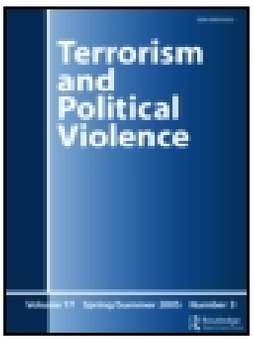

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Understanding the Islamic State's competitive advantages: Remaking state and nationhood in the Middle East and North Africa

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ABSTRACT

While many researchers have examined the evolution and unique characteristics of the Islamic State (IS), taking an IS-centric approach has yet to illuminate the factors allowing for its establishment in the first place. To provide a clearer explanation for IS's successes and improve analysts' ability to predict future occurrences of similar phenomena, we analyze IS's competitive advantages through the lens of two defining structural conditions in the Middle East North Africa (MENA): failure of state institutions and nationhood. It is commonly understood that the MENA faces challenges associated with state fragility, but our examination of state and national resiliency shows that Syria and Iraq yield the most deleterious results in the breakdown of the nation, suggesting that the combined failure of state and nation, as well as IS's ability to fill these related vacuities, is a significant reason IS thrives there today. Against this backdrop, we provide a model of IS's state- and nation-making project, and illustrate IS's clear competitive advantages over all other state and non-state actors in both countries, except for Kurdish groupings. We conclude with recommendations on how policy-makers may begin halting and reversing the failure of both state and nation in Iraq and Syria.

KEYWORDS

Caliphate; Egypt; Iraq; Islamic radicalism; Islamic State; IS; ISIL; ISIS; Jihad; Libya; Middle East and North Africa; nation making; state making; Sunni; Syria

Introduction

On June 29, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) proclaimed the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate—the so-called "Islamic State" (IS)—in areas straddling Syria and Iraq. With IS's declared vision of bringing all the lands of Islam under its control, beginning with "Greater Syria," IS has emerged as the most resilient and capable insurgent force in either country. Today, the Caliphate comprises a larger landmass and population than many existing states, including approximately 12,000–35,000 square miles by some estimates and containing between 4–8 million people, making it roughly the 112th largest state in the world, just ahead of Jordan in total land area.[1]

While IS's immediate goals include direct operations only in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, IS emissaries in the Gulf and North Africa (Libya and the Egyptian Sinai, in particular) are further destabilizing these already fragile countries. Present competition

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between IS and rival Al Qaeda (AQ) factions for primacy over Salafi jihadist domains, and fighting between IS and Shi'a, as well as Kurdish forces further complicate the picture.

Unlike the Taliban, which conquered and established a primitive military-religious emirate or AQ, which managed its global terror franchise network from safe havens in Sudan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, IS has built a transnational proto-state, i.e., one that seeks to supplant the region's state system and perform all the roles of a nation-state but lacks international recognition and access to legitimate economies. This model of flouting regional state borders (established as an outcome of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and widely seen as illegitimate in the eyes of Greater Syrians), reinventing Sunni nationhood, and substituting a new state in failed areas of existing ones, represents a number of specific competitive advantages over its rivals, both state and non-state. The phenomenon of the organization's nation-state-making ambitions presents new dimensions of analysis to counterinsurgency and governance experts. Therefore, this research seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of the structural conditions that have allowed for the establishment of the Caliphate and the methods IS utilizes in order to capitalize on those conditions.

Background: IS in competitive strategic perspective

Before the execution of the U.S.-led international coalition mission aimed at degrading and destroying IS, the IS problem set was primarily composed of external states, the governments of Syria and Iraq as well as the semi-autonomous Kurdish Regional Government, and numerous armed non-state actors. Crudely speaking, over the last 4 years of civil war in Syria, alliances were split between two sides: the United States, Friends of Syria, and Saudi-led GCC, who supported the ouster of the Assad regime; and Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Russia, which supported Assad.

However, conditions changed dramatically and rapidly following the initial period of post-Arab Spring destabilization. Specifically, the failure of the Sunni-led Syrian revolution, the exclusionary Shi'a sectarian political structure of Iraq, and the breakdown of the regional security environment combined to provoke, embolden, and intensify Sunni outrage while unleashing and allowing for the strengthening of Sunni militias. This culminated in Sunni-dominated areas of Syria and Iraq becoming the primary battleground of what claimed to be the global Sunni jihadist movement. After IS proclaimed and began expanding and consolidating the Caliphate, the priorities of Assad's external opponents were eclipsed—at least in the short term—by the goal of winning the war against IS.[2]

In its present manifestation, IS is guided by an amalgamation of surviving portions of the two primary adversaries the U.S. defeated during the Iraq War: Al Qaeda in Iraq and some members of the former Ba'athist Iraqi military regime.[3] Although ideologically unlikely bedfellows, members of this alliance share three things in common that appear to have transcended their dissimilarities. These include their desire for political power in a system of governance that bars their participation, a willingness to pursue their goals at nearly any cost (human and material), and the knowledge that the U.S.-led coalition against them is both a leading obstacle and catalyst to realizing their ambitions.[4]

Analytical oversight and the ascent of IS

The swift ascent of IS was the direct result of the organization's ability to realize what no other current jihadi group has—the establishment of an Islamic state rooted in a defensible territory that transcends internationally recognized state borders. This represents an unforeseen development that has made IS the most competitive insurgent force operating in Syria and Iraq and arguably within the largely Salafi-jihadi world.

