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The Islamic State and the Return of Revolutionary Warfare

Craig Whiteside 

Naval War College Monterey, Monterey, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

The rise of the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) is not well understood at this point. This paper starts by comparing the Islamic State to the Vietnamese communists in a revolutionary warfare framework and makes a causal argument that the Islamic State's defeat of the Sahwa (Awakening) movement in Iraq was the key to its successful establishment of control of most Sunni areas and the mobilization of its population for support. Islamic State operational summaries and captured documents are used to quantitatively establish the impact of the subversion campaign against the Sahwa and Iraqi government and trace the efforts of operatives in tribal outreach and recruiting. This research provides a valuable insight into the return of a powerful method of insurgency as well as a glimpse into the vast clandestine network that provides the strength of the Islamic State movement.

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Introduction

The descent into disorder began years before the crisis, with whispers of the return of veterans from the previous war and the announcements from a political front representing a competing shadow government opposed to the incumbent. The murky deaths of political figures in the hinterlands are written off as banditry, local blood debts, and revenge killings unremarkable in a society long riven by internecine conflict. Seemingly random in pattern, the deaths soon become part of the rhythm of everyday life in the country, as unexplainable as they are inconsequential. The rising criminality in these areas soon block many government services in the area, a fact buried by the bureaucracy and invisible to the leaders of the state who believe that what they see in the capital is the

CONTACT Craig Whiteside  cawhites@nps.edu
 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

reality of the state. Villages have no officials, taxes go uncollected, and schools have no teachers. By the time the state's police and military units lose the ability to operate in these same rural areas, the crisis has matured to an existential crisis for the state.

This generic vignette is an amalgamation of several accounts of the Vietnamese People's Revolutionary Party campaign to defeat the Diem regime during 1959–1963, but it also could easily pass for a description of what happened in the Sunni provinces of Iraq from 2008 to 2013 – long before the world discovered the Islamic State. Often incorrectly described as an ex-Baathist cabal that invaded Iraq from Syria and easily defeated an unmotivated and corrupt Shia Army of occupation, the Islamic State is better understood as a revolutionary movement that has learned, practiced, adjusted, and honed a successful politico-military doctrine in their state-building campaign. They have deep roots in the population and are determined to win the competition of governing with the Iraqi government. In short, they are very real and here to stay.

The inspiration for this research came from Bernard Fall, whose writings about the Vietnam wars often reflected an amazement of the subversive nature of revolutionary warfare and its paralyzing effect on government. Fall delighted in contrasting public pronouncements of government control by French military or American political observers who counted secure provinces instead of obscure assassinations or uncollected taxes.¹ The cumulative results of this subversion and an associated fear led others to claim that the exhaustion effect of revolutionary warfare was unbeatable, 'a dynamic that will take over the world!'² Surely this was overstated, and the end of the Cold War heralded an end to ideological warfare, and the return of power and interest based conflict now that the war of ideologies was over – it was the end of history.³

The demise of revolutionary warfare turned out to be a fantasy.⁴ A little known movement known as Salafi-jihadism adopted it after the Afghan–Soviet War, due to the similarity of its struggle against powerful enemies and proxies that dominated an international system inherently incompatible with their ideology. The Salafi-jihadist movement suffered a long series of trials as it stumbled from failed revolution to crushed revolt, so much so that one of its adherents who later founded the Islamic State movement⁵ called it 'the sad, recurrent story in the arenas of jihad.'⁶ Abu Musab al Zarqawi too failed, but his successors continued to adapt and evolve and implemented a doctrine that, in a series of operational campaigns, finally produced a pseudo-state⁷ with a reasonably effective conventional army and political apparatus. This interweaving of political actions with military ones is a clear indicator of an understanding of revolutionary warfare, a phenomenon rarely mentioned today in reference to the Islamic State.⁸ A careful study of the rise of the Islamic State will demonstrate that its adaptation of Mao's revolutionary warfare concept – as executed by the Vietnamese communists and modified it to fit its Islamist ideology – best explains how the Islamic State rose to power.

To support this argument, I will first examine the revolutionary aspects of the Islamic State in accordance with revolutionary warfare theory. Next, I will trace the development of revolutionary warfare doctrine in the Salafist–jihadist movement to its current state of execution by the Islamic State. In the third part, I will conduct a structured comparison between the Vietnamese communists campaign in South Vietnam from 1959 to 1964 with the Islamic State’s campaign in Iraq from 2008 to 2013. Finally, I will test a hypothesis concerning the Islamic State’s defeat of the Sahwa (Awakening) movement as a necessary condition for their return to prominence in Sunni Iraq.⁹

Islamic State as a revolutionary movement

While often described as a ‘terror group’,¹⁰ the Islamic State actually fits the definition of a movement conducting an insurgency, defined as an armed struggle dedicated to replacing the government.¹¹ Revolutionary warfare is a more specific version of an insurgency, designed to use guerrilla warfare combined with political action to further an ideology in place of the incumbent government.¹² While wars are always fought for political purposes, the French counterinsurgent Galula argued that in conventional warfare political goals run parallel to military efforts and play the decisive role in strategy formulation at the beginning and in deciding war termination alternatives in the end of conflict. In contrast, revolutionary warfare is primarily political in nature, with political efforts integrated into all operations at the tactical and operational levels of war.

The Islamic State movement has two political goals: the establishment of a caliphate in the place of the current governments that rule over majority Muslim populations and a subsequent expansion across the world. While some observers label this vision unrealistic or simply aspirational,¹³ historian Ibn Khaldun believed in the natural expansionistic nature of a truly Islamic state.¹⁴ The creation of a polity where Muslims can exercise the correct practice of their religion is a key narrative in Islamic State messaging. Therefore, the Islamic State is revolutionary in two different aspects: in its desire to replace state governance in a long list of countries, as well as in a recognition that it can never integrate socially, politically, or economically with an international order of states that will always be at war with it.

In addition to its revolutionary nature, the Islamic State has adopted the jihadist version of irregular warfare, which is described as action by small groups conducting independent operations.¹⁵ Due to the powerful nature of the state and the system it is rebelling against, the Islamic State conducts robberies, assassinations, acts of terror, sabotage, and other attacks termed ‘war out of the dark’. There are no conventional battles and no blitzkrieg in this ‘long attritional struggle’ to wear down the will of the enemy.¹⁶ These activities took place in the first two of what McCuen described as the four phases of revolutionary warfare: organization, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and mobile warfare.¹⁷ These

phases can occur at different times in different locations, and are conditions based, meaning that setbacks could force the revolutionaries back into a lower stage of operations out of weakness.

The advantages of a credible and established network in an irregular warfare setting are seen in McCuen's early stages, where smaller and nimbler organizations with a widespread set of associates linked together in small nodes can work with greater autonomy and anonymity, while a smaller central nervous system creates and disseminates broad policies and strategy for the movement.¹⁸ The Islamic State has existed from the very beginning in 2002 as a growing network of foreign Islamists that recruited a strong core of *ansar* (local supporters) and later related tribesmen, former Saddam regime members, and Sunni rejectionists.

A revolutionary movement can achieve its end state in several different ways, including massive uprisings or coups d'état, but the choice of irregular warfare is often dictated by the strength of the system.¹⁹ Cuba's revolution required minimal action by a small cohort to overthrow the government, whereas the Islamic State faced a majority Shia population in Iraq and a global hegemon supporting the local Iraqi government. This fact made the choice of irregular warfare a wise one.

One critique of viewing the Islamic State through a revolutionary warfare lens is that it is simply an outdated construct. Metz argued that modern insurgencies are in essence a complex internal conflict, with a need to generate income for operational purposes, which leads to the development of patronage networks and a widely diffusive set of alliances.²⁰ This reduces the requirement to mobilize the population for support and removes incentives for engagement with prospective supporters, with the result that contemporary insurgencies are more focused on violence and coercion. While this is a valid description of the Islamic State's early years as it struggled to grow and dominate the resistance movement in Iraq from 2004 to 2007, the post-surge Islamic State made some important attitudinal changes to how they engendered support within its target population.

