Employment of Operational Art:
Daesh's Offense into Iraq During the Summer of 2014

A Monograph

by

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2019

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 23052019	2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUNE 18-MAY 19

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Employment of Operational Art: *Daesh's* Offense into Iraq During the Summer of 2014	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S) Jimenez, Moises, MAJ	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301	8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

In the Summer of 2014, the world learned of a new horror as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) stormed its way into the sovereign state of Iraq. Fueled by a religious fervor and united through Salafist dogma, ISIL overwhelmed Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) through use of tempo and deliberate lines of operation to achieve strategic aims. Within a two-month period, ISIL advanced hundreds of kilometers, secured multiple population clusters, and established a governmental regime to replace the Iraqi government. With the withdrawal of US combat power from Iraq, and the lucrative investment of Iraqi forces, multiple questions remain unanswered. How could a group of jihadists, with limited training, armed with technical vehicles and various small arms weapons overwhelm the security forces of the Iraqi government? Through the lens of Quranic warfare, this monograph argues that operational art was present during ISIL's offensive action and consolidation activities. Understanding the deliberate methodologies of jihadist organizations, like ISIL, will enable today's military practitioners to further understand jihadists and their Salafist ideology.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
ISIL, ISIS, Daesh, Operational Art, Iraq, Iraqi Security Forces, Jihadist, Abu Bakir Al-Baghdadi, Salafism

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)	(U)	49	19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Monograph Approval Page

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Monograph Title: Employment of Operational Art: Daesh's Offense into Iraq During the Summer of 2014

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Abstract

Employment of Operational Art: Daesh's Offensive into Iraq During the Summer of 2014, by MAJ Moises Jimenez, US Army, 49 pages.

In the Summer of 2014, the world learned of a new horror as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) stormed its way into the sovereign state of Iraq. Fueled by a religious fervor and united through Salafist dogma, ISIL overwhelmed Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) through use of tempo and deliberate lines of operation to achieve strategic aims. Within a two-month period, ISIL advanced hundreds of kilometers, secured multiple population clusters, and established a governmental regime to replace the Iraqi government. With the withdrawal of US combat power from Iraq, and the lucrative investment of Iraqi forces, multiple questions remain unanswered. How could a group of jihadists, with limited training, armed with technical vehicles and various small arms weapons overwhelm the security forces of the Iraqi government?

Through the lens of Quranic warfare, this monograph argues that operational art was present during ISIL's offensive action and consolidation activities. Understanding the deliberate methodologies of jihadist organizations, like ISIL, will enable today's military practitioners to further understand jihadists and their Salafist ideology.

This monograph examines the presence of lines of operation, tempo, center of gravity, lines of effort, phasing and transitions during ISIL's offensive and consolidation activities. The monograph discusses ISIL's adherence to Salafist ideologies and the unique requirements to maintain a global caliphate. United by their interpretations of pure Sunni Islam, members of ISIL can converge both lethal and non-lethal action against belligerents. The monograph concludes with the understanding of ISIL's deliberate arrangement of lethal and non-lethal activity to accomplish strategic objectives.

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Acknowledgement

I must first thank God himself for blessing me with a life filled with opportunities and joy. Secondly, I thank my wife, Claudia, for not only enduring this year, but for being my best friend during some of the most difficult trials of my life. I thank you for walking with me during this journey and bringing two boys into this world. I owe sincere gratitude and appreciation towards Dr. Justin Kidd and COL Yannick Michaud for their mentorship and guidance to complete this academic endeavor. I would like to thank the Soldiers I've served within the 1st Infantry and 10th Mountain Divisions. Thank you for your selfless service and unquestionable loyalty. Lastly, I would like to thank the Iraqi and Afghan locals I've served alongside. I pray that your respective communities will one day find peace. To those who fought and died against jihadists, you are not forgotten. Until we meet again. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Acronyms

ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISW	Institute for the Study of War
PiX	Primary Information Exchange
SVBIEDs	Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices

Illustrations

Introduction

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

— Ayna Ahlul-Muru'at, "The Return of Khilafah," *Dabiq*, June 2014

Background of the Study

In the summer of 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) shocked the world with its blitzkrieg-like thrust into Iraq. Despite being numerically outnumbered, ISIL defeated Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), and occupied Iraq's northern and western provinces. Between May and July of 2014, ISIL gained multiple tactical victories and installed a fanatical regime that exposed the world to incomprehensible acts of violence. ISIL, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or *Daesh*, gained global notoriety for its ferocity, resolve, and commitment to install a global caliphate. At first, US officials labeled the group as a barbaric insurgency that would be incapable of achieving strategic objectives.[1] As ISIL continued to defeat the ISF, they demonstrated an ability to arrange activity in a deliberate manner.

ISIS's activities in the summer of 2014 are noteworthy in that a jihadist organization yielded tactical success through synchronized activity and achieved strategic effects against a coherent opponent. Since the receding of controlled territory, the world is growing aware at the sophistication and organized decision-making ISIS employed. Understanding the strategic aims and operational frameworks of modern jihadist groups requires the military practitioner to understand ISIL's activities in Iraq in the summer of 2014.

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[1] Michael Nelson, "Barack Obama: Foreign Affairs," Miller Center, October 4, 2016, accessed March 25, 2019, https://millercenter.org/president/obama/foreign-affairs. The Obama administration acknowledged its underestimated *Daesh's* capabilities and strategic aims in Syria and Iraq.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap in literature that explains ISIL's purposeful arrangement of military and non-military activities. The general focus of available literature depicts jihadists as violent, disjointed, and decentralized. Existing literature explains that jihadists rely on Salafist dogma to determine the justification for conflict, objectives, and conduct during war. Lastly, existing literature does not provide a modern vignette to understand jihadist organizations as they arrange activities to accomplish their strategic objectives.

The purpose of this study is to understand ISIS's purposeful arrangement of military and non-military activity to achieve strategic objectives in Iraq within the summer of 2014. Through the lens of operational art, the study will examine ISIL's methodic organization of action. It will also review *Daesh's* use of lines of operation, tempo, center of gravity, lines of effort, and phasing to achieve strategic objectives that assisted the jihadist faction to achieve operational success. ISIL's activities in Iraq are a modern interpretation of 3rd century Sunni Islam that reveal the reliance of religious authority, compliance of Islamic jurisprudence, and religious fervor to re-create the Islamic caliphate.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it will enable modern military practitioners to understand the sophistication of jihadist operations and their deliberate methods to install a global caliphate. By understanding *Daesh's* actions in Iraq, planners, commanders, and subordinates can further understand the religious doctrine of ISIL, their synchronized actions, and the religious authority of its leaders. The results of this study will highlight the purposeful orchestration of action to achieve strategic objectives in Iraq during the summer of 2014.

Definition of Terms

To maintain collective understanding, the study provides definitions of several terms that inform the reader and bring clarity to US Army terms as well as jihadist definitions. Army *Field*

Manual (FM) 3-0 Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 Operations, and *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0 Operations*, are the primary references for operational terms. Abu Bakr's manuscript of the *Management of Savagery,* publications of ISIL's *Dabiq* magazine, and various academic literature are references for ISIL's theological terms and definitions.

According to US doctrine, operational art is a deliberate approach by military organizations to create strategies and operations by employing available means and ways to achieve strategic ends.[2] The elements of operational art are end state conditions, center of gravity, decisive points, lines of operations and effort, basing, tempo, phasing, culmination, operational reach, and risk.[3]

Lines of operation geographically link objectives to end state conditions. Subordinate elements complete tasks associated with lines of operation that do not require direct commander approval. Lines of effort also link objectives to end state conditions, of effort codify the commander's intent and allow subordinates to exercise initiative within identified parameters.[4]

Lines of effort links multiple tasks with the purpose of the operation. Lines of effort deal with the logic of the purpose as opposed to geographical positioning. Commanders rely on lines to codify intangible conditions.[5]

Tempo is the speed of military activity with respect to opposing forces. Maintaining tempo against adversaries provides advantage and allows military units to exercise flexibility.

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[2] US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2017), 1-19.

[3] Ibid., 2-4.

[4] US Department of the Army, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 2-6.

[5] Ibid.

Maintaining tempo also requires a deliberate balance of operational endurance and reach to prevent culmination.[6]

Center of gravity is the ultimate source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or the will to act. Loss of the center of gravity could result in defeat; moreover, it provides a central point for planning and operations. Understanding centers of gravity will assist formations in recognizing operational frameworks and successive decisive points.[7]

Operational approach refers to the broad activities a force undertakes to achieve end state and conditions. An operational approach includes arrangement of lethal and non-lethal action to accomplish a strategic objective. Determining the operational approach requires understanding of the strategic environment. As the conflict progresses, commanders must refine their operational approach.[8]

Abu Bakir refers to the *Umma* as the consolidated community of Muslims. The word *Umma* does possess religious relevance in Islamic principles; however, Abu Bakir uses the word to delineate a united Muslim community that is committed in achieving a new global caliphate.[9]

Tawhid refers to the Islamic principle that acknowledges one deity; however, Abu Bakir's concept of *Tawhid* militarizes the belief of a central religious authority and mandates military action against polytheism and groups that acquiesce to outside beliefs.[10]

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[6] US Army, *(ADRP) 3-0,* 2-7.

[7] Ibid., 2-4.

[8] US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-7.

[9] Abu Bakr Naji, *The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass,* trans. William McCants (Cambridge, MA: John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006), 235. Abu Bakr Naji is often confused with Abu Bakir Al-Baghdadi, ISIL's religious and militant leader. Abu Bakr Naji is a prolific Sunni extremist whose works have influenced Al Qaeda, ISIL, and other jihadist organizations to combat the United States, its allies and partners.

[10] Ibid., 264.