The deterioration of the operational environments in Iraq and Syria has brought increased analytical focus to the challenges that state fragility and failure pose to rebuilding these states. However, what seems to have eluded counterinsurgency analysts were the particular opportunities that these same conditions provide for actors with trans-national state- and nation-making ambitions rather than those of traditional insurgent groups who aim to disrupt or overthrow an established system of government and engage in state and nation-building in order to win over local populations. This is likely attributable to the relative strength of the nation-state system since the end of World War II, and the fact that non-state actors so rarely win. Of 366 intra-state conflicts recorded between 1946 and 2005, only 31 resulted in "victory" for the non-state challenger.[5] Most non-state insurgents, revolutionaries, putschists, and separatists are not attempting nation-state making by redrawing territorial boundaries and reinventing national identities.[6,7,8]

State and nation building versus state and nation making

The social science literature on state and nation formation is broad and polemically dynamic.[9] However, since the guiding purpose of this study is to contribute to the development of cross-cutting, foundational literature on new dimensions of violent, insurgent behavior as represented by IS in the context of the MENA, we have chosen to take a theoretically minimalist approach. By stripping the existing literature of nuances that stretch beyond the aims of this study and drawing from scholarly perspectives on state and nation building, as well as state and nation making, our aim is to help develop a fresh theoretical outlook that allows for a stronger understanding of the factors providing IS with the competitive advantages it currently enjoys over all of its rivals.

State and nation building

The concepts of state and nation building first gained prominence in the social science literature as a response to instability surrounding the transition of many former colonies to sovereign statehood following World War II.[10] Today, after having received a great deal of theoretical consideration, especially since the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is possible to define state and nation building according to the consensus view that these are interventionist strategies undertaken by state or non-state actors to reform or rebuild a state and the state's national identity within the parameters of existing structures.[11]

State and nation making

Conversely, the concepts of state and nation making have received comparatively little theoretical attention for two primary reasons. First, from a normative perspective, the

modern nation-state has come to represent the bedrock of the international system, and therefore, there is a widely held belief that the entity of the state must and should be preserved at any cost.[12] Secondly, from an empirical point of view, because the nation-state system has remained fairly stable for more than a half century, researchers have had little reason to return to the study of state and nation formation until now.

Nevertheless, drawing from Charles Tilly's work (1985 and 1996), this study defines state and nation making as the creation of a new state and nation—territorially, structurally, and ideationally[13]—which represent phenomena unseen since the establishment of the present nation-state system. Utilizing the historical experiences of Western European countries from the 16th century onward, Tilly developed a theory of state formation as an outcome of war making. For Tilly (1985), these resilient states emerged as a byproduct of four interdependent and somewhat simultaneous processes associated with successful warfighting: a) war making (eliminating or neutralizing rivals outside the territories in which they had clear and continuous priority as wielders of force; b) state making (eliminating or neutralizing rivals inside those territories); c) protection (eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients by establishing rule of law and a system of government); and d) extraction (acquiring the means of carrying out the first three of these activities).[14]

As an extension of his work on the connection between war making and state making, Tilly also developed a theory for explaining the instrumental role of nation making in state making. Based on the premise that the heightening extractive appetites of militarily expansive states caused a necessary shift from indirect to direct rule (galvanizing resistance from previously autonomous and insulated groupings whose power was being increasingly threatened by the state), Tilly argued that the ensuing competition between statesmen and regional non-state stakeholders created incentives for both to try to exploit regional identities as a means of generating popular support and loyalty to them.[15] In other words, providing a sense of shared identity or citizenship (often coercively) became imperative for the ability of the state or its competitors to exercise a monopoly of force.[16]

Understanding IS through the lens of state and nation failure

By now many researchers have painstakingly examined the evolution and unique characteristics of IS.[17] These works have contributed greatly to an enhanced understanding of IS as an organization and the features that differentiate it from other insurgent groups. However, this IS-centric approach does not illuminate the structural factors that allowed for the establishment of the Caliphate in the first place, an undertaking that would provide a clearer explanation for IS's successes and improve analysts' ability to predict future occurrences of similar phenomena. Therefore, we analyze IS's nation-state-making project through the lens of two defining structural conditions in the MENA: the failure of state institutions and nationhood.

