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Framing and analyzing ISIS through classical management perspectives

Abstract

The formulation and implementation of effective counterterrorism strategies require a robust understanding of the dynamics and inter-related organizational elements of the outfits being combated in order to have a balanced all-round view of their strong points and the weak zones that can be focused upon for more efficient operations. Focusing on ISIS and the Jihadist Lone Wolf type, the threats they pose to the Spanish society can be better countered through a proactive approach also underpinned by the imperatives of the organizational elements of these organizations. Supplementing the existing frameworks being used by agencies, an invaluable perspective would be to observe the business and management dynamics within these organizations by creating a blueprint of their different dimensions - their linkages, imperatives, compulsions and the constraints that drive their structure and operations. In this context, the blueprint model introduced by these two types includes the areas of mission, structure, financing, recruitment, and propagation. The model shows the sequencing between the various areas of management with the options chosen by rational leadership in terms of the better fitting according to the internal and external environments and resources at their disposal. An analysis of such progression that results in the internal organization and the capabilities of the entities can then be deployed by the counterterrorism agencies to identify and home in on the specific weak points for optimal results. This Model can be further enhanced to include other areas that would help in creating blueprints for specific terrorist entities operating in any specific environment.

Keywords

Terrorism, counterterrorism, jihadist, ISIS, strategy

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Introduction

With the rising threat of terrorist attacks in Spain, especially the “Lone Wolf” attacks that are patently designed to spur fear and insecurity among the public, there is a need to analyze the terrorist organizations of ISIS and its related lone operators with different perspectives. This will facilitate the formulation of more effective initiatives for deterring terrorist attacks and punishing perpetrators.

State agencies have achieved significant success in combating the menace of terrorism but there always exists a room for enhancing and improving on the perspectives from which the phenomenon can be analyzed in order to obtain better effectiveness therefrom. It also provides a multi-dimensional approach, being another cog in the mechanism to analyzing the entities with a view to framing better countering strategies. The emergence of terrorist entities, their recruitment techniques and their means of obtaining resources can all be viewed as having a commercial angle too. A useful parallel can thus be drawn with conventional business organizations and management strategy approaches in order to provide solutions to curb the potential harm such entities can inflict on societies. Assessment of terrorist outfits as commercially driven entities would provide valuable additional insights into their mechanisms, along with highlighting the strong points and the constraints that exist in these entities. Knowledge of such specific organizational angles would provide the government agencies with better capabilities to plan and mount their campaigns.

Backdrop

Terrorist attacks continued to hit European countries in 2017, leading to many innocent victims losing their lives, and creating an environment of overall general perception and fear of the unknown amongst the public. The number of failed, foiled or completed attacks in Europe has increased as the following graph shows:

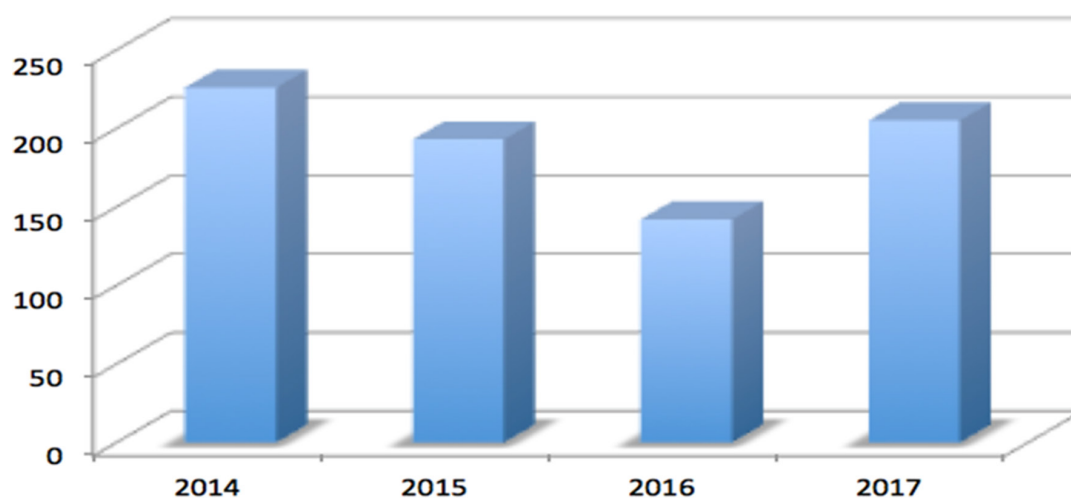


Figure 1 – Number of terrorist attacks in Europe¹

1. Europol. “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”. 2018.

The UK experienced the highest number of attacks (107), followed by France (54) and Spain (16). Spain's was a special case as it experienced jihadist attacks after having been relatively safe from such strikes for a long period of time. More critically, the nature of these attacks indicates a high number of separatist and jihadist attacks.

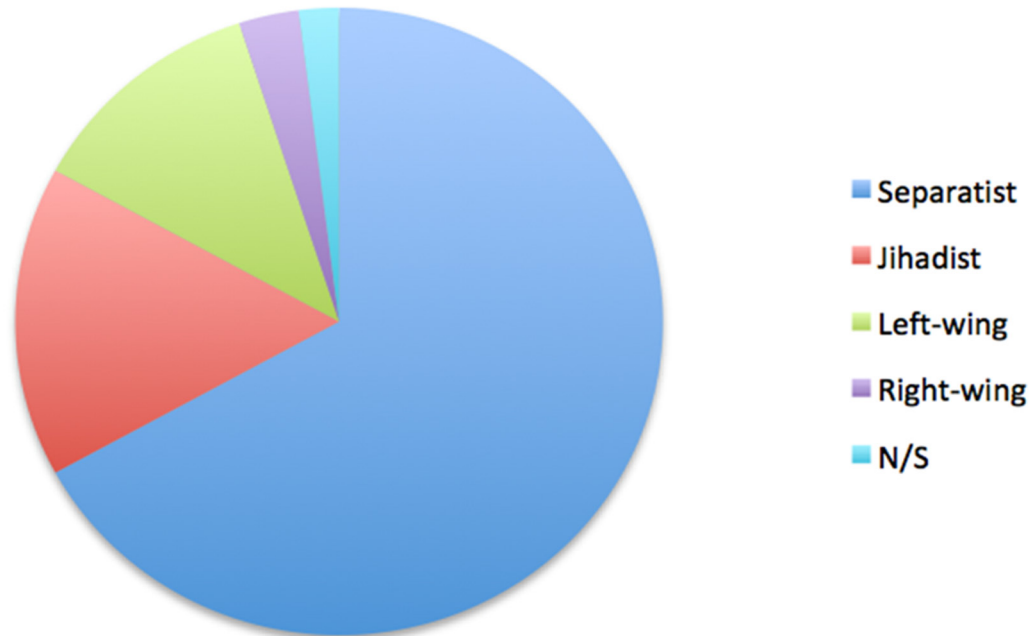


Figure 2 – Types of terrorist attacks in Europe²

A total of 33 failed, foiled and completed jihadist terrorist attacks were reported in the EU in 2017, which is more than double the number from last year. Out of these, ten attacks were successful as they achieved the goals of the perpetrators, invariably set as “killing of enemies of Islam” by the terrorists. This led to 62 fatalities with the most casualties occurring in UK, followed by Spain, which suffered 16 deaths. Regarding the degree of sophistication employed, the trend showed a decrease as less specialized measures were used. In cases when high degree of sophistication was required, the attacks were generally abortive, for instance the attack in Brussels when a premature detonation in the incendiary devices placed in a luggage trolley was caused due to poor designing and manufacturing. Alarming, the attack in Parsons Green, where the explosives failed to detonate, could have resulted in a high number of casualties had it been carried out with high quality manufactured components and handled properly.

Trend regarding ISIS and Jihadist attacks

As the trend shows, jihadists are carefully selecting the targets and goals they want to pursue³. Such attacks are being carried out in indiscriminate fashion, designed to

² Europol. “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”. 2018.

³ Europol. “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”. 2018.

instill fear in the population, and also against symbols of the Western “hedonistic” lifestyle, together with symbols of authority. The Barcelona attack showed a propensity of the terrorists for indiscriminate killings. Alarmingly, jihadists have demonstrated their capability to remain largely undetected, and to radicalize without suspicion in the garb of religious norms in many instances.

As ISIS is becoming weaker due to concerted global and regional drives, it is spurring its members to carry out Lone Actor (or Lone Wolf as it is usually referred to) attacks. This instruction tends to require them to focus on their countries of origin upon return, generally in Europe and the Middle East region. The propaganda outlets including social media are used to exhort the individuals, also specifying the means of attacks on civilian targets. The authorities are thus faced with a radically altered challenge in setting up counterterrorism initiatives. The planning and support from those outside Europe, as coordinated recently by the lone operators inside the continent is an additional concern. This feature gives the lone operators better execution and planning skills than the conventional model. Those who are especially vulnerable to turning to violence in their own countries are those who have returned from war-torn Syria and have the mandate of causing havoc through individual acts in Europe. These radically inspired individuals who espouse the principles of ISIS have been responsible for the recent rise in UK of such lone actor attacks. For Spain, the phenomenon can be related to in the case of a Danish citizen who was earlier exposed to the warzone between 2012 and 2015. He was arrested on his return from Denmark as a result of a successful surveillance operation. Keeping the costs of terrorism high and having legislative pressure brought to bear on the lone actors will mitigate the bane. Some European countries like Austria have reported an increase even in females attempting to travel to the Syrian warzone. Many of these females married foreign terrorist fighters after coming into contact with them through social media.