The term *Hisba* describes acts of responsibility and religious cleanliness. Specifically, ISIL enforces a strict form of *Hisba* that requires all followers to condemn narcotics, alcoholic, and nicotine. The act of *Hisba* is an exhaustive list of accountabilities that ISIL held territory enforces.[11]

Mushrikin is a historic term that describes individuals that worship entities outside of the Islamic faith; however, Abu Bakir militarizes the concept by invoking action against *Mushrikin* and requires expulsion from the Arabic Peninsula.[12]

Dawa is a concept that ISIL practices to bridge trust, rapport, and confidence with locals. ISIL's strategy addresses the needs of the people in an effort to lure locals into the ranks of jihadist organizations. *Dawa* activities vary from state to state; nonetheless, the general concept focuses on local national trust.[13]

The term *Wilayat* describes a divine authority over territory. ISIL justifies annexation of territories through religious authority. Of note, the methods of *Wilayat* differ between provinces.[14]

Takfiri, a jihadist doctrinal belief that allows followers to indiscriminately kill non-Muslims or other Muslims that do not believe in the proponents of Sunni Islam. There are some

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[11] Harleen K. Gambhir, "Dabiq: The Strategic Messaging of the Islamic State" Institute for The Study of War, August 15, 2014, 51, accessed October 25, 2018, www.iswresearch.blogspot.com.

[12] ISIS, "Remaining and Expanding," *The Dabiq*, no. 5 (September 2017): 27, accessed October 30, 2018, www.clarionproject.org.

[13] Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model," *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2015, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015 /01/28/the-islamic-states-model/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bfa834784bdc.

[14] Ibid.

exceptions to the doctrine that spare lives of non-Muslims and non-Sunnis who concede to the norms of ISIL's governance.[15]

Salafists believe that the faith of Islam should closely mirror the activities of third century Islam; furthermore, *Salafism* should not interface with the cultural norms of modern society.[16] The aims of *Salafism* are to reach religious purity through traditional interpretations of Sunni Islam.[17]

Theoretical Framework

This study will examine ISIL's activity through the lens of Salafism and Quranic warfare. ISIL's activity complies with the Salafist dogma of early Islam. In keeping with conservative Islamic principles, today's Sunni jihadist organizations aim to establish a global caliphate and serve as an example of Sunni Islam in its purest form. In order to achieve a caliphate and a pure Salafist society, jihadists must be led by an ordained individual who will install the requirements of a pure Sunni society. Today, ISIL identifies Abu Bakir Al-Baghdadi as the embodiment of Salafism and has the legal and religious authority to govern its activities, military operations, and strategic aim. Similar to professional armies, ISIL follows a doctrinal process that guides their strategic aims, methodologies, and tactical objectives.

Research Questions

Three research questions directed this study:

R1 – Were elements of lines of operation and tempo evident during ISIL's offensive campaign between May and July 2014?

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[15] Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/.

[16] Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, DC: Columbia University Press, 2015), 4-5.

[17] Ibid., 7.

R2 – Were elements of center of gravity and lines of effort apparent as they consolidated territorial gains in the summer of 2014?

R3 – Were phasing and transition present as ISIL balanced territorial gains and advancement?

Limitations

Classification levels limit complete access to ISIL's activities in 2014. This study relied on open source information as well as primary and secondary sources. Because of its highly classified level, access to Abu Bakir's orders and directives are unattainable. Furthermore, ISIL's destructive effects on Iraq's military impose challenges in acquiring ISF unit readiness levels. Lastly, acquiring ISF directives and readiness levels would require additional time and placement to access.

Delimitations

This study will focus on ISIL's major offensive operations in Iraq between May and July 2014. The study includes military action in proximity to Iraq's major highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12. The study will include strategic frameworks, guidance, and ideological texts before and after the operation; however, deliberate focus on their offense will assist the reader to understand ISIL's use of operational art to accomplish its strategic objectives.

Organization of the Study

The study is comprised of five sections. Section one is the introduction and discusses the general parameters, purpose, and context of the study. Section two is the literature review which highlights prevailing literature of jihadist dogma. Section three is the methodology which presents the primary sources used to assess ISIL's activity in Iraq. Section four is the findings and analysis which answers the study's research questions. Lastly, section five is the conclusion which summarizes the study and proposes future research.

Literature Review

A prevailing viewpoint labels ISIL's actions as barbaric, disjointed, and utterly violent. This study presents a different perspective by explaining the purposeful arrangement of their violent activities. Abundant literature exists that articulates the rise of jihadist organizations, their justification of the September 11, 2001 attacks, and jihadist activities against the state of Israel. However, current US literature falls short in explaining ISIL's religious justification for war, its strategic objectives, and its conduct during war.

Understanding the arrangement of jihadist actions requires understanding of their societal interpretation of conflict and justification of war. Juxtaposed with US and European institutions, the United States relies on legal principles to govern war time policy. However, jihadist factions rely on religious doctrine to justify war and military action. Despite the varying strategies and judicial processes, the US and European governments utilize familiar institutions and decision making to justify war, identify wartime objectives, and determine the conduct of war.

The United States and its European allies differ on strategic policy but agree that war and politics share an intrinsic link. To understand US strategy, it is useful to consider the insights of Clausewitz, Dolman, Kelly, and Brennan. Carl von Clausewitz, a historical theorist whose works still influence US strategic policy, explains that "war is a merely a continuation of policy by other means."[18] Clausewitz attempts to explain the complex nature of war and the demands of society through his paradoxical trinity of enmity, chance, and reason. He further explains that states must harness enmity to help facilitate war, governmental institutions, and the state's military apparatus.

The United States and its European allies determine strategic objectives through similar processes. Everett Dolman, a notable professor of strategy at the US Air Force staff college who continually critiques US strategy, provides the most modern definition of strategic objectives. Dolman describes strategic objectives as states jockeying to obtain a better condition of peace.

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[18] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* ed. and trans. Michael E. Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

Dolman further elaborates on his definition by tying tactical objectives through the strategic manipulation of boundaries. His definition places precedence on geographical positioning and evolving conditions. Dolman further defines military strategy as linking military means with political aims in hopes of continuing conditions of advantage.[19]

The United States links strategic objectives through application of operational art. Influences from the different services affect the Department of Defense's understanding of operational art. Former Director General of Future Warfare, Brigadier Justin Kelly, and former Director of General Simulation, Dr. Michael J. Brennan, provide a relevant definition of operational art. In their article, "The Leavenworth Heresy and the Perversion of Operational Art," they define operational art as the "thoughtful sequencing of tactical actions to achieve a subordinate objective within a campaign" and that "good operational art ensures that tactical actions contribute to the attainment of the purpose of a war."[20]

Having described the process in which the United States defines and determines strategic objectives and operational art, the remainder of this section will synthesize relevant literature that describe jihadist activity. Information from this section will facilitate understanding of ISIL's religious authority for waging war, determining objectives, and conduct during war. Lastly, this section will enable understanding of ISIL's 2014 offensive framework and requisite consolidation activities.

Past Jihadist Doctrine and Literature: Justification for War

Salafist dogma prescribes the justification for war through divine permission and self-defense. Islamic ideology states that the *Holy Quran* provides a divine philosophy in justifying

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[19] Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principles in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14-15.

[20] Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan, "The Leavenworth Heresy and the Perversion of Operational Art," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 56 (January 2010): 109-16.

war, and that mankind cannot validate its prosecution.[21] Brigadier General S. K. Malik's *Quranic Concept of War*, John Kelsay's *Arguing the Just War in Islam,* and Jeevan Deol's *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought*, all support the notion that the *Quran* provides divine permission to justify jihadist conflicts.[22] Brigadier General S. K. Malik, a former Pakistani Army General, captured the necessity of Islamic jurisprudence and its role in conducting Quranic warfare. Malik's *Quranic Concept of War* provides multiple religious references to the *Quran* in pursuing the religious causes of Allah.[23] Malik identifies that in the *Holy Quran*, section 449, part 17, verses 39 and 40, "believers of Allah have divine permission against disbelievers and that Allah will provide support within a just cause."[24]

Malik asserts that conflicts of self-defense mandates believers to assist in military action, and that the call to war is not only a religious requirement, but a religious order from God himself.[25] Jeevan Deol also supports the religious notion of defensive based conflicts. Also known as, *fard 'ayn*, the defensive war requires the collective burden on all Muslims to participate in armed struggle.[26] John Kelsay's book echoes the narrative that the strategic activities of the United States and its allies were offensive actions against all Muslims. The logic

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[21] Joseph C Myers, "The Quranic Concept of War," *Parameters* (Winter 2006-07): 6-7, accessed September 13, 2018, http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters /articles/06winter/win-ess.pdf.

[22] S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War* (New Delhi: Himalayan Books, 1986), 20; John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 158. God commands followers to liberate oppressed Muslim communities. Jeevan Deol and Zaheer Kazmi, *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 57.

[23] Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, 20.

[24] Muhammad Taqi-ud Al Hilali, *Holy Quran* (Medina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, 632), section 449.

[25] Malik, *Quranic Concept of War*, 21.

[26] Deol and Kazmi, *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought*, 57. Professor Jeevan Deol teaches the logic of jihadi ideologies in multiple universities in the United Kingdom.

of a defensive based war grants jihadists opportunity to reciprocate violence.[27] The combined

analysis reflects in Abu Bakr's publication of the *Management of Savagery*. In his document he

repeatedly labels the universal struggle of the *Umma* (Muslim community) in a defensive conflict.

Abu Bakr ends his publication by stating that if the defensive struggle stops, then earth itself will

fall into the corrupt beliefs of infidels.[28] By masterfully twisting the narrative of the US war on

terror to a defensive war, jihadist organizations are able to claim theological justification and

draw immense support to wage war.

Past Jihadist Doctrine and Literature: The Objective of War

Through Salafist beliefs, the objective of war requires jihadists to seize terrain and souls.