Evolution of revolutionary Salafist–jihadism

It might seem farfetched to attempt to trace the influence of a group of progressive atheists on reactionary religious zealots, but it is a valuable exercise if one wants to understand the Islamic State movement. It should not be surprising that a group that venerates the *salaf* of early Islam would claim a heritage of irregular warfare including trickery, small numbers, and a reliance on superior morale to win the day. Ibn Khaldun, who described this way of warfare in the *Muqadimmah*, wrote 'Muhammad won with small numbers over the polytheists during his lifetime' because of what the historian called *asabiyah*, or special group feeling.²¹

The Islamic State's consistent use of historical narratives and concepts is often overlooked by observers who focus on the tactic of terror and the brutality of the

group, and it also obscures the deep roots of its doctrine in previous generations of jihad.²² While others focus on the formative experiences of many Salafist–jihadists in the Soviet–Afghan war when analyzing doctrinal evolution, it was the failed Syrian uprising against Hafiz al Assad from 1976–1982 that seems to have most influenced the development of Salafi–jihadi revolutionary warfare. Abu Musab al Suri, a Syrian fighter turned theorist, wrote an influential training book titled ‘Lessons Learned from the Armed Jihad Ordeal in Syria’. The work is an insightful litany of the problems of an unorganized and poorly structured resistance movement that was routed by the security services of a totalitarian regime. Al Suri wrote:

the struggle for the sake and path of Allah is not called ‘jihad’ for nothing, the term ‘jihad’ literally means: ‘exerting a tiring effort to set up.’ The enemy is strong and powerful, we are weak and poor, the war duration is going to be long and the best way to fight it is in a revolutionary jihad way for the sake of Allah. The preparations better be deliberate, comprehensive, and properly planned, taking into account past experiences and lessons.²³

By revolutionary al Suri meant in the way of what he termed the ‘gang warfare theorists’, who advocated waging war on behalf of the masses who nurtured and sustained insurgents. A fan of Taber’s *The War of the Flea*, Suri also referenced the metaphor of the insurgent as a fish in the sea of the people (without citation) in his work. Al Suri’s omission of Mao was a clever dodge to avoid tainting the message with the messenger for virulent Salafi–jihadis who hated communism as a source of disbelief and atheism.²⁴

Suri’s document was captured in one of al Qaeda’s camps in Afghanistan during the American invasion. Since 1996, the Taliban had hosted various Arab jihadist training camps, and Suri’s document was available for study. Bin Laden had led his organization back to Afghanistan from Sudan, and a young and upcoming Jordanian named Abu Musab al Zarqawi had recently arrived to establish his own training camp.²⁵ Saif al Adl, an al Qaeda advisor, courted Zarqawi on behalf of al Qaeda in order to gain influence in the Levant region. Al Adl set up Zarqawi in Herat, Afghanistan, away from the prying eyes of the Pakistanis and closer to their future operating area – reachable through Iran. Zarqawi had collected many Syrians as part of his early group, brothers who had all been through the ‘misery’ of the failed uprising against Hafez Assad.²⁶ Since the camp in Herat functioned as a place to exchange ideas with other Salafist–jihadists in the current, it is highly probable that Zarqawi was influenced during this time by the Suri’s lessons learned work.

Hypothesis

Zarqawi’s Tawhid wal Jihad, established in Iraq in 2002,²⁷ became a dominant element of the subsequent resistance to the American occupation and the Iraqi government, establishing de facto control of Anbar province by 2006. Why were

they so successful compared to the homegrown and more numerous competitors like Jaysh al Muhammed and the 1920s Revolution Brigade? To frame the argument for the rest of this paper, I constructed two assumptions and one hypothesis.

Assumption 1

Zarqawi's early attempts at insurgency in Jordan were an unqualified disaster.²⁸ Between his release from prison in 1999 and the 2001 scattering of Arab jihadist camps in Afghanistan due to the American invasion, Zarqawi secured an education on how to establish a successful group. That education came mostly from Abu Musab al Suri's work on the failed Syrian rebellion and Suri's advocacy of revolutionary warfare. Zarqawi and his early advisors especially focused on these particular lessons:

- (1) Maintain a covert organization and avoid temptation of going public, even when seeing success.
- (2) Push a centralized strategy in a decentralized organization that is compartmentalized to avoid compromise.
- (3) Do not prioritize military activities over public opinion.
- (4) Safeguard all communications as this is the 'weak link'.
- (5) Quality over quantity, and ideology over military experience works best. Jihadists will learn in the college of war.
- (6) Adopt a clear pattern of publicizing operations. Don't publicize the killings of Muslim informers.
- (7) Stay true to the Muslim banner and avoid the draw of secularism.
- (8) To avoid factionalism, emphasize the indoctrination of members.²⁹

These lessons learned set Tawhid wal Jihad apart from all other insurgent groups and helped them achieve an early dominance. Scholars of the Iraq insurgency from 2003 to 2006³⁰ support this assumption with one exception: the controversial killings of Muslims. The Islamic State relied heavily on Zarqawi's interpretation of the takfir concept, and their response to criticism was to simply deny or fail to claim attacks with significant civilian deaths. For example, Zarqawi's group denied bombing the Samarra mosque in February 2006, despite strong evidence to the contrary.³¹

Assumption 2

Despite substantial success in 2006 and in the middle of a sectarian war between the Shia and Sunni of Iraq, the Islamic State movement was devastated by a split in the Sunni community, which turned on them in the form of the Awakening movement. Like Ho and Giap, Zarqawi's successor Abu Omar al Baghdadi and his deputy Abu Hamza al Muhajir found themselves facing catastrophic defeat

before adapting their organization to leverage the advantages of a revolutionary movement. The blueprint that the Islamic State used, consciously or not, was proven successful by the Viet Cong in their assassination campaign against village chiefs in South Vietnam from 1959 to 1963, which allowed them unfettered access to a majority of the rural population for mobilization purposes. This leads to my hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1

If the Islamic State succeeded in winning support from the Sunni community after 2010, then it was because it adapted the tactics of subversion and revolutionary warfare to remove its Sunni rivals and their government supporters from its core areas and regain a base of political support in the Sunni community.

This hypothesis runs counter to the narrative that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki alienated and neglected the Awakening movement, or allowed militias and security forces to kill them off as part of a sectarian campaign.³² Instead, I argue that the Islamic State ran a skillful campaign to eliminate Sunni partisans of the Iraqi government in large numbers, while coopting and wooing other Sunnis back into the fold. Islamic State ability to control territory after 2010 facilitated this collaboration.³³ Once pro-government Sunnis were eliminated from key areas, Iraqi Security Forces stood little chance of defeating an underground subversive movement, and their COIN practices suffered in direct correlation with rising casualties from an unseen enemy.

To validate these two assumptions, I will compare and contrast the initial communist campaign in Vietnam to disconnect the Diem government from the population with the Islamic State campaign to defeat the Sahwa following the Surge. This will establish to what degree the Islamic State adopted principles of revolutionary warfare from the advocacy of the Suri school of Salafist–jihadism. Next, I will test the hypothesis that the Islamic State was the primary agent for the collapse of the Sahwa movement as an effective security force for Sunni areas by conducting a quantitative analysis of the Islamic State's assassination campaign targeting the Sahwa from 2007 to 2013.

Comparing the Vietnamese communists (1960–1964) to Islamic State (2008–2013)

Assassination as a political weapon is not a new tactic, but its role in revolutionary warfare is underdeveloped compared to the importance of mobilizing and harnessing the power of the people and the asymmetric battle between weak insurgent and powerful incumbent government. In reality, the three are often tied together using a common tactic that embraces all three elements of revolutionary warfare: terror. The most recent issue of al Qaeda's *Inspire* has an instructional section on assassination operations, a subconscious and belated

homage to the rampant success of the campaign of their rival and former affiliate, the Islamic State.³⁴ The removal of the links tying the government to the people is a key aspect of the foundation for a successful insurgency, a tactic proven by the Vietnamese communists.

The early years

The assassination campaign in South Vietnam began with an acknowledgment of weakness, an alternate means for the Vietnamese communists to carry on the fight against the Diem government when hopes of a general insurrection were dim. Prior to the Treaty of Paris in 1955, 60% of villages in the South were under communist control.³⁵ By 1958, an effective campaign by the Diem government had severely damaged local communist cadres in the rural areas. In one village, all 20 members of the People's Revolutionary Party had been arrested and imprisoned.³⁶ Denying a request to start open warfare in the South by its former Vietminh cadres – now called the People's Revolutionary Party – the Ho Chi Minh regime in the North approved a subversion campaign in 1958 against village chiefs called the 'extermination of traitors'.³⁷ The purpose of the campaign was to eliminate government interference of party activities in villages, to create fear in their enemies, and to build the faith of its supporters. The inspiration for this campaign came from previous purges of Trotskyites in 1945–1946 as well as the liquidation of 'reactionaries' in the North following the 1955 peace treaty.³⁸

The Islamic State movement enjoyed a similar strength in the majority Sunni areas of Iraq in 2006 according to one highly publicized American intelligence assessment³⁹, and it had experimented with controlling territory in Fallujah, Ramadi, Mosul, and al Qaim. Ironically, its success in achieving this domination inspired a backlash among its own Sunni base, mostly from rival insurgent groups that were feuding with Islamic State fighters⁴⁰ and tribes that refused to submit to Islamic State governance and its takeover of the local black markets.⁴¹ Zarqawi's strict policy of killing collaborators with the government encouraged local Sunni tribes, while still fearful of the consequences of collaboration with the government,⁴² to work with American units in Ramadi and Fallujah to establish local security militias and local police that would secure tribal areas against Islamic State fighters.⁴³ This grassroots movement, a mix of tribes and select resistance groups known as the Awakening, spread to other Sunni areas in Diyala and North Babil province and made it impossible for the Islamic State to retain control over core areas. The result was a dramatic and sudden defeat for the Islamic State movement, which like the Vietnamese communists had lost the ability to operate freely in rural areas and to recruit proselytize, tax, and hide.