Origins of ISIS

Reasons of emergence

General Jack Keane, a retired four-star general and one of those who masterminded the USA war surge in 2009, explained the rise of ISIS by linking it to a strategic blunder committed by the US administration⁴. He recounts how in 2009, with Al-Qaida practically defeated, President Obama made the mistake of pulling troops out, leaving dangerous men like former allies Maliki to their devices. In July 2010, ISIS was taken over by Abu Bakr Baghdadi, which set the stage for the wider conflict. This was after the death of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, when Abu Bakr was voted by nine of the eleven Shuraa members to become the head of Al-Qaida

4 Hall, B. “Inside ISIS - The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army”. *New York: Center Street*. 2015.

in Iraq. His swift rise through the ranks suggests that he had cultivated this move during his time in Camp Bucca prison. For the next few years, several massive attacks were launched in Baghdad, designed to stoke sectarian violence. After the elimination of Bin Laden, revenge attacks were promised and hundreds were killed in brutal coordinated attacks. The campaign picked up steam in July 2012, with the announcement of a new strategy called “Breaking the Walls” – a plan to refuel the group and free jihadist prisoners around the country. This lasted a year, and with the ratcheting up sectarian violence, led to the swelling of ISIS ranks as hardened battle-ready freed prisoners joined. The most devastating event was the fall of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city in June 2014. The United States and its allies were indecisive and proverbially “looked the other way” as ISIS swept through Mosul, freeing over a thousand jihadists and seizing countless battalions’ worth of sophisticated United States weaponry. The marginalization of Ba’athists by the Iraqi regime had played into the hands of ISIS, as it found a significant core of disciplined fighters disenfranchised with the weak Iraqi regime. The corruption in the Iraqi Army ranks did not help, as it rendered them defenseless to stave off the ISIS onslaught. This marked the significant entrenchment of ISIS through massive land captures in Iraq and in parts of Syria.

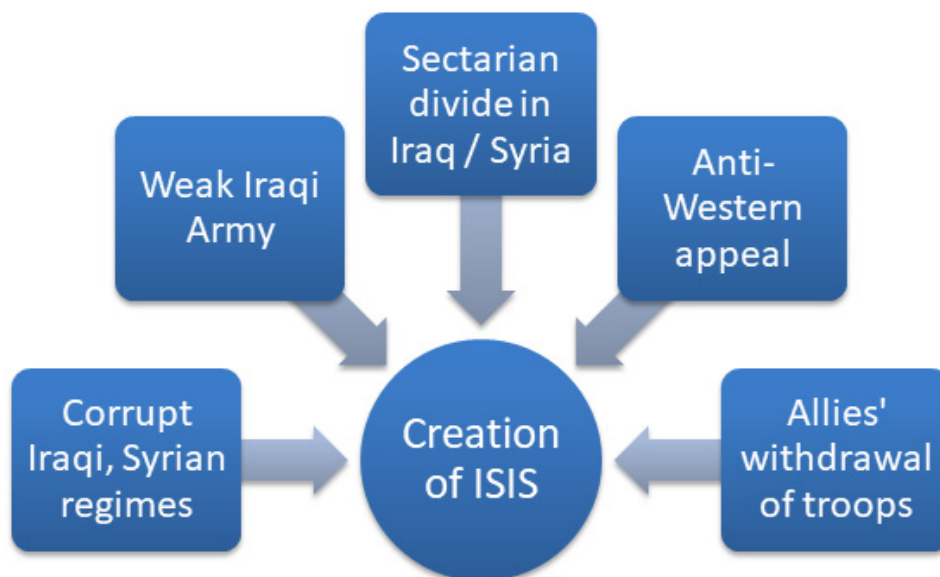


Figure 3 – Creation of ISIS

Global Footprint

With origins in Iraq and Syria, and having surprised the Allied forces with its rapid land conquest spree in 2015, ISIS has progressively lost control over considerable large tracts of land. This has been made possible through concerted military operations by the Allied forces to drive out the elements from total control to constricted zones and confining them to guerilla operations. However, given the flexibility it deploys in its structure and operations, ISIS has leveraged support from the Lone Wolf operators to carry out attacks in other parts of the world.

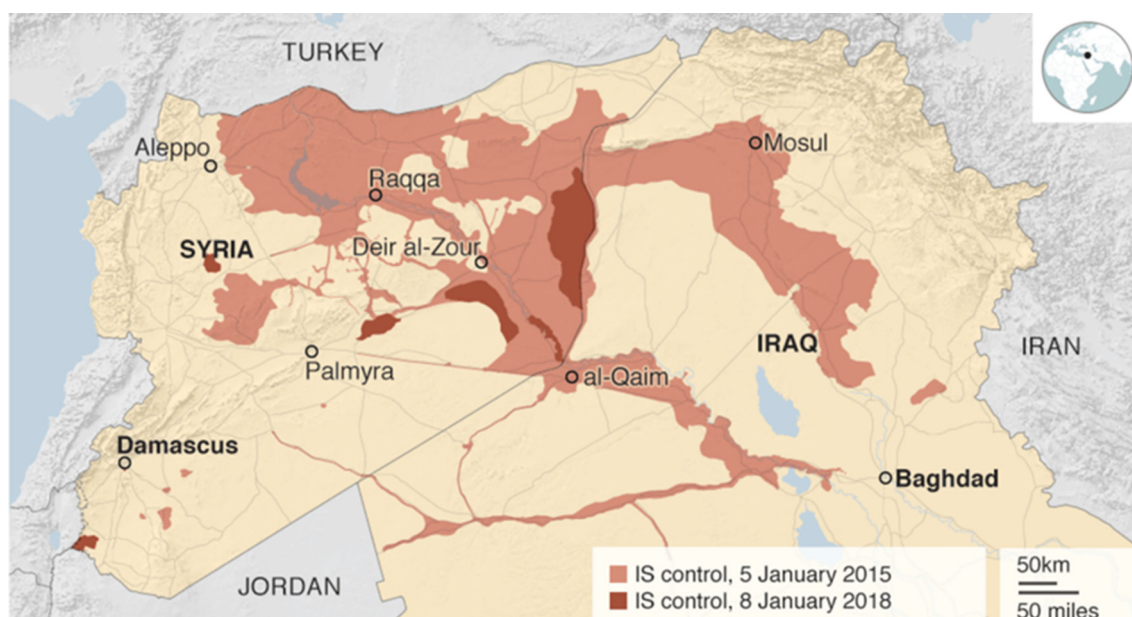


Figure 4 – ISIS Waning Land Capture⁵

Understanding through tracking business dimensions

A better holistic understanding of the terrorist organizations, with a view to analyzing them from business and management spheres will provide the security agencies with additional flexibility in framing their responses to these outfits. When the framework identifies both the strong and weak points, these can be selectively worked upon, depending on the nature and extent of their strengths or weaknesses. The objective is not to devise a uniform model for use against all outfits, but to work on a specific form that fits the model being used by ISIS and the Lone Wolf operator. These vulnerabilities, as given by different constrained options chosen by these entities as they operate in specific locations would be useful to bear in mind in the formulation of strategies to wreck their plans. Hence, the framework also provides for a mapping mechanism, as the agencies can compare and contrast various organizations through the blueprint identifying the specific weak zones of the respective terrorist entities to target.

The layout of this article includes specific analysis of the various dimensions, along with the countering initiatives that can be formulated, as evolved from the blueprint of the model. It does not aim to be an all-encompassing drive but as an additional tool to be used by security agencies. It is considered that such a model would uncover some weaknesses and vulnerable zones that can potentially be missed through traditional analysis.



Figure 5 - The Basic Business Dimension Framework

⁵ IHS Conflict Monitor, 2018.

Mission

The mission of an organization for a conventional business or for a terrorist one, defines the reason for the organization's existence, along with the values that form the core of its foundation. It announces to the world and to its members, both existing and potential, the actions, attitudes and behaviors that govern its march towards achieving its objectives. It pulls the entity together and provides guidance points in terms of conflict resolution and the strategies pursued by the leadership, with justifications therein for the members to follow. ETA, for example, was founded in 1959 in opposition to the Franco regime, with the avowed mission of maintaining Basque autonomy and preserving Basque culture. The means of achieving the mission included using violence through the strategy of action-reaction-action⁶.

The following table summarizes the various dimensions that underpin the mission of a terrorist organization, along with examples.

Separatist	ETA,LTTE
Religious Radical	AQI, ISIS, Hizbullah
Supremacist	Klu Klux Klan
Socio-Economic model	Extreme anti-abortion (AOG – Army of God), extreme anti-immigration (Klu Klux Klan), anti-capitalism (Anti Capitalist Action) etc.

Table I – Mission of terrorist organizations.