Of the two requirements, jihadist literature identifies the soul as the main objective of war.[29]

Seyyid Qutb, a notable religious leader and advocate for a global caliphate, describes his support

for jihadi conflict in his book *Milestones.* Seyyid Qutb's *Milestones* supports a theological focus

on the human soul and interprets the soul as a tangible objective. Within a tactical lens, jihadists

secure the souls of followers and its enemies by destroying political institutions that prevent Islam

from freely expanding.[30] By destroying opposing political and religious institutions, Seyyid

argues that spiritual preservation is attainable.

Preparing the souls of jihadists is another crucial objective of jihadist conflict. Within a

spiritual context, jihadists interpret the soul as a vessel that requires spiritual salvation. Achieving

spiritual salvation requires strict Islamic practice and the obtainment of a pure Sunni

establishment. Abu Bakr Naji, a renown jihadi strategist, provides a long-term vision in

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[27] Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, 204. John Kelsay, a professor at Florida State University, devotes his academic works on exploring the role of justice and conflict in Islam.

[28] Naji, *The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, 258.

[29] Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War,* 58.

[30] Seyyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Columbia: Create Space Publishing, 2005), 56-57.

destabilizing enemy states and the creation of the caliphate in his work, *The Management of Savagery*. Naji emphasizes the use of Islamic jihad to prepare Muslim souls for enduring struggle.[31] In Naji's *The Management of Savagery,* he describes conflict as an instrument to obtain souls and strengthen the *Umma* (Muslim community). Within his publication, he argues to strengthen the souls of the *Umma*, and develop the condition of the human spirit in over fifty passages. Lastly, Abu Bakir Al-Baghdadi, ISIL's legal and religious ruler, claims that reviving the global caliphate is a requirement of all Muslims that will create a larger mechanism for spiritual salvation.[32]

Past Jihadist Doctrine and Literature: The Conduct of War

The works Kelsay, Deol, Malik, Qutb, and Naji converge by explaining jihadist logic of violence as a means to establish a global caliphate. They proclaim that jihadist groups arrange acts of terror, and other actions in support of a global objective. Naji and Malik describe time tested principles of attacking susceptible objectives and by capitalizing on slow enemy responsiveness.[33] In attacking susceptible objectives, Naji and Malik explain why jihadists harness terror in the conduct of religious warfare. Acknowledging that the human soul is the main objective of jihadist organizations, jihadists employ acts of terror as a means to achieve their global objectives and impose a condition of psychological dislocation.[34] By declaring the global conflict as a defensive endeavor, Kelsay and Deol assert that jihadists can justify reciprocal terror that requires participation of all Muslims.[35] Through an understanding of past jihadist literature, modern jihadist activity supports a framework of religious justification, strategic objectives, and a terror-based perspective of war.

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[31] Naji, *The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, 134.

[32] Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," 15.

[33] Naji, *The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, 64.

[34] Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War,* 59-60.

[35] Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam,* 204.

Current ISIL Doctrine and Literature

Since the invasion of Iraq in the summer of 2014, ISIL has distributed monthly magazines known as the *Dabiq* and *Raumiyah.* The jihadist organization distributes the online magazine to unite the Muslim community (*Umma*), dictate consolidation activities (*jama'ah*), advocate for the beginning of the Islamic caliphate (*hijrah*), and bolster its ranks.[36]

Since its first issue in May 2014, ISIS has distributed twenty-five digital magazines. The magazines do not limit narratives to activities in Iraq but inform their readers of jihadist activity across the globe. Of the twenty-five separate distributions, *Dabiq* issues one, two, and three focus on ISIL's activities in Iraq during the summer of 2014.

The first issue, labeled "The Return of the Khalifah," highlights the return of the *Khalifah,* or divine authority, who will transform the *Umma* to a pure Salafist caliphate.[37] Published in May 2014, it echoes Qutb's and Malik's requirements of religious authority. As if to pay homage to Abu Bakr's *Management of Savagery*, the declaration of the caliphate will not only serve as a mechanism to combat non-believers, but will also increase spiritual salvation of the Sunni sect.[38] It also supports Abu Bakr's narrative that the current struggle of the *Umma* (Muslim community) is a bridge in establishing the global caliphate. It exploits a narrative of *Daesh* conducting acts of *hisha* (religious cleanliness) and *jama'ah* (policing action and consolidation activities) in Iraq in the summer of 2014.

The second issue, the *Mubalah* (the Flood of Noah) exploits a narrative of religious polarity by categorizing the world into believers and non-believers.[39] The magazine highlights

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[36] ISIS, "The Return of the Khilafah," *The Dabiq*, no. 1 (June 2014): 3. ISIL's monthly magazine does not provide an author for any of its monthly editorials. The publication does claim to be the official magazines of ISIL and is translated into multiple languages.

[37] Ibid., 7.

[38] Naji, *The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Umma Will Pass*, 57.

[39] Ibid., 10.

efforts of the *Umma* to destroy relics in Iraq that are outside of Sunni practice.[40] Again, the

religious requirement of *jama'ah* permeates throughout the digital product.

Issue number three reinforces Malik's Quranic maxims that require unity of effort,

aggressiveness, and patience throughout the global effort.[41] Titled "A Call to Hijrah," it informs

its readers of executions, liberation, and other acts of *jama'ah* (consolidation territory) in Iraq in

the summer of 2014. It details ISIL's offensive actions and consolidation activities in Nineva,

Iraq, as well as policing actions throughout previously held territory.[42]

These issues of the *The Dabiq* reinforce a requirement of terrorist activity. In line with

Malik and Qutb's publications, inflicting terror on non-believers is necessary to remove opposing

institutions and defeating the souls of the enemy. Through the combined methodology, the *Dabiq*

is applying Malik's Quranic process that wages war at the individual and collective level through

a united Muslim front.[43] *The Dabiq* magazines are more than religious propaganda with

prescriptive lines of effort. Jihadists view the magazines as a legitimate source of guidance that

facilitates behavior across a growing extremist community.

Jihadist organizations rely on religious authority and Salafist dogma to justify war,

identify objectives, and conduct war. Contrary to the National Security Strategy of the United

States, ISIL divorces its military actions with political goals. Through the lens of Islamic

ideology, ISIL must maintain and establish a global caliphate through the descriptive practices of

3rd century Islam. Having discussed literature that inform the behavior of jihadist groups, the

study will transition to the methodology and primary sources utilized.

Methodology

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[40] ISIS, "The Flood," *The Dabiq,* no. 2 (June 2014): 15-17.

[41] Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, 66-69.

[42] ISIS, "The Call to Hijrah," *The Dabiq,* no. 3 (August 2014): 12-17.

[43] Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, 54.

This monograph was a qualitative examination of *Daesh's* use of planning and operational art during its activities in Iraq between May and July 2014. Three research questions guided the research to assess ISIL's activities in Iraq within the three-month period. The monograph identifies that elements of operational art were present between May and July 2014 and that *Daesh's* tactical actions supported attainment of strategic objectives. Assessing ISIL's employment of operational art in the summer of 2014 is an appropriate case study because the vignette shows the ability of a jihadist organization to synchronize tactical actions to achieve strategic objectives in a competitive space.

Data Collection

Based on unrestricted, open source information of the 2014 conflict, the monograph used information provided by The *Institute for the Study of War* (ISW) and *The Primary Information Exchange* (PiX). The ISW provided reports of ISIL's advance into Iraq and operations conducted by ISF. The open source site provided weekly analysis of ISIL's positions. The site provided situation reports of Kurdish, Iraqi, and *Daesh* forces as they fought to achieve dominance in the area. The forum also shared detailed information regarding the political climate of Iraqi provinces prior to *Daesh's* invasion. Through polling data, the site highlighted enduring ethnic tension present in the summer of 2014. Aside from polling data, the ISW also shared preparation activities ISF conducted as they mobilized personnel, equipment, and resources while combating the jihadist threat. Information from the ISW will assess elements of operational art present during ISIS's offensive thrust into Iraq.

Information provided by the PiX, available at Pixtoday.net, discuss reports of ISIL's governmental and policing activities. The site also provided orders from local *Daesh* leadership as they enforce sharia law, education, banking, essential services, taxes, transportation, acts of *hisba*, *dawa*, *jama'ah*, and other services. The medium provided detailed processes of ISIL governance with a distinct focus on the cities of Mosul, Tikrit, Ramadi, and Hawijah.

Furthermore, publications of ISIL's governmental initiatives were used to assess elements of operational art present during its consolidation activities.

The study also reviewed ISIL's digital magazines, *The Dabiq*, to correlate ISIL's monthly priorities and guidance dictated by Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi. *The Dabiq* magazines were used to identify elements of operational art present during their consolidation activities. To enable maximum dispersion of the study, the monograph will not include information categorized as "secret," or higher, and focused on ISIL's regional activities in the summer of 2014.

Data Analysis

The research questions of this monograph assessed ISIL's employment of operational art during its activities in Iraq from May through July 2014. Data incorporated identified how ISIL showcased elements tempo and lines of operation during their offensive activities. The study identified how elements of lines of effort and center of gravity existed as they consolidated territorial gains. Lastly, the data presented identifies how elements of phasing and transition existed as ISIL balanced its operational offensive and consolidation activities. Data acquired includes Iraqi election polls, major offensive activities, ISIL governmental activities, ISIL policing actions, and decision making. Assessing their actions and acquired data, through the lens of operational art, this study identified presence of operational as *Daesh* conducted their campaign between May and July 2014.

Case Study

The case study will analyze *Daesh's* offensive actions and consolidation activities by addressing the identified research questions. Although their offensive action and consolidation activities occurred simultaneously, this section will compartmentalize the offensive campaign and consolidation actions into separate sections. The first section, ISIL's Iraq offensive, will focus on their use of tempo and lines of operation. It will also analyze their understanding of the operational environment, the selection of objectives, and the use of time and space to achieve a

strategic aim. The second section will discuss *Daesh's* consolidation activities and their

synchronization of *dawa* (acts of charity), *hisba* (religious cleanliness), *tawhid* (violence against

outside beliefs), and *takfiri* (violence against unbelievers) to supplement its lethal activity, ISIL's

use of governance to promote authority of the *wilayat*, and ISIL's deliberate balance to maintain

offensive capability while retaining newly gained territory.

