

JULY 2014

CHARLES C. CARIS & SAMUEL REYNOLDS

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 22

ISIS GOVERNANCE IN SYRIA



*Cover: Members loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) wave ISIL flags as they drive around Raqqa June 29, 2014. REUTERS/Stringer
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Islamic State's June 2014 announcement of a "caliphate" is not empty rhetoric. In fact, the idea of the caliphate that rests within a controlled territory is a core part of ISIS's political vision. The ISIS grand strategy to realize this vision involves first establishing control of terrain through military conquest and then reinforcing this control through governance. This grand strategy proceeds in phases that have been laid out by ISIS itself in its publications, and elaborates a vision that it hopes will attract both fighters and citizens to its nascent state. The declaration of a caliphate in Iraq and Syria, however, raises the question: can ISIS govern?

Available evidence indicates that ISIS has indeed demonstrated the capacity to govern both rural and urban areas in Syria that it controls. Through the integration of military and political campaigns, particularly in the provincial capital of Raqqa, ISIS has built a holistic system of governance that includes religious, educational, judicial, security, humanitarian, and infrastructure projects, among others. Raqqa is the central city in ISIS's territorial network and thus it offers the most fully developed example of ISIS's Caliphate vision. However, Raqqa is not the only striking example of ISIS governance. Towns in Aleppo province, in particular al-Bab and Manbij, are also host to a number of governance programs, as are select towns in other provinces to varying degrees.

ISIS divides governance into two broad categories: administrative and service-oriented. Administrative offices are responsible for managing religious outreach and enforcement, courts and punishments, educational programming, and public relations. ISIS begins by establishing outreach centers and rudimentary court systems first because these are less resource-intensive and less controversial among the Syrian population. After consolidating militarily, ISIS generally progresses towards religious police, stricter punishments, and a concerted educational system. These types of programs require more dedicated personnel, resource investments, and greater support from the population.

ISIS's service-oriented offices manage humanitarian aid, bakeries, and key infrastructure such as water and electricity lines. In a similar fashion to its administrative offices, ISIS begins by offering humanitarian aid, particularly during Ramadan, and coordinates with religious outreach events to provide food aid to attendees. This is seen as less threatening and requires little personnel or resources from ISIS. As ISIS takes sole control over territory, it expands to provide more services, often operating the heavy equipment needed to repair sewer and electricity lines. ISIS has also attempted to manage large industrial facilities, such as dams and a thermal power plant in Aleppo province.

In conjunction with these governance projects, ISIS has worked to legitimate its vision for a caliphate as laid out in publications such as the English-language magazine *Dabiq*. ISIS has argued that it has the duty to govern both the religious and political lives of Muslims. Under this model, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is both ISIS's chief religious official and its senior statesman. ISIS sees itself as an all-encompassing entity, one that eventually is meant to shoulder all the responsibilities of a traditional state. Though maintaining some practical state functions that derive from effective urban management may not be within his capacity.

ISIS's sweeping yet exclusionary method of governance is potentially one of the organization's greatest strengths, but it may also become one of ISIS's greatest weaknesses. ISIS maintains social control by

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eliminating resistance, but this in turn places technical skills that are essential to run modern cities in shorter supply. In the process of establishing its governance project, ISIS has dismantled state institutions without replacing them with sustainable alternatives. The immediate provision of aid and electricity, for example, does not translate into the creation of a durable economy. The consequence of ISIS's failure, however, may not be the dismantling of the Caliphate, but rather the devastation of the cities and systems that comprise Iraq and Syria such that they never recover.

Thus far in Syria, ISIS has provided a relative measure of organization in a chaotic environment. This may prompt assessments which overstate ISIS's efficacy in conducting state functions. Though ISIS certainly has demonstrated intent to commit resources to governance activities, it is yet to demonstrate the capacity for the long-term planning of state institutions and processes. Translating broad military expansions from the summer of 2013 into a well-governed contiguous zone will be ISIS's most daunting task yet, and may prove to be a critical vulnerability.

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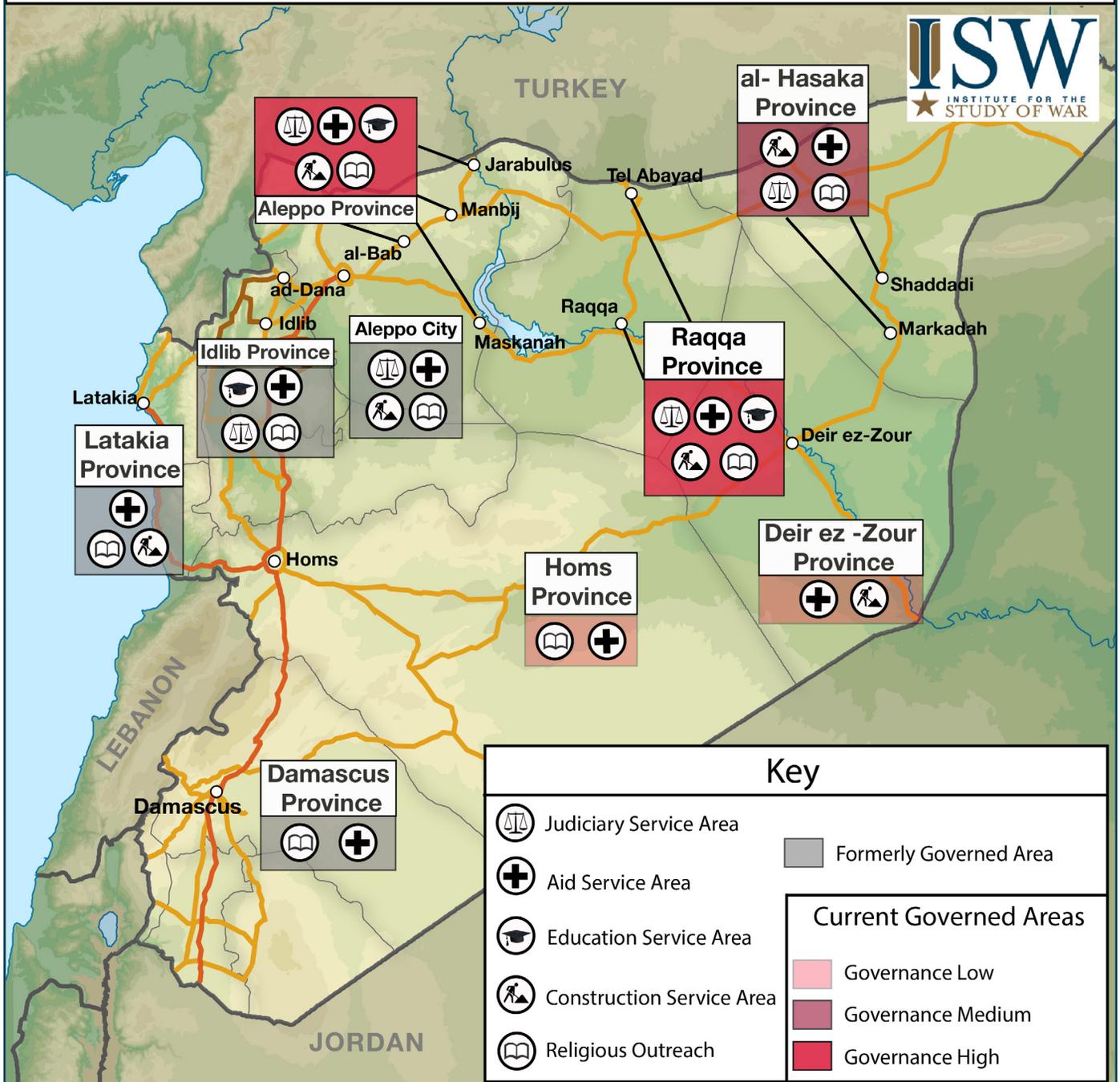
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ISIS Governance Areas As of July 2014



Key	
	Judiciary Service Area
	Aid Service Area
	Education Service Area
	Construction Service Area
	Religious Outreach
	Formerly Governed Area
Current Governed Areas	
	Governance Low
	Governance Medium
	Governance High

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 22

ISIS GOVERNANCE IN SYRIA

By Charles C. Caris & Samuel Reynolds

Following the seizure of Mosul, ISIS Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi publicly announced the formation of an “Islamic Caliphate”,¹ articulating a political vision to justify ISIS’s ongoing military campaign to consolidate territory across Iraq and Syria.² The announcement of the Caliphate seems to realize ISIS’s grand strategy of first establishing control of terrain through military conquest and then reinforcing this control through governance. This grand strategy proceeds in phases that have been laid out by ISIS itself in its publications, and elaborates a vision that it hopes will attract both fighters and citizens to its nascent state.³ The declaration of a “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria, however, raises the question: can ISIS govern?

By the time Baghdadi officially announced the Islamic Caliphate in June 2014, ISIS had already been conducting governance activities in parts of Syria for at least seven months. A joint political and military campaign by ISIS has been underway in Syria, particularly in the northeastern provincial capital of ar-Raqqah⁴ where ISIS has built a holistic system of governance that includes religious, educational, judicial, security, humanitarian, and infrastructure projects, among others. Raqqah is the central city in ISIS’s territorial network, the first city where ISIS established exclusive control, and thus it offers the most fully developed example of ISIS’s Caliphate vision in practice.