Campaign against the Traitors

The primary targets of the Vietnamese communist assassination campaign in South Vietnam beginning in 1959 were village chiefs and school teachers. The

'destruction of oppression' campaign highlighted what the People's Revolutionary Party called 'selective' terror, which included disemboweling village chiefs, their wives, and decapitating children in front of entire villages.⁴⁴ These killings were carefully vetted by party officials, and were deemed a political act first and foremost. Once authority was removed, local grievances such as land reform could be acted on. Again, the purpose of this was political – not economic in this case. The land was not permanently awarded to peasants because this would remove or solve the grievance, which had to be maintained for continued support for the movement.⁴⁵

Once the government's local representatives were eliminated from the village, the communists moved to expand control through the establishment of liberation committees that consisted of military affairs, recruitment, security, finance, propaganda, and civil affairs.⁴⁶ Taxes were collected, less for financial needs and more as an implicit recognition of party legitimacy in the area.⁴⁷ Fall used this same logic to investigate who truly dominated the villages of the Red River Delta in 1953 and found that 'the bulk of the Delta was no longer paying taxes'. Fall also found an inverse correlation between the presence of teachers and Viet Minh control.⁴⁸

Vietnamese Communist Party legitimacy was expanded by the use of mass political organizations that were separate from the party so as not to dilute its purity. Instead, the party maintained a carefully concealed control of these front organizations – representing women or farmers united for land reform – while using them to expand the exposure of the population to indoctrination of party principles and stressing popular local grievances.⁴⁹

In contrast to this popular outreach, the assassination campaign of government associated 'counter-revolutionaries' was not about terrorizing a population into submission, which has limited effect and undermines the legitimacy of the future regime. This distaste for extreme violence was expressed by the Chinese communists who were openly critical of the Vietnamese for their reliance on terror.⁵⁰ However, this did not dissuade the Vietnamese communists; the intent of the campaign was to create an unfair advantage in the competition for governance, which cannot be won in an absentee fashion and therefore the insurgents win by default.

Compared to the politically advanced People's Revolutionary Party, the Islamic State movement was a military organization with a highly functioning public relations office and little governance outside of small local areas. These attempts at governance had focused on the strict imposition of the Islamic State's religious ideology and had not been considered successful. Furthermore, the foreign roots of the organization had allowed rivals to paint the group as unrepresentative of the true wishes of Iraqi Sunnis.⁵¹

The natural advancement of Iraqi ansar (supporters) of the Islamic State drove the organization to create a political union that allowed Salafist groups to join with the Islamic State movement in a front called the Mujahideen Shura Council

(MSC) in January 2006. Several months after Zarqawi was killed in the summer of 2006, Abu Omar al Qureshi al Baghdadi⁵² became the leader of the newly proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq in October. Abu Hamza al Muhajir, an Egyptian al Qaeda veteran, became Omar's deputy and the military leader of the movement. The Islamic State claimed in a subsequent press release that the group known as al Qaeda in Iraq no longer existed.⁵³

The significance of this transition was the establishment of a political body with Iraqi leadership and one with a historical tie to the Salafist community that had grown in Iraq since the 1980s. This move, which took place too late to prevent the defeat of the movement in 2007 at the hands of the Sahwa and Coalition forces, played a large role in the later resurgence of the Islamic State. The creation of various committees signified a more serious approach to matching the type of political organization required for the success of a revolutionary movement – as seen in the success of the Vietnamese communists.

Abu Omar and Abu Hamza publicly discussed the reasons for their failure to capture public support and admitted to certain failures. A captured letter from 2007 – a 38-page strategy document by someone close to the leadership – decried the rigidity of the movement's doctrine and recommended improvements in organization and a more flexible strategy of revolution⁵⁴ – a very Leninist approach.⁵⁵ In addition to pushing the concept of an Islamic State when they controlled no territory, the new leaders of the movement prioritized a subversion campaign directed at their Sunni rivals who had pushed them out of their core areas. Abu Omar announced a campaign called al Karamah (Dignity) in 2008 followed by the Hasad al Khayr (Harvest of the Good) in 2009, focusing on eliminating Sunni Sahwa, Shia militias, and Iraqi government officials and political candidates. It was frequently referred to as the 'Campaign against the Traitors'. To test my hypothesis that these campaigns were a major factor in the return of the Islamic State, the following case study is presented.

Turning the tables: Testing the hypothesis

The abrupt fracturing of the Sunni resistance in 2007 saw a significant amount of fighting between rival groups, an end to robust sanctuaries for the Islamic State movement, and the death and desertion of large numbers of fighters. Pressure from below (Sahwa) and above (US Special Operations Forces) meant the organization had to operate in small cells with little guidance other than the establishment of open worded campaign plans. To measure the impact of these campaigns, I used the Iraqi Body Count database⁵⁶ to ascertain a baseline of Awakening deaths from 2006 to 2013. I compared this estimation with an analysis of all of the Islamic State operational summaries from the same period in four key locations with varying population sizes and makeup: Jurf ah Sakhr, Garma, Baqubah, and Mosul. These summaries had been posted by the official media outlets of the movement, systematically since 2004, on jihadist websites

for dissemination to supporters. The four locations in Iraq cover Babil, Anbar, Diyala, and Nineveh provinces and represent the southern, western, eastern, and northern regions of Sunni Iraq. What the locations shared in common was a pattern of Islamic State activity that highlighted their importance as core areas of support by the population.

Four samples

Jurf ah Sakhr (pop. 80,000)⁵⁷ is a small agricultural area along the Euphrates river that had been the home to the Republican Guard Medina Division, with a corresponding ammunition supply point looted after the invasion that provided enough explosive material to supply the insurgency for decades. Almost exclusively Sunni, it sat on the border of the Sunni–Shia fault line that ran south of Baghdad and was close to the highway that Shia pilgrims used to walk to Karbala. Sectarian control of this area was a major concern for both sides of the divide.

Garma (pop. 116,000) is a medium-sized village outside of Fallujah described as the ‘hardest nut to crack’ by the Marines assigned to pacify Anbar province in 2006.⁵⁸ Garma (sometimes spelled Karma) is also almost exclusively Sunni, but its location in Sunni Anbar province left sectarian tensions somewhat lower, with the exception of the Shia Army unit from Basra that had failed to pacify it prior to the Awakening, when security was put into local Sunni hands in early 2007.

Baqubah (pop. 220,000) is the capital of Diyala, a mixed sect province north-east of Baghdad with a high residual level of violence. Shia militia activity was heavy in the region, and it took some time and effort for the Awakening to be established in the city. The measurements for Baqubah included the nearby towns of Buhriz and Khalis, and all three had functioning Sunni Awakening units in a diverse population of Sunni and Shia. Like Garma and Jurf, it was a historic stronghold for the Islamic State; it took most of 2008 to clear out the large number of militants that had fled from other areas due to the Sahwa/Surge.

Mosul (pop. 2,000,000)⁵⁹ is also a provincial capital and a large ethnically diverse city in Nineveh, the north of Iraq. The ancient city astride the Tigris River was the second largest city in Iraq before 2014 and had a large Sunni population which had often been at odds with the local Kurds. Efforts to establish an Awakening in Mosul had been frustrated by an Islamic State movement that maintained an extensive extortion network that had taxed oil and other normal economic activity since 2005.

The benchmark: Iraqi Body Count

The Iraqi Body Count database uses multiple media reports of deaths along with morgue data to report casualties and helpfully reports the special status of victims such as Awakening members or Shia pilgrims. This victim count is

Table 1. Awakening deaths in Iraq, 2007–2013 (data from IraqiBodyCount.org).

Year	Deaths
2007	149
2008	677
2009	254
2010	262
2011	204
2012	221
2013	546
Total	2313

certainly understated due to the nature of civil wars and the fact that some bodies are not reported or found. To establish a benchmark, I screened for all reported Awakening/Sahwa references across the country from 2007 to 2013 (see Table 1). Awakening deaths at the national level peaked early in 2008 at 677 as the Islamic State movement adjusted to its loss of control of core areas, then leveled out evenly from 2009 to 2012 before rising dramatically again in 2013 as the Islamic State began to control more and more territory throughout Iraq, including Fallujah in December 2013. It is striking, however, that Awakening deaths are relatively constant between high points, at a time when the Islamic State movement is often declared non-existent or in Syrian sanctuaries. The total deaths of Sahwa members is 2313, a significant number considering that the Sahwa consisted of 90,000 members.⁶⁰ The benchmark doesn't measure the number of Sahwa that were wounded, incapacitated, fled the country, or defected to the Islamic State.

The pattern of nationwide Sahwa deaths shows that after the first full year of the Awakening's existence (2008) was also the record high; after this, deaths leveled out at between 200 and 250 per year until 2013, when deaths again spiked in the year before the Islamic State made its move to permanently control and administer territory. In accordance with my hypothesis, 2008 marked a turning point and a diminished capability for the Islamic State movement to take action against the Sahwa, which then manifested itself in a patient campaign to undermine the organization for the next four years. By 2013, the organization was strong enough to push out of its newly established core areas and expand influence in all Sunni areas of Iraq, and this results in twice as many Sahwa deaths than in any year since 2008. By very early 2014, the Islamic State had achieved success in Anbar and many other areas. The four sample locations: Jurf, Garma, Baqubah, and Mosul allow a glimpse into the actual strategy the Islamic State took in establishing control.