Poverty provides a key opportunity for terrorist organizations to mobilize the masses based on some illusory cause⁷. A more lethal brand of narrative develops when religion is at the core due to brainwashing and the capacity of such outfits to weed out those with low commitment to the cause⁸. A failed economy, allied with social deprivation of the masses, and wide stretches of comparatively lawless areas owing to corruption being rife in the zones, provides the organizations with a ready environment to advance their goals. A popular term developed for this is the “Club Model”⁹ where the terrorist organization, for all intents and purposes, takes over the social environment, providing the populace with basic social necessities, carefully tying up the people in a web of organized subservience to further its own causes. The failure of governments in these instances, and in many cases, the issue of a civil war compounding the misery of

6 Tejerina, B. “Protest Cycle, Political Violence and Social Movements in the Basque Country”. *Nations and Nationalism*, 2001, no. 7(1), 39-57.

7 US Government Department of Defence. “Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ikhwan) Encyclopedia: Islamist Extremism and Terrorism, Jihad and Sharia Law, Relationship to Hamas, Egyptian Uprising and the Ouster of Mubarak, Election of Mohamed Morsi”. Congress. 2012.

8 Shapiro, J. “The Terrorist’s Dilemma”. Princeton, *New Jersey: Princetown University Press*. 2013.

9 Berman, E., & Laitin. “Religion, terrorism and public goods: Testing the Club Model”. *Journal of Public Economics*. 2008.

the local people, provide a breeding ground for entities focused on terrorism to recruit and to mobilize the members.



Figure 6 Club Model – The Process

For counterterrorism agencies, understanding the mission dimension is relevant for absorbing the nature of the social and economic deprivation of the people, especially in the Club Model, thereby leading to the need for social reforms and the uplifting of the areas¹⁰. Thus, the drive, which became famous in the Gulf War with the notion of “winning hearts and minds”, is designed to dilute the attraction and narrative of terrorist organizations like ISIS. Moreover, in the case of a faulty narrative being propounded, the counterterrorism agencies can work to educate and extricate the people from the influence of such false doctrines through using various social media platforms, and overall by providing aligned education in the areas, allied with developing and promoting a mantra of enlightened moderation amongst the people. This is being done, and can be consolidated, in many cases by recruiting moderate religious scholars and funding local seminaries through the alignment of their syllabi in accordance with the requirements and needs of modern society.

When the narrative of terrorism, as twisted and manipulated from the religious edicts, is defeated, it creates awareness in the people of the exploitative angle and dissuades them from falling into the traps of such orientations. The mission is the beginning of it all, and if it can be shown to be faulty, misguided, illusory or manipulated, it will likely constrain the organization from leveraging its use amongst the masses. Thus, like in the case of conventional organizations, to defeat these organizations at their game, counter-terrorism agencies must understand the mission and where the fault lines exist therein. The use of state media can be used as a major weapon to present a convincing case to the people who can potentially fall for terror narratives. Specifically, in the case of the Lone Wolf operators and ISIS, governments can pull together further approaches to put the false narrative in the limelight through additional media releases and initiatives on social welfare and governance. The lone actor drives inspiration from indoctrination that takes place in the seminaries and through social media. For the terrorists’ numbers

¹⁰ Berman, E., & Laitin. “Religion, terrorism and public goods: Testing the Club Model”. *Journal of Public Economics*. 2008.

and intensity to wane, the counterterrorism agencies must work towards curbing the spread of such material on social media and through keeping checks on other platforms of information¹¹. However, with the emergence of new platforms, as will be related to later in the article, governments need to increase their resource allocation to fight through this medium more effectively in order to restrict the ability of the mainstream groups to keep churning out their propaganda and reach lone wolf operators.

Structure

The organizational and management structure of a terrorist organization has critical consequences both for the organization and for the state and international entities fighting terrorism. A group's effectiveness in achieving its nefarious objectives is determined by its structure as much as it is by its environment. Traditional organizations, with multiple segments and operations can be structured on a departmental or divisional basis. It is a similar case with terrorist networks.

The environment and the constraints shape the organization's structure. A hierarchical vertical structure is favored by entities that require specialization and a firm grip on their members. It also dilutes the preference divergence angle with tighter controls comparatively for the operatives and second-tier leaders. However, given the high level of security threats that come with the hierarchical vertical structure, the organizations morph into cellular ones, as driven by compulsions¹². An example of this is Hamas, which, when it appeared on the radar of the agencies, quickly reformulated its structure to a cellular form in order to avoid its members being captured. The cellular form gives way to a high level of preference divergence that dissipates the resources of the entity and also provides the counterterrorism agencies with more challenges regarding penetrating the set-ups. It also requires a higher level of monitoring and surveillance.

Historically, when ISIS has control over significant tracts of land, the organization adopts a hierarchical structure, as the security threat is lower. This accounts for the systematic exploitation of the resources at its disposal, including oilfields and the local businesses. Such funding avenues provide an extra pull for the foreign terrorist fighters by dint of the low security threat and a more amenable social environment. A networked structure, on the other hand, lends greater flexibility to the organizations with additional autonomy and longevity also being concomitant features. On the other hand, the hierarchical structure paves the way for efficiency due to specialization through an entity's cells including operations, intelligence and support¹³. Some powerful organizations including the Red Army faction in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy and the PLO have employed this structure.

11 Europol. "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report". 2018.

12 Shapiro, J. "The Terrorist's Dilemma". Princeton, New Jersey: Princetown University Press. 2013.

13 Nacos, B. L. "Terrorism and Counterterrorism". Routledge. 2016.

In terms of advantages conferred by hierarchical settings, the entity can be compared with a military outfit with clearly defined lines of authority and responsibility, accountability of the operatives and functional units and specialization in the ranks¹⁴. A clear-cut hierarchy brings with it the advantage to members of a lucid understanding of the roles and authority dimensions, and firmer control of subordinates. Research has shown the greater lethality of organizations that have been formed on this mode of structure¹⁵. However, as is the case with the Lone Wolf type set-ups, they pose a greater danger to the European societies due to the element of surprise and embedded sleeper cells that can be triggered at a low cost to the mainframe groups abroad¹⁶. Disadvantages concerned with the networked structure thus include the dissipation of resources and focus, disjointed and individualistic responses of the different network sub-leaders leading to a strategic misalignment. The IRA faced this dilemma with a lack of synchronization and much internal strife between the cells when it came to furthering the objectives espoused by the leadership. Going back to the example of ETA, campaigns were sustained initially through operational flexibility due to the hierarchical structure.

ISIS, when it had control over large tracts of land, for example in 2008, employed an “M-form” multidivisional hierarchical form where a central management structure with functional bureaus is replicated at the lower levels geographically¹⁷. This was very similar to the one used by Al-Qaida in the late 1990s. Such a structure, also known as isomorphism, enabled ISIS to use bureaucracy and a formal hierarchy to help the militant cells perform their operations. The governorate-level structure for Anbar, picked up from documents seized by a local militia, which was helping the coalition forces in March 2007, shows a structure quite similar to that of Al-Qaida, with the *Emir* presiding over different committees and the sector *Emirs*.

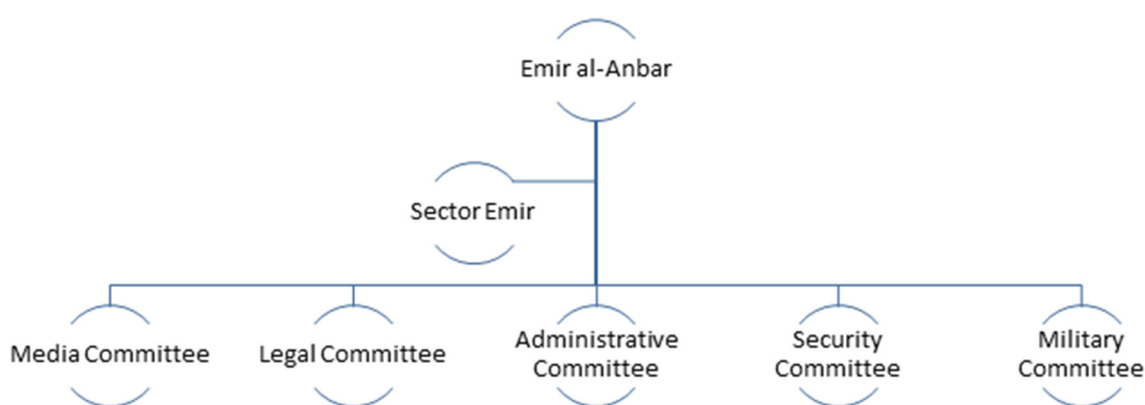


Figure 7: ISIS Hierarchical Chart for the Anbar Governorate, 2007

14 Heger, L., Jung, D., & Wong, W. “Organizing for Resistance: How Group Structure Impacts the Character of Violence”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2012, no. 24, 743-768.

15 Shapiro, J. “The Terrorist’s Dilemma”. Princeton, *New Jersey: Princetown University Press*. 2013.

16 Europol. “Terrorism Situation and Trend Report”. 2018.

17 Nance, M. “Defeating ISIS”. *New York: Skyhorse Publishing*. 2016.

In turn, the different Committee *Emirs* had a sub-functional hierarchical system with significant land capture providing the leverage to operate in this fashion.¹⁸



Figure 8: ISIS Provincial Organizational Chart for the Anbar Governorate, 2007

The above hierarchical structure gives way to a cellular form when land capture is degraded, thereby increasing the need to ratchet up security. This morphing capacity works in tandem with the command form of M-type where different cells are given directions from a central command. Satellite phones and messengers are required to carry coded strategic messages to the leaders of various cells. Such a cellular form, although less effective for a concerted and coherent strategy, provides ISIS with longevity due to its flexibility to adapt to the environment. The communication between the cells is restricted to key members of the group in order to strengthen security measures.