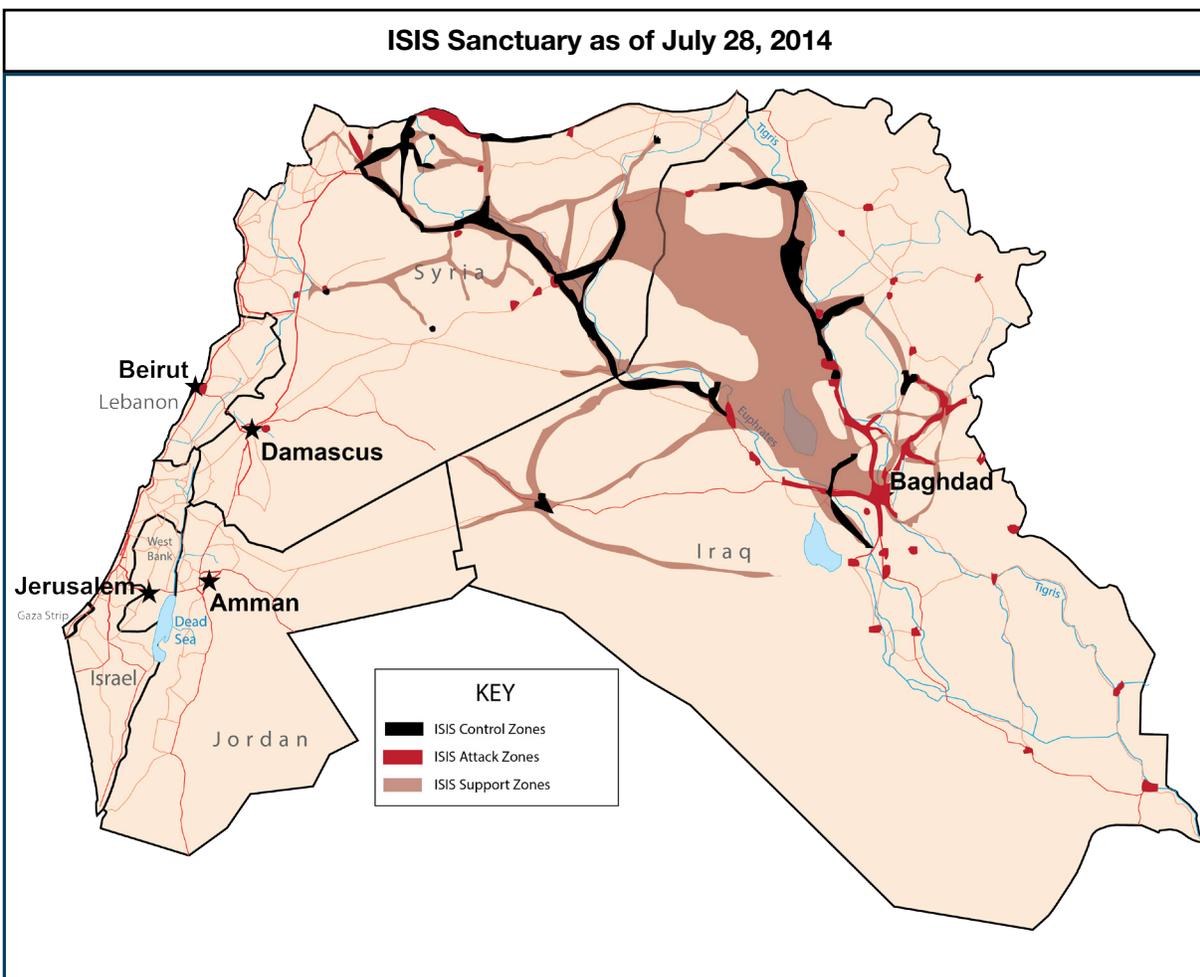
From a theoretical perspective, the ISIS governance project is an extension of what it calls *imamah*, or leadership.⁵ As ISIS argued at length in a recent English-language periodical, the concept of *imamah* extends to both religious and political affairs.⁶ Not only is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the professed leading religious authority in the newly-declared Caliphate, but he is also the senior statesman of ISIS, overseeing all political and governance-related activities that will cause ISIS to become a permanent fixture. Like the ISIS military strategy, these campaigns reflect thoughtful design, to transition from military control to political control. ISIS’s Caliphate, although it was seized through military force, must perform many of the internal functions of a traditional state in order to remain.

As ISIS conducts its military campaign in Iraq and Syria, it is important to observe how ISIS pursued this transition inside Raqqah and other Syrian cities. Their example may serve as a roadmap for what to expect from ISIS in Mosul and other locations in Iraq where ISIS has established military control. The degree to which ISIS can adapt its Syrian solutions to

an Iraqi context will be an important test of the Caliphate’s ability to erase modern borders, a clear and often repeated goal.⁷ ISIS demonstrated the importance of this message in a literal way when it bulldozed a portion of the Sykes-Picot border separating Syria and Iraq in June 2014.⁸ ISIS will have to contend with resistance from some Iraqis and Syrians, though ISIS has also fashioned several ways to do this in Raqqah and other cities in Syria. Despite much of its messaging about idyllic life in the Caliphate, ISIS social control is brutal and comprehensive, as this report will demonstrate.

Information compiled for this report is largely drawn from ISIS self-reporting, which is both a primary source and a clear propaganda tool (see, for example, Appendix).⁹ ISIS has been broadcasting its military and social programs with photos, videos, graphic art, and print media as part of a sophisticated political campaign. The political campaign is linked to ISIS statecraft, and it provides an important window into what ISIS chooses to emphasize as primary elements of its governance. Moreover, the proliferation of ISIS English-language print media beginning in May 2014 and describing life within Raqqah speak to the intent of ISIS to recruit not only fighters, but also citizens, to come and live in a functioning and thriving community. In reality, life in Raqqah is likely not thriving, and this report will explore ISIS representation with real estimates for events on the ground. Nevertheless, this report will carefully examine the photos and videos posted by ISIS that demonstrate the structure and scale of their governance and social programs.

Combined with other sources, this paper will examine how ISIS came to establish urban control in Raqqah and other parts of Syria. First, the paper will describe how ISIS consolidated military control over Raqqah by eliminating



The above map depicts the terrain within Iraq and Syria that ISIS controls as well as its support zones and attack zones.

rivals and eventually through military victory in early January 2014. Second, the paper will document the ISIS governance programs that followed its military campaign and which form the basis of ISIS statecraft. Taken together, this paper answers the question of whether ISIS is capable of establishing governance and eliminating resistance in the areas that it controls. The Caliphate is not only a military conquest and not only a governance plan, it is an active and integrated endeavor to build an alternative to modern states from the remains of Iraq and Syria.

THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ EXPANDS INTO SYRIA

From the time that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the formation of ISIS in April 2013, expanding the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) to include Syria, ISIS has demonstrated the intent to control territory through military force. Meanwhile, Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), the other al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Syria,¹⁰ pursued an alternate path. JN appeared to adopt al-

Qaeda's methodology for social integration, fighting with the Syrian opposition in order to bolster its credibility and gain greater popular legitimacy, thereby securing a foothold in Syria's post-war future. Ostensibly because Baghdadi moved into Syria without the authorization of al-Qaeda emir Ayman al-Zawahiri,¹¹ and remained there against Zawahiri's orders, al-Qaeda's general command disavowed ISIS in February 2014.¹²

This break likely occurred because of ISIS's divergent methodology, characterized by the overt pursuit of physical control prior to gaining social acceptance. Al-Qaeda's general command may also have been concerned that ISIS's prominence in Syria was diluting the appeal of JN, its official Syrian affiliate. Capitalizing upon its military and political successes, ISIS is now pursuing its caliphate without Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda. Their future relationship is uncertain, however, JN played a prominent role in ISIS's rise to power in Syria and it is therefore important to understand this fractured relationship.

ISIS ELIMINATES COMPETITORS IN RAQQA CITY

After Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's failed merger attempt with Jabhat al-Nusra in April 2013, ISIS devoted significant resources towards gaining control of Syrian territory, and more recently Iraqi territory, in order to create the necessary conditions for governance. Raqqa, which fell out of Syrian regime control in March 2013,¹³ is a central feature of this plan. From ISIS's perspective, Raqqa is the prototype for Islamic governance, and it showcases the full spectrum of ISIS governance tactics. The situation in Raqqa demonstrates the level of governance that is possible when ISIS has established full territorial control. Therefore, Raqqa is a valuable benchmark by which to measure ISIS capabilities elsewhere in Syria and Iraq. ISIS did exercise limited governance in Raqqa in 2013, but could not begin to fully integrate its governance projects until after it expelled its competitors in the city in January 2014.

The ISIS intimidation campaign began shortly after ISIS announced its intended merger with JN on April 9, 2013. After a period of a month in which ISIS and JN were nearly interchangeable inside Raqqa city while the merger was being debated in leadership circles,¹⁴ ISIS's first public act in the city was to execute three civilians in the city's main square.¹⁵ ISIS continued targeting activists and rebel groups throughout the summer and fall of 2013 under the rule of the notorious ISIS provincial emir for Raqqa, known as Abu Luqman.¹⁶ This eventually prompted Abu Saad al-Hadrami and Abu Dajana, the leading JN emirs in Raqqa who had initially been subsumed within ISIS leadership after the merger, to defect from ISIS and withdraw from Raqqa entirely along with a group of core followers.¹⁷

In Abu Saad's absence during the midsummer months, ISIS continued nearly unopposed, detonating multiple VBIEDs (Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device) at the FSA (Free Syrian Army)-affiliated Ahfad al-Rasul headquarters building in the Raqqa train station on August 13.¹⁸ The explosion killed Ahfad al-Rasul's leader and top commanders in the city, causing Ahfad al-Rasul to end its official presence in Raqqa.¹⁹ For ISIS, this was nothing short of a declaration of war against a rival rebel group, and marked a major escalation in ISIS's campaign in Raqqa city.

On September 12, 2013, the JN emir Abu Saad returned to Raqqa city and absorbed the leading groups in the FSA-affiliated 11th Division, formed earlier in the summer of 2013, into JN. The groups which joined JN, including Jabhat Thuwar Raqqa and the Muntasir Billah Brigade,²⁰ did not

necessarily share an ideological affiliation with the al-Qaeda affiliate, but were attracted by Abu Saad, who had been an influential and well liked commander in Raqqa before his departure. Despite Abu Saad's summer absence, which he claimed allowed him to consolidate strength outside the city, and the addition of 11th Division groups to JN's ranks, ISIS fighters kidnapped Abu Saad shortly after his reemergence on September 12.²¹ The next month, on October 14, 2013, ISIS invited 300 leading social and religious figures to discuss ISIS policies in the city, but later executed two among the crowd who had expressed dissenting opinions. According to the pro-opposition organization Syria Untold, after this event the last remaining activists were pushed out of the city.²²

ISIS's decisive power play in Raqqa city came November 20, 2013, when rebels launched a major offensive against the 17th Division Base, one of the Syrian regime's last remaining positions in Raqqa province.²³ Four days into the offensive, amid fierce clashes with regime forces, JN was forced to send fighters away from the front lines in order to reinforce its headquarters building at the Provincial Building against ISIS fighters who were massing in the vicinity.²⁴ According to the pro-opposition Damascus Bureau website, which interviewed locals in Raqqa, the force dispositions of ISIS and JN were quite different during this period. JN allocated the majority of its forces to northern Raqqa city near the front lines of the battle for the 17th Division as well as various checkpoints throughout the city. ISIS, on the other hand, concentrated its forces around its headquarters building and at checkpoints inside the city, having largely withdrawn from the front lines in August, 2013, according to activists.²⁵ The different force dispositions of JN and ISIS demonstrate the different priorities of the two groups. JN's main effort during this time period was fighting the Syrian regime, as it oriented many of its fighters near the 17th Division north of the city. ISIS, however, was seemingly more concerned with consolidating its position inside Raqqa city.

