic]."⁸¹ Rather than reach the undecided voters among the Arab masses, Zarqawi's primary agenda was "to motivate the already-committed jihadists to translate their convictions into deadly action."⁸² Unlike the al-Qaeda core, Zarqawi's primary interests were to attract specific jihadists who understood and accepted the costs of membership, rather than attempt to slowly radicalize the masses. The divided views of the al-Qaeda core and its branches are representative of the contradictory approaches to media that resulted in this organization. As a result, it is important to note that *Inspire* is not the only form of al-Qaeda written media. However, it does have a specific purpose and direction, unique to al-Qaeda's other forms of media.

History of *Inspire*

As al-Qaeda grew and developed with a specific vision, different forms of written media were created and distributed based on differences of audience and agenda. While much of al-Qaeda's media is written and distributed in Arabic, *Inspire* is specifically

⁸⁰ Lynch, "Al-Qaeda's Media Strategies," 52

⁸¹ Ibid, 50

⁸² Ibid, 53

targeted to Western Muslims, as stated in in the first issue of *Inspire* in a letter from the editor:

This Islamic Magazine is geared towards making the Muslim a *mujahid* in Allah's path. Our intent is to give the most accurate presentation of Islam as followed by the *Salaf as-Salih* [Salafi movement]. Our concern for the *ummah* is worldwide and thus we try to touch upon all major issues while giving attention to the events unfolding in the Arabian Peninsula as we witness it on the ground. Jihad has been deconstructed in our age and thus its revival in comprehension and endeavor is of utmost importance for the Caliphate's manifestation. Under the media foundation of *al-Malahem*, we present the first magazine to be issued by the al-Qā'idah [sic] Organization in the English language. In the West; in East, West and South Africa; in South and Southeast Asia and elsewhere are millions of Muslims whose first or second language is English. It is our intent for this magazine to be a platform to present the important issues facing the *ummah* today to the wide and dispersed English speaking Muslim readership. We also call upon and encourage our readers to contribute by sending their articles, comments or suggestions to us.⁸³

Compared with other al-Qaeda media, *Inspire* focuses entirely on recruitment, and is formatted and stylized to garner attention by both the Western media and potential Western or English-Speaking Muslim recruits.⁸⁴ Additionally, while its scope is broad to include all English speakers, the images, rhetoric, and overall frames of *Inspire* are most effective toward the Western reader.⁸⁵

The primary editors of *Inspire* were initially Samir Khan and Anwar al-Awlaki, prominent members of al-Qaeda who spent a significant amount of time in the US. Due to their American citizenship, these al-Qaeda leaders carried a significant amount of weight in their words toward western Muslims as they were seen as reliable and trustworthy. Additionally, their insider knowledge of America allowed them to provide

⁸³ *Inspire* no. 1 (Summer 2010), 2

⁸⁴ Sivek, "Packaging Inspiration," 3

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 3-4

an accurate recreation of a more Western layout and voice for the media. Following Khan and al-Awlaki's deaths in September 2011 in a US drone strike, al-Qaeda leader Yahya Ibrahim became the primary editor of *Inspire*.⁸⁶ However, Khan and al-Awlaki's legacy and influence continue to persist in later issues of the magazine, in both direct and subtle ways.⁸⁷

Another figure that had considerable influence on the creation and publication of *Inspire* was Abu Musab al-Suri. As a creator of al-Qaeda media, he was a founder of the Islamic Conflict Studies Bureau, which distributed al-Qaeda videotapes to foreign news outlets.⁸⁸ Through this center, al-Suri arranged multiple interviews for Osama bin Laden with Western media, including Peter Bergen's famous 1997 interview.⁸⁹ Additionally, al-Suri worked as an editor for al-Qaeda's London-based biweekly online magazine *al-Ansar: For the Struggle Against the Crusader War*.⁹⁰ Al-Suri remained active in al-Qaeda's media efforts until his 2005 capture in Quetta, Pakistan. Al-Suri is particularly important for the development of *Inspire* through his legacy in al-Qaeda media, and, as will be discussed below, in his contribution to recurring ideological articles in *Inspire* issues.

Inspire started out as the successor and upgraded version of *Jihad Recollections*—an AQAP magazine produced by Samir Khan in 2009. Limited to three issues, the tone of

⁸⁶ According to the Fall 2011 issue 7 of *Inspire*, Yahya Ibrahim is the Editor in Chief; *Inspire* no. 7 (Fall 2011), 3

⁸⁷ Sivek, "Packaging Inspiration," 5; Khan and al-Awlaki maintain an influence through past pictures or posthumous quotes of these leaders in issues of *Inspire*; more blatant influence is a seemingly legitimate interview with al-Awlaki and article by Khan that appear nearly three years after their deaths, in the twelfth issue of *Inspire* (Spring 2014).

⁸⁸ Stalinsky, "Al-Qaeda Military Strategist"

⁸⁹ CNN, "Al Qaeda operative captured"

⁹⁰ Stalinsky, "Al-Qaeda Military Strategist"

Jihad Recollections is serious, and, like *Inspire*, was primarily addressed to Muslims in the West. Yet according to Sivek, the primary differences between *Jihad Recollections* and *Inspire* fall within its primary focus, the unique appeal of *Inspire* toward “Western youth and celebrity culture,” and a difference in tone: the satirical quality of *Inspire* differs from the more serious tone of *Jihad Recollections*. The somewhat playful and humorous tone of *Inspire* catches the attention of both Western Muslim youth and Western Media.⁹¹ The ironically lighthearted feel of *Inspire* has led Western media to question its seriousness, which is perhaps an intentional choice to attract young Muslims to openly explore the agenda of al-Qaeda as portrayed in *Inspire*. According to Sivek, these elements give *Inspire* “a greater capacity for reaching and affecting readers than previous al-Qaeda English-language publications.”⁹²

In general, *Inspire* assumes the characteristics of Western magazines to create a familiar environment for the Western reader while normalizing the otherwise taboo nature of its content. Additionally, a magazine format provides the capacity for multiple articles, discussion points, and other ideological lessons, thus providing a more comprehensive method for portraying the overall mission and vision of al-Qaeda.

Overview of *Inspire*

Inspire magazine has a layout that would appear familiar to the western reader. The cover pages have a clearly printed *Inspire* logo alongside the *al-Malahem Media* logo, with a clear and unique title for each issue. Additionally, each cover page contains a

⁹¹ Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration,” 3-4

⁹² Ibid, 5

quick summary of the cover story, and a couple of lines describing other topics discussed in the issue. All of this overlays a provocative image related to the issue's cover story. Each magazine opens with a two-page table of contents, with images and text outlining the different stories in the magazine. Additionally, within the first few pages, there is a "Letter from the Editor," where the primary editor can provide his thoughts on the issue and future issues to come. For the average youth, the high quality graphics and images on the cover alone would likely make it difficult to distinguish *Inspire* from a *US weekly*.

Inspire has grown in sophistication with each release. The initial issue was less organized and unclear in its overall layout, with mostly unimpressive graphics and a monotonous color scheme used throughout the magazine. By the eighth issue, the opening pages had impressive and colorful graphics, a clear layout, and engaging language (the table of contents included a multiple choice trivia question titled "Take the *Inspire* Challenge!"). Additionally, the current use of article series and a consistency in topics encourages a reader following, where *Inspire's* audience would want to stay connected with each issue.

By March 2015, AQAP has released a total of 13 issues of *Inspire*. Of these 13 issues three are "Special Issue" magazines: whereas normal *Inspire* issues have an average of 56 pages, the "Special Issue" magazines have an average of only 21 pages. Over time, the issues of *Inspire* have become more organized and streamlined in their presentation of articles. For example, from the eighth issue on, the table of contents has been organized into larger topics—a structure that has been maintained for the rest of the issues. Depending on the topic of each issue, the content might change, but six consistent

categories are as follows: *Cover Story*; *Latest and Opinion*; *History and Strategy*; *Manhaj Review*; *Open Source Jihad*. I will summarize each of these categories below, giving examples of articles written for each. After this overview, I will discuss how all of these elements together function as a form of recruitment to the al-Qaeda ideology, which challenges readers to radicalize and perform acts of violent jihad in their homeland.

Cover Story

Most sections of *Inspire* consist of articles written by al-Qaeda leaders. These articles can cover a wide-range of issues, from extrapolating a specific point of ideology, to presenting an interview with an al-Qaeda leader. The cover story is always the primary article for each issue, and is usually the most timely and important considering its release date. The cover story usually focuses on a particular lesson or theme, and weaves together political and religious rhetoric to justify its main arguments.

One particularly timely cover story is for Issue 11 (Special Issue), released on May 30, 2013. Titled “Who & Why,” this issue was released less than two months after the April 15, 2013 Boston Bombings—an internationally publicized attack that had immediate association with al-Qaeda affiliates. Because it is one of the three shortened “special issues” of *Inspire*, nearly all of the articles in the 11th issue center on the Boston Bombings. However, the cover story specifically focuses “on the indications of this operation in the development of this blazing war. A war waged by the West led by the US against the Muslim world and the oppressed nations around the globe.”⁹³ In the context of Western media attempting to understand the motivations and justifications of the attack,

⁹³ *Inspire* no. 11 (Spring 2013), 28

this cover story methodically outlines the reasons, both historic and contemporary, for al-Qaeda's actions.⁹⁴

At the core of each cover story is the primary al-Qaeda Salafi ideology, as inspired by Sayyid Qutb and Abdullah Azzam. Rather than focus on the general functions of al-Qaeda, the cover stories usually place current events within the ideological framework of the Salafi movement, continuing the “othering” *Jahillayah* master narrative as originally expressed by Sayyid Qutb, and expanded upon by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Additionally, all cover stories are written by influential leaders of al-Qaeda. Before their deaths, Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan wrote most of the cover stories. Since then, Yahya Ibrahim and Abu Abdullah Almoravid have written the stories,⁹⁵ with an “External Operations Team” writing for the 13th issue. These are authors with less notoriety than Khan and al-Awlaki, but they seem to be the new editors of the magazine. As is appropriate in any Western magazine, the cover story needs to be written by someone who is seen as legitimate, as it is the central focus for each issue. Ultimately, the inclusion of a Cover Story provides a clear organization and theme for the issue, while creating a familiar and approachable atmosphere for the Western reader.

Latest and Opinion

The opening pages of *Inspire* always include sections that paint the magazine and

⁹⁴ As a “historical” justification, al-Qaeda blames the creation of the state of Israel and the US support of Israel for of the Deir Yassin massacre—a historically dubious claim. This is but one example of violent Israeli actions for which “all the credit returns to the US unlimited support.” In a contemporary perspective, Abu Abdullah Almoravid mentions recent drone strikes against innocents.