Islamic State operational reports

To test my hypothesis that the Islamic State was responsible for this carnage, and not the Maliki administration or Shia militias, I extracted claims from the

Islamic State's wilayat (provincial) monthly operational summaries and compared them to the Iraqi Body Count data for the four cities described above. The veracity of the claims does vary by province, but for the most part the movement seemed to follow Abu Musab al Suri's guidance to be honest in order to maintain credibility.⁶¹ The press releases noted when the operators were unsure of the target's status or had missed the target, chalking it up as God's will. They often gave descriptions of exact locations and names, making verification with press reports achievable.

Often, I found that the Islamic State had claimed an assassination that remained an unsolved mystery in the press. For example, according to an NPR report, Sunni Islamic Party member and elected official Samir Safwat al Hadithi⁶² was gunned down outside his home in southern Baghdad on 18 February 2009.⁶³ The news report insinuated that either Shia militias had assassinated him or his own Sunni political rivals had. He was the third Islamic Party member assassinated that month. There was no mention in the newscast of the possibility that the Islamic State had killed a Sunni rival for participating in a democratically elected government, an act of apostasy according to Islamic State doctrine. The Islamic State claimed his death in May of 2009 – unnoticed by the same media that reported on it in February.⁶⁴

Jurf

The benchmark Iraqi Body Count (IBC) Sahwa deaths suggests a bell-shaped distribution with a slow start to the campaign, peak deaths in 2009–2011, and a reduction afterwards. A parallel analysis of Islamic State claims shows a similar pattern with peak attacks and most deaths claimed in 2011 (13), which mirrored the benchmark. Attacks and deaths drop off after 2011. The correlation between Islamic State claims and the benchmark was close to 80% (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

Garma

According to the benchmark, Sahwa deaths in this key Anbar town were unremarkable until 2013, when an increase in Islamic State activity in Anbar corresponded with the high. With some minor exceptions, Islamic State claims

Table 2. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Jurf ah Sakhr.

Jurf	Sahwa killed (IBC)	ISI claimed (Sahwa kill)	ISI claimed (Sahwa wounded)	ISI claimed attacks
2007	1	NR	NR	NR
2008	5	4	4	6
2009	17	8	6	14
2010	14	11	4	10
2011	13	13	6	20
2012	4	1	0	2
2013	1	9	0	6
Total	55	46	20	58

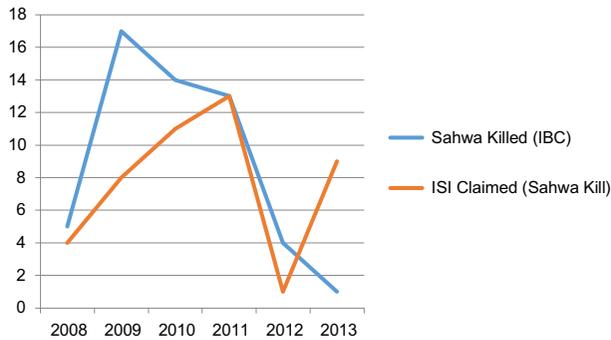


Figure 1. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Jurf ah Sakhr.

Table 3. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Garma.

Garma	Sahwa killed (IBC)	ISI claimed (Sahwa Kill)	ISI claimed (Sahwa wounded)	ISI claimed attacks
2007	0	NR	NR	NR
2008	4	25	0	1
2009	7	8	9	10
2010	2	0	1	1
2011	0	2	1	3
2012	0	0	0	1
2013	31	11	7	9
Total	44	46	18	25

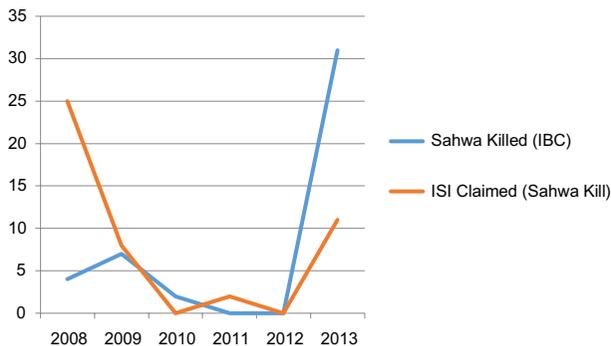
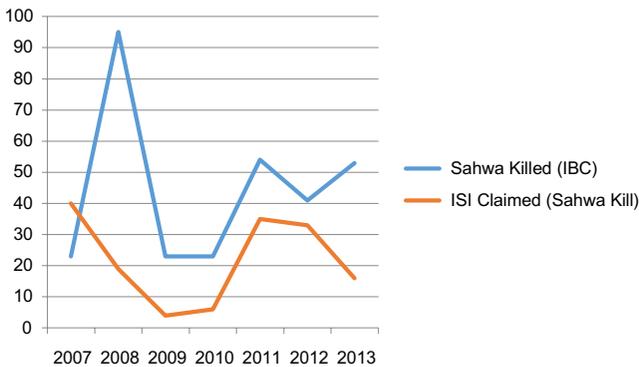


Figure 2. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Garma.

matched the output of the benchmark as well as the pattern (see Table 3 and Figure 2). Anbar was the home of the Sahwa movement, and it seemed to maintain its strength there longer than it did in the other sample cities. While other Sahwa associated tribes, particularly in the Ramadi region, held fast against the return of the Islamic State, Garma returned to the Islamic State fold in early 2014.⁶⁵

Table 4. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Baqubah.

Baqubah	Sahwa killed (IBC)	ISI claimed (Sahwa Kill)	ISI claimed (Sahwa wounded)	ISI claimed attacks
2007	23	40	1	17
2008	95	19	14	7
2009	23	4	7	6
2010	23	6	5	10
2011	54	35	25	48
2012	41	33	22	44
2013	53	16	13	20
Total	312	153	87	152

**Figure 3.** Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Baqubah.

Baqubah

The pattern of Sahwa deaths differs from both the national level benchmark and the other cases in that it remained constant throughout, with a spike in violence in 2008 as the Islamic State movement, which had consolidated in Diyala during the Surge operations, was defeated. While the pattern for ISI claims is similar to the benchmark (see Table 4 and Figure 3), it suffers from incomplete data from missing operational summaries in 2008 (missing 10 months out of 12), 2009 (missing 9), 2010 (missing 8), and 2013 (missing 5). The other provinces reliably reported their activities, but the Islamic State Diyala media organization for whatever reason either failed to post its data or I was unable to collect it. Nonetheless, despite missing 32 months of data during this period, the Islamic State still claimed almost half the number of Sahwa deaths compared to the benchmark. It is possible that Shia militias operating in Diyala also targeted the Sahwa for sectarian reasons and are responsible for the deaths reported in the benchmark. This possibility aside, there are several press reports that indicate that many of the Sahwa deaths that occurred during the period of missing operational reports were inflicted by the Islamic State.

In late 2009, Ramzy Mardini of the Jamestown Foundation noted that 'AQI' had reformed the Islamic State of Iraq in Diyala province that September and

‘recently opened a campaign of assassination’ against senior Sahwa leaders there. There is plenty of evidence to believe that the Islamic State movement was active before 2009 due to its own claims of a substantial number of Sahwa kills (59) prior to this (see Table 4), but Mardini’s claim could explain the absence of the periodic operational summaries that were so consistently produced in the other provinces. According to Mardini,

On November 17, AQI-associated operatives assassinated Hameed Khaleel al-Obeidi, the leader of the Sahwa council of the Bab al-Darb district of Baaquba, the capital city of Diyala province. The next day, AQI affiliates fired upon Shaykh Houssam Ulwan al-Majmaai, the commander of Sahwa forces for all of Diyala, after intercepting his vehicle on the major road leading to the Kanaan district (*Awsat al-Iraq*, November 18). Though the operation failed to kill al-Majmaai, it was the second assassination attempt on his life within a month. In late October, a bomb wounded the Sahwa leader in the Bahraz district, south of Baaquba (*Awsat al-Iraq*, October 22). Only days earlier a suicide bomber killed the Bahraz Sahwa leader Leith Mashaan and other members of the Awakening movement. Mashaan was reported to have contributed to the arrests of numerous AQI leaders, including the individual the Iraqi government claims to be Abu Omar al-Baghdadi – the alleged commander of the ISI (*Awsat al-Iraq*, October 13).⁶⁶

The suicide bomber and the revenge motives all point toward Islamic State involvement in these deaths. In the claims I do have, the Islamic State claimed three other attacks on Sheik Houssam’s aides in the Majmaai clan in Buhriz town, just south of Baqubah, with Jasim Suhayl being killed on 4 March 2011,⁶⁷ a failed attempt on 29 September 2011,⁶⁸ and Ahmad Nada killed on 24 May 2012.⁶⁹

The *New York Times* documented the disintegration of the Baqubah Sahwa movement in October 2010, which happened earlier than Jurf (2011) and Garma (2013), noting that the Sahwa was caught between an aggressive Islamic State that could infiltrate the movement and an untrusting government that often disrespected them and occasionally arrested them in cases of mistaken identity or suspicion of involvement in insurgent activities. One Islamic State member was quoted saying ‘many of those who called themselves the Awakening felt remorse . . . They believed they were making a mistake by helping the occupiers and have returned to Al Qaeda. I can say this number is increasing every day.’