In terms of the various “franchises” of ISIS, the Libyan segment of ISIS surfaced fully on October 5, 2014 as MSSI and other militants pledged their support for the organization¹⁹. According to the audio recordings available, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi accepted many pledges from sundry groups in countries including Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. Cult followers of ISIS and al-Qaeda number approximately 10,000 in Nigeria, which despite being a minute proportion of the total population, commands a significant presence and space in the media. Boko Haram in 2013 followed the al-Qaeda strategy of leaving the cities and moving to uncontrolled zones where they could establish their own micro societies and brand of religion. Their allegiance with ISIS was announced in 2015.

Regarding the overall central hierarchy structure of ISIS, it is headed by the Shuraa Council, consisting of between 9 and 11 members. It has the ultimate power, with authority to make and overturn decisions, even those made by Baghdadi himself. This rigid command structure was set up originally by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi himself and has been followed by ISIS ever since.

The composition of the Councils is largely shrouded in mystery, and more so is the matter of how much power Baghdadi himself exercises over the Shuraa Council²⁰. Evidence has been gathered that Baghdadi himself handpicked the Shuraa Council from the allies he made during his imprisonment in camp Bucca, and those who

18 Nance, M. “Defeating ISIS”. *New York: Skyhorse Publishing*. 2016.

19 Michael, M. “How a Libyan city joined the Islamic State group”. *AP News*. 2014.

20 Hall, B. “Inside ISIS - The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army”. *New York: Center Street*. 2015.

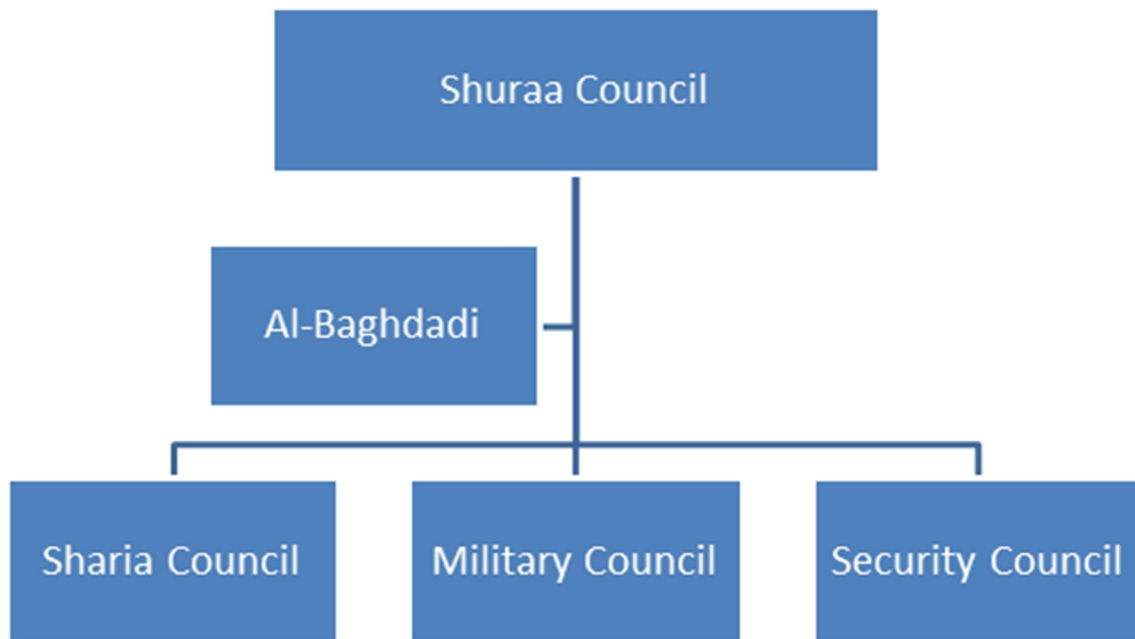


Figure 9 – ISIS Central Command Structure

fought alongside him in Iraq after 2009, thereby making it impractical for them to go against his word. The Sharia Council is headed by Baghdadi himself, and manages the doctrine formations and the implementation of religious edicts. The Military Council is responsible for strategic planning, organizing attacks, promoting officers, deploying of arms and ammunition, and distributing bounty. It consists of 8-13 members, with Chechen fighters generally holding sway in this Council. The Security Council oversees the internal security measures and controls, including intelligence and spy routing, the leadership's security, infiltration of enemy lines, and the formation of suicide units.

When security threats are high, the leadership generally chooses and at times morphs the organization structure into a cellular form²¹. Within this set-up, separate cells act as core tactical components for the entire organization. When this is done, it makes it more difficult for the counterterrorism agencies to infiltrate the whole organization. Individuals in one cell would be mostly unaware of the existence and composition of other cells, so this fact lends longevity to the organization even in cases of regular capture of operatives. Terrorist groups can also construct cells that are multifunctional in nature. The cell members can be given an option of remaining in direct coordination with each other for technical and emotional support²². In these instances, the cell leader may be the only individual given the authority and option to communicate and coordinate with other cells and higher levels. ISIS operates multiple cells that serve the organization in different regional or local areas throughout national and transnational activities.

21 Zirakzadeh, C. E. "From Revolutionary Dreams to Organizational Fragmentation: Disputes over Violence within ETA and Sendero Luminoso". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2002, no. 14(4), 66-92.

22 Mishal, S., & Avraham, S. "The Palestinian Hamas". *Columbia University Press*. 2000.

Regarding mounting counterterrorist initiatives based on an organizational structure, there are important insights that can be deployed. In the case of a centrally controlled set-up, with a heavy hierarchical foundation, the entity's security can be undermined through infiltrating its membership, thereby gaining more relevant intelligence of the specialized units. Capture of the top leadership invariably leads to the loss of vital unified existence, as was encountered by Al-Qaida which for a significant period of time had a diluted presence after the elimination of Osama Bin Laden.

The top leadership can also provide a platform for effective negotiations that may not be available when a cellular structure is being used. In cases where the incidence of terrorism is considered to be an isolated one, the relevant authorities must develop a fuller understanding of the motivation, and of the preparation along with strategies employed by the terrorist organizations. Here, a strong base of intelligence gathering would form the core of the strategy used by governments, along with establishing a better economic, social and political understanding of how to resolve the grievances that may lead to such terrorist action by the potential members²³. A cell-based system could provide a major hindrance to the deployment of counterintelligence initiatives, with their additional flexibility and the practicality of other cells remaining intact even when one cell is neutralized.

ISIS' operational capabilities have historically faced leadership issues in terms of situational awareness, modulating the use and calibration of violence and preventing local authorities from mounting capacity degrading moves. This preference divergence, or in other words, the tilt of various members and leaders to flex their own understanding regarding the reasons for a theme and the way ahead, gives the counterterrorism agencies a major diluting tool for spreading dissent and infighting in the cells. Thus, when the capture and killing of leaders is not considered to be so beneficial, leveraging internecine and disruptive moves to destabilize the cells of ISIS would give major dividends. Also, an avowed strategy by the global fraternity is to make way for "open, equitable and inclusive pluralistic societies"²⁴.

The control structure of terrorist organizations like ISIS, including the hierarchical and even the cellular ones, embed elements of loyalty over other features, and can thus be focused on for defeating the organization. The leadership can ingrain a philosophy of preventing members of cells from coordinating with other cells for fear of a loss of control or even confusion regarding the mission²⁵. The government can step in here, and provide the countering initiatives and spur dissent and break-up through calibrating within its hold the financial flows to the operatives to turn

23 Heath-Kelly, C. "Counter-Terrorism and the Counterfactual: Producing the 'Radicalisation' Discourse and the UK PREVENT Strategy". *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 2013, no. 15 (3), 394-415.

24 UNDP. "Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment". *UNDP*. 2017.

25 Shapiro, J. "The Terrorist's Dilemma". Princeton, *New Jersey: Princetown University Press*. 2013.

hostile, and also to systematically degrade the leadership capabilities to inflict terror. In the case of a high level of preference divergence seen, as is the case of various cells operating for ISIS, they can be simply observed. As their leadership eventually focuses upon these cells, the governments have a clear sight of the framework and the identities of members executing the same for the leadership. For instance, when Ayman al-Zawahiri identified a cell commander as siphoning off funds of the organization, the counterterrorism agencies left that member stay in the organization. This strategy was adopted as the cell commander was an element that could sustain a drive inside the organization against the main leadership, on account of his own perception of being victimized.