⁹⁵ Little is known about Yahya Ibrahim and Abu Abdullah “Almoravid” aside from their claimed leadership in al-Qaeda. Almoravid's name appears connected to the 11th Century Almoravid dynasty in Southern Spain and North Africa—perhaps Abu Abdullah Almoravid is similarly associated with this region.

its writers in a favorable light through sections titled *Inspire Reactions* and *Inspire Responses*. Under the larger category titled “Latest and Opinion,” *Inspire Reactions* contains a page of quotes drawn from government officials and media organizations on their response to al-Qaeda and *Inspire*. These are enemy individuals and organizations that actively fight against al-Qaeda. This collection of quotes portrays al-Qaeda as a serious threat and portrays *Inspire* as a serious mouthpiece for the organization; this legitimizes al-Qaeda for readers who might not initially buy into the seriousness of *Inspire*’s message. Additionally, the *Inspire Responses* section includes “emailed questions” that are allegedly submitted by prospective al-Qaeda recruits. Each question is given a thorough and thoughtful response, showing the openness and seeming trustworthiness of the magazine editors, who appear to be easily reached by email and are willing to give a meaningful response. Each magazine issue also contains contact information for any inquirers with questions. In fact, questions are encouraged, as stated in the opening response to one question asked in *Inspire* Issue 5:

We appreciate you taking your time out to write your questions to us. If you have any further questions, please ask. It’s better to talk to the source than to rely on what others say.⁹⁶

Both of these sections suggest that al-Qaeda is neither afraid of its opponents (as presented in “*Inspire Reactions*”) nor challenged by doubts from prospective followers (as articulated in “*Inspire Responses*”). Rather, al-Qaeda is seen as a rational organization, capable of remaining resolute in the midst of criticism and critique. This form of propaganda encourages the reader to think critically about al-Qaeda and reach

⁹⁶ *Inspire* no. 5 (Spring 2011), 9

out to them personally.

History and Strategy

In all but the “Special Issue” editions and 13th issue, *Inspire* consistently contains an article as part of a reoccurring series called “The Jihadi Experiences.” This section contains excerpts from Abu Mus’ab al-Suri’s 1600 word magnum opus, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*. These excerpts are in fact verbatim plagiarisms of Brynjar Lia’s translations of al-Suri’s work, taken from Lia’s 2008 study of al-Suri titled *Architect of Global Jihad*. The excerpts cover Chapter 8 sections 4-6 of al-Suri’s larger text, which, according to al-Suri, “contains the essence and substance” of his key points.⁹⁷ They provide historical details of the development of jihad, focusing on the 20th and 21st centuries. The articles give a historical account of specific issues, pulling from dozens of examples to prove its argument. In many ways, this section is one of the most important parts of *Inspire*, as al-Suri provides a nuanced account of the development of al-Qaeda, and how it fits into the larger world jihad movement, effectively globalizing the jihadist ideology. Additionally, the professorial status given to al-Suri gives his writings authority. For example, in the fifth issue of *Inspire*, al-Suri addresses the definition of terrorism, stating:

We refuse to understand this term according to the American description. ‘Terrorism’ is an abstract word, and like many of the abstract words, it can carry a good or bad meaning according to the context, and what is added to it and what is attached to it. The word is an abstract term, which has neither positive nor negative meaning.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, 347

⁹⁸ *Inspire* no. 5 (Spring 2011), 29

By promoting a more “neutral” definition of terrorism, al-Suri allows the reader to determine for himself the actual motives of al-Qaeda, rather than rely on Western depictions that portray al-Qaeda negatively. As part of his teachings, al-Suri suggests a moral dichotomy for understanding terrorism: blameworthy terrorism vs. praiseworthy terrorism. The former designation is applied to “thieves, highway robbers, invaders...oppressors and un-rightful rulers of people, such as the Pharaohs and their servants.”⁹⁹ Praiseworthy terrorism refers to “terrorism by the righteous that have been unjustly treated. It removes injustice from the oppressed. This is undertaken through terrorizing and repelling the oppressor.”¹⁰⁰ Al-Suri goes on to say that “Terrorizing the enemies is a religious duty, and assassinating their leaders is a Prophetic tradition”—a lesson which al-Suri says he learned from a university lecture.¹⁰¹ By addressing this topic, al-Suri not only challenges the Western definition of terrorism, but also refutes allegedly false claims about the motivations of al-Qaeda, painting the organization in a righteous and rational light.

Rather than simply articulate the many ways that al-Qaeda is right and the West is wrong, this section gives a seemingly in-depth analysis of al-Qaeda’s motivations and actions, while providing suggestions for how the organization and its followers should move forward in jihad. Additionally, this series, more than others in *Inspire*, uses theological claims to justify al-Qaeda’s violent actions. Using both images and text, this section is presented as a lecture taught by a professor, who gives a seemingly accurate

⁹⁹ Ibid, 29

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 29

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 29

depiction of the history and role of al-Qaeda. Each article is part of the larger series, providing a canonical feel. The promise for additional articles keeps the reader waiting for the next *Inspire* issue. The tone and content of the articles create an academic tone for the magazine, adding to the legitimacy of its ideology, and challenging the reader to consider the material seriously.

Manhaj Review

Manhaj Review is a section that first appears in the fourth issue of *Inspire*. According to Quintan Wiktorowicz's study of Radical Islam, Manhaj is defined as the "methodology for arriving at religious "truth."¹⁰² In general, this section provides articles that push readers toward the "truth" of al-Qaeda, usually by providing personal narratives of different al-Qaeda members sharing their reasons for joining the organization. The primary article series within Manhaj Review is titled "Why Did I Choose al-Qaeda?" written by Anwar al-Awlaki:

Shaykh Abu Mus'ab al-Awlaki, may Allah have mercy upon him, had written a book entitled, "Why did I choose al Qaeda?" outlining 46 reasons of why he chose to join the organization. We will be translating his reasons here as a part of a series.¹⁰³

Each excerpt of "Why...al-Qaeda" addresses between one and three reasons for joining the organization. Compared to other articles in *Inspire*, this series combines a personal narrative with an ideological justification to join al-Qaeda. The reasons vary from explaining how al-Qaeda has "the qualities of the victorious group,"¹⁰⁴ to describing

¹⁰² Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 18.

¹⁰³ *Inspire* no. 4 (Winter 2010), 48

¹⁰⁴ *Inspire* no. 5 (Spring 2011), 62

how al-Qaeda emphasizes “great importance to the aspect of brotherhood for Allah’s sake.”¹⁰⁵

The death of al-Awlaki had a significant impact on the integrity of “Why...al-Qaeda.” In the issues following al-Awlaki’s death, these articles appear more isolated and less part of a continued series. For example, it was standard for each issue of *Inspire* to continue the numbering of reasons provided; beginning in issue 10, the numbering ceases and the articles become shorter, and more abstract reasons are provided. Additionally, this section is entirely absent from issue 13—a striking lapse considering the past investment in the series. The death of al-Awlaki and Khan affected not only the grammatical accuracy of each issue, as described by Sivek, but also affected the overall production quality of the magazine, as is best seen in the declining quality of Manhaj Review. However, the consistent content that appears within Manhaj Review adds a personal narrative to the magazine, encouraging readers to reflect on their own experiences and respond in a similar fashion. In many ways, more than other sections of *Inspire*, the content of Manhaj Review indirectly puts pressure on the reader to act internally and think critically about joining al-Qaeda.

Open Source Jihad

Perhaps the most infamous section in all non-special *Inspire* issues is “Open Source Jihad” (OSJ), which is notable for its step-by-step illustrated guide for teaching readers to construct the equipment required to carry out terrorist attacks. The opening pages of each OSJ section include a detailed graphic outlining the contents of the section, and a

¹⁰⁵ *Inspire* no. 8 (Fall 2011), 50

recurring text box reminiscent of a dictionary entry that provides the definition of OSJ (See: Appendix: Figure 1). The recurring motto of OSJ boasts that it will teach the reader to “make a bomb in the kitchen of your mom”—a playful description for an unquestionably serious and dangerous topic. The youth-based strategy of *Inspire* is most apparent in OSJ, as its primary rhetoric is satirical and lighthearted. Rather than remind readers of the dangerous and horrifying nature of bomb building, a scientific yet informal tone is presented, while ingredients and instructions are listed with in-depth text and imagery.

Beyond bomb building, OSJ also includes sections on how to properly hold, operate, and train with military-grade firearms, such as the AK-47. The following introduction to “OSJ Gun School” in the fourth issue of *Inspire* is a good example of the rhetoric used to engage readers:

Whichever land of jihad you decide to travel to today, the AK will be the standard weapon of choice amongst the *mujahidin*. Thus it is imperative to know how to use the weapon. In this series, we will prepare you on the basics of the AK, the weapons [sic] capabilities, how to open the weapon and clean it, shooting positions, the types of bullets and the add-ons.¹⁰⁶

The second-person use of the pronoun “you” immediately engages the reader, and the informal narrative works to normalize the otherwise taboo nature of the topic; this is an effective tool to engage the reader when sharing this exclusive knowledge.

OSJ is the most pronounced section in *Inspire* for invoking an insider status in the reader. Because the subject matter is deemed illegal and dangerous, the reader is taking a risk in accessing the material. This intentional atmosphere of covertness subtly

¹⁰⁶ *Inspire* no. 4 (Winter 2010), 42

encourages the reader to act, as simply reading the material has already put the reader in potential danger from the authorities.

Inclusion of Advertisements

Mock advertisements are also used throughout *Inspire*, mostly included as filler pages between articles. Similar to the organization and of topics, the use of advertisements makes the magazine seem familiar and approachable to the Western reader. Some advertisements are used to further indoctrinate readers with the al-Qaeda ideology. For example, Appendix: Figure 2, shows a bright, colorful picture of a smiling young Muslim sending a text to his mom:

“My dear mom, I will lay down my life for Islam. I’m gonna die for Islam Inshaa Allah [sic]”¹⁰⁷

The background picture consists of clouds with doves flying, clearly invoking stereotypical heavenly imagery. This directly challenges the Western criticisms of Islamic martyrdom, implying a peaceful, joyful, and rewarding result, rather than a senseless suicide, as implied by Western media.

Other *Inspire* advertisements work to undermine and criticize Western leaders, usually in a playful and satirical fashion. As seen in Appendix: Figure 3, this advertisement is simply a picture of President Obama with the classic Mother Goose rhyme of Humpty Dumpty. In the bottom right corner is the label, “A Cold Diss Ad,” which uses slang to appeal to a younger audience. This unique use of Western slang similarly creates an insider status for a younger audience, who would feel that *Inspire*

¹⁰⁷ *Inspire* no. 11 (Spring 2013), 26

was written primarily for them.