ISIL's Iraq Offensive, May-July 2014: Campaign Summary

Prior to initiating its major offensive into Iraq, ISIL demonstrated an understanding of the

strategic environment by leveraging political and ethnic tensions. In the months leading up to the

Iraqi national election, ISIS exploited tension between disenfranchised Iraqi-Sunnis and the Iraqi-

Shiite government. On May 5, 2014, Iraq's Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, stated that the future

of Iraq's government would not be based on ethnic or sectarian considerations.[44] In response,

Kurdish and Sunni leaders voiced opposition to Maliki's stance, and lobbied for a representative

government that included equal representation of all political parties. Sunni leaders stated that the

combined Iraqi alliance would not support Maliki for a third term.[45] In response, ISIL further

exploited political tension by condemning the elections and rallying Iraqi Sunnis to support the

jihadist movement through ISIL's official Twitter pages.[46]

Their use of digital media helped the jihadists further exploit a politically fractured

environment and undermine Iraq's governmental institutions. Embedded in their digital messages

were multiple Quranic verses that reinforce Abu Bakr's call to support the *wilayat* and acts of

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[44] Ahmed Ali, "Iraqi Government Formation Negotiations Begin," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, May 10, 2014, accessed October 25, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/05 /iraqi-government-formation-negotiations.html. Prime Minster Nouri al-Maliki sought a third consecutive term in the summer elections of 2014.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Omar Abdullah, "Iraq Update 2014 #14: ISIS Condemns Elections, Posts Warnings in Kirkuk, Diyala, Ninewa, and Northern Baghdad," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, March 28, 2014, accessed October 25, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/03/iraq-update-2014-14-isis-condemns.html.

tawhid.[47] ISIL's employment of digital media targeted Sunni communities residing in Kirkuk, Ninewa, Al Anbar, Baghdad, and Diyala.[48] By employing digital media, *Daesh* could indirectly influence five million Iraqis.[49]

The Iraqi national elections of 2014 validated ISIL's narrative of disenfranchised Sunnis. Of the 271 available seats, Iraqi Sunnis acquired only 38 seats.[50] From the previous election, Iraqi Sunnis lost five representative seats while Iraqi Shiites, Kurds, and other Iraqi groups gained additional seats within the representative government. During the summer election of 2014 Iraqi Shiites won 60 percent of the total representative government. Due to an expanding Shiite representative body, ISIS invoked claims of claims of *takfiri* (violence against non-believers) and *Mushrikin* (expulsion of non-believes from sacred lands) to contend the results of the election.[51] Although primary sources are not available to showcase the decision making of ISIL leadership, the use of digital mediums, and the timing of *Daesh's* attack, seems to indicate an ability to exploit the fractured environment of Iraq in the summer of 2014.

In June and July 2014, jihadists demonstrated an ability to move quickly along multiple avenues of approach to achieve tactical success against ISF. Between June 11 and June 20, they advanced 334 kilometers while seizing territory and combating the Iraqi Army, police, militia, and national border units. Along the same highway, between June 11 and June 15, *Daesh* maneuvered throughout the communities of Qaim and Rawa while Iraqi forces marshaled from

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[47] Abdullah, "Iraq Update 2014 #14." Shura 21 condemns followers to support laws outside of Islamic law. Hud 133 requires followers to avoid interactions with those who do not follow Islamic teachings.

[48] Ibid.

[49] PiX Today, "Iraq Population 2014: Iraq Running Estimates - PiX Iraq," accessed October 25, 2018, https://www.pixtoday.net/iraq/index.php/Article:Iraq_Running_Estimates.

[50] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Final 2014 Iraqi National Elections Results by Major Political Groups," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, May 19, 2014, accessed December 17, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/05/final-2014-iraqi-national-elections.html.

[51] Ibid.

Al Kut, Basra, and other provinces.[52] On June 16, the Iraqi government deployed two Iraqi border guard brigades to Qaim and throughout Al Anbar province to halt *Daesh's* axis of advance.[53] Between June 11 and June 20 the group conducted multiple operations to control highway 12. By June 20, jihadists secured the entire community of Al-Fallujah, while isolating bypassed ISF units along highway 12.[54] Bypassed ISF forces in Qaim, Rawa, Haditha, Hit, Ramadi, and Habbaniya continued to contest *Daesh's* control as they advanced. By mid-June, jihadists controlled seven of nineteen Iraqi governorates with lethal activity in least two additional provinces.[55]

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[52] Ahmed Ali and Heather L. Pickerell, "Situation Report June 12-14, 2014," *Institute for The Study of War Blog*, June 14, 2014, accessed December 15, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/situation-report-june-12-14-2014.html.

[53] Ahmed Ali and Heater L. Pickerell, "Situation Report: June 16, 2014," *Institute for The Study of War Blog*, June 16, 2014, accessed December 15, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com /2014/06/situation-report-june-16-2014.html.

[54] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Control of Terrain in Iraq: June 21, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, June 21, 2014, accessed December 15, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/control-of-terrain-in-iraq-june-21-2014.html.

[55] Jessica Lewis, "The ISIS Battle Plan," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, June 12, 2014, accessed December 17, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/the-isis-battle-plan.html.
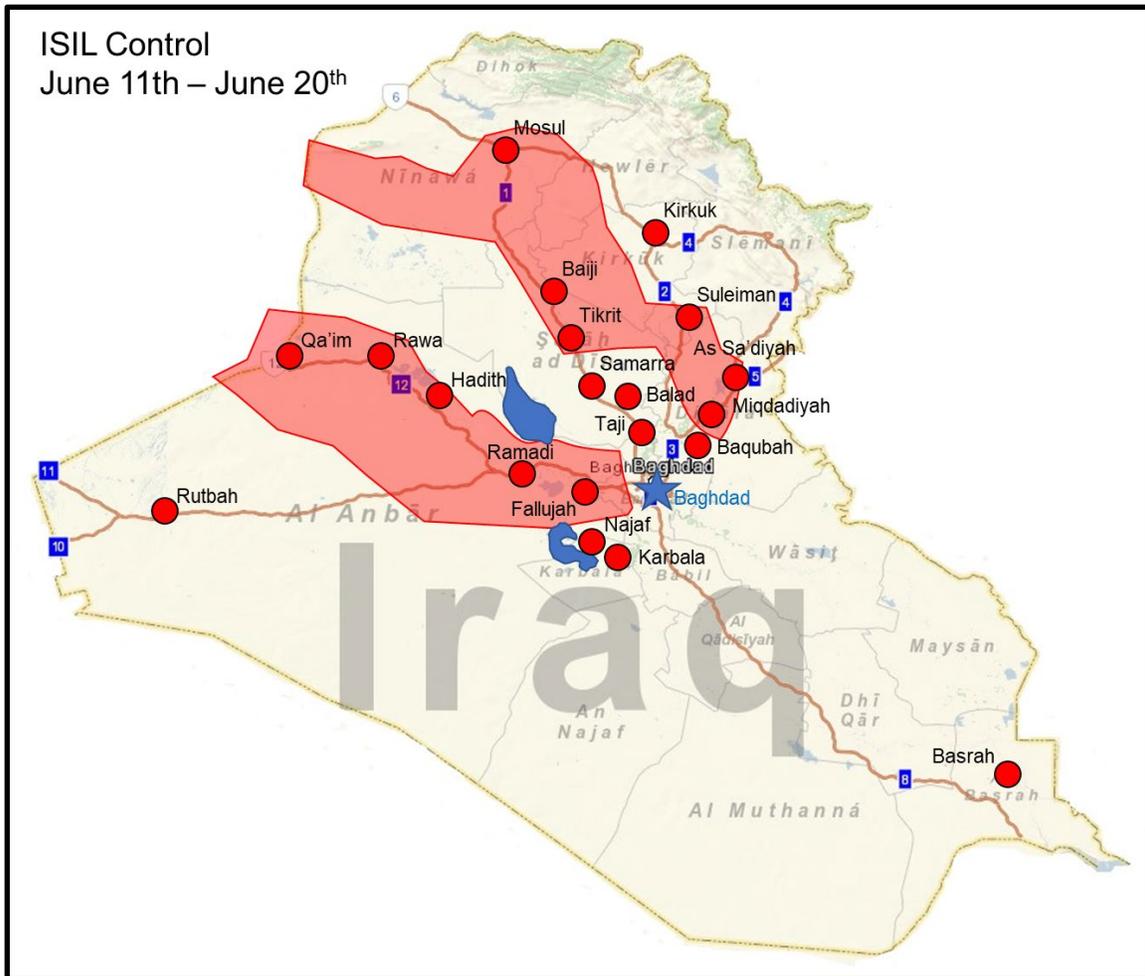
Figure 1.   ISIL's territorial control between June 1-June 20. Map source data: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, "Map of the World," accessed February 20, 2019, www.map.nga.mil. Vector data of cities of control created by the author. Figure 1 shows Daesh's multi-pronged approach to Baghdad and extent of its territorial control.

By mid-June, the jihadists had completed their dominion over the Iraqi cities of Kirkuk, Mosul, Fallujah, Jurf as-Sukhar, Tikrit, and Baiji.[56] Between June 20 and July 13, ISIS utilized three separate avenues of approach to seize Baghdad.[57] *Daesh's* offensive thrust from Tikrit secured multiple checkpoints along highway 1, and rural villages (see figure 1). ISIL's attack

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[56] Lewis, "The ISIS Battle Plan."