Alternatively, when a cell leader is identified as having security problems by the main leadership, they can be given an exit route, thereby also reducing the credibility and deterrence of punishment for disobedience of the top leadership. These measures can provide for a practical exit route for various dissident cells and the rank and file from the grip of the top leadership. However, they cannot be brought into effect due to legislative measures inside developed nations in many cases, but can practically be rolled out in the war-affected zones in other regions of the world where such cells are operating. This also triggers a high element of preference divergence within the organization, for when the cell leaders and other operatives feel their lives are more in danger at the cost of protection of the top leadership, they can be persuaded to leave the outfits and join mainstream society.

When faced also with the cellular structure of ISIS, the governmental agencies can trigger additional leadership issues within the organization as a whole where different cell leaders are positioning themselves for more power. When the government enters into a negotiation round with representatives of these organizations, it creates a feeling of lack of trust within the organization as perceptions of switching sides and leaving terrorism are triggered. Crucially, as unity among the leadership gives the entity a binding force, when the leaders are shown to be involved in internal rifts, their credibility is reduced considerably.

Recruitment

Linked directly with the structure, the dimension of recruitment exists to provide human resources for the terrorist entity, just as it does for the conventional business. As traditional and conventional organizations work towards attracting, developing and retaining high-quality competent staff, the terrorist organizations, also in the same vein, look for various avenues to enhance their manpower. As it has been documented copiously²⁶, the environment in socially deprived areas gives ideal grounds for recruitment to terrorist outfits. There is indeed a significant segment that has joined

26 Center for the Analysis of Terrorism. "ISIS Financing". *CAT*, 2016.

the cause, as they feel committed due to indoctrination. Thus, leveraging the religious clergy would be one of the main strategies of organizations based on terror, as they require validation for their nefarious mission and causes. The validation in this regard is both on moral and religious grounds, however illusory they may be.

Terrorist organizations have different pools of potential recruits to work on, depending on their security threats and the level of state patronage should they be benefiting from any. As opposed to terrorist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, which is financed and harbored by a state, ISIS does not enjoy such protection. Hence, its recruitment basis is not streamlined through state media, but rather reliant on scattered tracts of war-torn and disenfranchised zones providing Club Model to be leveraged.

Regarding the “Foreign Terrorist Fighter” phenomenon, both ISIS and Al-Qaida have extensive networks spanning many Western countries too, which provide recruitment zones. However, the misplaced zeal of such fighters to embrace martyrdom makes handling them a potential issue for calibrated use by the cells abroad. A particularly useful measure accommodated by the Club Model is the capacity it lends to terrorists to weed out potential defectors and recruit the most dedicated and fired up volunteers who can then be assigned highly lethal and danger-filled missions. This recruitment sphere as also provided by ISIS in regions of Africa and in Afghanistan is built on public goods and services in a marginalized environment²⁷, which thus creates an atmosphere of dependency and of trust. These features are then later exploited due to very high costs of defection too, as the members generally are not capable of integration in mainstream society due to a lack of all-rounded education and skills. However, when such defections are achieved by counterterrorism agencies, it can be a rich vein of extremely useful specific information. Such organizations in their more successful forms are efficient providers of social services through mutual aid – a phenomenon in which the volunteers are also required to demonstrate their commitment and dedication through sacrificing productive time and other resources. This debilitates the opportunities available to the members to be potentially gainful members of the overall society and makes them depend relatively inextricably on the designs of the organization. To fight this strength, the options available include the provision of social services in the region, thereby giving the people an alternative. This would come at a high cost to the international community, but is a worthwhile initiative, as it will mitigate the environment that would otherwise be ideal recruiting grounds for terror.

A terrorist profile can be constructed for ISIS members and also for the lone actors that support the organization. A stereotypical model is not feasible, but a large segment can be profiled as sharing some distinctive features and a psychological bent. Two categories exist here. In the first one, a typical ISIS operator is a young radicalized individual, disenfranchised and generally from an impoverished background,

27 Berman, E., & Laitin. “Religion, terrorism and public goods: Testing the Club Model”. *Journal of Public Economics*. 2008.

economically reliant on the organization. Such individuals are ripe for the Club Model, as they want to give meaning to their life, which before joining the pull of the organization, generally lies in an unused state in an economic and social vacuum. The second profile exists for the foreign terrorist fighter who generally is not from such a background, but is brimming with radicalized fervor and willing to even invest in achieving martyrdom in a foreign country. Such individuals can have an educated background, but would be carrying significant seriousness and focus in religious matters, holding strong views and generally being argumentative in their social circles when debating religious issues. Regarding the profile of the Lone Actor operators supportive of ISIS, these are generally loners who go about their own business in a quiet fashion, and are on the fringes of social integration, shunning much social activity, spending a disproportionate time surfing the internet with a view to collecting data to be used for their activities.

Financing

Finance is required to operate organizations as various important stakeholders involved in terrorism are in the fray for resources. Intercepting and constraining this lifeline of fundamental resources provides counterterrorism agencies with a major tool for breaking down the effectiveness of terrorist outfits. However, the fountainhead of resources and the diversity of the finance base of these organizations can differ in complexity and influence, thereby requiring modulated approaches to countering them. The issue is compounded when national states overtly harbor terrorist organizations²⁸. This is where the organizations become a tool for furthering the regional and international designs of the state, and they have a low degree of independence. The dimension making this availability of finance a robust source for the terror outfits is the amounts involved. When a resourceful nation supports terrorism, it results in the emergence of attractive prepositions for its recruitment and continuity.

Also, in this realm, protection money is a form of illegal tax installed in many countries where lawlessness abounds, and provides a vacuum of government for terrorists. Organizations including the FARC, the Taliban and ETA have engaged in the imposition of these taxes. They can, however, be a source of acrimony with the constituents who may be antagonized when made to pay sums of money without having any advantages.

ISIS financing is estimated to run into huge amounts, with estimates as much as between USD 1 billion to USD 2 billion in the year 2015²⁹. This makes the dangerous

28 Fanusie, Y. J., & Entz, A. "Islamic State: Financial Assessment". *Center on Sanctions & Illicit Finance. Foundation for Defense of Democracies*. 2017.

29 Glaser, D. "The Evolution of Terrorism Financing: Disrupting the Islamic State". *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. 2016.

organization one of the most prolifically funded ones in modern terror history. The avenues of financing are diverse for ISIS – ranging from the control of land, extortion, kidnapping, oil and gas sales, to robberies and other crimes. Many of these activities are by their very nature challenging and very difficult to intercept due to the capture of land by the organization³⁰. The majority of this ISIS funding goes towards paying for the fighters' salaries and for administrative costs.

Going back to 2015, as much as 60% of Syrian territory was under ISIS control, with revenues also coming from Assad's regime. Land and property taxes and protection money provided a rich vein of finance, with the majority of such funding coming from the controlled region of Deir. Agriculture farmland revenues, donations from rich individuals, who for their survival have to give funding or risk death, and smuggling are the other sources. ISIS may conduct special activities from time to time, to buffer up its finances. For instance, in June 2014, when it captured Mosul, the bank heist yielded USD 425 million. This flow of resources leads to facilitating further land captures and also the disruption of many of the State's activities. For example, due to such moves by ISIS, the Iraqi Government had to stop pension payments, as fears took hold of funds being snatched and used by ISIS. The organization does not lack sophisticated personnel either, as was demonstrated when it was able to conduct successful profitable arbitrage through US dollar auctions held by the Iraqi Central Bank. This led to the Coalition forces conducting air raids and destroying oil fields under the control of terrorists. The USA also put a stop to the shipment of dollars into Iraq's Central Bank in August 2015. This shows how diversified the avenues are for ISIS funding, and this feature gives it flexibility, especially due to the direct control of land in order to keep operations running seamlessly. However, as ISIS experienced, its access to such financing has waned as its land control has been eroded through successful raids liberating the zones³¹. However, a more reliable feature under the control of ISIS for funding is through using money laundering by way of *hawala* or informal money transfer channels.

Lone Wolf operators are generally reliant on their own funding for the procurement and use of terror weapons, as they do not belong to any organized outfit. They lack specialization and thus cannot make use of financing on an efficient scale. However, the tendency as related earlier to aim for civilian casualties is a highly relevant aspect that is combated by the counterterrorism agencies tasked with affording protection to the population. As a countering move to stop the flow of financing for these individuals, the agencies have to increase the scrutiny of finances, and of neighborhood watches, whereby suspected individuals are prevented from having free access to funds. Although in many instances this can be seen as an infringement on civilian rights, the danger of funds potentially falling into the hands of Lone Wolf operators

30 Fanusie, Y. J., & Entz, A. "Islamic State: Financial Assessment". *Center on Sanctions & Illicit Finance. Foundation for Defense of Democracies*. 2017.

31 Clarke, C. P. "The Terrorist Diaspora". *Testimony, House Homeland Security Committee Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States*, 2017.

far outweighs such concerns. They may aim to get access to funds through links with some established networks, for example a firm whereby they are funded through ISIS links in a relative anonymous capacity. Anti- money laundering moves by agencies can mitigate this avenue.

Banking channels have been made more difficult to tap into but the emergence of cryptocurrencies provides yet another form. Bitcoin, being the most popular of such currencies, has gained prominence due to safe transactions, low costs, anonymity and the high speed of international transfers³². Fortunately, however, the proliferation of these currencies amongst the terror networks is not high, as banking channels have been strengthened to militate against such spread.