State and nation failure

State failure can be defined as the failure of governments to deliver political goods to citizens on a scale likely to undermine the legitimacy and the existence of the state itself. State failure occurs in respect to a wide range of political goods, of which the most

crucial are the provision of security, a legal system to adjudicate disputes, provision of economic and communication infrastructures, the supply of some form of welfare policies, and opportunities for participation in the political process. The degree to which states deliver these political goods significantly influences their relative strength, weakness, or failure.[18]

Nation failure, on the other hand, occurs because nation-states' cultural projections of their nationhood are no longer convincing to many, and there is no consensus on their cultural traditions, customs, symbols, rituals, and historical experiences. This allows competing nationalisms to emerge, often mutually exclusive, that seek to replace the former common identity.[19,20]

The literature on nation-state fragility identifies two basic categories of state failure: cases which do not alter the underlying willingness of the population to accept rules, decisions, and measures adopted by a common government, and cases which do alter this disposition. The latter represent nation failure, as opposed to state failure.[21]

When a state's nationhood fails: a) grievances of the state's national groupings intensify, often resulting in violence and undermining the state's ability to provide security, which can cause greater fear and further violence; b) just before or after conflict erupts, members of these nations who have the means to do so flee, leaving a vacuum of human capital, and rendering the remaining members of the nation more vulnerable; c) the social contract between disparate nations and the state dissolves and the state loses legitimacy; d) the embattled security apparatus no longer exercises a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, inviting competition from other actors; and e) militant groups representing exclusive nationalisms create an atmosphere of fear in which war in the name of the nation's self-defense appears to be the only solution to a significant portion of the affected population.[22]

Analysis: State and nation resiliency in the MENA

The Fragile States Index (FSI) provides a commonly utilized weighted calculus of twelve indicators that are critical to assessing the resiliency of nation-states. These include 1) *Demographic pressures*; 2) *Refugees and IDPs*; 3) *Uneven economic development*; 4) *Poverty and economic decline*; 5) *Public services*; 6) *Human rights*; 7) *Factionalized elites*; 8) *External intervention*; 9) *Group grievances*; 10) *Human flight*; 11) *Legitimacy of the state*; and 12) *Embattlement of the security apparatus*.

The first eight of these can be understood as indicators of states' capacity to deliver political goods, representing state resiliency.[23] The latter four of them can be understood as the indicators that reflect and influence the disposition of the population to be governed, representing national resiliency. Both groups of indicators have been aggregated to show simplified averages representing state fragility and nation fragility respectively.

Figure 1 shows that on average in 2015,[24] the entire MENA region faced challenges associated with state fragility, and Yemen (8.99), Syria (8.83), Iraq (8.4), Libya (7.75), Egypt (7.46), and Lebanon (7.19) were the closest to the brink of state failure.

Figure 2 illustrates nation resiliency and shows Syria and Iraq (9.33) followed by Yemen (9.05), Libya (8.33), Lebanon (7.65), and Egypt (7.58) yielded the most deleterious results. This indicates a severe breakdown of the nation in these countries and suggests that the reason rival ethnic and sectarian nationalisms thrive there is because of failing national identities.