The article also quoted the same Sheik Houssam Majmaai as receiving a phone call from his cousin, a jailed Islamic State member, who advised him to rejoin the insurgency. Sheik Majmaai declined, but acknowledged that the effort was an example of an ‘ongoing seduction’ by men who ‘had no doubts’ about their future success.⁷⁰ Pairing these news reports with an extrapolation of Islamic State activities for the missing months, and the results come close to the patterns of the other three cases.

Mosul

The final case was the provincial capital of Nineveh. The benchmark for Sahwa deaths reveal very few in number (4) over a seven-year period, and the Islamic

Table 5. Comparison of IS claimed attacks to Benchmark (IBC) in Mosul.

Mosul	Sahwa killed (IBC)	ISI claimed (Sahwa kill)	ISI claimed (Sahwa wounded)	ISI claimed attacks
2007	1	NR	NR	NR
2008	0	2	2	7
2009	1	1	0	1
2010	0	0	0	0
2011	0	0	0	0
2012	0	1	1	4
2013	2	3	0	3
Total	4	7	3	15

State claims are similar (see Table 5). Considering that Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq, this scarcity of Sahwa deaths is puzzling. There are several reasons that the Islamic State did not conduct an anti-Sahwa campaign in Mosul, the most obvious being that there was never an Awakening movement there.⁷¹ The weight of the evidence leads me to believe that this failure was due to the deep entrenchment of the Islamic State in Mosul and a lack of desire of Sunnis there to rally to the government, unlike in Anbar and elsewhere.

The presence of the Islamic State in Mosul grew in late 2004 after the battles of Fallujah forced some Zarqawi elements to relocate to Mosul.⁷² From 2005 to 2008 the Islamic State movement established a strong extortion network⁷³ that soon replaced Anbar province as its strongest revenue generator.⁷⁴ In one short period in early 2010, the counterinsurgents killed or captured an Islamic State economic security emir, three 'extortion personalities', an oil minister and his deputy, and an oil extortion leader all in the Mosul area.⁷⁵ This economic infrastructure, a level of development that belies the criticism of the Islamic State's 'fake state', allowed the group to be completely self-funded by 2006⁷⁶ – with a resultant independence from external interference that al Suri stressed in his lessons learned.⁷⁷

The Islamic State's strong presence in Mosul was manifested in two important ways, one politically and the other militarily. Captured Islamic State of Iraq documents⁷⁸ from Mosul in 2007 demonstrate early attempts by Wilayat Ninewa to govern the population as a shadow government, including regulation of billiards and music halls,⁷⁹ crime,⁸⁰ and sexual harassment.⁸¹ These decrees provide evidence of the Islamic State's early nation-building desires not only in Mosul but also Diyala, Anbar, and Saladin provinces, and foreshadow the nation-building efforts that took place once the Islamic State secured territory in these same provinces in 2014.⁸²

While attacks on Awakening in Mosul were negligible, attacks on the Iraqi Security Forces in Nineveh province were the highest in the nation during this time period. A sample of Islamic State claimed operations in three provinces demonstrate that without an Awakening presence to collaborate with the state for security maintenance and intelligence gathering, insurgent activity as early

Table 6. Islamic State attacks during the month of Dhu-al Hijjah (28 October – 24 November) 2011. (Documented Military Operations in Mosul (17 January 2012), Anbar (3 January 2012), and Diyala (18 December 2011)).

	Attacks
Mosul	73
Anbar	52
Diyala	20

as 2011 was significantly higher in Mosul than elsewhere (see Table 6). This factor will be investigated in more detail by returning to the Jurf ah Sakhr case study and comparing the Islamic State campaign against the Sahwa with its parallel effort against the Iraqi Security Forces operating in the area.

Jurf Part II

Security for Jurf ah Sakhr district in 2008 consisted of a small Awakening detachment of 200 local Sunnis from a diverse group of clans in the area, mostly from the Janabi federation. Iraq Security Forces consisted of local police, an Army battalion, and an Emergency Response Force regiment (SWAT). This was a significant increase in forces since the Awakening movement took root in Jurf in mid-2007, at which time there were no police, one Iraqi Army platoon, and one US Army platoon. The Awakening movement which reduced violence in the area had been mostly made up of Sunni professionals, tribal elements, and former resistance members from the Islamic Army and other insurgent groups. Sabah al Azab al Janabi was appointed by the local Janabi tribe to lead the Awakening movement, and he eventually became the mayor of Jurf ah Sakhr district, which included half a dozen small villages (Fadiliyah, Farisiyah, Owesat, Sunydiy, Hamiya, and Abd Ways). American forces remained in support of local Iraqi Army units in Hamiya through the very end of the American presence in the country (2011).⁸³

In four years there were only two attacks against American forces and both happened early in 2008. Given the amount of Islamic State activity during this time period, there can be little doubt that the Islamic State movement was deliberately avoiding targeting American forces because their focus was on defeating the Sahwa. The earliest attack on a key Sahwa leader occurred in October 2008 when Abd al Hadi was assassinated by the Islamic State. Hadi had been active in the resistance against the government and the United States, and was wanted for the killing of an American paratrooper.⁸⁴ He had also led the fight against the Islamic State in 2007 but was denied participation in the Sahwa at the time due to his past. By 2008 he had joined the Sahwa in some leadership capacity, partnering with Sabah al Azab before his death. The Islamic State claimed the assassination of Hadi as part of Abu Omar's Al Karamah (Dignity) campaign.⁸⁵

Attacks increased steadily in Jurf, with most targeting the Sahwa in 2008 (6 of 9) and 2009 (14 of 21). Attacks were more evenly spread in 2010 (10 of 23)

Table 7. Breakdown of Sahwa attacks, January 2008 – February 2013, claimed by Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

	Jurf	Garma	Baqubah	Mosul
Awakening date	June 2007	Spring 2007	Late 2007	None
Sectarian makeup	Sunni	Sunni	Mixed	Mixed
Sahwa attacks	58	25	152	15
Close kill	29	11	44	5
IED/sticky	14	6	72	5
Named target	26	9	76	7
Sahwa leaders targeted	23	9	73	7
Houses destroyed	3	1	17	1
Killed	46	46	153	4
Wounded	20	18	87	3

and 2011 (20 of 45) despite the fact that Jurf had a heavy Iraqi Security Force presence during many times of the year in order to protect the various pilgrimages to Karbala on the highway that skirted the town to the south. In addition to a heavy Sahwa focus, the Islamic State's strategy hinged on eliminating key Sahwa leaders in a discriminate manner while pressuring tribal leaders to withdraw their participation in the local militia. Of the 58 attacks on Sahwa during the period, exactly half were close-kill assassinations in the middle of the night and another quarter of them were IEDs of the normal type, or more frequently, sticky bombs that were magnetically attached to the engine of a Sahwa vehicle and detonated while driving. In 26 of the 58 attacks the victim was named, and 23 targets were leaders or key tribal sheiks supporting the movement. Targeting the leadership, instead of lower ranking Sahwa sitting on check points, was designed to allow future recruitment of Sahwa members to the Islamic State at a future date (see Table 7).

Of the many Jurf Sahwa leaders targeted by Islamic State, Sabah al Azab survived one assassination attempt in July 2009 due to mistaken identity⁸⁶ and was seriously wounded in June 2010 in an IED attack.⁸⁷ By the end of 2011 Sabah had fled the country, due to both Islamic State pressure and the state's security forces which no longer seemed to trust Sabah to keep Jurf secure.⁸⁸ The campaign against the Awakening began to taper after his absence, but not before claiming a distinguished tribal leader from Jurf ah Sakhr named Ahmad Muzahim al Janabi, who was assassinated while returning from a meeting in Baghdad of the National Reconciliation Committee in October 2012.⁸⁹ By this time, the Islamic State had shifted its focus in the Jurf area from the Sahwa to the Iraqi Security Forces.