Implications of *Inspire*

Inspire is a multi-dimensional publication. Organizing the magazine similarly to western models makes its material more approachable and legitimate for its Western Muslim readership. The variety of articles, from timely cover stories and historical teachings to personal narratives and bomb-building guides, creates a comprehensive image of al-Qaeda and life as a *Mujahid*. Additionally, the editorial efforts to challenge and dispel traditional Western fears and critiques of al-Qaeda create a secondary narrative for the Western reader to digest, increasing the likelihood of successful recruitment.

Each magazine issue is presented as part of the larger *Inspire* series, by creating a consistency in topics, series, themes, etc. Simultaneously, each issue is accessible to the first-time reader. For example, Issue 10 of *Inspire* includes a half-page section titled “What is al-Qaeda?” where a writer provides a quick overview of the organization.¹⁰⁸ This is clearly important to the magazine in its attempt to dispel false allegations held against the organization. This article would not be as useful for the long-term reader of *Inspire*, who already understands the purpose and ideology of the organization. Each issue intentionally builds off of past issues, while simultaneously being structured in an open and accessible way for all readers.

Susan Sivek accurately assesses that *Inspire* “idolizes those who were strong and set aside frivolity to pursue jihad,” and that those who “attempted or completed

¹⁰⁸ *Inspire* no. 10 (Spring 2013), 35

individual acts of violence are described as models for readers.”¹⁰⁹ These individuals are mentioned by name, and would be recognized by Western readers for their attacks, such as the Tsarnaev Brothers of Boston or the “Underwear Bomber.” By idolizing the martyrs and heroes of al-Qaeda, the magazine attempts to both recruit others to join in attacks and normalize the radical events themselves.

The content of *Inspire* is framed within specific master narratives that strategically work to persuade readers of al-Qaeda’s ideology. By emphasizing the global dichotomy of *Jahiliyyah*, and portraying Western forces as wholly oppressive, *Inspire* functions with a consistent a narrative that justifies the magazine’s core content, and encourages the reader to act. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, recognizing the specific master narratives in extremist media will contribute to a more effective counter-narrative.

¹⁰⁹ Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration,” 14

Chapter Three

Dabiq and the Evolving Image of the Islamic State

“The spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah’s permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dābiq.”

- Abū Mus’ab az-Zarqāwī

Tracing the Development of ISIS-Released Media

Media is crucial for developing any organization’s public persona. For the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), there are two primary media centers to release official ISIS publications: al-Furqan and al-Hayat. While al-Furqan “posts messages from the leadership, including videos of mass executions, and retweets material from the other Islamic State sites,” al-Hayat is the primary Media Center targeting Western supporters.¹¹⁰ Additionally, ISIS contains media centers in each province under their control, which specifically focus on local news.¹¹¹ In order to analyze the recruitment tactics of ISIS toward Western Muslims, this chapter will focus on al-Hayat printed media, and specifically its *Dabiq* magazine.

I organize this chapter by first discussing the history and evolution of ISIS media, from a six page report to a comprehensive 50+ page magazine. I then provide an overview of the magazine’s structure and projected agenda, before summarizing and analyzing the reoccurring core content of the magazine. Finally, I discuss the implications

¹¹⁰ Barrett, “The Islamic State,” 55

¹¹¹ Ibid 55;

Ali Hashem, “The Islamic State's Social Media Strategy,” *Al-Monitor*, August 18, 2014, Accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/is-clinton-atrocities-social-media-baghdadi-mccain.html#>.

of ISIS' intentional framing of its multidimensional magazine, arguing that ISIS' recruitment is based on territorial expansion and the long-term goals of state building.

From Brochure to Magazine

Like much of the internal dynamics of ISIS as an organization, not much is known about the development of al-Hayat media. The initial appearance of the media center was in early June 2014, with the release of the first "Islamic State Report." Since then, there have been three distinct publications by the group: "Islamic State News," "Islamic State Report," and *Dabiq*. As the territorial expansion of ISIS has grown more significant, the publications of its media have also grown more focused and mature, from a six-page visual summary of conquest to a 55-page comprehensive document that touches upon nearly all aspects of the organization. Analyzing the publication of ISIS media also reveals the development of its primary goals and agenda as the organization has grown. Not only do these publications highlight individual timely events, but they also reveal ISIS' larger goal of establishing and expanding a homeland for all Muslims, while providing an eschatological viewpoint on global affairs.

On June 1, 2014, the first issue of Islamic State News (ISN) was published by the *al-Hayat Media Center*. The six-page long issue offers mostly a visual means of communication, portraying ISIS in a positive, powerful, and competent manner. The report was organized by granting one page per province where ISIS had a significant presence. While most pages focus on ISIS' military accomplishments and advances, some sections provide a textual-visual representation of ISIS' aid distribution activities.

Thus, ISN attempts to paint a more holistic picture of ISIS, highlighting both its military accomplishments, but ultimately emphasizing its success in governance. This more comprehensive picture provides legitimacy for an organization that attempts to develop a state by showing that ISIS is not limited to a specific set of activities.

While ISN provides a visual update of ISIS' developments, Islamic State Report (ISR) contributes written commentary with information about the larger vision and philosophy of the organization. Most of the four issues of ISR focus on two topics: summaries of how ISIS disseminates, corrects, and clarifies "true" Islamic knowledge, and interviews with the heads of various departments within ISIS governance. The first set of commentaries propagates ISIS' overall philosophy and theology, while the second provides legitimacy for its means of governance, and describes how it secures rights for the subject of its self-declared Caliphate. While ISN and ISR provide a visual and textual overview of the functions of ISIS as it grows militarily and governs its people, ISIS' official magazine, *Dabiq*, provides a comprehensive image of the Islamic State, and works as a tool for recruiting foreign fighters from around the world.

Overview of *Dabiq*

The first issue of *Dabiq* was released during the month of Ramadan, in early July 2014. Continuously released through monthly issues, there were currently seven issues by March 1, 2015. *Dabiq* is an extremely high quality, glossy magazine that addresses ISIS in a comprehensive and thorough manner. Additionally, *Dabiq* incorporates all of ISN and ISR information, making it the only currently written publication of al-Hayat. Each

issue of the magazine is structured in a similar fashion, with specific sections repeating in all issues. The well-organized magazine always opens with a table of contents, and includes articles written by official leaders of ISIS. The following are the recurring categories that contain articles in each issue of *Dabiq*: Foreword, Article, Report, Wisdom, Feature, In The Words Of The Enemy, and Special.

The first issue of *Dabiq* explains the history and significance of the magazine's name for ISIS. Dabiq is the name of a city located in the northern countryside of the Aleppo Governorate in Syria. In the hadith volume "Sahih Muslim," Dabiq is described as the location of an important battle between Muslim and Crusader forces. During the battle, one third of the Muslims flee, one third are killed, and one third conquer the Western enemies. Following the end of the battle, the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, will descend and lead the surviving Muslims into the End of Times.¹¹² The primary ideologue for ISIS and original leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, (which would later become ISIS), Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, allegedly anticipated the expansion of fighters from Iraq into Syria, saying:

The Spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify - by Allah's permission - until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq.¹¹³

While the name contains an eschatological significance originating from a saying of the Prophet, titling ISIS' primary written media "*Dabiq*" also highlights the political significance of ISIS ideology. The apocalyptic images expressed in *Dabiq's* chosen moniker are perpetuated and referred to throughout the first issue, and remain a central

¹¹² *Dabiq* no. 1 (July 2014), 4-5

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 4

aspect of ISIS rhetoric for its public representation and tactics of recruitment.

Foreword

Every issue of *Dabiq* begins with a Foreword, which allows the primary editor to share important and timely information with the reader. Similar to a Letter From The Editor, the foreword gives a concise update on the status of ISIS and al-Hayat Media Center, and usually gives words of encouragement or clarification, especially in response to Western media allegations against ISIS. For example, as seen in the third issue of *Dabiq*, which was released after President Obama announced US airstrikes in Iraq on August 7, 2014, the foreword mostly consists of eight specific things that Obama “tried to ignore when discussing the strikes and consequential execution of James Foley.” These ranged from the US’s alleged indifference to the warning of Foley’s execution, to the Iraqi civilian casualties of “women, children, and the elderly” during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and continued airstrikes in the region.¹¹⁴ Thus, the Foreword provides ISIS with the space to openly discredit allegedly false claims about the organization, and challenge the Western notion of the US as a trustworthy nation.

Additionally, nearly all issues begin the Foreword with the same standard Islamic greeting: “All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May blessings and peace be upon His Messenger Muhammad, and his family and companions.”¹¹⁵ By opening each issue with this greeting, *Dabiq* is seen as a genuinely Islamic magazine, and signals to the reader that the primary audience is also Muslim. However, the most recent, seventh, issue

¹¹⁴ *Dabiq* no. 3 (September 2014), 3-4

¹¹⁵ *Dabiq* no. 2 (July 2014), 3

begins the foreword by immediately discussing the pressing news story (specifically, the ISIS beheading of the Japanese captive, Haruna Yukawa).¹¹⁶ This break of consistency suggests either a drop in the magazine's attention to detail, or a familiarity with the magazine's development and audience base, where the editors do not find it necessary to publish an invocation of religious blessing in each issue. In either case, the consistent addition of a Foreword provides a familiar rhythm to the reader of *Dabiq*, allowing the editor to speak directly to the reader and begin each issue with a specific opening and timely statement.

Article

The contents under *Dabiq*'s "Article" sections change with each issue, but in general it works to legitimize the organization and its ideology through exegetical study. For example, in the first issue, the Article is titled "The Concept of Imamah (Leadership) is from the Millah (Path) of Ibrahim."¹¹⁷ This comprehensive five-part article expands upon the theological and political concept of *Imamah*, and by connecting it to the Islamic story of Ibrahim, ultimately declares that "The Islamic State is a true Imamah," with the newly declared Caliph Ibrahim (formerly known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi), as both the political and religious leader.¹¹⁸ Through this study, ISIS is able to take a recognized doctrine of Islam, and apply it as a legitimizing tool for the newly created Islamic State

¹¹⁶ *Dabiq* no. 7 (February 2015), 3

¹¹⁷ The inaccurate translation of Millah is a direct quote from the Article's title. A more accurate translation would be "community," specifically referring to the historical context of the Jewish community. The writers of *Dabiq* ignore this connotation, offering their own translation to fit their own agenda.