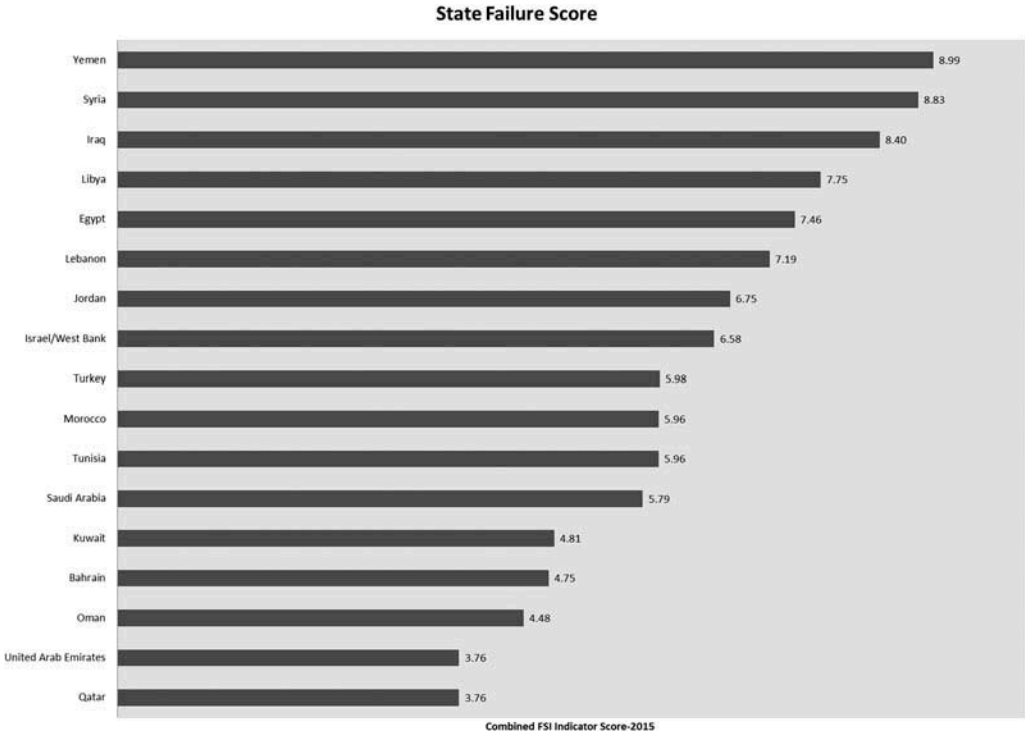

Figure 1. State fragility in MENA countries, *FSI* 2015.

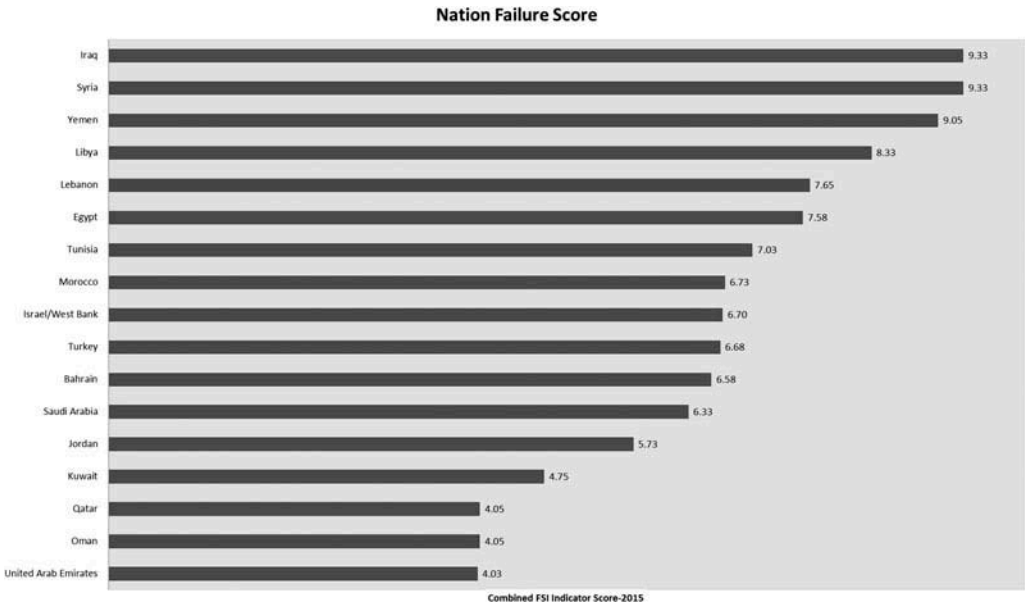

Figure 2. Nation fragility in MENA countries, *FSI* 2015.

State- and nation-making model

It is against this backdrop of unprecedented state and nation failure in Syria and Iraq that IS has been empowered to embark on a process of state and nation making. Extrapolating from Tilly's theoretical work, procedurally, state making entails capturing and defending territory, extracting revenue to finance its institutions and war efforts, and building systems of government in order to sustain these gains.[25] Nation making involves cultivating a shared sense of citizenship within this establishment.[26] Table 1 provides a model of state and nation making,[27] illustrating IS's clear competitive advantages over all other state and non-state actors operating in Syria and Iraq, except the Kurds.[28,29]

As depicted above, on a fundamental level and regardless of fluctuations in gains and losses, IS's ongoing state- and nation-making project comes at the direct expense of Syrian and Iraqi state capacity and national unity. However, Kurdish groupings in both countries who aspire to independent nation-statehood have benefited from state failure as well as by fighting alongside coalition forces in the war against IS. Kurdish areas of Syria's northern region gained *de facto* independence early in the civil war and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), through its battlefield effectiveness and cooperation with the Coalition, has gained bargaining power in support of its ultimate aim of independence from Iraq. The Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish regions have been (to varying degrees) extracting resources and governing for years and have expanded their territory, e.g., Kirkuk, as a direct result of IS-led instability. Additionally, these empowering experiences, combined with state failure in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the post-Arab Spring Middle East, have served to strengthen Kurdish nationalism.[30]

Shi'a militias and groupings, including Lebanon-based Hezbollah, have also strengthened their position through their strategic support of the Syrian and Iraqi governments and by capturing and defending territories in the name of those states and often with the support of Iran. This has in turn bolstered trans-regional Shi'a national sentiment.[31] Simultaneously in Syria, Sunni Islamist groups such as AQ-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and the seven militias making up the Islamic Front stake out territory, provide limited services, and implement Sharia law. However, while they hold many of the same ultimate objectives as IS, their personnel and immediate goals are distinctly Syrian and revolutionary, aiming to overthrow the Assad regime through close cooperation with coalitions of local rebel groups and refraining from imposing harsh Sharia rule before populations accept them. Similarly, as they are largely externally funded, their focus is not

Table 1. State- and nation-making model.