Hawala is a popular mechanism for the transfer of money from Europe mainly for terrorists, but not towards Europe, as reported in an investigation. The diaspora communities residing in Europe play a main role in funding this for violent activities in their countries of origin. A disturbing feature here is the link between the places of worship and the procurement of funding for terrorist causes. In most cases, it has been reported that calls for fundraising and such donations are made in mosques, or through websites and other social media forums. Non-profit organizations (NPO) can be used as a vehicle to launder money and fund terrorism.

Propagation

The structure of a terrorist organization affects significantly the choices of avenues preferred by it regarding propagating its mission for the purpose of gathering constituency support. In the case of a cellular structure, there can be significant differences amongst the cells regarding their single agreed-upon measure to propagate, as was the case with ETA³³. In the case of jihadist organizations, including their inspired lone operators, the main avenue at the disposal of the religious groups generally provides them with multiple benefits. All this is centered upon heavy indoctrination of the masses, and is focused on exploiting the places of worship, social gatherings, and also various modes of conventional and alternative social media platforms, together with printed material to propagate their aims and mission.

A coherent and cohesive strategy must be adopted by counterterrorism agencies to combat the exploitation of the places of worship and also to provide counter narratives since a vacuum is always conducive for the terrorists. This requires effective modes in sundry communities and also to specifically outlaw any indoctrination carried out at places of worship or elsewhere. In Europe, such narrative building is outlawed as a hate crime. Continued control and vetting of material being taught in religious

32 Europol. "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report". 2018.

33 Heger, L., Jung, D., & Wong, W. "Organizing for Resistance: How Group Structure Impacts the Character of Violence". *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2012, no. 24, 743-768.

seminaries including mosques is essential, as exposure to any hate-preaching material would work towards altering the orientation of impressionable minds.

The Jihadist narrative requires continuous monitoring, and more robust measures to control the activities in seminaries and mosques. It is ideal to have effective direct control over the material being distributed. These facilities and resources are not available in cases where the states themselves are harboring terrorists. When direct control over these seminaries is not possible, especially in regions where they have considerable political clout, the government can systematically pit these ideologues against each other through triggering and promoting internal rifts. This is facilitated by the diverse interpretations of religious edicts by different sects in Islam, creating confusion regarding which is the appropriate one to follow. The coalition has attempted this in some countries through aligning the religious syllabi, and also through providing clear exit routes to the defectors. Purging religious books of traditional hate material has been carried out, for example in Afghanistan.

Measures to create fissures between the religious leaders of such outfits regarding their specific interpretations of Islam can be the bedrock of a strategy to confuse the rank and file about the credibility and validity of the ideological stances as taken by different proponents of religious orientation. Such differences, for example, stem from differing perceptions amongst groups of jihadists too. Where one preaches extreme violence, through manipulating and leveraging the use of religious scriptures to paint an illusory position, some moderate groups preach tolerance and denounce violence. Starkly, both tend to have strong constituencies, which are convinced of the validity and relevance of different religious scriptures as being quoted by the groups. This ambiguity presents an excellent intervention point for the agencies to exploit.

The virtual threat has to be countered as online radicalization has been found to drive perpetrators to violence. The resources being invested to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria may turn out to be merely pyrrhic victories if the virtual threat is not successfully combated. Twitter has been the main medium exploited by ISIS to broadcast its propaganda and thus disseminate messages to those minds vulnerable to radicalization³⁴. These tactics have been highly organized, providing the organization with an outsized influence in the way the world perceives it. They have been able to achieve this through publishing images of graphic violence, and at the same time drawing recruits and motivating the lone actors. Evidence has been gathered that through December 2014, ISIS supporters were using at least 46,000 Twitter accounts. The figure can be extended to 70,000 accounts to provide a fuller range of the estimate. In terms of their locations, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq have featured at the top, although hundreds of accounts tweeted with their location data embedded. One in five of such accounts chose English as their primary language, with Arabic by far being the most

34 Berger, J. M., & Morgan, J. "The ISIS Twitter Census". *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World*. 2015.

popular with around 60% accounts choosing that medium to communicate. There were between 500 and 2,000 extremely active accounts, which tweeted in tandem with concentrated bursts. Although the administrators suspended hundreds of such accounts, thousands more surfaced. A main issue with suspending such accounts is that suspension can lead to further isolation of the individuals and thus they are lesser exposed to social pressures to deradicalize. Following on from the large-scale suspensions of accounts in 2014, the main accounts of ISIS on Twitter are generally “protected” by the operators, permitting only a limited number of people the access to read the tweets. There is high intelligence value to be gained from the ISIS accounts. Relevant and accurate GPS coordinates can be collected from ISIS territories, especially in Iraq and in Syria.

The narrative being peddled by ISIS is largely based on a long-established theological foundation, which asserts that only jihadist (extremist) followers of Islam are true Muslims³⁵. Its objective is “a Caliphate upon the prophetic methodology”, whereby all the plans and actions are justified based on carefully chosen and manipulated scriptures that are generally exploited out of context, and bearing specious scholarly interpretation. ISIS has maintained a consistent output in the virtual realms in the last three years, despite claims of its effectiveness being impaired. Taking a conservative estimate, it produces around 100 pieces of new content weekly, with videos playing a critical part in bypassing the language barriers for its supporters. The organization has produced around 2,000 official videos so far, with the figure rising to 6,000 when the wider movement for *jihadism* is included.

Methodology of dissemination online is through the use of a “Swarmcast”, conjuring imagery of an interconnected network like a swarm of bees in mid-flight. Such a phenomenon follows the concepts of speed, agility, resilience, and flexibility. These features have enabled the ISIS network to outmaneuver all efforts so far to significantly curtail its presence online. Twitter accounts for 40% of the traced traffic of jihadist content online. Such content is also spread regularly through Facebook, Google and YouTube. In terms of access to such content worldwide, specifically the five most prolific locations are Turkey, the USA, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the UK.

Some use Twitter for private messaging and for sending covert signals³⁶. Smaller accounts focus on local events in a reporting and organizing context, whereas the medium-sized ones provide a snapshot of early ISIS media releases to create a pull. ISIS cannot achieve its objectives of propagation, recruitment and operational mission coordination on social media without leaving itself exposed to scrutiny. Starkly, the most important information is generally featured in small accounts, with the large ones generally focusing on noise, as the content is far more stage-managed. According

35 Frampton, M., Fisher, A., & Prucha, N. “The New Netwar: countering Extremist Online”. *Policy Exchange*. 2017.

36 Berger, J. M., & Morgan, J. “The ISIS Twitter Census”. *The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World*. 2015.

to a study on ISIS social media strategy documents, original information emanates initially from the smaller accounts, and is then carried on for widespread propagation through *mujtahidun* being the core group of supporters who originate elsewhere. The challenge for the counterterrorism agencies is to weaken the network by weeding out and making inoperative only those accounts that do not provide an efficient intelligence value from the social media ecosystem.

By the year 2017, over 150 social media platforms had been tracked as being used by terrorists for furthering their narratives and overall propaganda³⁷. Moreover, file-sharing sites have been used to store and to retrieve content, with both services adopted to further the narratives. As the regulator and industry law enforcement agencies have stepped in to intercept and fight against this, start-up social media and mushrooming companies pose further challenges to the authorities.

The focus of the propagation has shifted from utopia to war, representing a surge in military conflict in the warzones³⁸. However, ISIS has historically used social media propagation avenues to shore up its support base through the peddling of a utopian narrative, to assert the religious credentials of its leaders, and to plan for military operations. Whether this radical shift in the focus represents a failure of ISIS or a strategic choice is a moot point.

Jihadist groups have used popular open mediums like Twitter and Facebook to further their objectives. Heavy monitoring and censoring in many cases is rendered impractical, as a single rogue message when carried out with tactical skill can reach an audience of potentially millions before the administrators can detect and delete it. An example of this is the use of popular hashtags in Twitter by such groups, which further their narratives appending to a popular hashtag and thus reaching a wider audience. A further challenge is thrown up with the spawning of new mediums for communication, especially ones like Telegram, which afford high security for the users from tapping by authorities through the provision of encryptions³⁹. Thus by making communication safer for the participants, such mediums and platforms also provide terrorists with an opportunity to interact with relative freedom. Even though the authorities surfing the web continually remove content regarding, for example, of bomb-making instructions, there are various sites where such information can be retrieved⁴⁰. The lone operators and also mainstream ISIS members can use the internet to procure explosives using online shops located in many EU member states. Using companies that are conducting legitimate businesses facilitates even procurement from outside the EU. Such measures must be curbed through effective legislation and the deployment of extra resources.

37 Europol. "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)". 2017.

38 Winter, C. "Inside the collapse of Islamic State's propaganda machine". *UK: Wired*. 2017.

39 Europol. "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)". 2017.

40 Europol. "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report". 2018.

Avenues	Examples
Organizations	Promotional Surreptitious activities, Dark Web
Individuals	Social networking, giving out sensitive information inadvertently
Internet search engines	Detailed logistical: Real-time TV footage, Google Earth

Table II - Publicly available sensitive information for terrorists' use.