One of ISIS's final acts before the January 2014 rebel uprising occurred on December 2, when its fighters finally seized the Martyrs Church (Armenian Orthodox) and converted it to an outreach headquarters building in the city.²⁶ This act indicates ISIS felt unchallenged in Raqqa city, both by the civilian population and by other rebel groups (one of whom had prevented ISIS from seizing the church previously).²⁷ An article published by *Damascus Bureau* on December 18 called the situation in Raqqa prior to the rebel revolt a "cold war" between JN and ISIS, alluding to the growing tension between the groups.²⁸ All other rebel groups at this point had already been marginalized with the exception of Ahrar al-Sham, who still maintained a role in Raqqa's governance operations.²⁹

REBELS CONDUCT SURPRISE ATTACKS ON ISIS THROUGHOUT NORTHERN SYRIA

The rebel uprising against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) began in Idlib and Aleppo provinces on January 3, 2014,³⁰ the same day ISIS seized most of Fallujah, in Iraq's Anbar Province.³¹ Rebel infighting spread to Raqqa Province three days later, on January 6, when rebels led by JN freed 50 prisoners from a large ISIS detention center in eastern Raqqa city.³² Other rebel groups including Ahrar al-Sham, Liwa al-Tawhid, and smaller FSA-linked brigades continued to overrun ISIS positions throughout the day, prompting an anonymous FSA Eastern Front source to report to *Asharq al-Awsat* that "ISIS may lose control of Raqqa at any time."³³ By January 7, ISIS held only one position in all of Raqqa — the fortified Governor's Palace located in the center of the city.³⁴ ISIS responded quickly and decisively to attacks against itself in northern Syria by ordering strategic withdrawals of its forces and signing temporary ceasefires until it could recover. ISIS quickly retracted from the Tal Abyad border crossing on January 6 after Turkey closed its border gate temporarily.³⁵ On January 7, senior ISIS emir Abu Omar al-Shishani signed a temporary truce with senior Ahrar al-Sham commander and al-Qaeda emissary Abu Khalid al-Suri at Jarrah Airbase, near Maskana in southern Aleppo province. ISIS broke the truce less than two weeks later on January 20, when it took control of the base from Ahrar al-Sham fighters.³⁶ In Aleppo, after JN brokered a last minute agreement with ISIS, ISIS fighters abandoned their main headquarters building at the Children's Hospital in the Qadi Asker neighborhood, along with a number of other checkpoints in the province.³⁷

ISIS TAKES AN OFFENSIVE POSTURE

By January 9, ISIS fighters who had been expelled from Raqqa regrouped, and began blocking the main bridges leading south out of Raqqa in order to set the stage for a ground offensive inside the city. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported many civilians even attempted to flee across the Euphrates River by rowboat.³⁸ On January 10, ISIS seized most of the Mashlab district in eastern Raqqa and continued towards the city center.³⁹

January 12 marked a decisive turning point for ISIS as it reportedly received a "large group" of reinforcements from the desert near the Iraq-Syria border, according to an anonymous Western military attaché cited by McClatchy.⁴⁰ Another group of ISIS fighters was sent from Deir ez-Zour province, according to IHS Janes.⁴¹ The additional manpower allowed ISIS to mount an attack on a JN headquarters

building in eastern Raqqa, located at the Oweis al-Qarni Shrine, on January 13.⁴² The following day ISIS secured full control over the city and reached besieged fighters in the Governor's Palace. The quick advance was made possible in part by an arrangement with *salafi* Ahrar al-Sham, who agreed to leave the city in order to prevent additional casualties.⁴³ Among ISIS's first acts upon seizing Raqqa was executing Abu Saad al-Hadrami, the prominent JN Emir in Raqqa who had been imprisoned by ISIS since September, 2013, along with roughly 100 other prisoners.⁴⁴

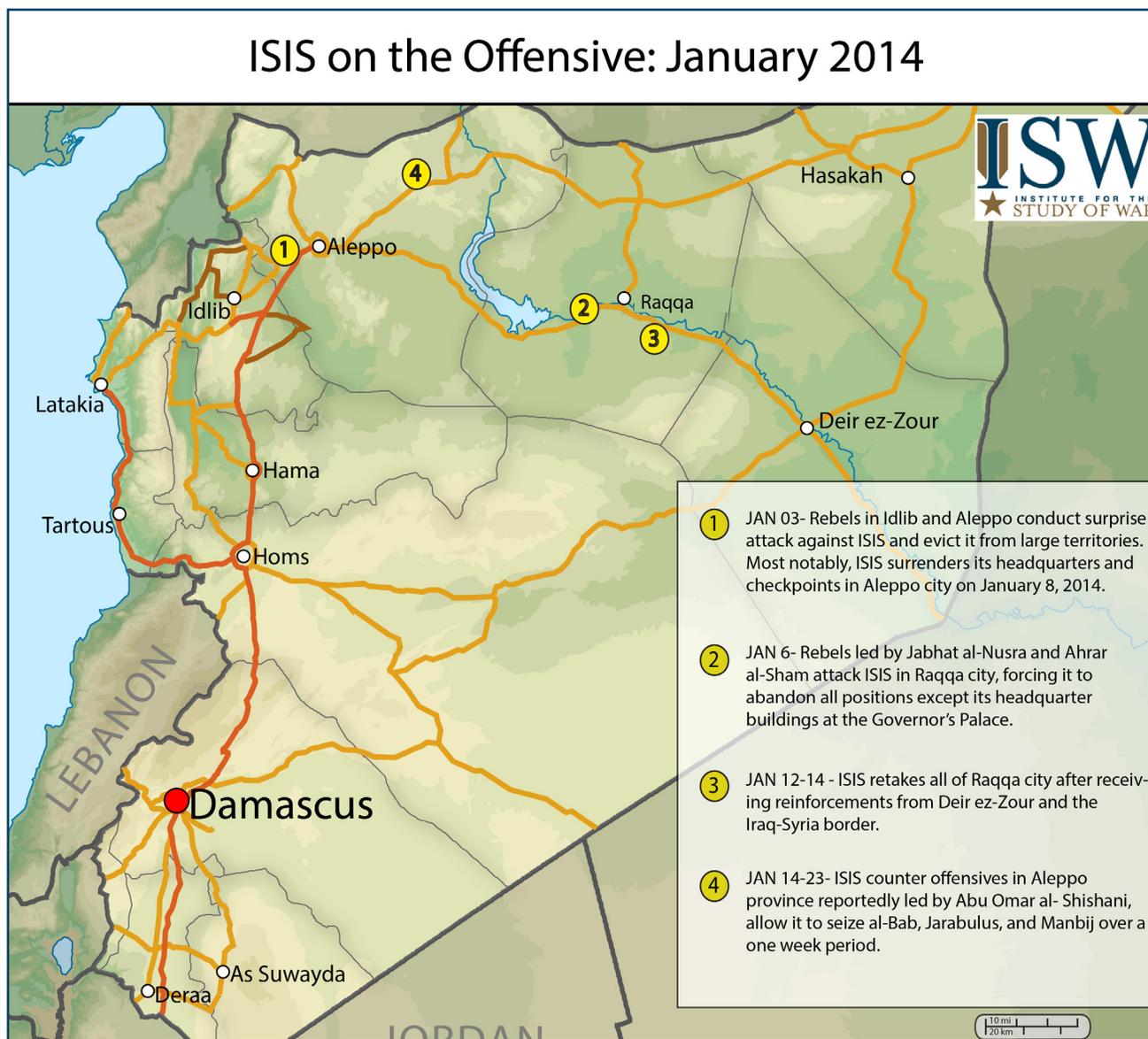
ISIS also retook towns outside of Raqqa city during this period. After regaining control over Tal Abyad from Ahrar al-Sham on January 13, ISIS reportedly executed the remaining Ahrar al-Sham fighters and burned their homes.⁴⁵ On January 14, ISIS reentered Taqba, just west of Raqqa city, after Liwa al-Tawhid fighters agreed to cede the area.⁴⁶ Al-Bab, in northeastern Aleppo province on the road to the Turkish border, fell also on January 14 to fighters under the command of senior ISIS emir Abu Omar al-Shishani.⁴⁷ It is likely that some of the troop strength for the al-Bab assault was drawn from ISIS fighters who had recently withdrawn from Aleppo city.

Now with unparalleled control over Raqqa city, on January 21 ISIS issued its first round of religious decrees since retaking the city. New regulations included bans on smoking and dress requirements for women.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, ISIS continued pressuring the remaining opposition groups north of Raqqa city, near the regime's 17th Division, prompting first Ahrar al-Sham and then local group Jabhat Thuwar Raqqa to surrender their positions and retreat from the area.⁴⁹

By January 23, Lebanese *al-Akhbar* reported basic services had been restored to Raqqa and the city had resumed daily business.⁵⁰ The same day, ISIS forces led by Abu Omar al-Shishani seized Manbij in northeastern Aleppo province, after reportedly receiving reinforcements from Raqqa city.⁵¹ This indicates ISIS no longer felt threatened by other rebel groups in Raqqa city and had additional manpower on hand it could allocate to Manbij.

THE CONTEXT OF THE FALL OF RAQQA

The ISIS response to the rebel uprising was sophisticated, well-executed, and conducted in parallel to a large ISIS offensive operation in Fallujah, Iraq. The organization managed, in many cases nearly bloodlessly, to withdraw forces quickly from multiple fronts and array them defensively in strategic locations. From these staging areas, ISIS undertook



offensive operations to reassert itself in northern and eastern Syria. If reports are true that ISIS sent reinforcements from Raqqa city to Manbij on January 23, then it was able to transition from defense to offense in fewer than 10 days, a short operational pause. ISIS withdrawal from Idlib and Latakia provinces, although it occurred later in March 2014,⁵² was also largely bloodless. This explanation, however, risks giving too little weight to the extent of ISIS dominance in Raqqa city before the rebel uprising in January 2014. When ISIS finally established sole control of Raqqa city, it was not merely the result of a single successful military campaign. Rather, ISIS's seizure was the culmination of a months-long process of gradual intimidation and disenfranchisement of rivals in Raqqa.

Since January, ISIS has continued to maintain relative dominance over Raqqa city and other Syrian territories behind ISIS front lines. In late June 2014, ISIS staged a large military parade inside Raqqa to showcase its capabilities. Many of the vehicles participating in the parade were tanks and U.S. Humvees first seized in Iraqi territory.⁵³ In addition, ISIS has erected strict checkpoints around every entrance to Raqqa city. ISIS members reportedly check every entering vehicle to ensure compliance with ISIS shari'a standards as well as to ensure fighters from other factions are prohibited from entering the city.⁵⁴

Most importantly, however, ISIS has capitalized on its sole dominance of Syrian towns by expanding its governance operations. ISIS now maintains offices in its major towns

that manage almost every aspect of administrative and service-oriented operations, which the following section will detail. Establishing governance structures is one of the most important reasons ISIS attempts to take sole control over towns in the furtherance of its vision for its Caliphate. Clearly there are military benefits to this as well, such as creating safe havens and secure staging grounds for future attacks. For ISIS, however, political control is equally important. Although JN has successfully cooperated with other groups and organizations to implement governance, the ISIS project is more ambitious and exclusionary. To maximize the success of its initiatives, ISIS must establish military dominance. Indeed, military conquest is one of the key ways ISIS legitimizes itself. Once that is accomplished, ISIS is able to implement its program, the best example of which can be seen in Raqqa.