Entity/faction	Captures and defends territory	Extracts revenues	Institutionalizes rule of law and governance	Cultivates sense of citizenship
Islamic State	Increasingly	Increasingly	Increasingly	Increasingly
Government of Iraq	Decreasingly	Decreasingly	Decreasingly	Decreasingly
Government of Syria	Decreasingly	Decreasingly	Decreasingly	Decreasingly
Kurdish Regional Government	Increasingly	Stable	Stable	Increasingly
Syrian Kurdish Militias	Increasingly	Stable	Stable	Increasingly
Shi'a Militias in Iraq and Syria	Increasingly	N/A	N/A	Increasingly
Syrian Sunni Militias	Somewhat	N/A	Somewhat	Somewhat
Iraq Sunni Militias	Decreasingly	N/A	Decreasingly	Somewhat

on creating a self-supporting state that extracts revenues but achieving Sunni independence from Shi'a forces in Syria. In Iraq, most Sunni militias and political or tribal groupings lack the capacity to resist IS, are reluctant to move against the other Sunni "revolutionaries" fighting Baghdad, or have been overwhelmed or divided by IS.[32] Nevertheless, because neither Shi'a nor Sunni militias and groupings in either country are pursuing IS's complete nation-state-making mission, none of them are as robustly capable. However, due to the persistence of the interests and grievances among their diverse constituents, these groups are likely to continue fighting to achieve their aims.

The Islamic State's state- and nation-making project

The sections to follow describe in detail the engineering and architecture of IS's competitive advantages over all other rivals.

Capturing and defending territory: From safe haven to statehood

The task of capturing and defending territory and then exercising a monopoly of force in those areas is perhaps the most crucial initial aspect of nation-state making, and one in which IS has excelled. IS's ability to monopolize force is dependent upon four interrelated factors: the permissive regional environment, organizational prowess (gained as a result of military competition), strategic selection of targets (both territorial and political), and ideological uniformity and motivation.

IS exploits the permissive environment

Since the inception of the Caliphate's progenitor organization the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006, its ability to exploit nation-state fragility and capitalize on the weaknesses of its rivals has represented a strategic competitive advantage. Despite major military defeats to ISI during the 2007–08 U.S. troop surge and Sunni tribal *sahwa* (awakening), U.S. disengagement and withdrawal from Iraq from 2009 to 2011 simultaneously boosted ISI's morale and ability to recruit, and weakened Iraqi forces. This was due mostly to the removal of constraints on Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's increasingly authoritarian and sectarian government and the resulting Sunni backlash. Maliki asserted Shi'a power in devastating fashion, systematically arresting senior Sunni politicians, denying Sunni participation in the Iraqi political process and security apparatus, and dismantling the Sons of Iraq coalitions. Sunni commanders and soldiers, many of them trained by the U.S. and deployed to key northern centers like Mosul, were replaced with Shi'a loyalists, many of whom lacked significant battlefield experience.[33] These decisions afforded ISI opportunities to recruit from among disenfranchised communities and expand its organization anew.

In Syria, the brutal repression of (mostly) Sunni activists during the initial Arab Spring protests in 2011 resulted in a quick deterioration into ethno-sectarian conflict. The expansion of the Syrian civil war in late 2011 and 2012 allowed ISI-affiliated JN, headed by the Syrian ISI commander of Mosul, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, to open up several fronts. JN's bravery, single-minded focus on defeating Assad, and willingness to integrate with the local population in the mode of AQ was famed even by secular rebels and drew many foreign fighters to its ranks. However, these battlefield triumphs and JN's growing prestige persuaded ISI chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to capitalize on these gains and to try

to rein in his Syrian affiliate. He announced the absorption of JN into a new group, the Islamic State in Iraq and Al Sham (ISIS), in an April 2013 radio address, a move Jawlani contested, appealing to AQ head Aymen al-Zawahiri for adjudication. While the two factions negotiated, ISIS began rapidly moving fighters into northern and eastern Syria that spring, capturing territory and establishing governance in several cities, especially Raqqa. As many as 65% of JN fighters may have gone over to ISIS when it was formed, giving ISIS prepositioned forces in many of its target areas.[34] The war in Syria would reinvigorate ISI/ISIS, facilitating both its organizational and territorial expansion into the present Islamic State, with Raqqa as its capital. In summary, IS has exploited instability and growing rage at Shi'a/Alawite dominance resulting in Sunni exclusion throughout the region, grievances that continue to fuel IS gains across Iraq and Syria.