Without a functioning Awakening unit providing information and context on the local Sunni dynamics in Jurf, attacks on security forces increased after 2010 and were characterized by attacks using mortars and IEDs, both activities that require some military skill and a population that is either supportive or unwilling

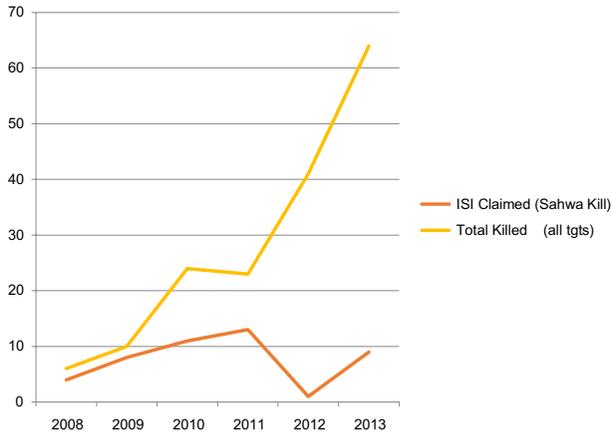


Figure 4. Comparison of Awakening deaths to other targets (ISF, US, Civ) in Jurf.

to inform. After 2011, casualties among security forces operating in Jurf skyrocketed (see Table 8 and Figure 4). The early Sahwa intensive campaign gave way to a focus on security that struggled to operate in a suddenly unfriendly area. Large Army sweeps to find Islamic State insurgents in Jurf were not only failures, but the local Army unit lost its division commander and several other key leaders in an IED attack in Abd Ways in December 2013 that killed a total of 10.⁹⁰

Discussion

The Islamic State demonstrated a mastery of irregular warfare in their subversion of a tightly controlled Jurf run by an effective, tribally supported local Sahwa militia. While the irregular warfare campaign described above documents the damage done to the Sahwa and supporting governmental forces, it does not measure how the Islamic State was able to mobilize the population in preparation for taking control of core areas. To establish control, the Islamic State would have to master the techniques of political outreach to the local population coupled with an effective messaging campaign to popularize Islamic State solutions to local grievances in order to establish legitimacy for the movement. After a short period of adjustment and debate, Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al Muhajir did just that.

Gartenstein-Ross recently described the Islamic State's revolutionary warfare approach as less Maoist and instead closer to the Focoist approach, where the 'political foundation necessary for revolution can be crafted through violence.'⁹¹ Certainly the leaders of the Islamic State movement had and continue to have a cultural and cognitive preference for using violence to shape the environment and achieve the Caliphate. However, a focus on the excessive violence and terror

Table 8. Comparison of Sahwa attacks and total attacks in Jurf with casualty figures.

Jurf	ISI			ISI Claimed Attacks	Total Killed (all tgts)	Total Wounded (all tgts)	Total Attacks (all tgts)
	Sahwa Killed (IBC)	Claimed (Sahwa Kill)	ISI Claimed (Sahwa Wounded)				
2007	1	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
2008	5	4	4	6	6	4	9
2009	17	8	6	14	10	10	21
2010	14	11	4	10	24	19	23
2011	13	13	6	20	23	15	45
2012	4	1	0	2	41	22	21
2013	1	9	0	6	64	45	69
Total	55	46	20	58	168	115	188

produced by the Islamic State – while understandable – diverts our attention from its less visible but crucial mobilization of the support of the Sunni nation.

Social movement theory provides a framework to explain how the Islamic State accomplished the mobilization of supporters in its core areas of Iraq to successfully gain control of territory by 2014. McAdam's political process model, consisting of antecedent conditions, mechanisms, and effects, explains how resistance movements develop. Lee's social movement approach to resistance dynamics adapted the model for irregular warfare, with conditions that included political disunity, ungoverned economics, socio-ethnic divides, and identity grievances.⁹² The Islamic State emphasized a narrative of Maliki's oppression of Sunnis and its view of the historical and cultural inferiority of the Shia, exploited the divided Sunni polity, and its domination of the economy in Sunni areas attracted recruits and followers.

The mechanisms the Islamic State used to rebuild their Sunni base included co-optation and conversion of political elites, resource generation and usurpation of state resources, recruitment and network expansion, and framing using media platforms.⁹³ The elimination of pro-government Sunni tribal and Sahwa leaders allowed increased recruiting within the tribes and in rural areas. Islamic State media shifted its strategy to produce more products at the local level while focusing on what Ingram calls pragmatic and perceptual factors. Pragmatic factors focus on security and livelihood, while perceptual factors play on identity conflicts between the Sunni Iraqis that Islamic State was pursuing and the predominant sectarian makeup of the government, which is Shia.⁹⁴

The effects of the process are increased political legitimacy, economic self-sufficiency, organizational and operational resiliency, and increased popular support.⁹⁵ The Anbar Sunni protest movement created the appearance of a crisis that the Islamic State leveraged for additional legitimacy in their argument against the incumbent government, and their growing military strength in core areas allowed them to demonstrate the potential for governance. By the end of 2013, the Islamic State was seizing and holding territory for the first time since 2007. To demonstrate how the Islamic State mobilized its target population,

I used Lee's social movement approach to trace the Islamic State's rise in the areas in an around Jurf ah Sakhr using documents from the Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC).⁹⁶

Balancing coercion, co-option, and carrots

In August 2011, Islamic State of Iraq spokesman Abu Mohammed al Adnani highlighted how the anti-Sahwa campaign was used as a psychological weapon designed to instill fear:

How long are you going to live in fear? No one among you dares to leave his house, travel, or even sleep peacefully in his own home. When will you enjoy peace again? How long are you going to stay alert day and night? Do you think we will go away? Do you think we will cease to exist or get bored? No! Repent quickly before it is too late, for the results of the battle have been already decided, and it is only a matter of days!⁹⁷

The Sahwa had much to fear from the Islamic State, but there was often another message broadcast to the Sunni community – particularly the lower ranking members of the Sahwa – and this one is from Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, Omar's successor:

As for those who were misled by chieftains and members of our tribes and thus sided with the ranks of the Crusader United States and became servants and stooges of the Safavid government, I tell them that I swear to God you will not be harmed if you follow the truth and support the religion of God, just as you fought against it. Thus, repent and reform your mind because God will forgive you and replace your sins with good.⁹⁸

These two messages illustrate the dual-tone strategy that Abu Omar al Baghdadi crafted in 2008–2009 with his war minister and partner, Abu Hamza al Muhajir. As Lee's social movement model suggests, the dynamics were much more than just addressing a grievance or developing a slick media program. Such a change would require new institutions and the communication of the vision throughout the ranks.

The idea of repentance for the Sahwa was controversial among the upper ranks of the Islamic State. Captured correspondence from Abu Hamza to Al Qaeda Central in 2008 exposed a dispute between Abu Sulayman, the head of the Islamic State's legal branch, and Abu Hamza. Sulayman left the Islamic State to return to Pakistan where he complained to al Qaeda Central's leadership that Abu Hamza and Abu Omar had offered amnesty to the 'criminals of the tribes who went back and formed the Awakenings.'⁹⁹ The letters paint a picture different than the caricature of the Islamic State of as rigid, instead providing key evidence that the Islamic State's leadership was flexible and willing to change course, even in the face of the defection of key religious leaders. Furthermore, it exposes the breakdown in communications between the two groups.

Once the difficult leadership decision was made to offer repentance to the tribes and convince them to return to resistance, Abu Omar al Baghdadi created a tribal outreach office.¹⁰⁰ A RAND Corporation examination of captured Islamic State documents prior to 2008 does not show such a tribal outreach department in Anbar province's organization chart.¹⁰¹ By 2009, captured letters retrieved from the strike that killed Abu Omar and Abu Hamza revealed the efforts of an emir named Abu Khaldun from the 'Southern Belt'¹⁰² who was reporting back to a centralized tribal engagement office.

The institution of a tribal outreach office was a belated recognition that ignoring the importance of tribal leaders in the traditional Sunni society had been a primary factor in the rise of the Sahwa – particularly considering that the Islamic State movement was an economic competitor to Sunni tribes.¹⁰³ Islamic State had ignored the tribes originally because they were a rival to their future implementation of Sharia and the rule of the Islamic State appointed emir in local areas. This changed in 2008. Abu Khaldun's post-engagement reports, addressed to someone who reported directly to both Abu Omar and Abu Hamza, described his outreach to Sunni tribal leaders in Jurf ah Sakhr, Yousifiyah, Amiriyah al Fallujah, and other former ISI sanctuaries. The emir brought the tribal leaders gifts of fine robes and headdresses, and played on their Sunni ties and suspicions of the government. He reported who was amenable to the ISI, who was willing to sabotage Sahwa participation in the tribe, and who was stalling and maintaining ties to the government. In one case, he asked his superior in the letter for permission to move against one prominent sheik who had spurned his engagements and elected to run for government under the Maliki ticket.¹⁰⁴

In Jurf ah Sakhr in the fall of 2009, Abu Khaldun met with a very prominent Jurf Sheik (name withheld) and reported that his contact:

was a high ranking officer in former Army but refused to be part of al Alqami's state. Abu Asim visited him previously. As for me, I sat with him for five minutes after Ramadan prayers and introduced myself and told him about my mandate, and he welcomed me and I conveyed your best regards for him and gave him the gift I was taking to him. He told me to convey his allegiance to the sheikhs for best or worst and conveyed to me the leadership should avoid the type of mistakes committed in the past (target quality not quantity), and he repeated this last phrase three times and implored Allah to preserve you and grant you victory. We then parted.¹⁰⁵

The sheiks referred to were Abu Omar and Abu Hamza, and the reference to 'al Alqami's state' was a historic reference to the Caliph's Shia vizier al Alqami who allegedly conspired to assist the Mongols in the catastrophic sack of Baghdad that ended the Abbasid empire. The entire engagement emphasized similar identity (Sunni Arab) loyalties and religious ties. The tribal sheik was advising the emir to respect the tribes and work through them in their efforts to contest the Maliki government, and to be discriminate in the elimination of their enemies.