ISIS GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

In Raqqa and elsewhere, showcased through ISIS social media, ISIS divides governance into two broad categories: administration and Muslim services. Islamic outreach, Shari'a institutes, elementary education, law enforcement (both local and religious), courts, recruitment, and tribal relations fall under the administrative category. The provision of services, including humanitarian aid, bakeries, water and electricity falls under what ISIS calls the "Department of Muslim Services."⁵⁵

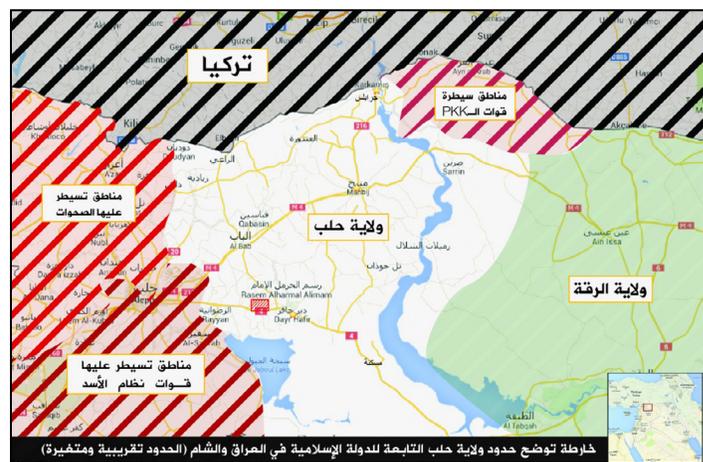
The level of sophistication of the governance programs that appear in a given area are determined most directly by ISIS's level of control over that area. Where ISIS maintains greater dominance, it tends to deploy more sophisticated governance, making a substantial investment in developing lasting institutions. Raqqa city is an example of a town that ISIS fully controls and in which it has demonstrated its most fully-formed governance programs. Where ISIS has not yet established full dominance, it tends to display less sophisticated governance. For example, ISIS currently pursues limited governance in Deir ez-Zour⁵⁶ province because it is engaged in an active military campaign.⁵⁷ This may change however, as ISIS succeeds in eliminating competition in Deir ez-Zour city and other towns in the province.⁵⁸

Which types of governance programs appear in an area is influenced most by the size and strategic location of the target area. In rural areas and in areas not strategically vital for ISIS, it tends to display more temporary and less resource-intensive governance. For example, when ISIS was conducting outreach in Latakia province during the fall of 2013, it demonstrated

a low-level governance capacity that was focused mostly on one-time religious outreach programs⁵⁹ and the provision of humanitarian aid.⁶⁰ Latakia was an important province for ISIS, as it provided access to the Alawite homeland, but it was not strategically vital to the ISIS military campaign in Syria and it did not contain a large population. Therefore, despite its relative freedom of movement in the northern reaches of Latakia, ISIS governance was limited in Latakia.

In urban and centrally-located areas, on the other hand, ISIS tends to develop more robust governance structures. In Aleppo city in the fall of 2013, for example, ISIS created a large organization to undertake major infrastructure projects.⁶¹ Aleppo is Syria's largest city and it is located in northern Syria proximate to a number of border crossings. Despite not exhibiting full control over the city, ISIS pursued a number of programs in Aleppo such as an electricity office and a traffic office.⁶²

In order to administer the territory under its control, ISIS has implemented a *Wilayat* system. The word *wilaya(t)* means "state" or "mandate" in Arabic. ISIS uses a *Wilayat* system to divide its territory in Syria and Iraq. In Aleppo and Raqqa, *Wilayat* actually refers to bounded territory defended by ISIS, but in other areas it can refer simply to terrain in which ISIS is active. Within the *Wilayat* are *Qata'a(t)*, or sectors, which divide territory even further. When ISIS refers to particular *Wilayat*, such as Aleppo, it does not include all the territory within Aleppo Province, only territory in which it claims to be active or maintains control.⁶³ For example, ISIS has created a *Wilayat* Damascus despite only maintaining control over a small pocket of rural territory.⁶⁴ The *Wilayat* system has been referred to by ISIS in social media posts and official statements since mid-2013,⁶⁵ but the structure has become more formalized



ISIS Provincial Governance in Syria as of July 2014.⁶⁶

in 2014 since ISIS has expanded its governance activities in Syria in particular.

ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS

Religious Outreach and Proselytization (Da'wa)

ISIS conducts religious outreach as one of its first actions upon entering territory. In many cases, this takes the form of official *Da'wa* events. In Arabic, *al-Da'wa* literally means “the call,” and involves formally calling others to Islam (or in this case, to ISIS’s particular brand of Islam). The *Da'wa* events, complete with tents, Quranic recitations, and religious sermons are designed to educate participants about ISIS core beliefs. In other cases, outreach is more limited and less visible; it may involve only disseminating pamphlets or hosting small-group study sessions at local mosques. *Da'wa* events can be single sessions and require little investment in resources, so it is a logical first choice for ISIS when it seeks to establish a foothold in a particular area. In addition, because the *Da'wa* events are unthreatening and often involve providing food and drink to the population, they are unlikely to cause a popular backlash against ISIS.

In Aleppo, *Da'wa* sessions were held as early as June 2013, in al-Bab, Manbij, Darat Izza, and other areas, corresponding



*An ISIS member hands out religious pamphlets to children and residents during a Da'wa session in Aleppo province in the summer of 2013.*⁶⁷

with the start of Ramadan.⁶⁸ ISIS also held Quran recitation competitions in Azaz, another northern Aleppo town, over the same period.⁶⁹ In early July 2013, *al-Furqan*, a top ISIS media outlet, devoted two full length productions in its “Messages from the Land of Epic Battles” series to *Da'wa* events in Aleppo province.⁷⁰ ISIS was still a relatively weak and unwelcome force in northern Syria, as evidenced by

multiple anti-ISIS demonstrations in the towns mentioned,⁷¹ so it is significant that ISIS chose to pursue religious outreach first, over other governance-related alternatives. ISIS also conducted religious outreach in Raqqa, hosting Quranic memorization workshops in June, 2013.⁷² However, because of the complexity of the relationship between ISIS and JN during this period, it is difficult to determine the extent of ISIS outreach activities in the early summer of 2013.

Since ISIS expanded its governance activities in January 2014, it has held frequent *Da'wa* sessions across *Wilayat Aleppo*⁷³ and *Wilayat Raqqa*,⁷⁴ its two most important and well developed territories. As previously mentioned, ISIS maintains a *Da'wa* headquarters building in Raqqa city in a confiscated Armenian church. In *Wilayat Aleppo*, which contains more towns and a greater population than *Wilayat Raqqa*, ISIS has claimed to have 11 separate *Da'wa* offices.⁷⁵

Another important part of ISIS’s religious outreach program is its management of Shari’a institutes. According to ISIS self-reporting, Shari’a institutes are some of the most common ISIS institutions within its territory. In June 2014, ISIS claimed to have established 22 Shari’a institutes in Aleppo province alone.⁷⁶ In practice, the institutes function much like adult education centers, providing a space where Muslims can learn about “matters of their religion.”⁷⁷ ISIS has also established specialized institutes for women only. One institute for women in Manbij was decorated with flowers and light colors, with the phrase “the Hijab is an obligation like Prayer” written in bolded black lettering.⁷⁸

Religious Police (al-Hisba)

The third element of ISIS’s shari’a administration program is its religious police. Unlike local police forces, *al-Hisba* have a mandate to “promote virtue and prevent vice to dry up sources of evil, prevent the manifestation of disobedience, and urge



*Armenian Church converted into ISIS Da'wa Headquarters in Raqqa city.*⁷⁹

Muslims towards well-being.”⁸⁰ A similar organization, known as *al-mutawa*, currently exists in Saudi Arabia, and was infamous for carrying clubs in order to beat shari‘a violators until this practice was discontinued. *Al-Furqan Foundation* outlined some of the main duties of *al-Hisba* in a May 28, 2014, video entitled “The Best Ummah.”⁸¹ *Al-Hisba* members were filmed reminding Muslims to attend Friday prayers, enforcing the prohibition on business transactions during prayer time, and overseeing the demolition of “polytheistic monuments” such as statues. The video also shows *al-Hisba* members responding to a call they received about a stash of illicit drugs hidden in a “den of corruption.”⁸²

Al-Hisba members are also responsible for documenting alleged violations of shari‘a in order to “rectify issues and find suitable solutions.”⁸³ At the religious police headquarters building in Raqqa, an ISIS member claimed his office had documented more than 470 violations in the first month of operations.⁸⁴ The violations were organized graphically, and delineated by type of violation, indicates a detailed record-keeping system. Serious violations such as insulting God (there were five reported) were all referred to an Islamic court for adjudication. ISIS also recorded the number of *al-Hisba* patrols on a daily basis. During the one-week period shown on-screen, ISIS conducted 60 patrols, averaging between 9 and 10 per day.⁸⁵ *Al-Hisba* patrol vehicles, which are painted and branded with an ISIS logo, are also outfitted with loudspeakers.⁸⁶ Activists in Raqqa report that *al-Hisba* patrols often broadcast religious guidance over the loudspeakers during patrols.⁸⁷ Once a violations report has been compiled, it is then sent to the *Wilayat* leadership on a weekly basis.⁸⁸

According to ISIS, there are currently 10 *al-Hisba* headquarters buildings in Aleppo province alone,⁸⁹ and likely additional headquarters in Raqqa province as well.⁹⁰ Judging by the meticulous nature of ISIS reporting on *al-Hisba* activities and the volume of patrols it is able to send out, ISIS has made a substantial investment in the *al-Hisba* infrastructure both in Aleppo and Raqqa provinces. The program, more than nearly any of ISIS’s other governance programs, directly infringes on the lives of civilians and violently punishes them if they fail to conform. In that sense, *al-Hisba* is one of ISIS’s most ambitious methods of governance because it risks alienating entire civilian populations. This explains why a widespread *al-Hisba* presence was not established in both Aleppo and Raqqa until the spring of 2014. ISIS would have wanted to establish firm territorial control and boost popular support for itself with other governance activities before instituting a robust *al-Hisba* program.

More than anything, the widespread presence of *al-Hisba* shows how deeply ISIS is concerned about establishing and maintaining religious legitimacy. It would have been much less resource intensive for ISIS to create only one police force inside Syria, or even to create two police forces occupying the same building. Instead, ISIS devoted resources towards the development of a specialized force just to uphold shari‘a. The two forces, *al-Hisba* and the local police, fall under completely separate jurisdictions, and there are no indications that they have an overlap in personnel.⁹¹



A religious patrol enters a Syrian market to ensure compliance with ISIS religious standards.

Related to the religious police and enforcement of Shari‘a is the issue of the treatment of minorities, specifically Christians who live under ISIS’s rule. Although the vast majority of non-Muslims have already fled ISIS-controlled areas, the small number of religious minorities remaining are subject to an Islamic *dhimmi* pact. Although historically the *dhimmi* status was used as a protection for religious minorities, in the case of Raqqa city it has been used to disenfranchise minorities. Instituted February 26, 2014, at the express command of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the *dhimmi* pact places a number of restrictions on Christians.⁹² In addition to being prohibited from repairing or building new houses of worship, Christians in Raqqa cannot display any aspect of their religion outside churches, they cannot disparage Islam in any way, and they cannot display any religious symbols in public places. Most importantly, Christians must pay *jizya*, a form of taxation on non-Muslims, twice per year, in order to be permitted to live in Raqqa city. Like *al-Hisba*, instituting a *dhimmi* pact is an ambitious undertaking which required uncontested control of Raqqa city. The pact also risks drawing the attention of the larger Christian community as well as the international community.