Dabiq no. 1 (July 2014), 20

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 27

and its leader.

This tool for gaining legitimacy is also used in the second issue of *Dabiq*, through the similarly extensive five-part article “It’s Either The Islamic State or The Flood.” By expanding upon the “Da’wah [proselytizing] of Nuh,” ISIS states that Allah did not give Prophet Nuh the ability to choose between “truth and falsehood,” but rather declared, “It’s either me or the flood.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, ISIS argues that:

From amongst the polluted ideologies that have afflicted people the entire world over throughout the course of the tyranny carried out by the forces of kufr, is the notion that the people can choose whether to follow the truth or to embark upon falsehood. This ideology teaches that no one has the right, regardless of whom he may be, to impose any creed or set of morals on anyone else even if that creed or set of morals is the truth revealed by Allah.¹²⁰

By connecting this rigid explication of truth to the teaching of Nuh (Noah), ISIS states that The Islamic State is the truth declared by Allah, and that all Muslims are obliged to follow it, or face the fatal dangers of the flood. Similar to the first issue of *Dabiq*, ISIS uses a scriptural master narrative as a justification for its creation and as a tool of recruitment.

In the sixth issue, an article critical of al-Qaeda discusses the hypocrisy of Ayman al-Zawahiri, who condemns some groups as *Kufirs* (unbelievers) but not others. This article ultimately works to challenge the jihadist nature of al-Qaeda. It directly highlights competition between the groups and works to delegitimize post-bin Laden al-Qaeda. The significance of ISIS framing their ideology in opposition to al-Qaeda will be discussed further in Chapter 4, but it is a core aspect of *Dabiq*. Overall, the contents of the “Article”

¹¹⁹ *Dabiq* no. 2 (July 2014), 5-11

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 7

category work to justify ISIS' creation, actions, and overall agenda.

Report

The “Report” contents found in *Dabiq* are a combination and continuation of previous material in “Islamic State News” and “Islamic State Reports.” Like the two predecessors to *Dabiq*, “Report” works to provide both visual and textual insight into life under the Islamic State. While most content focuses on military conquests and expansion into new regions, some information presents ISIS as providing cancer treatment for children or restoring electricity to a city.¹²¹ This breadth of content paints ISIS as a comprehensive organization focusing on state-building efforts, rather than as a one-dimensional militaristic organization.

The monthly issues of *Dabiq* make each “Report” section particularly timely and relevant, as most issues provide updates on recent sieges of towns or points of contention. Both the text and images in the Report paint ISIS and its military activities in an overwhelmingly positive light, stating that ISIS continues to expand and solidify its control over regions in Iraq and Syria, and provides information on the status of ISIS' expansion in other regions throughout the world. For example, in issue 5, an article titled “Remaining and Expanding” (released in November 2014), ISIS announces that:

The Islamic State announced the expansion of the Khilāfah to Sinai, Libya, Yemen, Algeria, and the Arabian Peninsula, accepting the bay'āt of the mujāhidīn in those lands. The news caused Muslims all over the Khilāfah to take to the streets in celebration. They realize that with this announcement, the battle on many of these fronts will intensify even further and will require an even greater level of patience. Yet, they celebrate, for they see the promise of Allah continuing to take shape every

¹²¹ *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 28-29

passing day. They see that the Khilāfah has not only returned, but is remaining and expanding, bringing Muslims of all colors under one banner and one leader to rid their lands of the tawāghīt and raise their swords in unity against the Jews and crusaders. With every kāfir that is enlisted to fight the Islamic State, every bomb that is dropped onto the homes of its people, every lie that is circulated against it by the international media, and every coin that is spent to try to halt its advance, the Khilāfah and its mujāhidīn only grow stronger, more determined and more defiant. Let the forces of kufr do what they can to wage war against it, for the Islamic State, by Allah’s permission, will only continue to move forward. Remaining and expanding...¹²²

The grandiose description of the celebrations throughout ISIS territory highlights the language that ISIS uses when it describes its polity. Rather than portray ISIS’ expansions in a realistic light, discussing the specific struggles and hindrances extant in the audacious plans, ISIS portrays its expansion as wholly successful and thriving. The motto “remaining and expanding” provides a direct counter-narrative to President Barack Obama’s famous promise in September 2014 to “degrade and destroy” ISIS as an organization.

Beyond simply announcing the growth of ISIS into different regions, *Dabiq* also discusses immediate and long-term implications. The declaration of ISIS as “a state where the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and westerner are all brothers,”¹²³ paints ISIS as a utopian state where all Muslims can live in harmony. In the fifth *Dabiq* issue, ISIS discusses the Kurds that have migrated to ISIS, for the “war with Kurds is a religious war...not a nationalistic war,” stating that the Kurds “are our people and brothers wherever they may be.”¹²⁴ This is a bold statement describing a

¹²² *Dabiq* no. 5 (November 2014), 12-13

¹²³ *Dabiq* no. 1 (July 2014), 7

¹²⁴ *Dabiq* no. 5 (November 2014), 12

people group that has been marginalized and denied a formal homeland for decades.

The “Report” section also works to shed light on the internal dynamics of life under The Islamic State. For example, Issue Six includes images and descriptions of different training courses for ISIS soldiers, along with the faces of alleged spies and their dead bodies after being executed.¹²⁵ Both Issues Six and Seven also include interviews with hostages under ISIS control. The sixth issue, released in January 2015, includes an interview with the captured Jordanian pilot Muaz al-Kasasbeh, referred to as “murtadd [apostate].”¹²⁶ Much of the interview includes specific facts about airbase locations and logistical information, showing that ISIS is efficient at extracting information from their captives. The interview ends with the captor asking, “Do you know what the Islamic State will do with you?” to which al-Kasasbeh responds, “Yes... They will kill me...”¹²⁷ Al-Kasabeh’s death made international headlines as he was burned to death while trapped in a cage; the video of the execution was released by ISIS on February 3, 2015, and is mentioned in the seventh issue of *Dabiq*, released on February 14, 2015.

From its portrayal of ISIS’ military developments to the shockingly graphic imagery and detail of its activities, the “Report” sections of *Dabiq* portray ISIS as an overwhelmingly powerful organization that is flourishing in the midst of Western resistance. This resilience is also shown in the violent actions taken against alleged criminals and apostates within ISIS territories, as ISIS portrays itself as uncompromising in its strict adherence to Shari’ah Law and the Qur’an.

¹²⁵ *Dabiq* no. 6 (December 2014), 26-27

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 34-36

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 36

Wisdom

Each issue of *Dabiq* includes a section titled “Wisdom,” which usually consists of quotes from an Islamic scholar or from a Hadith report, written over a visually engaging image. One such example can be seen in Appendix: Figures 4.1 and 4.2, taken from issue four. This Wisdom is titled “Ghanimah and Niyyah,”¹²⁸ translated “Spoils of War and Intention.” The text, set over an image of armaments, discusses the importance of devoting one’s heart sincerely for Allah as a condition for answered prayers and provisions.

Most issues of “Wisdom,” like other sections of *Dabiq*, express a theologically framed proof of ISIS’ success, with its military conquests a sign of divine favor and guidance in their actions. The consistent use of aesthetically pleasing images engages the reader and challenges the preconceived notions of ISIS as a poor, dangerous, and unwelcome place. Thus “Wisdom” contributes with the rest of *Dabiq* as a legitimizing tool for the Islamic identity of the organization, and works to recruit Muslims based on the seemingly divine approval of ISIS actions.

Feature

The cover story for each issue of *Dabiq* is categorized as a “Feature.” These articles are the longest of the *Dabiq* articles, and contain the core of ISIS ideology. Supported by theological, political, and historical arguments, these articles are also the most comprehensive explanations of ISIS ideology and beliefs. Nearly all of the “Feature”

¹²⁸ *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 30

stories fall within the theme of how the world is divided into two camps: “The camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of *kufir* and hypocrisy...”¹²⁹ This sentiment is expressed explicitly at least once in each issues of *Dabiq*, and is implicit throughout all the articles of the magazine. The following excerpt, taken from the “Feature” story of *Dabiq* issue four, is titled “Reflections on the Final Crusade:”

This crusade against the Islamic State is the greatest testimony from Allah for the proper manhaj of this Khilāfah. Anyone who says otherwise now should review his faith before death suddenly takes him while he stands with one foot in the trench of the crusaders and the other in the trench of the hypocrites whilst claiming he is in the grayzone! The mujāhid knows no grayzone. As the liar Bush truthfully said, “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.”

Shaykh Usāmah Ibn Lādin (rahimahullāh) commented, “So the world today is divided into two camps. Bush spoke the truth when he said, ‘Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.’ I.e. either you are with the crusade or you are with Islam. Bush today is in the frontline carrying a huge cross and treading.”¹³⁰

The terminology of the “grayzone,” refers to the middle ground between “Crusader” and Muslim. The core of ISIS ideology is the extinction of the grayzone, by boldly declaring a new world order of two camps. Obviously, this rhetoric is a tool for radicalization, especially by actively eliminating the possibility of a “moderate” Muslim. Within the same article, ISIS demands that, “Every Muslim should get out of his house, find a crusader, and kill him,” specifying that the Muslim should attribute this killing to the Islamic State, and not make the attacks appear random.¹³¹ While past issues of *Dabiq* attempted to recruit Western Muslims through commands of “Hijrah” (migration to ISIS territory), this is the first explicit command for all Muslims to attack “crusaders” in all

¹²⁹ *Dabiq* no. 1 (July 2014), 10

¹³⁰ *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 43

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 44

countries that have “entered into the alliance against the Islamic State, especially the US, UK, France, Australia, and Germany.”¹³² Aside from the different obligations that ISIS places on all Muslims, this statement reveals a shift and possible evolution in ISIS’ overall agenda and direction as an organization.

Similarly to other sections of *Dabiq*, the “Feature” articles incorporate contemporary and relevant events into the primary arguments. For example, the cover story of Issue Seven (Published in mid-February 2015) is titled “The Extinction of the Grayzone,” and directly condemns the French Mosques that supported the “Je Suis Charlie” movement and the “heretical concept of ‘free speech’” following the January 7 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris. Referring to the cover photo of Issue 7, with a picture of two Muslims holding “Je Suis Charlie” protest signs, the issue is titled “From Hypocrisy to Apostasy.”¹³³ By directly addressing such a global event, ISIS attempts to add its voice to the conversation and condemn Muslims who supported the Charlie Hebdo magazine. Specifically, ISIS addresses Muslims who find themselves within the “grayzone” and feel conflicted about this attack (or similar events).