Use of Symbolism

Carefully crafted messages are a vital element of the propagation carried out by ISIS. This filters down to even the videos of executions being carried out⁴¹. As an example, a horrific video released by ISIS in November 2014, showing the decapitation of a number of captured Syrian soldiers had the following angles to support the narrative of righteousness:



Figure 10– Symbolism used in execution videos to support narrative of righteousness

Firstly, all the ISIS soldiers are shown wearing identical military fatigues, without a collar thereby giving them plausible traditional Islamic look. This can also be seen as an attempt to portray them as a “legitimate Islamic army” rather than a gang of bloodthirsty disorganized terrorists. The victims in the video are made to look directly into the camera when being held down to be executed. This can be considered as sending out a goading message to the viewers, inviting the West “to dare to come

41 Hall, B. “Inside ISIS - The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army”. *New York: Center Street*. 2015.

and save them”. They are invariably all clean-shaven, which is a clear attempt to make them look “less like Muslims”. Additionally, as in this example, where the site of the executions was Dabiq, which carries a historical significance in Islamic history being the place of decisive battle between Islamic forces and the crusaders.

Governance in Land-capture model

The following process shows how ISIS has gone about imposing its governance on areas it captures.

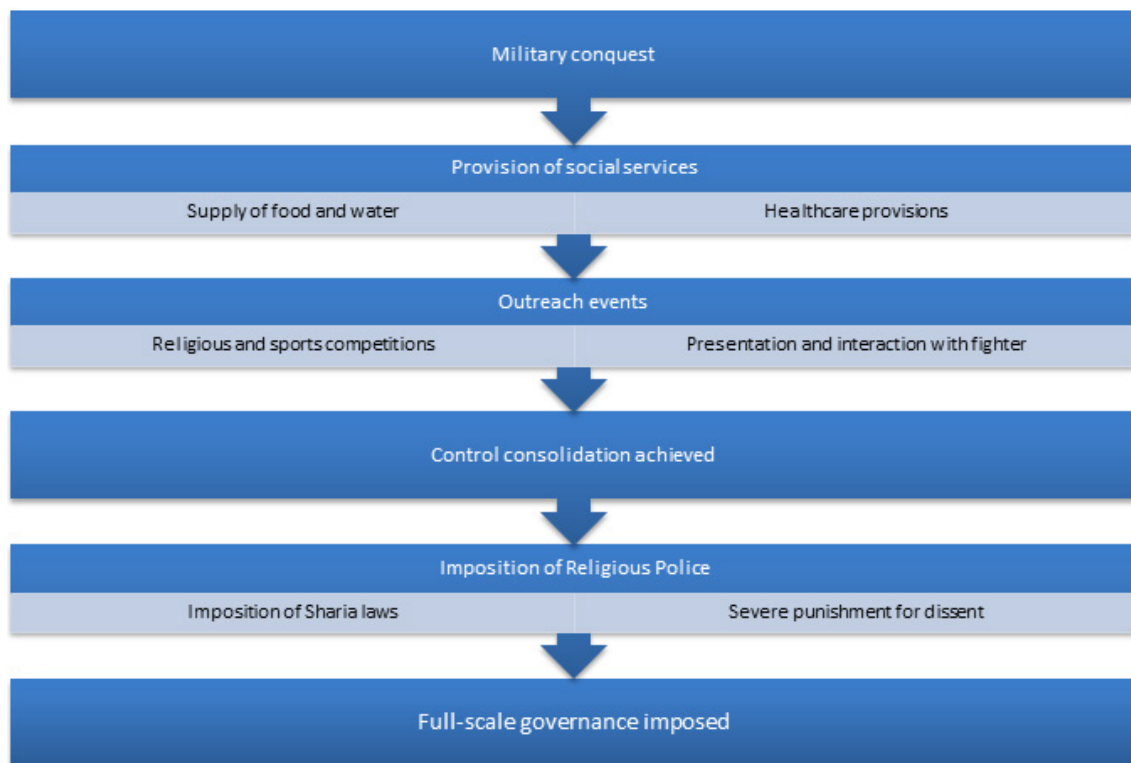


Figure 11 – Governance process in Land-Capture model

Following on from the conquest of a city or region, the first governance steps ISIS takes is to set up humanitarian and other social services provisions⁴². This is designed to woo the local population, which has potentially been deprived of these services by the outgoing government. Water and food is supplied, generally free of charge, bakeries are opened up, and free oil and blankets are provided in winter season. Mini clinics are operationalized to provide basic healthcare for the local population. Communities generally welcome these initiatives, as they come right after periods of civil war and strife, and are therefore considered to be acts of kindness. This is followed by outreach events where religious competitions and fairs are held, fighters make presentations and they answer bland planted questions from the

42 Hall, B. “Inside ISIS - The Brutal Rise of a Terrorist Army”. *New York: Center Street*. 2015.

locals. Sports competitions like tug-of-war and track and field are also held to sway the youth. Hence, a friendly and comfortable image of ISIS is presented, being part of the propaganda mill to convince the locals of how their social life would be better under ISIS. Once such controls are consolidated, ISIS pulls out the religious police system, which starts imposing strict Sharia laws and makes an example of those who resist. The timing of this part of the process ensures that revolt is unthinkable. This quickly then develops into full-scale governance with dissent from anybody meaning death and full compulsion to the rules as set out by the local ISIS command.

The ISIS Framework Dynamics – Depiction Summary

The depictions show how the various business dimensions work together in the Model for ISIS, both in the case of land capture, and also without it. It all requires a mission to originate and keep together the framework, which then moves on to the structure as guided by the environment – whether or not it provides for land capture. This results in the critical decision for balance between flexibility and the security threats that the leadership prefers. Thereupon, financing is required from multiple sources to make the model work, as it is required for tactical and operational activities. With the land capture model, ISIS units have access to considerable resources at their disposal, as opposed to the cellular form. Similarly, recruitment is generally through the Club Model for the hierarchical form. Propagation completes the framework. Related features have been identified which can be supplemented for any additional

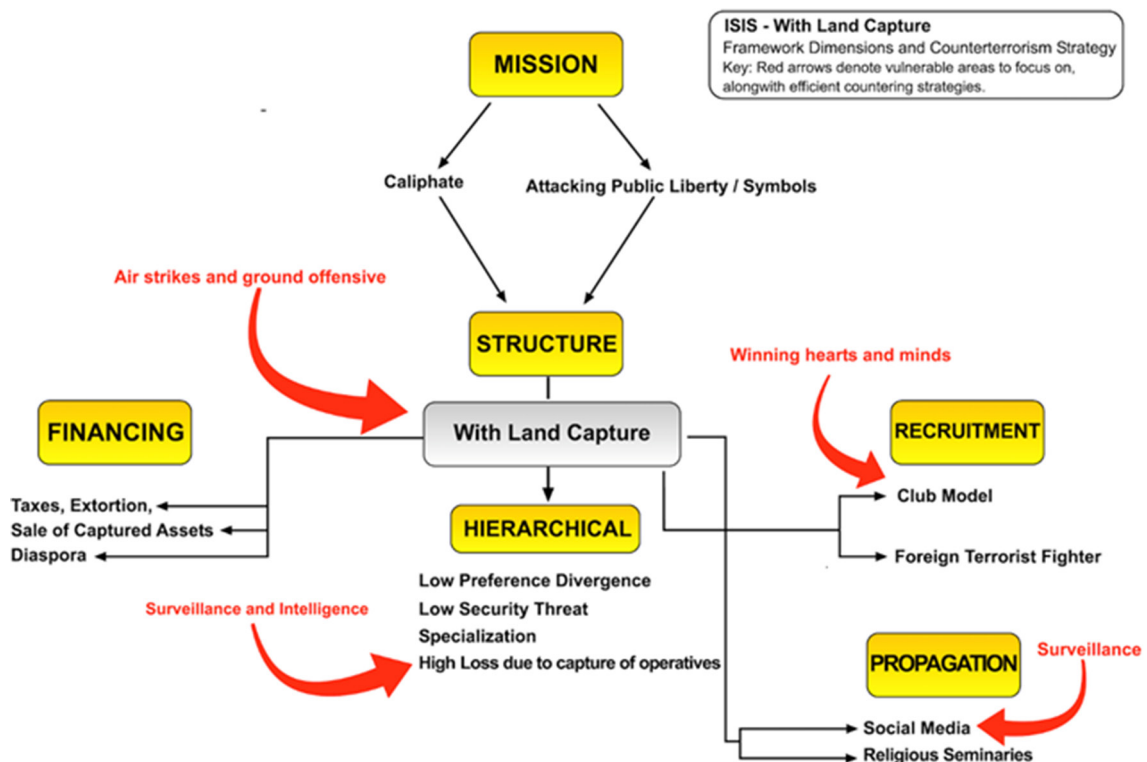


Figure 12: ISIS Framework and counterterrorism strategies – “With Land Capture” Model - (Developed by the author, Eisa Younes Alblooshi)

specifics given a change in the functioning of these outfits. This can then be used to observe also the morphing of the entities as well as highlighting areas to be focused upon for countering the organizations.

For the different cells or other structures of ISIS that are being combated in different regions, their specific profiling can be carried out under the Model, in order to identify the imperatives and compulsions of the organization, along with the weak points that can be targeted for the efficient deployment of counterterrorism resources.