Taken together, ISIS's *Da'wa* offices, Shari'a institutes, and *al-Hisba* stations constitute what ISIS calls its shari'a Department. If its self-reporting is accurate, the shari'a Department currently maintains 43 separate offices in Aleppo province alone, and likely a lower number in Raqqa province (due to population). This is a tremendous demonstration of ISIS capacity and points to the central role that shari'a plays in ISIS's long term Caliphate vision. Currently, there is not a single other governance area which manages as many offices as the shari'a Department, or even comes close.

Education (*al-Ta'lim*)

Education outreach is another cornerstone of ISIS's governance campaign, and is the most effective method for influencing children. ISIS educational curriculum is focused on the Islamic sciences, such as study of the Quran, rather than physics or mathematics.⁹³ There is no evidence of instruction in secular subjects or in any technical skills, nor is there any indication of ISIS formal schooling beyond the elementary level as of July 2014. A program of study at a mosque in Jarablus, northeastern Aleppo, posted online on March 10, 2014 indicates a specific focus on *aqida* (creed), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *sira* (life of the Prophet).⁹⁴

Unlike *Da'wa* events, which ISIS conducts soon after announcing its presence in a town, a concerted education

program requires access to consistent human and material resources. ISIS only reopens classrooms and organizes lesson plans if it is making a substantial investment in governing that space. In areas where ISIS chooses not to pursue a long-term educational plan, it connects with children through one-off *Da'wa* events, which are significantly less resource intensive. For example, in late 2013, ISIS delivered targeted religious lessons to groups of fifteen to thirty boys at events where food aid was also distributed in Latakia.⁹⁵ These one-time outdoor events in Latakia are representative of ISIS's relatively restrained governance strategies in those provinces in contrast to Raqqa and Aleppo provinces, where ISIS manages a much larger population of students in multiple cities.

Some of the first evidence of the scale of ISIS educational programming comes from a video released by *al-Furqan* on September 6, 2013, depicting an entire lesson on the Quran taught by a *sheikh* in Raqqah city identified as Abu Omar "the Syrian." Participating in the lesson were nearly 50 children, all identified by a black ISIS headband and all clutching a personal Quran.⁹⁶ Written on a nearby dry-erase board were priorities for the lesson, which included the reasons for praying, how to pray, and the importance of expressiveness in prayer. ISIS also developed the capacity to administer schools in Aleppo province during the fall of 2013. Photos spread by activists in the province in September show a schoolhouse purportedly managed by ISIS, including backpacks for



Children attend a Quran lesson in Aleppo.¹⁰³

students branded with the ISIS logo.⁹⁷ In December 2013, ISIS in Raqqa confirmed it had established at least one dedicated educational facility when it posted a picture of the facility to Twitter.⁹⁸

Since January 2014, ISIS has expanded the reach of its educational programs even more. In April, its Raqqa branch provided picture evidence of a new school it had founded in Raqqa city.⁹⁹ The school was advertised as a school for “high achievers,” indicating it is highly specialized. If ISIS has the capacity to re-open specialized schools, it likely already manages a core number of traditional schools as well. In March 2014, a well-known unofficial ISIS account in Raqqa even solicited resumes from prospective teachers in “various fields and disciplines” to fill teaching vacancies in the city. These projects are resource intensive, requiring dedicated school buildings, school supplies, and multiple teachers. Many ISIS schools have been adapted from existing Syrian schools, as evidenced by the uniform appearance of desks, wall-mounted chalk boards, and the physical layout of the buildings.¹⁰⁰ ISIS also provides short textbooks to enrolled students.¹⁰¹ Dedicated schools support larger class sizes, in some instances approximately sixty students being taught by a single teacher.¹⁰²

The ISIS educational program in Syria reaffirms the organization’s long term strategy to govern Syrian territory. ISIS does have other motivations for claiming to operate schools in Syria, such as winning local support and attracting followers. However, both ISIS rhetoric and the resources it has devoted to educational programming suggest its core motivation is to train the next generation of ISIS members, the actual citizenry of the Caliphate. ISIS sees itself not as a terrorist organization indoctrinating children, but as a sovereign state educating its citizens. With that said, the apparent lack of technical training or other professional training programs may be a weakness in ISIS long-term education strategy. In the short and medium term, ISIS may be able to meet its substantial technical requirements with local recruits (either voluntarily or under duress) and foreign emigrants who settle in Syria. However, in order to effectively govern Syrian territory over the long term, ISIS must provide education in areas outside the Islamic sciences.

Courts

The establishment of Islamic courts is another first priority for ISIS as it seeks to govern a space. Instituting Islamic law as the sole source of authority is a major component of ISIS’s Caliphate vision. Although ISIS legal rulings, which

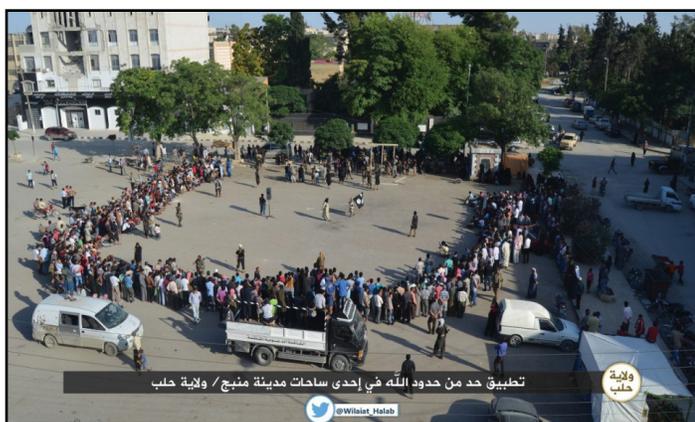
are based on the most uncompromising form of shari’a, are likely to engender negative sentiments within the population in the long term, in the short and medium term they may be relatively popular. Idlib civilians interviewed about the court system spoke highly of its rulings in an ISIS video posted in November 2013.¹⁰⁴ Although many among the Syrian population do not share ISIS’s beliefs, ISIS courts are often less subject to corruption than more secular courts. Court systems established by other rebel groups are more likely to be temporary, ad hoc, and subject to competing interpretations of Islamic law. For this reason, ISIS sees establishing Islamic courts as a relatively innocuous act, and will pursue them even in areas it does not fully control.

As ISIS extended its influence in northern Syria over the summer of 2013, it established Islamic courts in a number of towns. One of the first documented ISIS Islamic courts appeared in Jarablus, northern Aleppo province, in early July 2013.¹⁰⁵ By November, the court system had expanded into Idlib province. During a November 2013, *al-Furqan* interview with an ISIS judge in al-Dana, Idlib, the judge discusses how ISIS was able to fill a major vacuum in the area after establishing a court system.¹⁰⁶ He implies that when ISIS entered the area of al-Dana, crime and looting were a major problem, but after rulings from the court the area saw a major drop in crime. In a later interview with a civilian outside the courthouse, the man claimed he had traveled from nearby Darat Izza in Aleppo province to ask for a ruling.¹⁰⁷ Although it is important to consider these types of reports within the context of ISIS propaganda and messaging, the narrative presented by ISIS is not altogether false. It is important not to underestimate the extent to which residents of war torn areas may see the imposition of any law and order, even ISIS’s particularly strict brand of shari’a, as an improvement from a lawless, chaotic state. ISIS has allocated tremendous resources and personnel to imposing its state vision.

By the spring of 2014, ISIS had expanded the scope of its court system. Although it had been evicted from much of Latakia, Idlib, and Aleppo city, ISIS strengthened its courts in other areas such as Aleppo province and Raqqa city. In Aleppo, ISIS claims to have established five separate courthouses (one head courthouse and the rest sub-courthouses) across the province.¹⁰⁸ ISIS has also established specialized courthouse offices with dedicated employees. For example, in an April 6, 2014 video release by *al-Furqan*, one judge is identified as an employee of the office of personal dispute resolution.¹⁰⁹ In a follow up interview with one of the beneficiaries of the office, the man claims ISIS judges had ruled in his favor in a personal dispute in which he had been assaulted by another man. Later in the video release, *al-Furqan* also conducts an

interview with a judge identified as an employee of the office of “personal cases.” According to the judge, he rules on cases dealing with divorce and inheritance issues.¹¹⁰

With ISIS’s strengthened judicial system also came an increase in more serious forms of punishment, known as *hudud*, which are reserved for the most egregious offenses under Islamic law. In Raqqa especially, *hudud* are carried out on a weekly basis, sometimes in the form of public executions in Raqqa’s main square.¹¹¹ In February, 2014, a well-known ISIS account was deactivated for live-tweeting a *hudud* punishment in Raqqa city in the form of the amputation of a thief’s hand.¹¹² *Hudud* punishments have also been documented in Aleppo province, in al-Bab,¹¹³ Manbij,¹¹⁴ Maskana,¹¹⁵ and Deir Hafer.¹¹⁶



ISIS carries out *hudud* punishments in the town square in Manbij, Aleppo province.

Another facet of the ISIS court system is known as the “Court of Grievances” and functions similar to a complaints office. These courts have been documented in some form in both Raqqa and Aleppo provinces during the spring of 2014.¹¹⁸ Members of the population who have grievances against either ISIS fighters or local emirs may present a claim at the office. The ISIS court in Tal Abyad, in northern Raqqa, even invited members of the community to come forward with complaints at a designated time each week.¹¹⁹

Both the expanding number of issues ISIS courts have claimed to adjudicate and the increasing severity of punishments handed down indicate that ISIS is becoming secure in its position vis-à-vis the population. By setting up multiple specialized offices tailored to specific issues such as divorce or complaints against fighters, ISIS is making a large resource investment in the judiciary branch. In contrast to temporary court systems backed by Syrian rebel groups,¹²⁰ ISIS actually believes its legal rulings can form lasting judicial institutions in Syria. Another indicator that ISIS feels more secure is

the large number of *hudud* punishments recorded since early 2014. The punishments, even if carried out against a known criminal, are likely to produce a backlash both from local Syrians and from the international community.

Local Police

In order to carry out its legal rulings, ISIS maintains a local police force in Aleppo and Raqqa provinces. According to a provincial report for Aleppo released in June, 2014, the main function of the police forces is to serve as the “executive body for the court.”¹²¹ Additionally, the police forces are tasked with maintaining internal security through the deployment of regular patrols inside towns. According to a well-known unofficial ISIS account, ISIS provides local police patrols with dedicated vehicles as well as branded uniforms.¹²² The local police, as previously mentioned, fall under a completely different jurisdiction than ISIS religious police. ISIS currently claims to maintain 10 police stations in Aleppo province,¹²³ with additional offices in Raqqa province.