[57] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Control of Terrain in Iraq: July 13, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Blog,* July 13, 2014, accessed December 17, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/07/control-of-terrain-in-iraq-july-13-2014.html.

along highway 1 culminated at the community of Balad. Simultaneously, jihadist forces along highway 12 continued to attack remaining ISF forces. By July 13, ISIS secured and cleared 334 kilometers of Iraqi territory from Qaim to Fallujah. Northeast of Baghdad, jihadist forces clashed against ISF and Kurdish forces hoping to deny ISIL a third approach into the capital. Enemy activity also spread to Sadia, Mansouriyah, and Muqdadiyah. By July 13, *Daesh's* north eastern foothold of Muqdadiyah was 147 kilometers from Baghdad. North of the capital, Al-Baghdadi's forces stood 87 kilometers from its strategic objective, and a mere 65 kilometers from their positions from Al-Fallujah. Despite mobilization efforts, the ISF limited activity to a meeting engagement with ISIL's lead elements. By mid-July, ISF personnel were unable to seriously disrupt *Daesh's* military activity west of Fallujah, North of Baiji, or Northeast of Baghdad. ISIS's combined military actions along highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12 reveal coordinated activity to quickly seize terrain, attack the ISF through multiple axes, and attempted to enter the capital as early as July.[58] While advancing into Iraqi territory, *Daesh* maintained operational tempo despite of ISF resistance.

In the month of June, ISIS dictated the terms of hostilities. Specifically, Al-Baghdadi's offensive actions in Salah Din province overwhelmed the ISF, and forced Maliki's forces to be more reactionary. On June 10, 2014, offensives in Salah din province forced the Iraqi government to order a general withdrawal of the ISF from Tikrit and Kirkuk, and reconsolidate in Taiji.[59] On June 15, 2014, ISF forces deployed rapid response units to Camp Ashraf to disrupt ISIL's advance to Baghdad. By June 29, various Iraqi police, militia, and military units deployed forces to reinforce Baghdad. On the same day, over a thousand volunteers from Qadesiyah province

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[58] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Control of Terrain in Iraq: July 13, 2014."

[59] Institute for the Study of War Team, "ISIS Activity in Mosul and Beyond," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, June 10, 2014, accessed October 31, 2018, http://iswresearch.blog spot.com/2014/06/isis-activity-in-mosul-and-beyond.html.

mobilized in Baghdad to augment military units in the country's capital.[60] The following day the

province of Maysan deployed 927 volunteers to assist the Iraqi government throughout various

provinces.[61] Mobilization from the ISF and various militias deployed to contain *Daesh's* axis of

advance but were unable to project coordinated military activity north or west of Baghdad.

Despite ISF activity and mobilization, in one month *Daesh* gained over three hundred kilometers

of Iraqi highways, maintained complete control of seven provinces, and stood less than one

hundred and fifty kilometers from Baghdad along three separate approaches. In the month of June

2014, the ISF's military response was, at best, piecemealed, unsynchronized, and entirely reactive

to ISIL's tempo.

Increased ISF activity did degrade ISIS's tempo along its forward edge of the battlefield.

Despite initial success, the ISF were unable to deny jihadist influence in consolidated territory or

prevent ISIS from conducting terrorist attacks within Iraq's support areas. By mid-July 2014, ISF

launched a series of coordinated strikes to reclaim the cities of Tikrit and Kirkuk.[62] On July 30,

2014, the ISF conducted multiple offensives to halt ISIL's advance north of Baghdad in the town

of Udhaim.[63] For the first time, ISF counter-offensives integrated rotary and fixed-wing aircraft to

supplement ISF ground elements. While in Tikrit, Kirkuk, and Udhaim, the ISF committed

tremendous resources to secure Baghdad. Although the combined efforts of the Iraqi government

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[60] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Iraq Situation Report: June 30, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Blog,* June 30, 2014, accessed October 31, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/06/iraq-situation-report-june-30-2014.html.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ahmed Ali, "Iraq Situation Report: July 17, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Blog*, July 17, 2014, accessed October 31, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/07/iraq-situation-report-july-17-2014.html.

[63] Heather L. Pickerell, "Iraq Situation Report: July 30, 2014," *Institute for the Study of War Blog,* July 30, 2014, accessed October 31, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com /2014/07/iraq-situation-report-july-30-2014.html.

were unable to dislodge *Daesh's* hold within its consolidated territory, they were able to degrade ISIL's tempo and limit their advancement to Fallujah, Muqdadiyah, Balad, and Udhaim.

As the ISF increased its frequency of operations, *Daesh* increased its use of suicide bombings to disrupt ISF activity. In June and July, jihadists increased the use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) throughout Iraq. As early as June 11, ISIL employed a SVBIED attack in Sadr city that resulted in sixteen killed, and thirty-four wounded. Simultaneously, *Daesh* initiated another SVBIED in the central Baghdad community of al-Khadhimiya.[64] As jihadists secured the city of Tikrit, they employed explosive devices to target the homes of various ISF leaders in Tarmiyah. While entering the outskirts of Samarra, they synchronized the use of a SVBIED in a market in southwest Basra, killing ten civilians.[65] ISIL also employed two additional SVBIEDs in the city of Karbala and Wasit province.[66] While conducting offensive operations in Auja and Samarra, ISIS suicide bombers detonated car bombs in Baghdad, and the town of Safwan.[67] As the jihadists secured highways 1, 11, and 12, they employed SVBIED strikes into the country's capital, and targeted predominant Shiite communities. The use of SVBIED attacks in Baghdad and in Shiite communities suggests there was a stagnation in ISIL's offensive thrusts, and an opportunity to disrupt ISF activity.

Increased activity, coordination, and synchronization within the ISF appeared to impact ISIL's military offensive and control of tempo. *Daesh's* efforts along highways 1 and 11 forced the ISF to mobilize thousands of security personnel. Despite Iraqi counterattacks, mobilization efforts, and defensive preparations, ISIS controlled multiple Iraqi highways and population clusters in June and early July. Through the latter half of July, ISF activity disrupted *Daesh's* offensive momentum. In late July, the ISF mobilized forces to directly counter ISIL's

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[64] Lewis, "The ISIS Battle Plan."

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

advancements. With the increase of ISF forces and culminating insurgent activity, *Daesh* limited its actions to consolidating territory, and isolating Baghdad. Despite *Daesh's* stagnation in late July, jihadists demonstrated an ability to conduct military operations that overwhelmed ISF capacity. Aside from activity that showed ISIS's attempt to harness time and negotiate distance, they employed a deliberate approach in its selection of objectives and organization of military action.

Between June and July 2014, ISIL demonstrated an understanding of lines of operations. By seizing geographical objectives that oriented towards Baghdad, they revealed an ability to arrange tactical actions to accomplish a strategic aim. In less than two months, the jihadists employed a line of operation to seize Baghdad that required control of multiple avenues of approach. In just a few weeks, *Daesh* deliberately arranged tactical action to secure over three hundred kilometers of highways. Their deliberate approach presented multiple entry points into the capital of Baghdad. The arrangement of activity and commitment of forces along three separate avenues of approach not only leveraged existing Iraqi infrastructure, but showed a deep understanding of the need to select subobjectives that oriented on the country's capitol.

Militant activity between June 1 and June 21 showed a framework to seize major population clusters that orient towards Baghdad. Within the first week of June, *Daesh* mounted coordinated strikes on the cities of Mosul, Samarra, and Ramadi.[68] By June 11, ISIL possessed command of the city of Mosul, parts of Kirkuk, and portions of Baiji. On June 11, they simultaneously projected combat power to secure Auja and Samarra.[69] In the course of eleven days, ISIL arrayed combat power to secure major population sites in proximity to highway 1. Again, through route selection and sub-objectives, ISIL displayed coherence in thought by

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[68] Aaron Reese, "ISIS Launches Major Multi-Front Assault," *Institute for The Study of War Blog*, June 7, 2014, accessed December 15, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com /2014/06/isis-launches-major-multi-front-assault.html.

[69] Lewis, "The ISIS Battle Plan."

securing terrain that nested with the organization's purpose and strategic aim. The methodical seizure of major population clusters along major highways allowed *Daesh* access to disenfranchised Sunnis, and an opportunity bolster the ranks of the *Umma*.

On June 16, the jihadists sprang another offensive thrust from Syria along highway 11. Beginning from Qaim in Anbar province, ISIL overran police stations and checkpoints. Between June 16 and June 21, ISIS committed combat power to secure the communities of Rawa, Haditha, Hit, and Ramadi.[70] Arrayed along highway 11, the predominate Sunni areas between Qaim and Fallujah provided another axis into Baghdad.

By June 21, *Daesh's* activity showed a structure to control highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12. The use of Iraq's major highways presented a multi-pronged approach to Baghdad. By late June, ISIS effectively controlled highway 11 and continued to repel ISF authority within Rawa, Haditha, Hit, and Ramadi. At the same time, along highway 1, ISIL controlled of Mosul, Sharqat, Baiji, and Tikrit. To create another axis into Baghdad, the jihadists projected combat power east of Baiji. Al-Baghdadi's followers secured towns along highways 4 and 5, running north to south and converged towards the nation's capital. Along highway 4, the insurgents secured the terrain between Suleiman Beg and Udhain. Within highway 5, jihadists clashed with ISF within the towns of Jalula, Muqdadiyah, and Sadia. After two weeks of fighting in late June, the jihadists spread and seized objectives that oriented towards Baghdad. At the height of *Daesh's* advance, Al-Baghdadi's forces were 65 to 150 kilometers away from the capital along multiple avenues of approach.[71]