The network expanded throughout the Southern Belt in the Sunni farmland among a population vulnerable to their identity and tribal ties to the Islamic

State. The Iraqi state was simply incapable of competing with Abu Khaldun's social networking. From another of his reports:

- (1) After arrangements and communications, a meeting was held with Sheikh X[name withheld], the chief of al-'Imran sub-tribe of al-Gharir [or al-'Azir] tribe who lives in Shishbar region near by A1-Ghuwaythat, who is a popular man in his tribe, well known, and has good reputation. He is also supportive of the Islamic State and is ready to accommodate the State members. Several issues have been discussed, some of which are:
 - (a) Dismantling the al-Sahwah [Awakening Councils] groups, which is an Awakening of both apostasy and hypocrisy, and he told us that would be achieved by eliminating the al-Sahwah Sheikh, [name withheld] and the Al-Ghuwaythat al-Sahwah Sheikh, [name withheld]. He also showed readiness to cooperate with the brothers to work and accommodate them for any project.
 - (b) He told us he has three fighters who wish to pledge their allegiance and work with the Islamic State.
 - (c) The brothers in Al Latifyah have been informed about Sheik X's stance and the cooperation with him.

The meeting was conducted by our brother Abu-Hazim

- (1) A meeting was held with one of Zawba' tribal chiefs, Sheikh [name withheld] al-Zawba'i, who is kind, courageous, and supportive to the State, who literally told me: 'I wish for the Islamic State men to return so they can chase away those traitors, the men of the al-Sahwah groups of apostasy and hypocrisy who gave up their faith and honor for the infidel Occupier.
- (2) The discussion topic was about dismantling of the al-Sahwah groups, which is an al-Sahwah of apostasy and hypocrisy, as soon as possible. Also, he told me that he is going to do his best working with Sheikhs and good and prominent individuals to enlighten and advise the people to return to their right sense.

The meeting was conducted by our brother Abu-Hisham.

- (3) A trip to our brother [name withheld] has been conducted, whereas the conditions of the homes and the tribes around the Expressway between alMu'in and Abu-Hamdan have been discussed with him. He also has been tasked to move on with the matter of coordinating with other sheikhs in the region.
- (4) A communication took place with Hajji [name withheld] al-Qarghuli who is the uncle of Al-Qarghul sub-tribe leader Sheikh [name withheld], who is completely opposite to his brother's son and he is

supportive to the Islamic State. A meeting has been arranged soon with him.¹⁰⁶

The tribal outreach and network extension by leaders in the Islamic State movement was a slow process that took five years to develop, and only accelerated at the end when the Islamic State tapped into a parallel but independent Sunni protest movement in Anbar that reinforced their messaging about Shia oppression of Sunnis. Despite the empirical evidence suggesting that the Islamic State emphasized the elimination of its Sunni rivals, the leadership understood that co-option and engagement of the remainder of those networks was crucial in fashioning the foundations for the creation of a real Islamic State, one that remains and expands.

Conclusion

While many factors influenced the environment that enabled the Islamic State to rise to control large areas in both Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State's defeat of the Sahwa in Iraq is a primary factor that allowed it to upend government control of their core areas and mobilize its target population. The hypothesis testing confirms a strong correlation between the elimination of the Sahwa elements in the Jurf test case and the ability of the Islamic State to move from the Maoist organizational phase to mobile warfare against state security forces. While this is an important finding in explaining the rise of the Islamic State, this research presents several questions for future research.

If the Vietnamese communists and the Salafist–jihadists were able to adapt different ideologies to irregular warfare tactics, then how important is ideology as a factor in both successes? While it is possible that there are similarities between communism and Salafist–jihadism that could account for the compatibility between ideology and irregular warfare tactics, it seems intuitive that these would still be special cases. Are these ideologies similar enough to work in combination with the tactics to produce success? What role does insurgent leadership play in adapting to changing dynamics for success in this combination of violent social movement formation?

Another area that could be developed further is the idea of the two networks – the Sahwa and the Islamic State – at war with each other. An argument could be made that the Islamic State's multiple networks: Salafist–jihadists, outcasts from the Sahwa movement and Sunni resistance rejectionists, Camp Bucca alumni, former Ba'ath regime members, and foreign fighters combined to create a deep, overlapping network that was impenetrable to the Sahwa once they realized they were under attack. In contrast, the Sahwa were at odds with Sunni political leadership of the provinces and were localized networks that had odd strands across the country that could not be described as a national network. The previous war had damaged the structure of the tribes and the

tribes were hopelessly divided in most cases between supporting the Iraqi government or the resistance. The Islamic State did have this national character and could easily surge assets as they attacked different parts of the Sahwa network in detail. Islamic State assassination squads created patterns of attacks in this town, followed by a series of attacks in a nearby town, and so on. With perfect local intelligence by clandestine stay-behind networks, the Islamic State could achieve the discrimination demanded of them by their prospective Sunni tribal leaders sitting on the proverbial fence. In the battle of networks, the deeper and more connected network might have won.

Finally, the battle of narratives in this decade-long struggle by the Islamic State is fascinating. Analysts and reporters often describe the Islamic State as too brutal for even al Qaeda, and that this violence was supposedly crucial in instigating the Sahwa backlash in 2006. Yet in 2009 and 2010, Sunni tribal leaders are once again sending their men to join the Islamic State. I would suggest that Mao's concept of contradictions can explain this confusing juxtaposition of narratives and truth. Mao recommended that all grievances be attended to but not solved, while according to one observer: 'the secret behind revolutionary successes in winning the people is to tell them what they want to hear, irrespective of whether or not this happens to vary from the long term rebel objectives.'¹⁰⁷ I would add that the other secret is to take a kernel of truth, such as Iranian influence among some Shia politicians, and conflate it, manipulate it, and exaggerate it until it becomes what Ingram calls the crisis – a crisis that is manufactured, and that only the revolutionary can solve. After that, the revolutionary simply has to manage the savagery before establishing new governance ... and a new truth.¹⁰⁸

Notes

1. Fall, 'Theory and Practice', 50–6.
2. Taber, *The War of the Flea*, cover.
3. Fukuyama, *The End of History*, xiii.
4. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, 1. Marks studied four insurgencies (Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Peru) that were inspired by Mao's revolutionary doctrine. All were long-standing insurgencies whose lack of success after the Vietnam period might have confirmed the opinion that revolutionary warfare had lost its magic.
5. I use the term 'the Islamic State movement' to describe the group that Abu Musab al Zarqawi formed in Iraq in 2002 from remnants of his original camp in Afghanistan (founded in 1999) that he named Tawhid wal Jihad (Monotheism and Struggle). Zarqawi renamed the group Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn (Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia, a.k.a. al Qaeda in Iraq – AQI) in 2004 after pledging allegiance to Osama bin Laden. The group joined the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in January 2006, which was a political–military front of several jihadist groups but so dominated by AQI to the point that it is possible MSC was a sham organization used to convince Iraqis of its indigenous nature. Nevertheless, MSC lasted eight months before transforming

from a group into a shadow government with a variety of cabinet positions (at least in name if not function). The Islamic State of Iraq lasted from 2006 to 2013, when Abu Bakr al Baghdadi reclaimed the al Nusra franchise as an Islamic State element and changed the name of the organization to the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (Levant). The group left that name behind when it established the caliphate known as the Islamic State in 2014. Zarqawi's often stated intent in Iraq and the Levant as early as 2004 was to establish an Islamic state in the region once the coalition was expelled.

6. Abu Musab al Zarqawi, 'Zarqawi's Cry', 3.
7. The Islamic State controls territory in areas that are also claimed by Syria and Iraq, while administering services to the remaining population and claiming a monopoly on the legitimate application of violence in the same area. The legitimacy of such a state remains to be evaluated, although it is still in power after two years. No other state has recognized the Islamic State, nor has any international organization.
8. Exceptions are Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*; Goldstone, 'What is ISIS?'; and Gartenstein-Ross et al., *The War between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda*.
9. The Sahwa (Awakening) movement was/is a grassroots movement of Sunni tribes in Anbar that fought Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State of Iraq in 2006–2007 for control of Sunni areas. They were joined by elements of insurgent groups and other Sunnis and the movement spread outside Anbar to other Sunni areas of Iraq and elements still exist today, particularly around Ramadi. Cottam and Huseby's book *Confronting al Qaeda: The Sunni Awakening and US Strategy in Al Anbar* contains interviews and a scholarly analysis of changing identities and images for both the Americans and the Sunni of Iraq from 2003 to 2010.
10. Two popular books about the Islamic State are Stern and Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* and Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. Both sets of authors present the group as a state and an army respectively that centers on terror, as opposed to a movement that uses terror instrumentally to achieve its end state – the creation of a 'new' type of state in the international system.
11. Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 4.
12. Fall, 'Theory and Practice', 46.
13. Fromson and Simon, 'ISIS: The Dubious Paradise of Apocalypse Now', 44.
14. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. I, 473. This is important because IS describes themselves in this image and this end state drives their strategy.
15. Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 8.
16. *Ibid.*, 9.
17. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary Warfare*, 40. These phases are an adaptation to Mao's original stages as modified by the Vietnamese communists.
18. Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders, and Bandits*, 274.
19. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, 7.
20. Metz, *Rethinking Insurgency*, 13.
21. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, Vol. II, 86.
22. Hafez, 'Lessons from the Arab Afghans Phenomenon'.
23. Abu Musab al Suri, 'Lessons learned from the armed Jihad in Syria', 16.
24. Lia, 'Abu Musab al Suri's critique of hard line Salafists in Jihadist current'.
25. Hamid and Farrall, *The Arabs at War in Afghanistan*, 257.
26. al Adl, My experience with Abu Musab al Zarqawi, 10.
27. Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 13.
28. Brisard and Martinez, *Zarqawi*, 226–7.