Despite ISIS claims that its officers “do not rule on any case, but rather transfer cases to the court,” the reality is that extrajudicial detainment and torture are commonplace in ISIS-held territory. According to a report released by Amnesty International in December 2013, ISIS maintains at least seven large detention facilities throughout Raqqa and Aleppo provinces.¹²⁴ Although ISIS prisons in Aleppo city were surrendered to other rebel forces in January 2014, ISIS has likely established new facilities in the meantime. Inside its detention centers ISIS holds common criminals who have been sentenced by its judicial branch, but it also detains political opponents, activists, and even children as young as eight years old.¹²⁵ On April 28, 2014, an activist movement in Raqqa city publicized a protest by women demanding to know the fate of their male family members, who had been detained by ISIS for some time.¹²⁶

The continued presence of large-scale ISIS detention facilities throughout its territory underscores the grim reality of the organization; one that ISIS attempts to conceal in its official publications. Behind ISIS messaging about its just court system and impartial officers of the law lies a brutal organization that can leave no room for political, religious, or civil dissent. ISIS may claim that its police officers do not arbitrarily detain civilians, but local activists and international organizations such as Amnesty International continue to report human rights violations. After being the target of a rebel uprising against it in January 2014, ISIS cannot afford to allow serious dissent among the population.

Office of Recruitment

ISIS maintains multiple offices of recruitment for military service in Aleppo province and likely other areas as well.¹²⁷ The office of recruitment “welcomes any Muslim that wants to enter the fighting corps of the army of the Islamic State.” One office is located in al-Bab, northern Aleppo, conveniently close to the Turkish border as well as to the front lines of fighting with the regime and other rebel groups.¹²⁸ The recruitment offices handle registration of potential candidates, who are then put through the phases of “shari’a and military preparation” before being sent to the battlefield. It is likely that some candidates are sent to ISIS training camps spread throughout Syria, to undergo more intensive training. ISIS also maintains dedicated training camps for kids, including one named “Cubs of Zaraqawi” in the Eastern Ghouta region of Damascus.¹²⁹

Unlike a typical jihadist group, ISIS is openly broadcasting the locations of its recruitment centers in Syria. This is because ISIS sees itself not as a terrorist organization, but as an actual state attempting to recruit citizens into its standing army. Although ISIS likely recruits some of its members in secret to protect sensitive information, a portion of its recruitment drive in Syria is being conducted completely in the open. One reason ISIS has chosen to publicize its recruiting offices is that it aims to normalize its “fighting corps” among civilians. Military service members are often held in high regard in traditional states, and ISIS would like to create a similar relationship between its civilian population and its army. It is also important to consider the possibility that ISIS is using forced conscription to recruit military-age males. ISIS is known to use intimidation tactics among the civilian population, and residents may be fearful of the consequences of not enlisting at the recruitment centers.



Baqia Foundation films recruits at the Zaraqawi Cubs Training Camp in the Eastern Ghouta region of Damascus.¹³⁰

Public Relations / Tribal Affairs

In Aleppo province, ISIS claims to operate a bureau of public relations and tribal affairs.¹³¹ The office “responds to the demands of the citizenry, liaises with community elders, and conducts tribal outreach.” Tribal relations have been particularly important for ISIS recently, and the group’s most recent English-language periodical entitled *Dabiq* discusses Aleppo tribal outreach extensively. By establishing and officially naming a Public Relations / Tribal Affairs office, ISIS has again indicated its intent to create lasting institutions in Syria. Whereas other armed groups no doubt conduct significant outreach to tribal confederations and other key stakeholders, they do not consider this part of a specific “department.” ISIS, on the other hand, wants to portray itself as a fully formed polity with administrative offices.

ISLAMIC SERVICES

Providing for the Muslim community of the Caliphate is an integral part of the long-term strategy. Towards that end, ISIS has pursued a broad range of aid and infrastructure projects in almost every city it has entered. Aid projects especially are unlikely to be met with resistance from the local population, particularly if that population cannot meet its basic needs independently. ISIS was able to provide aid across Syria during the latter half of 2013, in Latakia,¹³² Damascus,¹³³ Deir ez-Zour,¹³⁴ and Idlib,¹³⁵ in addition to core provinces Aleppo and Raqqa.

These projects began to emerge on a small scale over the summer of 2013 as ISIS moved into new terrain, and on a larger scale in Aleppo city, with the establishment of the Islamic Administration of Public Service (IAPS) in the late spring.¹³⁶ IAPS, along with its later iterations in Aleppo province and Raqqa city, have an expansive mandate covering dozens of different services provided to the Muslim community. *Al-Furqan* provided an in-depth look at IAPS in a December 12, 2013, release. The production, entitled “Services *al-Dawla* Provides,” includes interviews with the heads of some of IAPS’s main offices: bakeries, cleanliness and sanitation, electricity, and transportation. Additionally, videos published by IAPS itself demonstrate the large scale of its operations in Aleppo city, where it was engaged in repairing water mains,¹³⁷ fixing power lines,¹³⁸ operating bread factories,¹³⁹ manning hospitals,¹⁴⁰ conducting traffic,¹⁴¹ and clearing debris from roads,¹⁴² among other undertakings.

Although IAPS was shut down in January 2014 as ISIS surrendered its bases inside Aleppo city, ISIS has since



The official logo of the now-defunct Islamic Administration of Public Services (IAPS).



A local worker repairing a sewer line wears a uniform provided by IAPS.

regenerated and improved its capacity to pursue infrastructure and aid projects in the province. According to a June 2014, ISIS report on its operations in Aleppo, the organization currently maintains seven different service branches in the province, including a labor and employment office.¹⁴³ In Raqqa, ISIS's largest single governance undertaking, it has maintained a similar structure since at least March, 2014.¹⁴⁴

The more complex infrastructure projects demand significant resources from ISIS, particularly skilled personnel and heavy machinery. These projects often require technical expertise needed to manipulate existing electrical infrastructure,¹⁴⁵ locate major water lines,¹⁴⁶ or operate heavy machinery.¹⁴⁷ The use of heavy machinery, including cherry pickers,¹⁴⁸ bulldozers,¹⁴⁹ cranes,¹⁵⁰ backhoes,¹⁵¹ and water trucks,¹⁵² requires a major investment to transport and maintain. In terms of personnel requirements, this indicates ISIS is either recruiting skilled workers internationally or using local laborers with existing skills. Again, these may be local laborers who volunteered or were forced into service. According to employees in Raqqa interviewed by the *New York Times*, ISIS

frequently replaces local management with ISIS personnel in order to ensure compliance.¹⁵³ The ISIS managers, who are often non-Syrians, threaten the skilled workforce to prevent them from leaving their jobs. This mechanism allows ISIS to undertake technically demanding infrastructure-related projects without having to devote much of its own manpower resources.

Like its administrative functions, ISIS prioritizes the provision of certain services over others for a variety of



ISIS repairs the electricity lines in al-Bab sector of Wilayat Aleppo.¹⁵⁴

reasons. In areas where it is militarily dominant, ISIS is more likely to open permanent Muslim services offices. In Raqqa city, for example, ISIS has a large services headquarters building in the center of town. ISIS also tends to pursue more ambitious and resource intensive service projects in areas with larger populations. For example, even though ISIS controls an expanding swath of territory in the Deir ez-Zour countryside, this area does not have enough residents to justify a large investment in infrastructure. For this reason, in rural areas of Syria ISIS is more likely to provide food and gasoline rather than infrastructure repair.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian assistance is normally the first exposure a local population has to ISIS's Muslim Services division. Many times this aid, in the form of food, clothing, gasoline, or medical services, is pursued in concert with early forms of administrative governance such as *Da'wa* meetings. Another reason ISIS provides humanitarian aid early on is that it is an easy way to facilitate a relationship of dependency on ISIS. If ISIS is able to provide assistance to those who would not get assistance otherwise, or even if it is able to provide below-market rates to civilians who are suffering financially, ISIS can gradually establish a monopoly over critical services. In

Raqqa, this has largely been the case since January 2014, with ISIS controlling bread factories and other critical services.

In areas with an established and enduring ISIS presence, ISIS focuses on lowering costs over direct charity. In Aleppo, before its withdrawal in January 2014, ISIS claimed to provide lower food prices for families shopping in certain stores¹⁵⁵ and opened at least one convenience store through the IAPS.¹⁵⁶ On March 24, 2014, ISIS advertised reduced-price of beef for the “poor and needy” in Maskana, in southern Aleppo province.¹⁵⁷ Civilians report ISIS has made bread cheaper and more readily available in Raqqa city as well.¹⁵⁸ These reduced prices may reflect ISIS’s control over means of production, threats towards business owners, or direct subsidy, though a combination of all three is the most likely.

ISIS structures many of these programs as means of ensuring longevity as well, by creating a dependence on ISIS for necessities. In Raqqa, ISIS has already established itself as the primary source of wheat, oil, and foreign currency by controlling the flow of goods through the city¹⁵⁹ and producing fuel and bread on its own. ISIS has also signaled an interest in controlling medical services by briefly running a public hospital in Idlib¹⁶⁰ and providing free medical care in Jarablus.¹⁶¹

Bakeries

Industrial bread factories are critical supply elements of ISIS’s aid campaigns because they are the cheapest and most efficient way of feeding large urban populations. ISIS at one point controlled at least three industrial bakeries, with at least one in Aleppo¹⁶² and another in Raqqa.¹⁶³ IAPS in Aleppo alleged its bakery was capable of producing upwards of 10,000 flatbreads an hour.¹⁶⁴ The bakeries require a significant personnel investment from ISIS; approximately sixteen people can be seen working in the bakery and the high output likely requires a number of maintenance and logistics personnel.¹⁶⁵ Staff is a mix of local Syrians¹⁶⁶ with supervision from ISIS personnel.¹⁶⁷

Most of the bread is directed towards ISIS-subsidized markets in Raqqa,¹⁶⁸ though it has been distributed for free in Aleppo province.¹⁶⁹ It is logical to assume ISIS also uses the bakeries to feed its fighters on the front lines. However, based on the distance between ISIS bakeries and distribution centers, this is probably not the case. ISIS tends to distribute bread quite close to where it operates bakeries, indicating that the bread it produces likely has a short shelf-life. For that reason it is likely to be an ineffective means of supplying ISIS personnel



*IAPS workers man an ISIS-administered bakery in Aleppo.*¹⁷⁰

located outside the immediate vicinity. The bakeries’ main purpose is providing a common staple food to the nearby population.

Water and Electricity

Some of ISIS’s most ambitious service-oriented projects have focused around water and electricity. In addition to repairing sewage lines, power lines, and electrical power stations in Aleppo and Raqqa provinces, ISIS also manages three dams and two power plants.¹⁷¹ ISIS placed these facilities on a list of “vitally important locations” in a recently released report on Aleppo province.¹⁷² Tabqa Dam in Raqqa province has housed one of ISIS’s largest detention facilities since 2013, and may serve as a military headquarters location as well. In addition to the military value in a fortified position such as a dam, the facilities also allow ISIS to provide water and electricity on an industrial scale. This further enforces the ISIS narrative that it is a Caliphate rather than a rebel group, and that it intends to govern Syrian territory over the long term. However, there are indications that lack of technical capability may be creating damaging and unanticipated consequences. ISIS’s use of the dam to ensure electricity in its areas of control has caused water levels in the adjacent Lake Assad to drop precipitously, threatening drinking water supplies for areas of Aleppo and Raqqa provinces.¹⁷³

In Aleppo province, just west of Kuweiris Airbase, ISIS has managed an entire thermal power plant complex since November 2013.¹⁷⁴ Footage released by IAPS shows the facility to be apparently clean, orderly, and fully operational, and from the outside the building housing the thermal power plant is enormous, containing five smokestacks.¹⁷⁵ This is likely one of ISIS’s largest governance undertakings, as operating the plant requires dozens of dedicated employees



ISIS tours a captured thermal power plant east of Aleppo city in the fall of 2013.

and a high level of technical expertise. ISIS would have no reason to undertake such a large project if it did not expect to remain in the area for an extended period of time.