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[70] Institute for the Study of War Team, "Control of Terrain in Iraq, June 21, 2014."
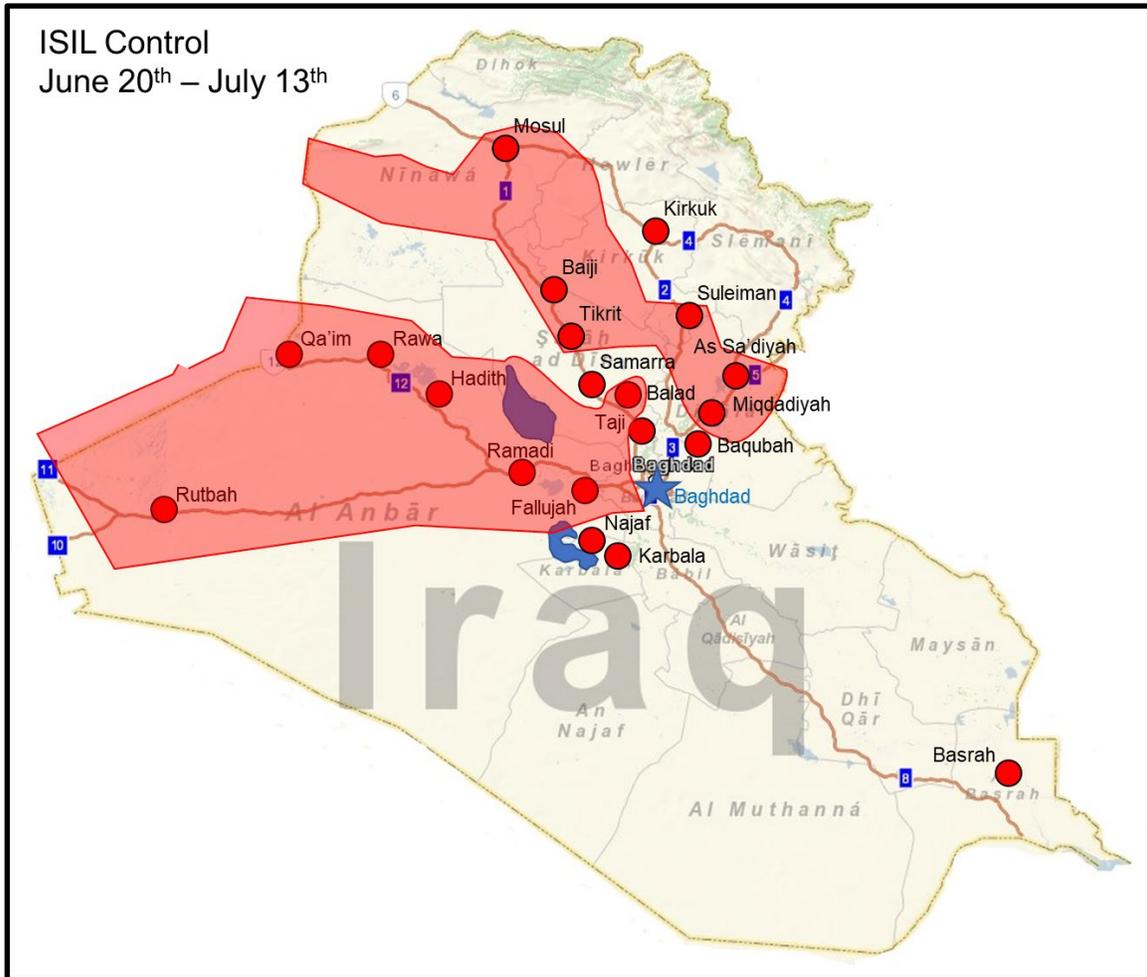
[71] Ibid.

Figure 2.   ISIL's territorial control between June 20–July 13. Map source data: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, "Map of the World," accessed February 20, 2019, www.map.nga.mil. Vector data of cities of control created by the author. Figure 2 shows an ongoing effort to seize Baghdad and territorial gains along highways 1, 4, 5 and 11.

Jihadist activity between July 13 and July 31 showed efforts to isolate the capital and consolidate existing territory. The two-week period marked a transition between successful offensive action to consolidation activity. ISIL's activities showed efforts to secure lines of communication to the Syrian border, and additional actions to isolate the Iraqi capital. Along the Syrian border they seized ISF facilitates in Tal Afar, and throughout Al Anbar province.[72] Simultaneously, the insurgents committed combat power to secure territory between highways 4

[72] Ali and Pickerell, "Iraq Situation Report: June 15, 2014."

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and 5. *Daesh's* consolidation activity shows a concerted effort to create a wedge between Kurdish forces and the ISF by securing Jalula, Sadia, and Mansouriyah, while they retained access to highway 4.
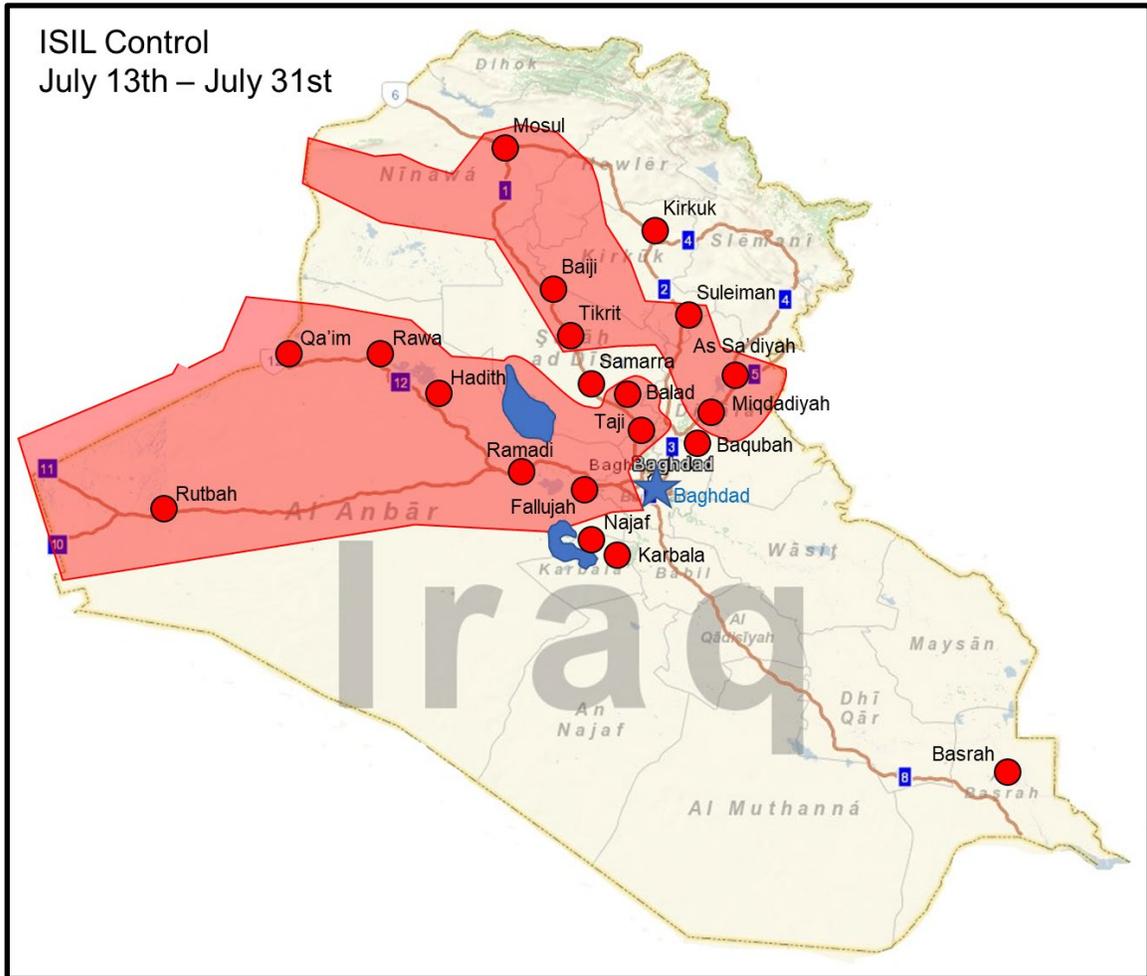
Figure 3.   ISIL's territorial control between June 30-July 31. Map source data: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency "Map of the World," accessed February 20, 2019, www.map.nga.mil. Vector data of cities of control created by the author. Figure 3 shows ISIL's transition to isolate Baghdad and retain previously held territory.

By late July ISIS possessed almost complete control of Al Anbar province, and majority control of several major population clusters west and north of Baghdad. They also continued efforts to isolate the capital. *Daesh's* selection of objectives demonstrated an ability to employ

lines of operation to achieve a strategic aim. Jihadist activities in June and July revealed

coherence in operations, and selection of objectives that geographically orient towards Baghdad.

ISIL's Iraq Offensive, May-July 2014: Research Questions

Offensive activity in the summer of 2014 revealed a deliberate approach in codifying

Abu Baghdadi's strategic aim. Before committing combat power, ISIL evidenced an

understanding of the operational environment by capitalizing on ethnic tension, and the

controversial results of the Iraqi election. Capitalizing on the election exploited a narrative of

religious injustice and validated intervention on behalf of Abu Baghdadi's followers.

The jihadists incorporated tempo to quickly seize objectives while traversing extended

distances. In June, they conducted a range of military activities throughout highways 1, 4, 5, 11,

and 12, despite ISF mobilization. In June, the jihadists had secured hundreds of kilometers of

terrain despite ISF counter attacks. In July, ISIS seemed to have lost control of tempo as the ISF

deployed extensive combat power and air power. By the closing days of July, *Daesh* maintained

control of 7 provinces, over 100 kilometers of secured highways, and were postured 70 to 150

kilometers away from Baghdad along three separate mobility corridors.

ISIL's selection of objectives, and their ability to set conditions for the ground campaign

indicates presence of operational art. *Daesh's* multi-pronged approach to Baghdad, utilizing

highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12, showed a coherent framework to achieve a strategic objective.

While seizing territory, the jihadists consolidated gains in the towns of Mosul, Qaim, Ramadi,

Tikrit, Ninawa, Haditha, Qaim, and Rawa. While conducting its methodical seizure of Iraqi

towns, *Daesh* secured objectives that geographically oriented to Baghdad and enabled lines of

communication to nearby support zones. While seizing objectives jihadists simultaneously

expanded lines of communication and terrain between highways, 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12.

In the three-month period, the ISF directly engaged ISIL's axis of advance and

consolidated security in the state capital. Through a combined network of Iraqi military, police,

and volunteer militia, the ISF did succeed in denying the jihadists access to the capital. Despite the ISF's integration of air and ground elements, it was unable to deny Al-Baghdadi's forces freedom of maneuver within jihadist consolidated areas.