Through the “Feature” articles, ISIS provides a platform to clearly lay out its ideology and add its voice to issues that are timely and relevant to contemporary events. The clarity provided in these articles allows ISIS to distinguish itself from other Jihadi organizations, and even expresses the differences between ISIS and its competitors.

In The Words Of The Enemy

¹³² Ibid, 44

¹³³ *Dabiq* no. 7 (February 2015), 61

All issues of *Dabiq* contain a section titled “In the Words of the Enemy,” where ISIS takes direct quotes from influential Westerners and provides original commentary. There are three components to every issue of “Words of the Enemy”: a single, large quote from the Western spokesman highlighted, a large paragraph of original *Dabiq* commentary on the individual, and various unflattering pictures of the individual. While the quotes are directly taken from public statements that usually discuss the need to fight ISIS, they also paint ISIS as a strong, competent, and dangerous opponent. Additionally, the commentary provided by ISIS paints the Western spokesman as weak, incompetent, and hypocritical.

The “Words of the Enemy” article in the third issue of *Dabiq* is particularly interesting, as the written commentary suggests that US President Barack Obama is a staunch Zionist. It includes a picture of Obama wearing a Jewish kippah (Appendix: Figure: 5.1 and 5.2). The picture was taken from Obama’s visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem in 2008.

All appearances of “Words of the Enemy” include quotes and images from different scholars and leaders who have publicly challenged ISIS. By using direct quotes in challenging its enemies, ISIS appears truthful and honest to its readers.

Special

The final section in nearly all issues of *Dabiq* is categorized as “Special,” and includes words written by captured Westerners for their Western readers. This series begins in Issue three of *Dabiq* with an article written by James Foley, putting the blame

for his death on US officials who failed to negotiate his release. Described as a “victim of [his] government’s foreign policy,” this article fails to put any blame for Foley’s death on ISIS, which rather “made many efforts to ensure a successful arrangement” for Foley’s release.¹³⁴

Similarly, Issue Four contains an article written by John Cantile, a BBC reporter captured by ISIS, who has been working as an official reporter for ISIS, in both their visual/audio and written media. Similar to Foley’s article, Cantile puts the blame for his continued capture on the US, pointing out the hypocrisy of not paying a ransom, as other nations have done before. The article is emotionally engaging, and Cantile closes it by addressing his wife, friends, and family, and pleading that they encourage America to negotiate with ISIS.¹³⁵ By incorporating the personal narratives of captured Westerners, ISIS is able to connect on an emotional level with its readers, while maintaining a blameless ideology that condemns the West for its abhorrent actions toward both Muslims and Americans.

Later articles allegedly written by Cantile suggest that the US President “switch off [his] cell phone, lock the Oval Office doors, and go play golf instead,” because “the war against the Islamic State just isn’t going to plan at all.”¹³⁶ The articles within the “Special” category consistently appropriate the narrative of captured Westerners to justify the image of Western governments as the primary oppressors of Muslims and the world in general. Additionally, sharing the story of Cantile, who now seems to be independently

¹³⁴ *Dabiq* no. 3 (September 2014), 39

¹³⁵ *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 52-55

¹³⁶ *Dabiq* no. 5 (November 2014), 36

active in the ISIS media system, encourages Westerners to migrate to ISIS and contribute to its cause, without fear of being rejected or harmed. As an outlet to further share the ISIS point of view, this section is both a recruitment tool and legitimizing force for the Islamic State.

Implications of *Dabiq*

While *Dabiq* includes articles that shed light on many different functions of the Islamic State, most of the magazine's contents can be summarized as either theological or political explanations for the legitimacy of the Caliphate. In many ways, the magazine can be considered as a tool of legitimacy for a relatively new and initially little-known organization. As a result, the intent of *Dabiq* is not simply to promote its ideology and recruit readers, but to explain and justify the many reasons why a Caliphate should be established, and why this makes ISIS the most legitimate and trustworthy jihadist organization. As will be discussed in the following chapter, *Dabiq* is written as a response to *Inspire* and al-Qaeda because of ISIS' past affiliation with the larger Jihadi organization. Additionally, in light of the larger "global civil war of jihad," *Dabiq* is a tool used for ISIS to publically position itself above al-Qaeda and other Jihadist organizations as most deserving of resources and recruits, and in possession of a superior ideology.

Chapter 4

Comparing *Inspire* and *Dabiq*

Analyzing *Inspire* and *Dabiq* within their specific contexts highlights their organizations' unique efforts of self-representation. However, by comparing *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, we can better understand how al-Qaeda and ISIS frame their organization and ideology, and how their magazines' contents fall within specific master narratives. Additionally, we can develop a stronger understanding of the differences in agenda, actions, and overall vision of each organization. Ultimately, this will allow for a more sophisticated discussion about the groups themselves, and provide the space needed for a contextually accurate and nuanced counter-narrative by those working in counter-terrorism.

Before comparing the two groups' media, it is important to note that nearly all issues of *Dabiq* were released after the issues of *Inspire*. While *Inspire* is still in print, the most recent issue of *Inspire*, released in December 2014, was published between *Dabiq* issues five and six. Additionally, the December 2014 issue of *Inspire* fails to mention ISIS or *Dabiq* in any capacity. Due to these factors, in many ways the contents of *Dabiq* can be read in relation to *Inspire*. There are obvious similarities between the contents of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, notably in the magazines' organization and coverage of specific themes. However, there are also clear differences in the contents of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*. These highlight the different agendas and tactics of both groups, and provide the framework for a more refined analysis of each organization. Through highlighting the

differences in presentation, contents, and rhetoric of *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, it becomes clear that recruitment for al-Qaeda focuses on ideologically radicalizing readers for membership in the organization, while recruitment for ISIS centers on citizenship in the larger Islamic State.

From a basic glance at *Inspire* and *Dabiq*, both magazines appear quite similar. Aesthetically, the magazines are very appealing with high detailed graphics and images running throughout each issue. Additionally, each magazine follows a similar organization that would appear familiar to the Western reader: A cover page with a gripping image and large text; a table of contents; an opening “Letter from the Editor” or foreword; argumentative articles; articles reminiscent of opinion-editorials; interviews; and finally, a closing “contact us” page. This familiar organization is no fluke—*Inspire* explicitly states that the purpose of the magazine is to reach Western Muslims, and *Dabiq*’s al-Hayat media center works to translate the magazine into multiple languages, including English.

Both *Inspire* and *Dabiq* utilize similar rhetorical techniques to share their information and connect with the reader. These shared argumentative devices include the use of personal narratives, historical justification, and theological exegesis. Additionally, by presenting the main articles within the frame of specific master narratives, both al-Qaeda and ISIS adopt a cultural and religious framework to strengthen their primary arguments. Both groups contain unique articles that shed light on specific aspects of their organization. Within *Inspire*, some examples include the use of advertisements and Open Source Jihad. Unique sections in *Dabiq* include the use of Reports, strong exegetical

articles, and pieces written by Westerners.

Differences in *Inspire*

The use of advertisements is unique to *Inspire*, and has two primary purposes. The first is to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding with the reader. Because *Inspire* is directed toward a Western audience, advertisements would be a natural component for any magazine reader. As a result advertisements can be seen as a normalizing tool adopted by al-Qaeda to create an “insider” feel for the reader. Second, the contents of most *Inspire* advertisements are satirical in nature and appeal to a younger audience. The slang used in advertisements is specifically designed for a younger audience who would find humor in the satire and informal language.

The unique nature of the Open Source Jihad section highlights al-Qaeda’s larger vision and agenda behind their magazine. Rather than simply share their ideology with a younger audience, *Inspire* works to radicalize the reader to eventually carry out attacks in their native lands. Thus, Open Source Jihad is a necessary and core component of every *Inspire* issue. While the articles provide the ideological reasons behind attacks, OSJ articles equip the reader with the tools needed to carry out the attacks. This core component is unique to al-Qaeda’s magazine, and is not found in the ISIS magazine *Dabiq*.

Differences in *Dabiq*

A unique aspect of *Dabiq* is its use of a “Report” section, which provides an update on the operations of the Islamic State. This Report section is a continuation of past

ISIS media, which was ultimately consolidated within *Dabiq*, and functions as a comprehensive news source for operations in all of ISIS-controlled territory. Because each Report focuses on the provinces under ISIS control or assault, ISIS can provide a significant amount of information on the activities in each territory. Beyond the military conquest of a specific region, Report also discusses the governance operations of ISIS in its state-building operations. The services provided by ISIS that are mentioned in Report are a direct response to on-the-ground realities in Iraq, and largely address international criticisms of the Iraqi government. By capitalizing on these deficiencies, ISIS makes its state more appealing and more powerful and legitimate than former Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki's state was. Further, ISIS describes its social services using religious vocabulary, legitimizing ISIS in both a political and religious sense. By using religious imagery, ISIS solidifies its identity as a caliphate and severs itself from "Western" terminology, while still offering similar, but more "pure," services than Western influenced states provide.

For the average Western reader, the information in the Report section comes as a shock, as it defies the general Western assumptions that ISIS is only focused on military operations and killing civilians. Obviously, the information offered in *Dabiq* is too limited to gather measurable data for the success of its governance operations, and is not reliable due to its heavy use of propaganda. Nonetheless, Report sheds light on the multi-dimensional functions of the larger state organization, and the apparent plethora of services it provides to the Muslims living under its control. While this information highlights the services ISIS provides as a state, it also serves as proof of the legitimacy of

the caliphate for the doubting Muslim.

Dabiq's unique “Report” section highlights a major difference between ISIS and al-Qaeda media. While each brand of al-Qaeda media operates within a specific branch of the al-Qaeda network, (with *Inspire* coming from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), al-Qaeda media focuses less than ISIS media on the control of land and territory. The emphasis of territorial control is unique to ISIS, as are its larger goal of establishing a global Caliphate. Report functions to provide the necessary state news updates as ISIS moves toward this vision.

Dabiq also includes a number of articles whose main purpose is to create exegetical arguments for the actions of ISIS. From justifying the creation of a Caliphate based on the “Millah of Ibrahim,” and boldly declaring the need for all Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State based on Noah’s fearful declaration of the imminent flood’s global destruction, to ISIS’ justification for slavery based on their interpretation of Qur’anic texts, the use of exegetical arguments is necessary for both justifying the existence of the Caliphate, but perhaps more importantly for legitimizing its existence as an *Islamic* state. To function as an acceptable state, ISIS would need recognition from the international community; however, to function as an Islamic state, ISIS would need the recognition and agreement of Muslims living under their control. As a result, theological arguments are important to the establishment and development of ISIS as a Caliphate, and as an entity that calls all Muslims to migrate and live under its control.