Regarding the counterterrorism strategies, the red arrows denote the specific efficient moves proposed for the relevant state. The relative sizes of the red arrows signify the extent of resources that should be allocated for the specific strategies.

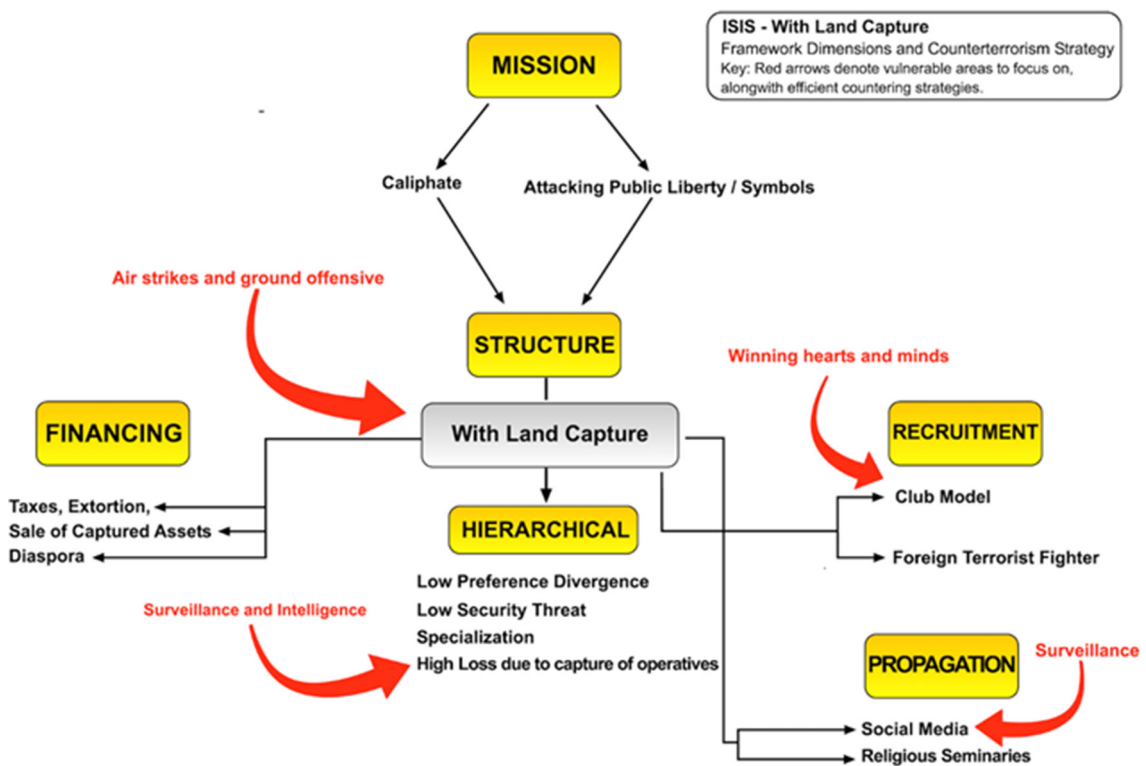


Figure 12: ISIS Framework and countering strategies – “With Land Capture” Model - (Developed by the author, Eisa Younes Alblooshi)

In the case where ISIS holds significant land, the above model holds. The highest proportion of the resources to counter ISIS in this model goes towards air strikes and ground offensives. Regarding the approach of surveillance and intelligence to capture the operatives and extract valuable information regarding the hierarchy, agencies should use communication interception technology and plant moles in the cells. To mitigate the pull of the Club Model, the countering forces must engender trust and respect within the local population through proverbially “winning the hearts and minds” through social initiatives that provide alternatives to the Club Model. Moreover, the social media surveillance should be kept in focus for targeted data on strategies and recruitment of fighters for ISIS.

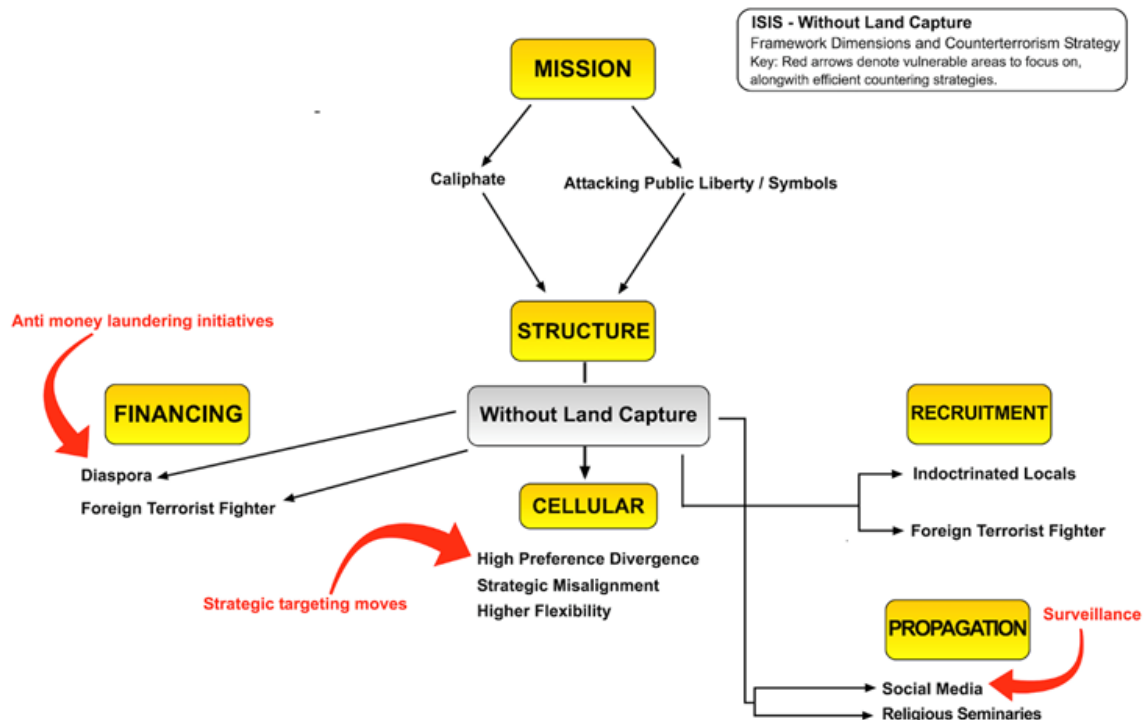


Figure 13: ISIS Framework and countering strategies – “Without Land Capture” Model - (Developed by the author, Eisa Younes Alblooshi)

Where ISIS operates without land capture, as has generally been the case since the 2016 loss of land in Iraq, the highest proportion of counterterrorism resources should be focused on the vulnerabilities of the organization due to high preference divergence. This can be in the shape of spurring defections, creating more fissures between leaders of different cells through careful use of communication and media, for instance through giving “credit” for some successful attacks to other cells. In terms of constraining the finances, anti-money laundering initiatives globally have significantly affected the flows to these cells. Social media surveillance is appropriate as an efficient measure in this model too due to the value of the data to be collected regarding potential recruits and strategies of different cells.

Conclusions

Given the critical importance of analyzing jihadist organizations like ISIS, and the drivers of the Lone Wolf operators aligned with such outfits or acting on their own, there exists a need to view the entities with a business lens too. Hence through assessing their dimensions of mission, structure, recruitment, financing and propagation, points for efficient interceptions and focus can be highlighted, facilitating the planning and execution of initiatives by counterterrorism agencies.

Proactive adoption and framing through the blueprint model would enable the counterterrorism agencies to more effectively combat the threats emanating from evolution of ISIS. It will equip the agencies with enhanced readiness and better understanding of the timing and extent of deployment of resources, given the

likelihood of ISIS adapting its strategic form and operational activities in the war theatres.

For ISIS, land capture lies central to its effective structure and capacity to inflict damage on society. The dimensions of the organization can be debilitated considerably through targeted airstrikes on the infrastructure and other logistical resources. However, the concerted moves to limit the capacity of ISIS to disseminate tactical and operational command and radicalization initiatives on social media platforms require a careful calibration as balance is also required to gather intelligence data. Drying up finance through anti-money laundering initiatives, especially regarding *hawala* provisions, provides counterterrorist organizations with a powerful tool to deprive the terrorists of their financing, leading to sub-optimal and internecine results for the terrorist cells. The heavy reliance on the Club Model for ISIS dictates the imperatives of significant investment to fight the radical narrative through “winning the hearts and minds” of the local population via economic and social reforms. That constrains the social vacuum and space available for ISIS for recruitment and militates against its pernicious narrative.

For the Lone Wolf actor inspired by ISIS, official surveillance and neighborhood watch intensity remain powerful features. This requires an elaborate system of intelligence gathering through operatives in sensitive neighborhoods, with the agents working in embedded capacity in the communities and picking and sharing details regarding the narratives being peddled in communities and of suspects potentially vulnerable to becoming lone actors for ISIS. Such an exercise requires special focus on the seminaries. Profiling such individuals with the concomitant exercise of putting their activities under robust monitoring, however significant in terms of resources, is a needed feature to combat and curtail this menace. Here again, the macro dimensions of social and economic well-being facilitates the reduction of numbers potentially contemplating turning against the state for destructive activities.

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