IS develops its organizational capacity as the result of military competition

Following broad successes by U.S. coalition and Iraqi forces in 2007–08, military setbacks to ISI in particular enabled the bureaucratization and re-expansion of the ISI terror group as a proto-state from 2009 onward. ISI granted this endowment of organizational capacity to the future Caliphate in the form of expanded and more professionally trained personnel, led particularly by ex-Ba'athists,[35] and the related innovations of decentralization of decision making and increased discipline among ISI's cadres,[36] made possible through a renewed emphasis on religious legitimacy.[37] It was largely due to American pressure that ISI evolved as a learning organization, able to survive, reinvent itself, and expand into the standing army we see today.

As with other states, the pressures of military competition and expansion drove the development of a sophisticated military.[38] IS bears all the hallmarks of a professionalized, "bureaucratically controlled" armed forces[39] including: a) an adaptable, cohesive leadership structure; b) a disciplined and experienced cadre; c) continuous and effective recruitment; d) the morale of their dedicated rank and file; e) superior logistics; f) an ability to consistently pay competitive salaries and benefits to veterans, widows, and orphans of fallen fighters; and g) extensive training, both military and ideological. These factors help to ensure battlefield effectiveness and longevity of the force by enhancing accountability, motivation, checks and balances on leadership, and unity of command and control.

Though a steady project since ISI's defeat in Iraq, ISIS increased its armed force through expansion into Syria and back into Iraq, building a large standing army that eclipses those of other rebel groups and the Iraqi army, and rivals the Syrian armed forces in many places.[40] ISIS' troop strength in Syria in August 2013 was estimated at 3,000–5,000[41] with a possible total of 10,000 across Syria and Iraq.[42] Following the June 2014 assault when ISIS captured much of northern Iraq, it had become a standing army estimated at between 20,000 and 31,500, largely the result of its victories there and the declaration of the Caliphate at the end of June.[43] IS's proven military capabilities drew over 15,000 foreign recruits to Syria and Iraq between June and October 2014, according to UN estimates.[44] The newly minted Islamic State would go on to conquer one third each of Iraq and Syria by the end of 2014 and may control as much as 50% of Syria at the time of this report's publication.

Strategic selection of targets (both territorial and political)

The territorial ambitions of what would become the Islamic State appeared early in its evolution when it was still a franchise of the central AQ organization operating in Iraq.[45]

ISI's hunger for territory and a monopoly of force took forms similar to those of present-day IS with the brutal elimination of rivals and its ethno-sectarian enemies, including Iraqi Shi'a, Kurds, and Yazidis, and the imposition of strict controls in areas under its influence. Their territorial strategies were similar to IS as well, establishing bases across Sunni-dominated al-Anbar province, capturing key lines of communication and resupply to Syria, and laying siege to Baghdad through encirclement.[46]

IS perfected ISI's military efforts, greatly expanding its list of targets to reflect troop strength and its nation-state-making ambitions. IS's selection of targets is opportunistic in timing but strategic in location: key checkpoints and transit routes, population centers, and resources are their focus in order to build wealth, prestige, and symbolic legitimacy,[47] and to bolster the perception of invincibility. While total control of the territories of Iraq and Syria is their ultimate aim, their pragmatic and methodical seizure of strategic locations—while ramping up its troop strength—marks their monopolization of force in the region. IS strategy in Iraq, and to some extent Syria, has been to soften their targets over a period of months, overwhelm the security forces to the point of collapse, and incite sectarian violence, all of which have proven effective.

IS employs elements of attrition, maneuver, and irregular warfare, defeating its enemy by massing on targets in some cases (as in the recapture of Raqqa and the siege of Kobani), using suicide attacks and information operations to disrupt enemy decision making, and widely employing company-sized attacks to capture key positions defended by much greater forces, as in Mosul in June 2014. This unique combination of techniques has made defending or re-taking territory extremely difficult for Iraqi and Syrian forces on the ground and coalition airpower above. Getting inside the IS military decision-making loop is likewise problematic due to its decentralized, modular structure and ability to return to asymmetric tactics when overwhelmed. Much of this resilience is the product of IS's organizational prowess.

Ideological uniformity and motivation

The Caliphate has proven adaptable and ruthless in its pursuit of a monopoly on violence against external threats. Whereas other rebel formations rely on cooperation and popular support to maintain momentum, the Caliphate's strategic advantage lies in its ruthless and authoritarian character.[48] IS has used cooptation and inducements, political coercion, trickery, feints, and outright military force to ensure submission by rival jihadi organizations, recalcitrant tribes, and reluctant populations. This approach has worked during IS's rise to power when unity of command and message is at a premium. By rejecting the need for coalition building, justified by the religious imperative to establish an Islamic State/Caliphate, IS tries to ensure both the image of its military fearsomeness and invincibility and the aura of religious inevitability that it cultivates. In the minds of many in the region, God must sanction the Islamic State because they are winning. These factors combine to blunt resistance on the ground. Since its June 2014 offensive, IS has allegedly executed close to 2,000 people in Syria including 81 fighters from the JN and rival opposition factions, and an alarming 930 members of the al-Shaitaat tribe in eastern Deir ez-Zor.[49]