Additionally, ISIS uses Arabic in their media in a manner that is different from al-Qaeda. ISIS uses a very rigid and literal method of transliterating Arabic into English.

Rather than simply transliterating Arabic as how it is normally spoken, ISIS implements all of the possible phonetic symbols to portray an exact pronunciation of Modern Standard (Classical) Arabic. On one hand, this allows ISIS to be completely accurate in its transliterations and faithful to original Arabic texts; on the other hand, it breaks the natural flow of reading, and creates overly awkward statements that would otherwise function better if transliterated less rigidly. One example of this faithful, albeit awkward, transliteration of Arabic is seen in an article in Issue 6 of *Dabiq*, titled: “The Qa’idah of adh-Dhawahiri, al-Harari, and an-Nadhari, and the Absent Yemeni Wisdom.”¹³⁷

Rather than use the common transliteration of al-Zawahiri (as pronounced from the Egyptian dialect), ISIS literally transliterates his name as adh-Dhawahiri (as pronounced from the Modern Standard Arabic, derived from Qur’anic grammar). By eliminating the vernacular pronunciation, ISIS attempts to separate itself from other Arabic-speaking nations and the status quo, working to legitimize itself by using a “purer” form of Islamic Arabic. In this way, ISIS attempts to appear as a more authentic Islamic state, which uses a more “truthful” Arabic as derived from the Qur’an. This unique use of Arabic is an additional device adopted to further separate ISIS from al-Qaeda.

Finally, *Dabiq* differs from *Inspire* in its continued use of articles written by Westerners held under ISIS control. While *Inspire* includes articles that summarize Western quotes of the al-Qaeda magazine, under “*Inspire* Reactions,” only *Dabiq* consistently includes articles written by Western journalists and other captives under ISIS control. Primarily, this is a tool for ISIS to challenge the notion that all Western

¹³⁷ *Dabiq* no. 6 (December 2014), 16

responses to ISIS are negative. Articles that appear to be written by Western journalists seem more trustworthy, especially if the articles provide an eyewitness account for the daily operations of the Caliphate. Additionally, these articles consistently paint America and Western countries as the ultimate enemies of Islam, arguing, for example, that the indifference of President Obama toward American or civilian deaths is what “killed” James Foley and others. This emphasis on allegedly “senseless” American actions against ISIS forces the reader to think critically about supporting such a seemingly hypocritical entity as the US.

While both *Inspire* and *Dabiq* use language in a specific and deliberate manner, the magazines possess strikingly different tones. *Inspire*'s tone is sarcastic at times, and utilizes mock advertisements, detailed graphics, and even poetry reminiscent of Rap Music to connect with a younger audience.¹³⁸ However, *Inspire* can also be shockingly serious and deadly in its tone, assuming a dominating posture that attempts to convince the reader of its jihadist ideology that condones the killing of Western aggressors. This complex, multi-dimensional tone is different from *Dabiq*, which remains serious and direct throughout all of its issues. This is to be expected, as *Dabiq* is not only concerned with simply recruiting new followers, but also convincing its audience of ISIS' legitimacy and sustainability as a permanent Islamic State.

Addressing the Master Narratives

As discussed in the Introduction, a master narrative is a “transhistorical narrative

¹³⁸ Sivek, “Packaging Inspiration,” 12-13

that is deeply embedded in a particular culture.”¹³⁹ These narratives are constructed systematically and contain archetypical elements that work to rationalize the specific issues presented.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, master narratives intersect and share common archetypes, which work to add emotional weight to the narrative.

Both *Inspire* and *Dabiq* utilize specific master narratives to engage and influence their readers. *Inspire* implements the narratives of *Jahiliyyah* and the Crusader enemies, effectively dichotomizing the world order and portraying themselves as victims of Western aggressors. *Dabiq* similarly utilizes these narratives while benefiting from the master narrative of the Caliphate. Through this master narrative, ISIS is portrayed as the utopian homeland for all Muslims that is both politically and religiously pure—this is painted in stark contrast to the United States and corrupt Arab regimes, who are seen as the cause of injustice and suffering. Additionally, the Caliphate master narrative is supplemented by ISIS’ eschatological theology that declares itself as the catalyst for the End Times. This component paints ISIS as a savior for all Muslims who pledge allegiance to the Islamic State and its Caliph—undoubtedly a powerful and effective narrative for recruitment. Additionally, as will be discussed below, ISIS’ master narrative of the Caliphate functions to differentiate itself from other Jihadist organizations, and declare its unquestionable superiority over others.

ISIS vs. al-Qaeda

One of the most profound aspects of *Dabiq* is how it portrays ISIS in relation to

¹³⁹ Jeffrey R. Halverson, H. Lloyd Goodall, and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives Of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 24

other jihadist organizations. In one of the last sections of the first issue of *Dabiq*, an article titled, “From Hijrah to Khilafah” opens by stating, “The goal of establishing the Khilafah has always been one that occupied the hearts of the mujahidin since the revival of jihad this century.”¹⁴¹ This section is unique to the rest of *Dabiq* issue one because it places ISIS not only in relation to the West or other Muslims, but also in comparison to other Jihadists. The article refers to the *jihad* in Afghanistan and Iraq, and quotes various *Shaykhs* who have died in the midst of *jihad*. The article traces how the caliphate was eventually established overtime, and provides the various stages of the caliphate, from Hijrah (migration) to Jama’ah (organization in groups), and eventually to Khilafah. However, this section is different from the rest of the issue as it not only emphasizes ISIS’ legitimacy or attempts to recruit Muslims from the West, but shows that ISIS wants to create an image for itself that is unique from other Jihadist groups. Opening the article by stating that the Khilafah has been central to all *mujahidin* during this century calls into question the authenticity of other jihadist groups that have not sought after the establishment of Khilafah as a primary goal.

As *Dabiq* evolves overtime, it becomes more direct with its attacks of other jihadi organizations, and specifically al-Qaeda. When discussing its parent organization, *Dabiq* always presents itself as a successor of bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, and consistently works to separate itself from the current al-Qaeda under al-Zawahiri’s leadership. One example of this is in *Dabiq* Issue 7, on a single page article titled “Responding to the Doubts,” where *Dabiq* reinforces the claims of its past issue’s critiques of al-Zawahiri’s al-Qaeda. The

¹⁴¹ *Dabiq* no. 1 (July 2014), 34-40

article states:

The official spokesman of the Khilāfah, Shaykh Abū Muhammad al-‘Adnānī (hafidhahullāh), said, “Rest assured, O soldiers of the Islamic State, for we – by Allah’s permission – will carry on upon the manhaj of the imām Shaykh Usāmah, the amīr of the istishhādīyīn Abū Mus’ab az-Zarqāwī, the founder of the State Abū ‘Umar al-Baghdādī, and its war minister Abū Hamzah al-Muhājir. We will never alter nor change until we taste what they tasted” [This Was Never Our Manhaj nor Will It Ever Be].¹⁴²

In this genealogical list of ISIS’ martyred ideologues and founders, Osama bin Laden is referenced as the father of the *manhaj*, the Jihadi “system” or method of operation.¹⁴³ Additionally, describing him as “*Imam Shaykh*” paints bin Laden as a supreme teacher and initial catalyst for the ideological development of the Caliphate. In many issues of *Dabiq*, bin Laden is referred to as a trustworthy source for ideology and theology and is frequently quoted in a fashion that supports the actions or ideologies of ISIS. These trustworthy, sincere qualities of bin Laden are clearly juxtaposed against al-Zawahiri, who is consistently painted as hypocritical, misleading, and even un-islamic.

Issue 6 of *Dabiq* includes an article analyzing the heretical leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri over al-Qaeda. Specifically, *Dabiq* ridicules al-Zawahiri’s seemingly liberal view of Shia Muslims, and the “followers of the tawāghīt [tyrants],”—Muslims whom ISIS deems apostates. The article then connects al-Zawahiri’s unacceptable theology to the rise of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi’s power in Yemen, and includes a picture of Hadi and John Kerry shaking hands—clearly an attempt to portray al-Qaeda as

¹⁴² *Dabiq* no. 7 (February 2015), 25

¹⁴³ *Manhaj*, or the methodology for arriving at religious “truth.” Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*, 18

hypocritically supporting the US. Throughout this article, the author argues that al-Zawahiri's leadership of al-Qaeda is not only theologically heretical, but hypocritical in deed and action, while simultaneously promoting ISIS as the true, pure form of Jihadi Islam. This issue of *Dabiq* highlights the tensions between ISIS and al-Qaeda, as ISIS deliberately works to methodically scrutinize and delegitimize al-Qaeda's current ideology and policies. By directly addressing this tension, ISIS effectively gains an upper hand in promoting itself as superior in terms of integrity and ideology.

By connecting with the teachings of bin Laden, ISIS is able to define itself as part of the former al-Qaeda. This is hugely important in terms of recruitment, as it suggests that ISIS recruits are fundamentally similar to the original al-Qaeda members. However, by embracing its past history and rejecting a current affiliation with al-Qaeda, ISIS is giving itself the freedom to pick and choose which aspects of al-Qaeda it adheres to, and the specific ways it is in direct opposition with the competing ideology. Additionally this allows ISIS to skew the ideology of bin-Laden's al-Qaeda to justify its actions. This is clearly seen as ISIS prides itself on the return of the Caliphate. This was a goal that bin Laden discussed and desired, but only as a long-term goal that involved changing current political systems and governments.¹⁴⁴ However, ISIS fails to mention bin Laden's competing view and instead places the fault of the tension between al-Qaeda and ISIS on Ayman al-Zawahiri's hypocritical and irresponsible leadership of al-Qaeda.

Due to the historical roots of ISIS's evolution out of al-Qaeda, ISIS understands the need to specifically differentiate itself from the famous jihadist organization. Due to a

¹⁴⁴ Byman and Williams, "ISIS vs. Al Qaeda."

competition over resources, recruits, and ideology, ISIS works to create a unique, superior framework, focusing on its establishment of a Caliphate. In both direct and subtle ways, this is a core component of the *Dabiq* message. While there are noticeable similarities in the media of al-Qaeda and ISIS, the differences highlight the ways that ISIS attempts to compete with al-Qaeda within the global civil war of jihad. By further exploring this difference in ideology and agenda, we can create a more effective counter-narrative to both jihadist organizations and their recruitment efforts.