Future Areas of Expansion for ISIS Governance

In parts of Syria, ISIS has achieved a relatively sophisticated level of governance, especially in *Wilayat* Raqqa and Aleppo, where it maintains a wide variety of administrative and service-related offices. These range from religious enforcement to adjudication of disputes to infrastructure repair to humanitarian aid. In other cities in Syria which are either in rural areas or not fully controlled by ISIS, ISIS does not develop the full spectrum of its governance activities. Instead, it focuses on less intrusive and more innocuous forms of governance both in the administrative and service-oriented categories. In Homs, Damascus, Deir ez-Zour, and Hasaka, ISIS governance activities include *Da'wa* events, humanitarian aid, and limited infrastructure repair.

As ISIS continues to expand in Syria – in Deir ez-Zour, western Aleppo Province, and other areas – it will seek to expand its governance activities as well. There are already early indications of this expansion, as evidenced by large humanitarian aid projects coinciding with Ramadan in Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour. As ISIS consolidates control over Deir ez-Zour in particular, it is likely to establish more permanent offices such as courts or religious police stations.

Another area where ISIS will expand its governance is Iraq. In addition to large Ramadan events in Anbar and Ninewa provinces, ISIS has also begun operating a local police department in Mosul city. As ISIS begins to eliminate rivals in these areas, it will attempt to establish more sophisticated forms of governance. The blueprint for this process is Raqqa, and ISIS is likely to pursue a similar strategy in Iraq if it is able to set the necessary conditions.

ISIS RELATIONS WITH THE SYRIAN POPULATION

Opposition groups and JN mobilized against ISIS in northern Syria in January 2014 because of the group's assassination of rebel leaders, seizure of key terrain, and unwillingness to work with other rebel groups. Although ISIS continues to maintain a firm hold on Raqqa, its brutal treatment of political activists and civilians has spawned an online campaign known as "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently."¹⁷⁶ There is little indication the protest group has a large physical presence on the ground in Raqqa, but it has succeeded in gaining international attention and was featured in a story on CNN in May 2014.¹⁷⁷

Based on its founding document, released April 17, 2014, the movement aims, among other things, to shed light on "the marginalized province of Raqqa" and "exposed the violations and crimes against the people of Raqqa" committed by ISIS.¹⁷⁸ On April 25, 2014, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently organized a day of protest against ISIS rule.¹⁷⁹ The main driver of protest against ISIS is its detainment practices; activists assert that ISIS held more than 1,000 Syrian prisoners in Raqqa province as of April 28, 2014.¹⁸⁰ ISIS has responded harshly to the Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently campaign as well as other opposition movements and media activists. On April 17, 2014, ISIS reportedly placed a large bounty of 20 million Syrian pounds on the head of one prominent journalist who had revealed the names of ISIS's top religious and military leaders in the city.¹⁸¹

FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN ISIS GOVERNANCE POSITIONS

Unlike JN, which has shown a willingness to coopt the local population and other rebel groups in providing governance, ISIS often places foreign members in important governance roles within its organization. A general hierarchy has emerged in Raqqa city, according to a report from Agence France-Presse, with Iraqi, Saudi, and Tunisian military and religious figures occupying the top posts. Egyptian, European, Chechen, and Syrian fighters are typically assigned to posts of secondary importance.¹⁸² This hierarchy was confirmed by a *New York Times* writer who visited Raqqa in July 2014. According to interviews with Raqqa citizens who work in the ISIS governance office, ISIS's head of the Electricity Office in Raqqa is Sudanese and one hospital is administered by a Jordanian who reports up to an Egyptian manager. Additionally, ISIS regularly staffs its various checkpoints around the city with foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya.¹⁸³ There are exceptions to this structure, however, as the

provincial emir for Raqqa province as well as his top religious official are reported to be of Syrian descent.¹⁸⁴

Chechen foreign fighters are especially prevalent in Raqqa city, and are more likely to bring their families with them than other groups. Local activists claim Chechen fighters and their families frequent markets in the city. They allegedly buy the most expensive goods and carry the latest in mobile phone and computer technology.¹⁸⁵ Pictures posted by one Chechen jihadist group even shows them opening up a Russian grocery store and a Russian elementary school with courses in Russian language.¹⁸⁶ This indicates that the Chechen contingent in Raqqa city intends to settle in Raqqa city long term and does not feel that it faces external threats in the city.

Many other nationalities have begun to arrive in Raqqa as well. The foreign contingent now occupies almost every hotel in the city as well as an upscale neighborhood named al-Thukna. According to one resident cited by the *Wall Street Journal*, ISIS fighters have begun requesting that those who own extra houses make room for arriving foreigners.¹⁸⁷ Until now, reports indicate most foreigners, especially those accompanied by their families, have been largely segregated from the rest of the Syrian population. A video released by *al-Furqan* showed dozens of Kazakh emigrants living together in a large walled compound in an unidentified town in Syria.¹⁸⁸ Foreign fighters also fill administrative governance positions outside of Raqqa city. Since December 2013, social media reporting in northern Syria also suggested that foreign fighters had been present in the ISIS governance staff in Aleppo, with multiple Egyptians leading classes in Jarablus,¹⁸⁹ an ad-Dana judge identified as a foreign militant,¹⁹⁰ and Moroccan and Chechen interrogators in an Aleppo prison.¹⁹¹

One reason why foreign fighters have been segregated from local populations is the tremendous backlash against them from Syrians. Many major fighting groups to include even the hardline *salafi* Ahrar al-Sham have released statements decrying the presence of foreign fighters inside Syria.¹⁹² However, as foreign fighter families become more normalized in Raqqa and other cities, they will likely become more integrated with the local population. This fits well into ISIS's global Caliphate vision, which intends to break down pre-existing cultural and ethnic boundaries.

While foreign fighters appear to hold more administrative leadership positions than their Syrian counterparts in ISIS, in Muslim services positions the ratios appear to be more even. This may be because infrastructure projects require a technical aptitude that ISIS must necessarily draw from the local community (for the time being). In addition, local

Syrians are likely easier to co-opt into service-oriented projects, which are more innocuous and less ideological.

As the ISIS Caliphate vision matures, however, ISIS may not need to continue drawing so heavily from the local Syrian population to pursue service-related and infrastructure projects. The June 5, 2014 issue of *Dabiq*, ISIS's English-language periodical, featured calls for skilled professionals to immigrate to Syria in addition to fighters.¹⁹³ This sentiment was echoed by a July 11, 2014 *al-Hayat Media* release featuring an English-speaking Canadian.¹⁹⁴ The man, identified as Abu Muslim, said "So this is more than just fighting, this means more than just fighting. We need the engineers, we need doctors, we need professionals, we need volunteers, we need fundraising. We need everything. There is a role for everybody ... Your families will live here in safety, just like how it is back home. We have wide expanses of territory here in Syria, and we can easily find accommodation for you and your families."¹⁹⁵ These statements underscore the fact that in one sense ISIS has already adopted a post-war mentality. ISIS has already developed the military capacity to defend the borders of its territory such that it can now focus on actually populating its Caliphate with like-minded Muslims.

CONCLUSION

ISIS has functionally erased the border between Syria and Iraq and installed in its place a caliphate that extends over 300 miles from east to west. Absent a substantial campaign to defeat ISIS, the Islamic State is poised to become an enduring presence in Syria and Iraq. ISIS continues to wage concurrent military offensives in both Syria and Iraq as of July 2014. Military conquest is a key part in ISIS's long-term strategy, and it derives core legitimacy from seizing hard power assets. Thus far, it has demonstrated its capacity to capture areas from the Syrian regime, the Iraqi government, and other competing rebel groups, whether by negotiations or by force. It has certainly proved itself to be a formidable military adversary.

As the Syrian city of Raqqa shows, however, gaining military superiority is only one phase of the ISIS program. As part of its *imamah* concept, by which ISIS aims to oversee the religious and political lives of the Muslims inside its Caliphate, ISIS established robust governance structures in Raqqa and the Aleppo countryside and is working to expand that governance through other areas it controls, such as Mosul. Programs such as the Shari'a institutes and *al-Hisba* religious police have been set up to enforce ISIS religious norms, while courthouses, local police, and infrastructure repair offices have been set

up to establish the governance required for the day-to-day functioning of the state.

As ISIS deepens its control in parts of Deir ez-Zour, al-Hasaka, and western Aleppo provinces, it is pursuing similar methodologies. For example, while engaged in a major offensive to seize Deir ez-Zour city which began in March 2014,¹⁹⁶ ISIS strengthened governance programs in its key staging grounds in al-Hasaka province such as Markada.¹⁹⁷ After its military offensive culminated and it established sole control over rebel-held parts of Deir ez-Zour city, ISIS immediately initiated governance programs in the city.¹⁹⁸ If ISIS successfully seizes the remaining regime-held neighborhoods as well as the military airport in Deir ez-Zour city, it is likely to expand its governance activities even further. Comparable to its strategy in Raqqa city, ISIS establishes relatively simple governance structures while it works to eliminate rivals and consolidate control over territory. After it has full control, ISIS deploys more substantial and resource-intensive programs.

The strategic expansion of ISIS governance, however, is into Iraq.¹⁹⁹ As of July 2014 there were strong indications ISIS was pursuing similar governance structures specifically in Ninewa and Anbar provinces. In addition to offering humanitarian aid during Ramadan, which ISIS did across all its territories, ISIS has established two courthouses²⁰⁰ and a local police force²⁰¹ in Mosul city. ISIS has also attempted to repair and maintain water lines in Mosul,²⁰² although the attempt has been met with government airstrikes.²⁰³ As it works to further its governance, ISIS is simultaneously working to establish the vision of the state it desires, expelling Christians and other religious minorities and confiscating their property for its use.²⁰⁴ Given what ISIS has accomplished in Syria, it is important not to underestimate the social control that ISIS will be able to instill in Iraq if their program is not interrupted.

Until now, ISIS's programs have not engendered enough public resentment to present a significant challenge. However, as ISIS expands into other areas in Syria and especially Iraq, its strict and brutal administration of territory may become a key vulnerability.²⁰⁵ ISIS has succeeded in Syria, but this is partly due to the absence of other capable actors. In Iraq, which maintains a functional central government – however weak – ISIS governance will likely be more susceptible to popular discontent. On the other hand, until now the majority of opposition groups in Iraq have fought *alongside* ISIS rather than against it. Another challenge for ISIS governance in the future will be manpower and technical expertise. On July 24, 2014, the *New York Times* reported that, despite its attempts, in

Raqqa city ISIS is only able to keep electricity running for an average of four hours per day and has also struggled to provide clean drinking water to the population.²⁰⁶ These shortcomings have been repeated in Mosul, where ISIS struggles to keep electricity running.²⁰⁷ These difficulties will only become more pronounced as ISIS attempts larger and more technically demanding projects.