While conquest is the primary means of expanding its force externally, fueling recruitment and conscription, a savvy blend of trust and coercion helps maintain military effectiveness in wide-ranging operations and a monopoly against internal threats.[50] Although IS employs coercive tactics like corporal punishment and execution,[51] they

also use modern practices such as offering fixed salaries and fostering an "*esprit de corps*" through personal ties formed by drilling and small unit sizes.[52] Most importantly, IS has created politically reliable and loyal cadres who are also effective fighters. As with other institutions, the IS army is motivated by religious ideals and its rank and file are dedicated to principles rather than a mercenary force.[53] Religious piety, fierce loyalty to the Caliphate, and self-sacrifice are of paramount importance to the maintenance of ideological unity within IS forces. Whereas ISI had some difficulty ensuring ideological conformity, the Caliphate has excelled, sending preachers (*shari'i*) into battle to ensure dogmatic compliance and build morale.[54]

Islamic texts echoed in IS's own statements emphasize the importance of accountability in the establishment of an army, not only for the sake of fairness but because it ensures the quality of the military force. The Caliphate, unlike Iraqi and Syrian forces, promotes commanders based on operational and leadership skills.[55] IS success also depends largely on its management expertise. Unlike the Taliban, who were largely uneducated and lacked a sophisticated grasp of modern management techniques, IS's Ba'athist cadres were formally educated and capable of managing large units operating modern equipment.[56] This has allowed IS to foster a modern Islamic army that places greater trust in subordinate commanders and relies more on standardized values and education than coercion.

However, much of IS's core military strategy, particularly that of continual territorial expansion and consolidation, also represents vulnerabilities for the organization. While territorial expansion is an explicit objective of IS, fueling recruitment and subduing resistance, IS is vulnerable to challenges to the perception of invincibility by organizations like JN in Syria or Sunni tribal fighters in Iraq. It is also vulnerable to changing perceptions among the populations it conquers. If significant stalling in the military campaign is perceived by locals at odds with IS, a snowballing of organized resistance could occur, drawing in resources from IS's competitors. Finally, as shown in the organizational documents captured after the U.S. Delta Force raid that killed IS commander Abu Sayyaf in May 2015, decapitation of IS leadership could yield damaging intelligence advantages to those opposed to IS and diminish its leadership capabilities which, at the top and particularly among ex-Ba'athists, appear to be highly specialized.

Extracting revenues

While IS's financing is often described as similar to any successful insurgent group, relying on external donations, kidnapping for ransom, and other criminal activities such as theft and extortion, what sets IS apart from its competition is the organization's emphasis on cultivating, legitimizing, and deepening its control over major national assets—oil, gas, water, and food, and its focus on penetrating local economies.

Emphasis on financial self-sufficiency and independence

Owing in large part to Iraqi and Syrian nation-state fragility, in 2014 IS was able to amass approximately $2.9bn in annual income and tens of millions in looted military hardware, with total assets thought to surpass $2tn.[57] This makes the organization the richest armed, non-state actor operating in the region[58] and would be ranked 161st

among the 214 world economies, on par with Guyana and earning more than Burundi, Liberia, and Belize.[59] Critically, unlike AQ and its affiliates, IS is focused on financial self-sufficiency and independence.[60,61] To that end, the group has undertaken a comprehensive approach to extracting revenues within the territories it occupies, attempting to entrench itself in regional markets and the wider economy. In the last year, IS is believed to have extracted $1.095bn (38%) from oil; $489m (17%) from natural gas; $360m (12%) from taxation; $300m (10%) from phosphate products; $292m (10%) from cement; and $200m (7%) from wheat and barley while only relying on an additional $120m (4%) from kidnapping and ransoming; and $50m (2%) from donations.[62] While coalition operations have disrupted some sources of IS revenue such as oil and gas refinement,[63] which are most vulnerable as fixed targets, their diversity of income sources and resilience will remain a persistent problem for interventionists due to their deep penetration of local economies and the lack of alternatives to IS rule.

Societal survivability

Of similar significance to the breadth of IS's sustainable revenue extraction approach is the depth of the organization's roots in these regional economic activities. With its dual focus on earning money while obtaining "buy-in" from local populations, IS is strengthening its societal survivability.[64] For example, the system of taxation developed by IS on the main highway between Jordan and Baghdad has replaced the government's import tax by charging reduced rates for the transport of goods into the Iraqi capital. Since the trucking business across western Iraq is primarily controlled by Sunni tribes, by imposing lower taxes IS is able to bring in a steady income while offering its tribal partners an opportunity to increase their earnings. IS has also negotiated comparable systems of mutually beneficial interdependence between the Caliphate and local stakeholders inside the Turkish border and elsewhere in western Iraq and eastern Syria, where the Iraqi and Syrian governments either failed or declined to do so, which has further enabled the group's nation-state-making capabilities.[65,66]