Conclusion

At 11:30am on Wednesday, January 7 2015, a black van drove outside a building on Rue Nicolas-Alpert, Paris. Two masked men ran out of the car carrying Kalashnikov assault rifles and quickly made their way to a nearby building. After asking reception staff the location of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine's office, the gunmen run to the second floor, and within minutes, slaughtered eleven people associated with *Charlie Hebdo* and one security official. It was well known that the gunmen were associated with Islam as early reports stated that the gunmen shouted, "Allahu Akbar!" and "We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad." Less well known, however, is that before the attack, the two shooters approached bystanders saying, "Tell the media that this is al-Qaeda in the Yemen."¹⁴⁵

I believe that this latter detail is one of the most important aspects of the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings. It took hours for the media to confirm the shooters as members of al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQAP), with many speculating that the attack derived from ISIS or another Islamic extremist group. Yet the shooters clearly did not want there to be any confusion: before the deed was complete, the shooters were already boasting about and clarifying their affiliation. A week after the attack, AQAP's official media group, al-

¹⁴⁵ Holly Watt, "Terrorists shouted they were from al-Qaeda in the Yemen before Charlie Hebdo attack," *The Telegraph*, January 7, 2015, Accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11330636/Terrorists-shouted-they-were-from-al-Qaeda-in-the-Yemen-before-Charlie-Hebdo-attack.html>.; BBC News. "Charlie Hebdo attack: Three days of terror." *BBC News*, January 14, 2015. Accessed March 10, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30708237>.

Malahem media, released a video that claimed responsibility for the attack, mostly to remove any doubt about the perpetrators of the shooting. In reflecting on the attack, one of the most important questions to ask is not simply why the attack itself happened, but rather why did al-Qaeda care so much about the perceived identity of the attackers?

As is explored in the findings of this paper, ISIS poses a competitive threat to al-Qaeda. In “jihadism’s global civil war,” al-Qaeda and ISIS compete over resources, influence, and superior ideology.¹⁴⁶ The rapid growth of ISIS, both in its expansion as an organization, and its significance in Western media, has posed a serious threat to al-Qaeda, which has, since 9/11, been recognized as the quintessential jihadist organization. ISIS has been the primary jihadist name in the western media since the August 2014 beheading of US journalist James Foley, if not earlier with the June 2014 capture of Iraq’s second largest city, Mosul. Al-Qaeda, however, was mostly absent from media attention until the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack. While many view Charlie Hebdo as an isolated incident, there is significant evidence that, as argued by the Bookings Institution’s fellow Shadi Hamid, the attack resulted from “terrorist outbidding, where ISIS and al-Qaeda are under pressure to outdo each other.”¹⁴⁷

Paradoxically, both the Islamic State and al-Qaeda rely on the attention and coverage of Western journalistic institutions in order to establish and promote their legitimacy on an international level among its target population, young Western Muslims.

¹⁴⁶ Byman and Williams, “ISIS vs. Al Qaeda.”

¹⁴⁷ Ben Hubbard, “Jihadists and Supporters Take to Social Media to Praise Attack on Charlie Hebdo,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 2015, Accessed March 10, 2015.
http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/world/europe/islamic-extremists-take-to-social-media-to-praise-charlie-hebdo-attack.html?_r=0.

This *bidding war*, this media competition between these two organizations—plus the fact that their magazines are online English publications — demonstrate their desire for global recognition as the vanguard of transnational jihadist Islam.

While the al-Qaeda and ISIS magazines are avenues of recruitment for these organizations, they are also a tool of legitimacy for the groups' ideology and actions. For al-Qaeda, *Inspire* magazine works to radicalize the reader to carry out “lone wolf” attacks like *Charlie Hebdo* in one's homeland; for ISIS, *Dabiq* magazine is an evolving product that emphasizes the need for a Caliphate, and demands a global migration of Muslims to join it. Additionally, the magazine presents ISIS' wider eschatological ideology that speaks to the overall vision of the organization and its need for expansion. Due to the sheer amount of ideology presented in the magazines, reading and analyzing them should be at the center of any counter-terrorism approach to these organizations and their recruitment efforts.

The underlying motivation behind the magazines—to target and recruit Western Muslims—is also a primary vulnerability of ISIS and al-Qaeda's media campaigns. The magazines deliberately represent themselves as reliable in order to create a sense of trust in the reader. While in reality much of their content is propaganda that wholly supports the host organizations, the magazines also contain authentic material published by official branches of the organizations. Due to the undeniable importance of ideology for recruiting and proliferating these organizations, creating a comprehensive counter-ideology can be an effective form of counter-terrorism.

For ISIS, which attempts to function as a legitimate state, the ideology presented in *Dabiq* is representative of the ideology taught in the various educational institutions under ISIS control. Thus, it is important to look beyond the immediate actions of ISIS and focus equally strongly on the long-term implications of the ISIS ideology. *Dabiq* is valuable as an example of an educational campaign by ISIS, but it is merely one campaign in the larger efforts of the Islamic State to recruit members. However, by deconstructing the messages presented in the media, specifically by identifying the master narratives presented, a more nuanced and contextually appropriate counter-narrative can be created.

Policy Suggestions

While countering the “warped ideology” of ISIS was part of the “comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy” to “degrade and ultimately destroy [ISIS]”¹⁴⁸ presented by President Obama in his September 2014 address to the nation, there is little evidence of a specific counter-narrative to ISIS ideology presented in its written media. One poor example was the US State Department’s creation of a satirical video attempting to challenge misleading propaganda portraying ISIS as a fantastical utopia. Meant to be educational, the video appeared to simply mock the ISIS video campaign rather than create a sophisticated counter-narrative that would influence its audience to wholly reject ISIS.

¹⁴⁸ The Washington Post, “Transcript: President Obama’s speech outlining strategy to defeat Islamic State,” *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2014, Accessed March 10, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/full-text-of-president-obamas-speech-outlining-strategy-to-defeat-islamic-state/2014/09/10/af69dec8-3943-11e4-9c9f-ebb47272e40e_story.html

Counterterrorism efforts should work instead to create informed, engaging, and creative counter narratives to ISIS propaganda. This media should not be developed by official US institutions, such as the State Department, as any content would likely be dismissed as US or Western propaganda. Rather, Islamic organizations would more likely have the theological understanding and reputation to create an effective counter-narrative. This media should be distributed through the same avenues as those used by ISIS and al-Qaeda, and the campaign should be multi-dimensional, including everything from visual/audio media to written media. The contents should be directed to Muslims, and therefore use similar signaling tactics that Islamic Extremist groups adopt, such as the use of transliterated Arabic, Islamic greetings, and exegetical teachings that promote love, inclusion, and acceptance, while challenging theologies of difference and violent jihad. While not copying ISIS or al-Qaeda media, this counter-narrative could employ similar tactics to engage readers and convince them of specific ideologies. Such a campaign, created from the Muslim community, could prove to be an effective grassroots challenge to the sophisticated media campaigns of ISIS and al-Qaeda.

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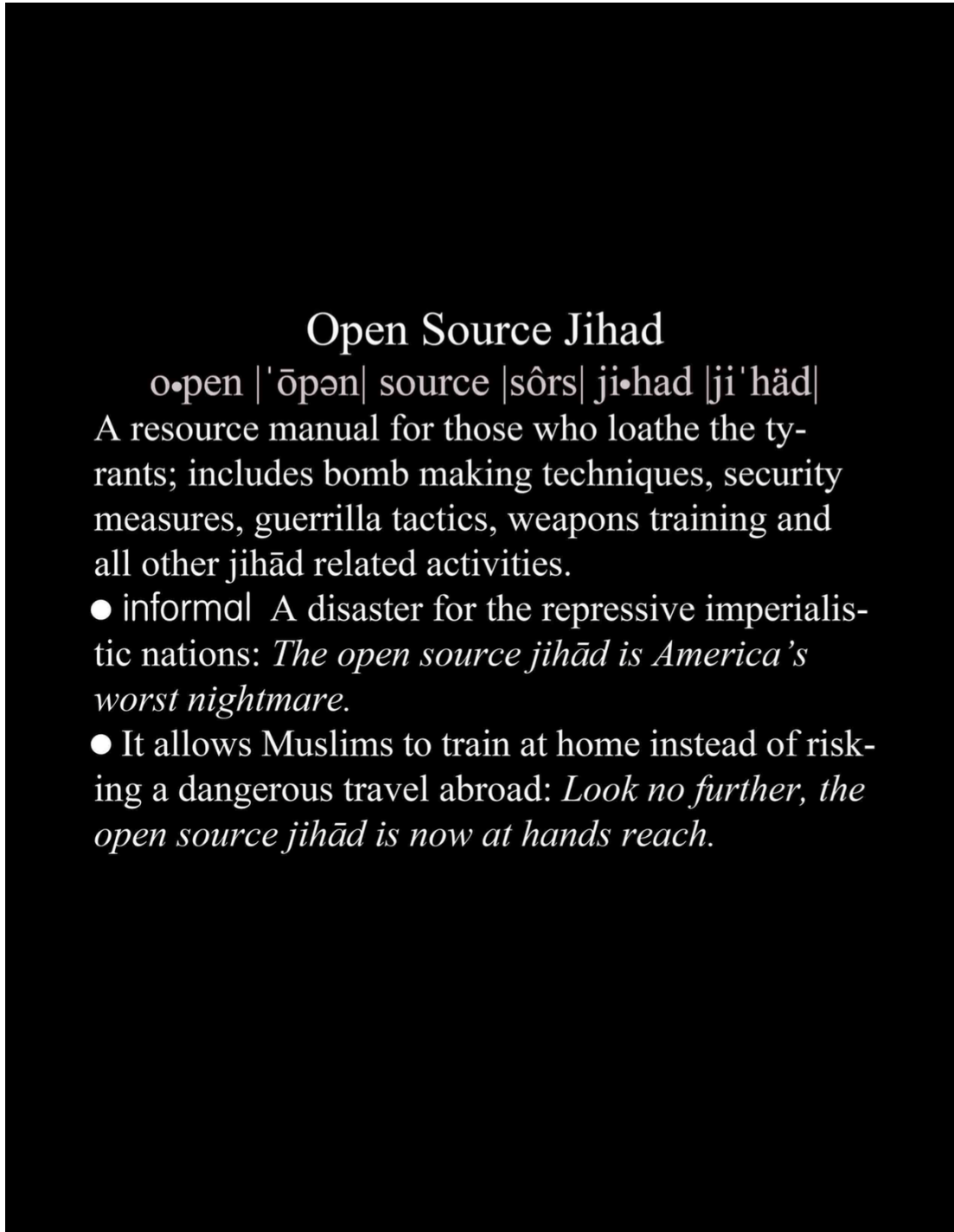
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Appendix:

Figure 1:



Source: *Inspire* no. 1 (Summer 2010), 32

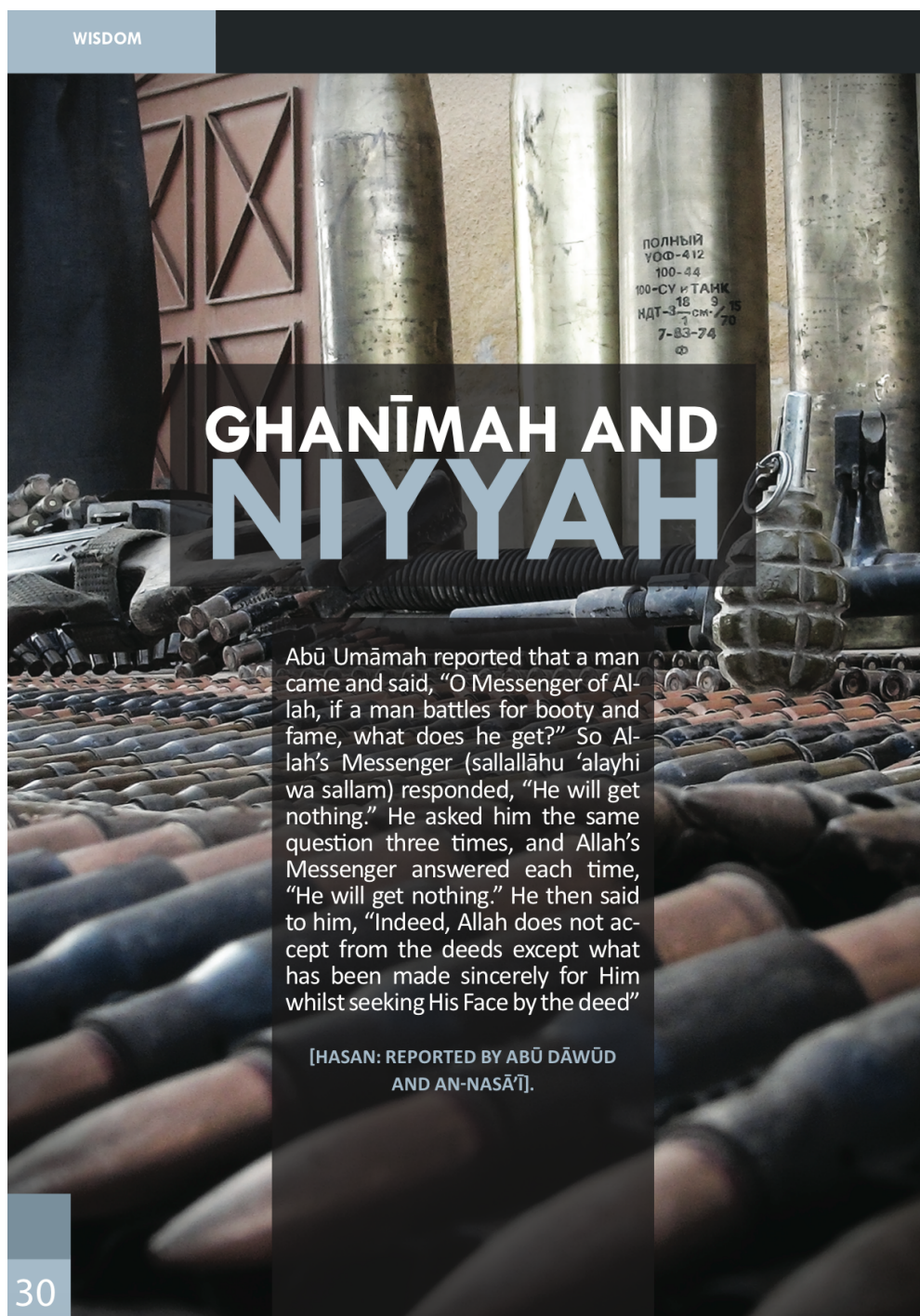
Figure 2:

Source: *Inspire* no. 11 (Spring 2013), 26

Figure 3:

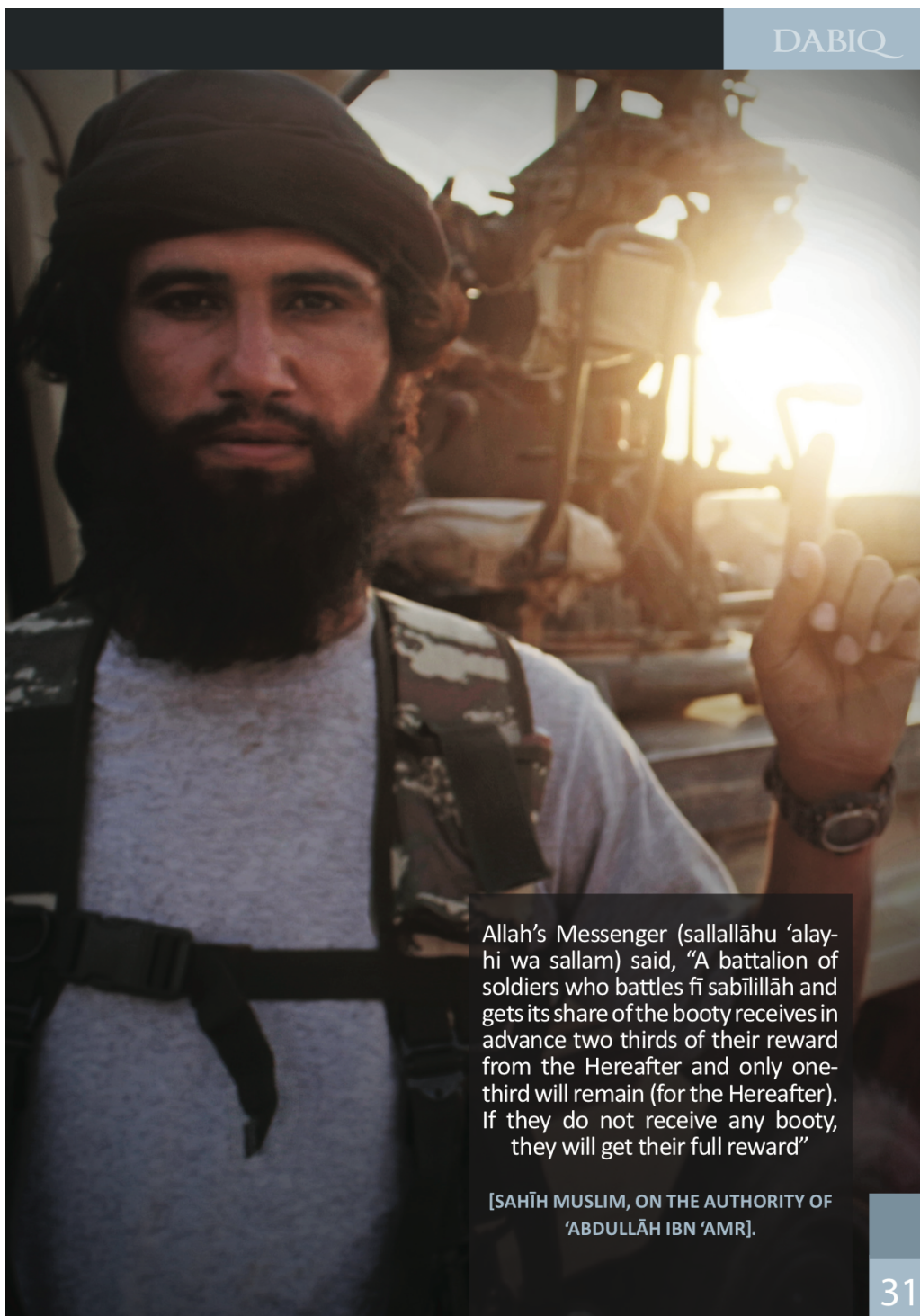
Source: *Inspire* no. 13 (Winter 2014), 46-47

Figure 4.1:



Source: *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 30

Figure 4.2:




Source: *Dabiq* no. 4 (October 2014), 31

Figure 5.1:

THE ENEMY'S WORDS

IN THE WORDS OF
THE ENEMY



On 7 August 2014, the crusader, apostate Barack Obama announced to the world the continuation of the American crusade against Islam and the Muslims of Iraq, only to prove to his followers that there is no difference between his partisan politics and that of his predecessor – Bush – apart from cosmetic, superficial touches. His decisions also expose the hypocritical politics of America that only serve the interests of their Jewish ally, Israel, and their own capitalist gluttony. So while genocide is committed by the Maliki, Asadi, and Israeli forces against the Muslims via systematic massacres, chemical warfare, rape, and starvation by siege, Obama watches with euphoria. However, when his brothers in Yazidi Satanism and Peshmergan Zionism are killed, he panics. Obama had this to say:

35

Source: *Dabiq* no. 3 (September 2014), 35

Figure 5.2:


DABIQ

““

Today I authorized two operations in Iraq – targeted airstrikes to protect our American personnel, and a humanitarian effort to help save thousands of Iraqi civilians who are trapped on a mountain without food and water, and facing almost certain death. Let me explain the actions we are taking and why. First, I said in June, as the terrorist group ISIL began an advance across Iraq, that the United States would be prepared to take targeted military action in Iraq if and when we determined that the situation required it. In recent days, these terrorists have continued to move across Iraq and have neared the city of Irbil, where American diplomats and civilians serve at our consulate, and American military personnel advise Iraqi forces. To stop the advance on Irbil, I’ve directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city. We intend to stay vigilant and take action if these terrorist forces threaten our personnel or facilities anywhere in Iraq, including our consulate in Irbil and our embassy in Baghdad. We’re also providing urgent assistance to Iraqi government and Kurdish forces so they can more effectively wage the fight against ISIL. Second, at the request of the Iraqi government, we’ve begun operations to help save Iraqi civilians stranded on the mountain. As ISIL has marched across Iraq it has waged a ruthless campaign against innocent Iraqis. And these terrorists have been especially barbaric towards religious minorities, including Christians and Yazidis, a small and ancient religious sect. Countless Iraqis have been displaced and chilling reports describe ISIL militants rounding up families, conducting mass executions, and enslaving Yazidi women. In recent days, Yazidi women, men, and children from the area of Sinjar have fled for their lives. And thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, are now hiding high up in the mountain with little but the clothes on their backs. They’re without food. They’re without water. People are starving and children are dying of thirst. Meanwhile, ISIL forces below have called for the systematic destruction of the entire Yazidi people below which would constitute genocide...

””

36



Source: *Dabiq* no. 3 (September 2014), 36