ISIL Consolidation Activities, May-July 2014: Campaign Summary

As *Daesh* projected combat power to increase the territory of the *Khalifah*, the jihadist organization made deliberate efforts to promote the authority of the *wilayat* through various governmental services. In addition to ISIL's governmental body, the jihadist organization consolidated its gains, and synchronized acts of *dawa*, *hisba*, *tawhid*, and *takfiri* to supplement its lethal activity. Through directives from *Daesh's* offices and bureaus, their non-lethal activity supported the goals of its strategic aim.

On June 25, 2014 ISIS's head of public relations, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani as-Shami, announced the revival of the *Khilafah*.[73] To exert control and validate the legitimacy of the *Khilafah*, *Daesh* established various departments to maintain its newly seized property of land and souls. One of its first governmental initiatives was to establish a system of finance, taxation, and property management. After capturing Mosul, jihadists immediately seized the assets of Mosul's Central Bank. Almost overnight, the jihadist organization became one of the wealthiest transnational organizations by seizing $425,000,000. Combined with their existing oil infrastructure, Al-Baghdadi now had the financial means to wage war on a global scale. As ISIL's governmental institutions grew, so did their financial mechanisms. Aside from existing infrastructure, ISIL tapped into black markets, extortion and taxation to increase its revenue.[74]

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[73] ISIS, "The Return of the Khilafah," 7.

[74] Terence McCoy, "ISIS Just Stole $425 Million, Iraqi Governor Says, and Became the 'World's Richest Terrorist Group'," *The Washington Post*, June 12, 2014, accessed October 29, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/06/12/isis-just-stole-425-million-and-became-the-worlds-richest-terrorist-group/?utm_term=.cd66ab0284bd.

As early as July, the jihadists converted massive quantities of crude oil into cheap fuel.

By tapping into black markets in Syria and Turkey, *Daesh* provided thousands of barrels of fuel a

day. A local buyer in Mosul described that he was able to purchase two hundred and fifty barrels

of fuel for six thousand dollars.[75] ISIS also implemented a flat tax rate on vehicles entering

Mosul. Large trucks carrying outside cargo paid a standard rate of 400 dollars, and small trucks

paid a tax of 100 dollars.[76] Al-Baghdadi's forces also inserted its authority in the local housing

market, and Mosul's real estate registration offices. Once in control of the registration offices,

ISIL took concerted efforts to seize homes belonging to Christians as well as other non-Sunni

ethnicities.[77] Known as the "*Bayt at-Mal*" system, ISIL's real estate treasury system could then

sell seized property.[78]

The jihadist organization also embedded itself in Mosul's Central Bank. In order to

conduct cash withdrawals, ISIS administrators required Iraqis to submit to a third-party

committee system. A withdrawal would prompt an immediate investigation to identify the

background of the individual and determine affiliations with Christians, other non-Sunni sects, or

the Iraqi government. Within days of seizing territory, ISIS would masterfully embed itself into

multiple aspects of Iraq's financial institutions and created unique methods to build on existing

markets. While building capital, the jihadist organization also imposed its system of sharia law

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[75] Ahmed Rasheed, "Oil Smuggling Finances Islamic State's New Caliphate," *Reuters*, July 23, 2014, accessed October 29, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/iraq-security-oil/oil-smuggling-finances-islamic-states-new-caliphate-idUSL6N0PX1KH20140723.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Matthew Levitt, "Terrorist Financing and the Islamic State," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 13, 2014, 10, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/terrorist-financing-and-the-islamic-state.

[78] Nawzat Shamdeen, "Extremists Now in Real Estate Business in Mosul," Niqash, accessed October 29, 2018, http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/economy/3552/.

throughout the provinces. Aside from financial responsibilities, *Daesh* accepted its role as a governing institution by providing basic services.

As the governing body of captured Iraqi towns, ISIL implemented sharia law through a publicized product known as the Madina Document.[79] Published on June 12, Mosul became the first of many Iraqi communities that experienced Abu al-Baghdadi's concept of society. Now in charge of essential services, *Daesh's* leadership pursued resources and property to extend medical services and local security.[80] On July 12, ISIS created its first local police department, and provided a monthly pay rate of four hundred dollars.[81] On July 20, jihadists surged initiatives to increase recruitment for its military forces. By incorporating digital medias, such as justpaste.it, *Daesh* revealed its use of child soldiers and claimed that its ranks received two thousand volunteers from the province of Ninewa.[82] Al-Baghdadi's forces also devoted energy in removing political opposition and destroying the infrastructure of the Iraqi government. In Ninewa province, ISIL apprehended multiple senior leaders who belonged to Saddam's former Ba'athist party.[83] In another instance, ISIS utilized explosives to simultaneously destroy six police stations in Al Anbar Province.[84] The combined actions displayed ISIL's methodology to implement its religious order of sharia law. In many captured provinces, *Daesh* balanced offensive action, with dedicated organizational energy to facilitate governmental services.

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[79] Jenna Lefler, "Life Under ISIS in Mosul," *Institute for the Study of War Blog,* July 28, 2014, accessed October 29, 2018, http://iswresearch.blogspot.com/2014/07/life-under-isis-in-mosul.html.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] ISIS, "The Flood," 45. On June 22, 2014, ISIL demolished six separate police stations in Al Anbar province.

ISIL employed acts of *dawa* (charity) to validate its governmental body, and build local support.[85] In the month of June, *Daesh's* head of public relations and tribal affairs met with the tribal elders of Albu Khamis, Banu Sa'id, al-'Awn, Al-Khafsah, and Al-Ghanim. The ISIL tribunal not only secured support from the predominate tribes of Mosul and Ninewa, but performed acts of *dawa* (charity) by rewarding compensation to the widows and orphans of major tribes.[86] In the same month, the jihadists distributed food to impoverished communities in Ninewa in support of the religious month of Ramadan.[87] On July 8 and July 15 jihadists publicized the distribution of meat to needy neighborhoods in Ninewa in their official Twitter pages.[88] In another act of *dawa*, administrators reduced rent costs in certain Mosul communities to eighty-five dollars.[89] In keeping with its religious values, *Daesh* denied aide to impoverished Christians, Yezidi, and other non-Sunni groups. Similarly, Iraqi Christians working in various health clinics were immediately banned from future service.[90] Not only did jihadists enforce acts of *dawa* at the local level, but deliberately managed initiatives through *Daesh's* Bureau of Charity. Beginning in 2014, Al-Baghdadi's subordinates facilitated a large-scale registration in Al-Anbar province to identify displaced families. Again, through a methodical fashion, ISIS facilitated inventory of its available food stock within the first half of each month, then distributed charitable goods within the second half of each month.[91] Not only did ISIL reach out to impoverished communities but

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[85] Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model."

[86] ISIS, "The Return of the Khilafah," 12-14. Albu Khamis, Banu Sa'id, al-'Awn, Al-Khafsah, and Al-Ghanim are Sunni elders within Ninewa and Mosul. Their collaboration with ISIL leadership validates ISIL's military intervention and fueled local support for jihadist cause.

[87] ISIS, "The Flood," 35.

[88] Lefler, "Life Under ISIS in Mosul."

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] PiX Team, "ISIS Governance," *Primary Information Exchange*, accessed October 29, 2018, https://www.pixtoday.net/iraq/index.php/Article:ISIS_Governance.

leveraged the support of local leaders to validate the *Khalifah* as Iraq's legitimate governmental body.

Daesh's governmental institutions did not limit their actions to community service. ISIL enforced protocols of *hisba* (religious cleanliness) to nest with the religious requirements of sharia. Laws of *hisba* entail restrictions on tobacco, pornography, alcohol, female clothing, garments, and certain textures. In the month of June, ISIL enforced sharia law and conducted multiple operations to remove illicit substances from their communities. On July 19, jihadist forces in the town of Ninawa enforced a mandate prohibiting "tight fitting" garments, brightly colored material and "transparent" clothing.[92] Acts of hisba were not intended to coerce the population, instead they served a mechanism to showcase the purity of the *Khalifah*.

Daesh did not limit its governing roles to self-policing but committed its resources to erase outside religious influences through acts of *tawhid* (violence against outside beliefs). In June 2014, ISIL systemically destroyed two Shiite tombs and religious sites in Mosul and Tal 'Afar. In June 2014, they utilized explosives to demolish the Husayniyyatul-Qubbah temple in Mosul, the "grave of the girl" tomb in Mosul, and the Husayniyyat Jawwad temple in Tal 'Afar.[93] In each event, the jihadists employed explosives to destroy religious sites. Through the use of explosives, *Daesh* sensationalized their activities and invoked an element of shock. Al-Baghdadi's forces then captured these events through various social media to further validate the existence of the *Khalifah* and supplement their recruiting initiatives. Again, while facilitating offensive action in other parts of Iraq, they allocated time and resources to enforce *tawhid* and their concept of sharia law.

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[92] Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi's Blog*, January, 27, 2015, accessed October 29, 2018, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.

[93] ISIS, "The Flood," 7-14. The jihadist group also devoted time to publicize the destruction of Shiite sites on social media and their monthly magazine, *The Dabiq*.