29. These concepts can be found throughout Abu Musab al Suri's 'Lessons learned' document.
30. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, 69; Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, 47.
31. Whiteside, *The Smiling, Scented Men*, 141–4.
32. Even an informed observer with a decade of Iraq experience and the former Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction claimed that the Maliki administration was responsible for 'killing all those Sunnis in the Awakening movement . . . they were met with murder'. This is a patently untrue statement but a common belief. This research proves the claim is baseless, while not disputing that Awakening members were at times arrested by the government under suspicion of collaboration with Islamic State – a charge that is hard to evaluate. Sometimes it was true. Bowen and Hamid, 'Discussion about Islamism', minute 44.
33. Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 112–13.
34. Al-Qaidah Organization in the Arabian Peninsula, 'Assassination Operations', 64–87.
35. Lomparis, *From People's War to People's Rule*, 95.
36. Andrews, *The Village at War*, 44.
37. Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 79.
38. *Ibid.*, 18.
39. Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 54.
40. Islamic State of Iraq, 'Analysis of the State of ISI', 3–4.
41. Russell, *Innovation, Transformation, and War*, 57.
42. *Ibid.*, 105.
43. Green and Mullen, *Fallujah Redux*, 118.
44. Andrews, *The Village at War*, 57.
45. *Ibid.*, 68.
46. *Ibid.*, 73–103.
47. *Ibid.*, 96.
48. Fall, 'Theory and Practice', 46–57.
49. Andrews, *The Village at War*, 72–95.
50. Lomparis, *From People's War to People's Rule*, 69.
51. Abu Omar, 'The Religious and Political Crime of the Election and Our Duty Toward It', 5.
52. The Qureshi indicated a lineage tie to the House of Muhammad, a legitimizing factor for a would-be caliph.
53. Abu Hamza, 'The command is for none but Allah'.
54. Islamic State of Iraq, 'Analysis of the State of ISI'. ID: NMEC-2007–612449
55. Lomparis, *From People's War to People's Rule*, 68.
56. Database available at iraqibodycount.org.
57. These population estimates are very rough due to the lack of reliable surveys since 2000. Baqubah's number includes Buhriz and Khalis numbers to reflect the mixed nature of Diyala province.
58. Green and Mullen, *Fallujah Redux*, 118.
59. The United Nations believes that over half a million Maslawis left the city in 2014 as refugees. UNAMI/OHCHR, *Report*, 4.
60. Williams and Adnan, 'Sunnis in Iraq Allied with U.S. Rejoin Rebels', A1.
61. Abu Musab al Suri, 'Lessons learned from the armed Jihad in Syria', 33.
62. Iraqi Body Count incident: k12246-ef1611.
63. Flintoff, 'Violence in Iraq Takes a Political Turn'.

64. Islamic State of Iraq, 'Harvest of operations in Al Rusafa and the Southern Sections (Baghdad), 1 Feb to 16 Mar 2009', item 1.
65. Ghazi and Arango, 'Qaeda-Linked Militants in Iraq Secure Nearly Full Control of Falluja', A8.
66. Mardini, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq Operations Suggest Rising Confidence Ahead of U.S. Military Withdrawal', 6.
67. Islamic State of Iraq, Documented Military Operations in Diyala Province, 17 Feb-26 Mar 2011.
68. Islamic State of Iraq, Documented Military Operations in Diyala Province, 26 Sep-17 Oct 2011.
69. Islamic State of Iraq, Documented Military Operations in Diyala Province, 22 Apr -19 Jun 2012.
70. Williams and Adnan, 'Sunnis in Iraq Allied with U.S. Rejoin Rebels', A1.
71. Al Umar, 'Al-Hamadani'.
72. Weiss and Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, 38-9.
73. Al Tamimi, 'Violence in Iraq', note 47.
74. Allam, 'Records show how Iraqi extremists withstood U.S. anti-terror efforts'.
75. Roggio, 'Iraqi forces strike blow to al Qaeda in Iraq's northern leadership cadre'.
76. Bahney et al., *Economic Analysis*, 75.
77. Abu Musab al Suri, 'Lessons learned from the armed Jihad in Syria', 19.
78. This research relied on many captured documents authored by the Islamic State of Iraq. I found these to be a very reliable source, and this claim is supported by the excellent work done by Jung et al. in 'Managing a Transnational Insurgency' as part of the Harmony Program for the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, NY. For a convincing theory on why an insurgent group would expose themselves to risk by producing such a voluminous administration, see Shapiro's *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, a chapter of which focuses on the 'Al Qaeda in Iraq'.
79. ISI, State of Ninewa, Mosul Sector, 'Warning to the owners of billiard halls, laser CD stores'.
80. ISI, Governor of Mosul, (No Title).
81. ISI, Warning No 106.
82. Al Tamimi, 'Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents'.
83. Interview with TW (20 March 2015), who served as a U.S. Army platoon leader in the Hamiya/Jurf area in 2010-2011.
84. Sergeant First Class Christopher Brevard of Apache 1-501 Parachute Infantry Regiment was killed in March 2007, allegedly at the direction of Abd al Hadi and his Islamic Army of Iraq cell in Jurf ah Sakhr.
85. ISI, 'Harvest of military operations in the Southern belt sector of the Baghdad Province', 19 October 2008 entry.
86. ISI, 'Documented Military Operations in the South Province', 3 July 2009 entry.
87. ISI, 'Documented Military Operations in the Southern Governorate', 9 June 2010 entry.
88. Interview with FJ (14 July 2015), an Awakening coordinator in Jurf from 2007-2012.
89. ISI, 'Documented military operations in the South Governorate', 15 Oct 2012 entry.
90. ISI, 'Statement detailing some documented cases in the blessed head harvesting raid in the southern province', item #2.
91. Gartenstein-Ross et al., *The War between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda*, 5.
92. McAdam, *Political Process*, 40-55. Brought to my attention by Professor Doowan Lee of the Naval Postgraduate School. Lee adapted the model for use in

- analyzing the social movement aspect of unconventional warfare and shared his unpublished paper 'Resistance Dynamics' with me.
93. These are subsets of the mechanism element in Lee's model.
 94. Ingram, 'Strategic Logic', 2.
 95. These are the subsets of the effects element in Lee's model.
 96. The Conflict Records Research Center at National Defense University was closed in late June 2015 due to a lack of funding. There are plans to reopen the center soon in a different venue.
 97. Adnani, 'The Islamic State of Iraq will Remain', minute 35–46.
 98. Abu Bakr, 'But Allah will not allow but that his light should be perfected', words addressing 'O Sunni Tribes ...'
 99. Anonymous Al Qaeda Central official writing to Abu Hamza, portion of the correspondence dated 25 January 2008.
 100. Abu Omar al Baghdadi had the personal credibility to establish a tribal outreach among Iraqi Sunnis, not Abu Hamza who was Egyptian. The relationship between the two partners and Abu Omar's considerable influence is a yet untold story that hopefully will be further developed by additional research.
 101. Anbar province had a legal, media, medical, prisoners, support battalion, security, treasury, and mail section overseen by an administrative emir council. A spoils group reported to the administrative emir. The general emir reported to the Mujahidin Shura Council (prior to the Islamic State formation) according to Bahney et al., *Economic Analysis*, 35. These documents came from the Harmony Batch ala Daham Hanush and Harmony Batch MA 7029-5.
 102. The Southern Belt was a term developed during the Zarqawi era to describe an area which stretches from south of Fallujah to just beyond the Tigris River south and east of Baghdad. This included Jurf ah Sakhr, one of the towns in the case study.
 103. Bahney et al., *Economic Analysis*, xvi.
 104. Abu Khaldun, 'Synopsis of the Relations Committee in Baghdad's Southern Belt'.
 105. Ibid.
 106. The names of the Sahwa sheiks were in the original document but withheld in this paper to protect them from possible harm. Abu Khaldun, 'OPSUM from Abu Mustafa of Southern Belt trying to overturn Sahwa'.
 107. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary Warfare*, 55–6.
 108. Haji Bakr Naji, *The Management of Savagery*, 31–3.

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ORCID

Craig Whiteside  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4094-7173>

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