This difficulty in successfully implementing infrastructure requirements is indicative of a fundamental challenge to ISIS's larger governance project. In order to run a functioning state, more than courts, police, and schools are required. ISIS has thus far pursued short-term, populist gains at the expense of long-term sustainability. In Syria, this is evident in its approach to a variety of governance requirements. For example, ISIS's management of the previously mentioned Tabqa Dam relies on shortcuts to provide immediately desired electricity and has undone the long-term planning intended to supply drinking water to the area. As ISIS dismantles much of the essential structures of the Syrian and Iraqi states, it is not replacing them with a comprehensive structure of its own. Rather, piecemeal undertakings provide propaganda victories but fail to create enduring and sustainable institutions and processes.

For this reason, ISIS's ambitious governance program is both a demonstration of ISIS's greatest strength and potentially its greatest weakness. The transition from war-making, at which ISIS has already proved adept, to state-making, at which it has had only limited experience, will be the most significant hurdle to the success of the ISIS Caliphate in the long term. It may also constitute the greatest threat to Iraq and Syria that ISIS can inflict, if ISIS mismanages essential urban and economic infrastructure.

APPENDIX: ISIS REPORT ON ALEPPO PROVINCE

The below text and images are taken from a report released on June 25, 2014 through the Islamic State's "Wilayat Aleppo" Twitter account. The report is over 20 pages long, and contains a broad-ranging description of the province as ISIS wishes to portray it. It includes images describing pastoral scenes of nature, as well as information describing the land, people, areas, and industry of the province. The full report is an excellent example of the strategic messaging campaign conducted by the Islamic State to encourage immigration and promote an image of normalcy. Below are selected portions of the report, translated by the author.

WILAYAT ALEPPO

In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate

The history, situation, borders, statistics, and the [fighting] fronts:

The media office for Wilayat Aleppo [from the Arabic word meaning "state" or "province"] presents a comprehensive report on Wilayat Aleppo, discussing the history, situation, borders, statistics, the [fighting] fronts, and so on.

In order that Muslims be fully informed and fully aware of the reality of the Islamic Wilayat generally, and Wilayat Aleppo in particular, and to form a deeper understanding of future events in all their dimensions, and to connect this to geography and the reality in which the Wilayat lives.



APPENDIX: ISIS REPORT ON ALEPPO PROVINCE

Wilayat Aleppo: It returned to the dominion of the Muslims and was governed with Sharia under the rule of the Commander of the Faithful (Amir al-Mu'minin) Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi since April 2014

Width – 110 Km
Length – 120 Km

Bordering it from the North: Turkey

And from the West (from North to South): The Sahawat al-Sham in the northern countryside and the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the southern countryside

And from the south: Wilayat Homs

And from the East: Wilayat Raqqa and Ayn al-Arab (in which the PKK is concentrated)

5 Courts: One Main court and the remainder Sub-courts. They govern by the laws of God, implement the hudud punishments, ensure rights, and extend justice; dozens of cases are dealt with daily, and it is based upon a legal and administrative cadre.

10 Religious Police Headquarters: They promote virtue and prevent vice to dry up sources of evil, and prevent the manifestation of disobedience, and urge Muslims towards well-being.

11 Da'wa Offices: They carry out da'wa in the state through the publication of brochures, establishment of da'wa tents and so on.

10 Police Stations: They maintain internal security and administer the patrols to protect people, family, and money.

5 Service Offices: They administer services of the people in various fields from electricity to water to bakeries to municipal services to traffic to humanitarian aid offices.

22 Shari'a institutes: Muslims learn in the institutes the most important issues of their religion from Aqida [creed] and Fiqh [jurisprudence] and Quran.



The State contains water supplies from the Euphrates Dam that fill a need for water and irrigation.

The Power Generating Stations work to provide electricity in the State.

APPENDIX: ISIS REPORT ON ALEPPO PROVINCE

INTRODUCTION:

Wilayat Aleppo is a wide area that includes a number of ancient historical cities; civilizations succeeded each other in it for more than 6,000 years, ending with the Ottoman Caliphate. Then it was seized by the French during the colonial period after World War I. Then after the French withdrawal and the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Wilayat Aleppo fell into the lot of what is today called Syria, precisely in the northwestern part. And after the Syrian Revolution the Islamic State, with its Sham branch under the name Jabhat al-Nusra, moved into Aleppo. It was one of the most important fighting forces and liberated large portions [of Aleppo]. After the official declaration of the extension of the Islamic State, the battlefield was renowned in al-Safira and the surrounding areas in the southern countryside. Then the battle was moved by the Islamic State to Aleppo's center by means of a ghazwat al-fath [raid of conquest] which aimed to cut the supply lines of New Aleppo which are under the control of the regime because of an attack on the Sheikh Said area and Khan Touman. And after the betrayal of the Sahawat and the withdrawal of the Islamic State from the fighting fronts to defend its soldiers, what ensued was a withdrawal western and then to the northern countryside to consolidate forces in the eastern countryside, which is considered the center of the Wilayat presently. The result of this was that the Islamic State took control over new areas and succeeded in securing the borders and achieved internal stability.

AREA AND BORDERS:

Width: 110 km

Length: 120 km

Area: 10,000 Sq Km

Bordering it from the North: Turkey

And from the West (from North to South): The Sahawat al-Sham in the northern countryside and the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the southern countryside

And from the south: Wilayat Homs

And from the East: Wilayat Raqqa and Ayn al-Arab (in which the PKK is concentrated) [See the map]



A map clarifying the borders of Wilayat Aleppo, a component of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (The borders are approximate and variable).

APPENDIX: ISIS REPORT ON ALEPPO PROVINCE

AREAS AND PARTITIONS:

The Wilayat is divided in the era of the Islamic State into two Sectors:

1. Sector of Manbij
 - a. The city of Manbij
 - b. The city of Jarabulus
 - c. The city of Maskanah
2. Sector of al-Bab
 - a. The city of al-Bab
 - b. The city of Deir Hafer



A map clarifying the sectors and areas in Wilayat Aleppo

APPENDIX: ISIS REPORT ON ALEPPO PROVINCE

THE FIGHTING FRONTS AND ENEMIES:

The border areas that the Islamic State protects has reached more than 130 km and is divided between the Sahawat, the regime, and the PKK, of which almost 60 km is directly against the Nusayri regime.

The Most Important Fronts [against the regime]:

al-Ta'ana, Shamer, Tal Rahal, Tal Bilat, al-Radwaniya, al-Safira

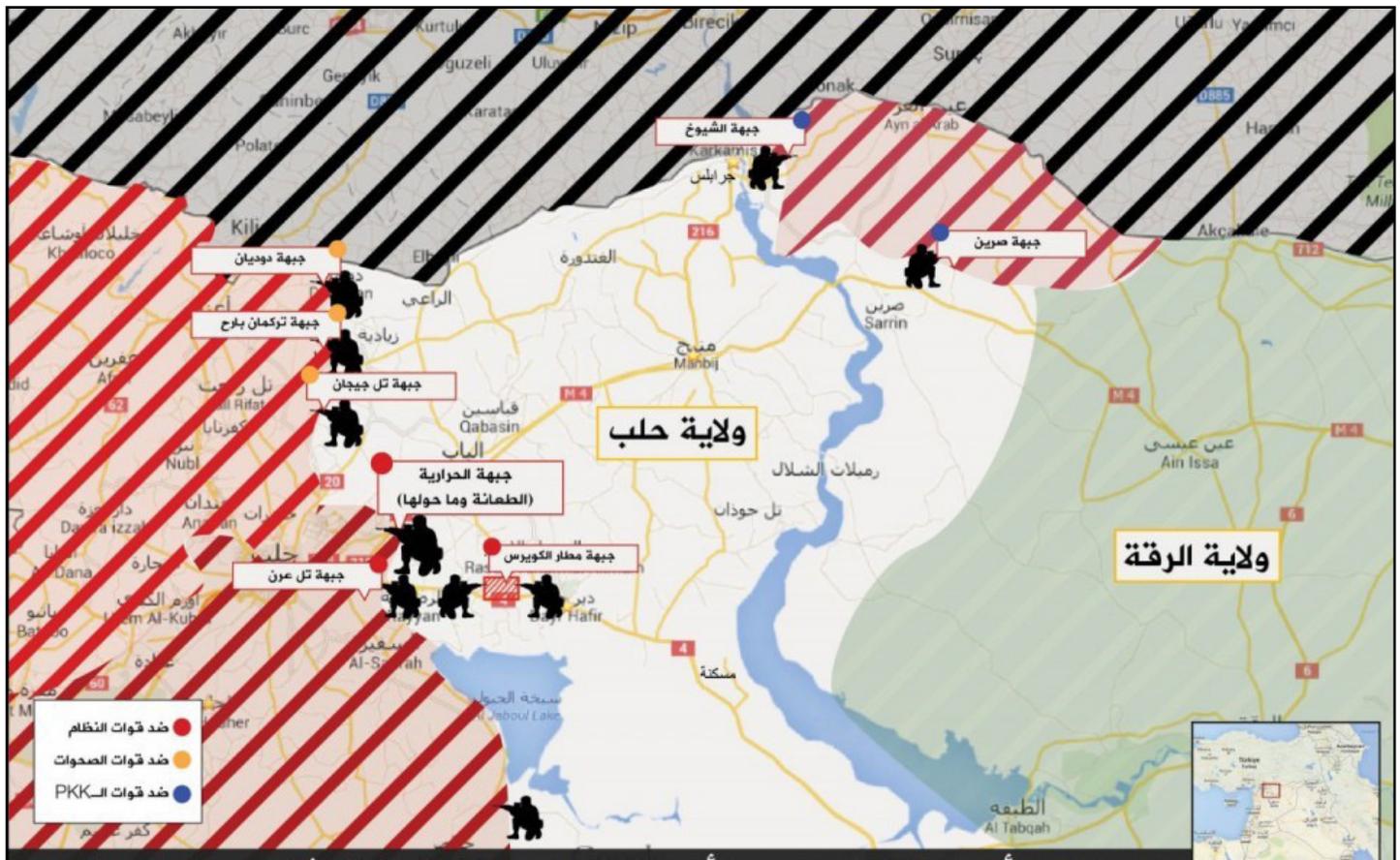
As for the section of the border which is against the Sahawat, it has reached about 30 km.

The Most Important Front [against the Sahawat]:

Dudyan, Turkman Berih, Akhtar, Maria

The section of the border against the PKK has reached about 40 km where the Islamic State besieges the town of Ayn al-Arab.

[See the Map]



A map clarifying the places of the active front with the enemies of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham

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