Combined with acts of *tawhid* (violence against outside beliefs), *Daesh* devoted organizational energy to exercise *takfiri,* the discriminate killings of non-Muslims or non-Sunnis. One of the most notable acts of *takfiri*, occurred between June 11 and June 16 in Tikrit, Iraq. Following their decisive seizure of Tikrit, the militant group took deliberate actions in apprehending the military servicemen stationed at Camp Speicher, and other Iraqis associated with security forces. Within a six-day period, ISIS executed hundreds of local Iraqi soldiers, policemen, and cadets in the outskirts of Tikrit. The activist organization, Humans Right Watch, claimed that victims of *Daesh's* mass killings tallied between 560 and 770 men in June.[94] Combined with witness testimony, formal Iraqi investigations, ISIL propaganda videos, photos, and satellite imagery, analysists from Humans Right Watch confirmed that jihadists conducted multiple massed executions at the Saladin Al Ayubi Palace, and at a nearby police building.[95] It is difficult to assess the true toll of the mass killings *Daesh* conducted, however, what is certain is that members of Al-Baghdadi's faction deliberately targeted Iraqi males who were associated with ISF. What is also certain is that *Daesh* exploited the killings to support a narrative of religious *takfiri*, and to supplement their recruitment efforts. Their collective governmental actions, the practices of *dawa, hisba, tawhid,* and *takfiri* show congruency in implementing sharia law, and validate the existence of the *Khalifah*.

ISIL's Consolidation Activities, May-July 2014: Research Questions

To understand elements of operational art present during ISIL's consolidation activities, it is important to appreciate their compliance with religious doctrine, and their ability to maintain governmental processes, and the ability to defend the *Khalifah* while generating additional combat power.

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[94] Human Rights Watch Team, "Iraq: Islamic State Executions in Tikrit," *Human Rights Watch*, September 2, 2014, accessed October 29, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/02/iraq-islamic-state-executions-tikrit.

[95] Ibid.

Daesh's consolidation activities reflect deliberate adherence to sharia law and the beliefs of Salafist dogma. By complying with the principles of Salafism, ISIS's leaders and subordinate elements possessed uniformed understanding to maintain the *Khalifah* and its expanding territories. The announcement of the *Khalifah* in June 2014 reinforces the belief that ISIL is a jihadist organization aspiring to implement the purest form of a Salafist society. The announcement of the *Khalifah*, the declaration of sharia law, via the Madina Document, the creation of financial institutions, and the creation of governing bureaus supported the notion that jihadists deliberately planned and implemented consolidation activities in the summer of 2014.

Through Salafist practices of *dawa, hisba, tawhid,* and *takfiri,* ISIL displayed coherent efforts in maintaining their newly formed government. By reaching out to the tribal elders of Albu Khamis, Banu Sa'id, al-'Awn, Al-Khafsah, and Al-Ghanim, *Daesh* adhered to the cultural norms of its newly seized territory. Moreover, by achieving tribal support, they were able to promote the validity of the *Khalifah* and further degrade the legitimacy of the Iraqi government. Through local and tribal support, the jihadists could conduct acts of *dawa* that supported their religious creeds. By providing charitable goods to disenfranchised Sunni's, ISIS was able to exploit a narrative of Prime Minister Maliki's negligence and discrimination towards Iraqi Sunnis. Through local support and a deliberate operational framework, they employed acts of *hisba* (religious cleanliness) and *tawhid* (violence against other religious groups) to further validate their governmental structure. By removing outside religious structures, narcotics, alcohol, and certain clothing from Iraqi communities, Abu Al-Baghdadi's organization highlighted its adherence to Salafist practices. Enforcing their strict code of sharia law also showed the greater Muslim community that Al-Baghdadi's governmental approach was the purest interpretation of Islam and demanded the adherence of surrounding communities. Through acts of *takfiri*, *Daesh* made the most compelling argument to unite the *Umma* by combatting enemies of the *Khalifah*. ISIL's systemic killings of former Iraqi soldiers, cadets, and policemen showed the resolve of the jihadist organization, and their desire to purify the *Umma* by instilling a devout,

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Sunni, Salafist regime. The combined actions were mechanisms to validate the effectiveness of the *khafliah* and were powerful recruiting tools used to increase the ranks of the *Umma.*

Findings and Analysis

Analysis from the case study validates the first research question: did elements of lines of operation and tempo exist during ISIL's offensive activities? By quickly securing the national highways, and rapidly seizing Iraqi population clusters, ISIS exercised tempo and lines of operation to achieve their operational and tactical success in the summer of 2014. During ISIL's offensive campaign, they seized objectives arrayed along highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and 12, which geographically oriented towards the Iraqi capital. All objectives mutually supported the advancement of *Daesh's* strategic goal and enabled future offensive action.[96] ISIL incorporated tempo to overwhelm various ISF elements which enabled its freedom of maneuver throughout most Iraqi provinces.[97] Within June jihadists seized nine separate Iraqi provinces, secured hundreds of kilometers of national highways, and postured a mere seventy kilometers outside of Baghdad. Despite tremendous mobilization, the ISF was unable to deny *Daesh's* tempo until the latter half of July.

Examination validates the premise of the second research question: how did ISIS employ lines of effort and center of gravity as they consolidated territorial gains in the summer of 2014? ISIL employed lines of effort that linked its Salafist ideology towards the establishment and maintenance of the *Khalifah*.[98] Acts of *dawa, hisba, tawhid,* and *takfiri* in multiple Iraqi communities highlight the organization's efforts to synchronize activity through clear lines of effort. Their center of gravity, defined as "the source of power that provides moral or physical

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[96] US Army, *ADRP 3-0*, 2-5.

[97] Ibid., 2-7. Tempo, defined as the relative speed and rhythm of military activities with respect to the enemy.

[98] Ibid., 2-6. Army doctrine defines lines of effort as a line that links tasks to the organization's true purpose.

strength," is visible throughout jihadists literature and non-military efforts.[99] In order to prepare

the souls of the *Umma* and to purify the caliphate, ISIL focused activity to remove opposing

religious and political institutions. The act of removing opposing establishments reinforced Al-

Baghdadi's efforts to protect the spiritual center of gravity within the newly formed caliphate.

Analysis confirms the premise of the third question: how did jihadists employ phasing

and transitions as it balanced territorial gains and advancement? Use of phasing and transitions

are evident during Al-Baghdadi's ground campaign. *Daesh* balanced territorial gains and

advancements by shifting priorities and by quickly dictating future objectives. The jihadist

organization effectively managed multiple efforts while conducting kinetic activity, expansion,

and consolidation. In the month of June and July jihadists showed the ability to transition military

efforts to future objectives as it conducted its methodical seizure of highways 1, 4, 5, 11, and

12.[100] As *Daesh's* advancement reached resistance along highways 1 and 11, Al-Baghdadi's

forces transitioned offensive activity to highways 4 and 5. The resulting transition overwhelmed

Iraqi forces and allowed jihadists to project additional combat power. While simultaneously

conducting offensive activity, ISIL displayed the cognitive ability to manage governmental

efforts while retaining territorial gains.

During *Daesh's* offensive campaign and during their consolidation activities, ISIL

deployed a deliberate methodology to yield tactical and operational success. United through their

religious fervor and harmonized doctrine, the jihadists understood the strategic environment, and

were able to exploit opportunities within the political climate. They also employed a

synchronized military campaign and conducted non-lethal activity to support their overall aim.

Although the study does not present orders from Abu al-Baghdadi prior to May 2014, the

aggregate effects of ISIL's invasion, *Daesh's* distribution of its global magazine *The Dabiq*, the

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[99] US Army, *ADRP 3-0*, 2-4.

[100] Ibid., 2-8.

distribution of the Madina Document and enforcement of sharia law, the declaration of the *Khalifah*, ISIL's recruitment drives, deliberate killings, and governmental initiatives suggest that ISIS is not an incoherent group of barbarians, but rather a transnational entity that synchronized its efforts through planning and Salafist doctrine.

Conclusion

Answers to the research questions suggests that operational art was present during *Daesh's* offensive action and consolidation activity in Iraq 2014. The methodology of the study highlighted that *Daesh's* purposeful arrangement of activity and aggregate actions indicate a level proficiency in strategic planning, preparation, and synchronized action. The research questions explored ISIL's use of operational art during its offensive campaign, its consolidation activities, and balance of territorial gains and offensive action. The study confirmed *Daesh's* deliberate use of lines of operation, tempo, centers of gravity, lines of effort, and phasing. By understanding the strategic environment in the summer of 2014, the jihadists exploited ethnic tension and projected combat power with the intent of establishing a permanent *Khalifah*. In support of their strategic aim, the jihadists employed offensive combat power and seized Iraqi towns, villages, and cities that geographically oriented towards Baghdad. As part of *Daesh's* Salafist dogma, they employed governmental functions and enforced religious acts of *dawa, hisba, tawhid,* and *takfiri.* While conducting offensive action, Al-Baghdadi's forces showed deliberate efforts to retain its territorial gains by shifting advances, changing priorities, and enforcing governmental action. ISIL's aggregate activities infer that the organization synchronized its efforts across time and space with the deliberate purpose of building a global caliphate. Despite ISIL's coordinated response, it fell short in achieving its strategic objective.

While the presence of operational art did not facilitate accomplishment of ISIL's main strategic objective, viewing their methodology, through the lens of jihadist warfare shows that Al-Baghdadi's followers were prepared to face temporary military defeat in Iraq. Recalling the

works of General Malik, military professionals must understand that jihadist organizations are not only prepared to die for the eternal struggle but will utilize cessation of conflict to prepare for future action.[101] In essence, in the minds of jihadists, the organization has already won despite military defeat. *Daesh's* military failure in Iraq is simply a temporary period that will eventually bring victory to the *Umma*.

Military practitioners and politicians describe ISIS and similar jihadist organizations as chaotic, unorganized, and barbaric; however, the study suggests that jihadist groups are not only capable of exhibiting competency but are also able to achieve operational success against susceptible states. In order to supplement the existing literature of ISIL, future studies could explore *Daesh's* use of operational art and multi domain functions in other parts of the world. Additional studies could expand on ISIS's arrangement of activity in Africa, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and Latin America. By better knowing the enemy, future research studies could then determine viable solutions to combat *Daesh* and other jihadist groups. As the US Army continues to prepare for large scale combat operations, it must retain lessons from ISIL's actions in 2014. As the strategic environment continues to evolve, the US Army must continue to invest intellectual capital to further understand jihadists, and the unique frameworks they employ.

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[101] Myers, "The Quranic Concept of War," 11-12.

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