Mosul represents a concrete example of how such systems helped ISI survive previous U.S. counterterrorism efforts and further their totalitarian governance model. The decimated ISI leadership moved to Mosul in 2008 and began consolidating power around the figure of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, building off of his purported religious credibility to ensure loyalty.[67] Mosul would become the financial engine of ISI for "years" thereafter, allowing the group to fund governance and military activities in other provinces through a sophisticated system of taxation, extortion, and kidnapping whereby local commanders funneled 20% of their incomes to the leadership.[68] After taking Mosul in June 2014, IS looted banks, reportedly making off with "more than $420 million."[69] They also instituted public fee-for-service regimes such as trash collection. Given the fee structure cited by analysts, IS could net $160,000–$400,000 per month from private Mosul households alone for collecting trash.[70] While building this level of sophistication is unlikely to occur quickly in other places, Mosul provides an example of what IS is capable of and aiming for and why it will be so difficult to dislodge.

However, these delicate, reciprocal systems also represent vulnerabilities to IS, requiring not only capital and physical access, but also the perception of their dominance and reliability. Any degradation of IS ground capabilities or cash reserves, reduction in

maneuverability due to increased personal security measures, or diminution in the veneer of invincibility of IS forces could have cascading effects on their acceptability as guarantors of order in trade, governance, and security.

Institutionalizing governance and rule of law

Having gained the military strength and financial self-sufficiency to support their nation-state-making initiatives, in early 2014, IS began institutionalizing the rule of law and governance in Sunni-dominated regions of Iraq and Syria where the governments' delivery of political goods (security, a legal system to adjudicate disputes, provision of economic and communication infrastructures, social welfare, and opportunities for participation in the political process) was the poorest and where the relationship between the Iraqi and Syrian governments and the local population was particularly adversarial.[71,72]

Governance strategy

With these conditions working to IS's advantage, the Caliphate's leadership quickly implemented an extreme expression of "carrot and stick" policies that offer high rewards for cooperation and costly punishments for resistance.[73] Although IS is roundly criticized by outside observers for its barbaric practices,[74] in lieu of an alternative, the Caliphate's legal infrastructure, enforcement mechanisms, and explicit efforts to deliver services has strengthened IS's position relative to the Iraqi and Syrian governments, as well as all other non-state actors. The popular desire for a stable and functioning form of Sunni governance has provided IS with an opportunity to establish six *walayah* (governorates) within the territorial boundaries of the Caliphate. They comprise Sharia and civil courts, Islamic outreach, policing, education, health, aid-based services, and public administration including redistributive and accountability aspects.[75,76] Finally, while implementing the Caliphate's totalitarian approach[77] would not be possible in most regions of the world today, war-weary populations facing a crisis of national identity are most susceptible to surrendering to totalitarianism's all-encompassing *modus operandi*.[78]

Totalitarian governance justified by IS's clerical leadership's interpretation of Sharia law

Establishing the legitimacy of the Caliphate, including the use of violence, in Islamic law represents an important lesson learned from the experiences of the region's embattled regimes and ISI, who wielded violence indiscriminately. Ensuring religious legitimacy in the long term, therefore, is the highest principle for the Caliphate, and likely its greatest strategic vulnerability. For example, immediately after declaring the Caliphate, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appealed to judges and *fuqaha'* (experts in Islamic jurisprudence) to join the Islamic state as one of his first acts of statesmanship. The rapidity with which IS has begun institutionalizing its legal infrastructure (i.e., setting up Sharia courts, Islamic schools, and recruitment and training centers) following its capture of territory shows the group's commitment to implementing an Islamic rule of law.[79] The Caliphate's enforcement capacity is illustrated by the generous salaries and formation of male and female police forces deployed to patrol the streets, enforcing both civil and Sharia law.[80] IS also looks to

its legitimacy in the future by building politico-military cadres through tightly managed religious and proto-nationalist education systems.[81]

In terms of providing services, IS has been known to subsidize the prices of staple products, particularly bread, and it has capped housing prices. Transportation services (primarily bussing) have been established and are normally offered for free. The Caliphate tries to repair critical infrastructure, including electrical lines, roads, and sidewalks. Social services such as free healthcare and vaccinations for children, soup kitchens for the poor, and schools, as well as leisure activities, are offered for boys and girls. Some civilian-initiated construction projects are even awarded loans, and postal systems have been created.[82] However, as outlined above, this level of governance also brings significant burdens and responsibilities. The provision of such services is dependent upon revenues that, even if sustainable, are estimated at a relatively modest $2.9bn, making the execution of all "state" functions potentially challenging. Many of these resources and much manpower will likewise be expended in repression as well as the conquering of new territories, coming at the expense of governing areas already under their control.

Cultivating a sense of citizenship

Finally, an essential component of any nation-state is a sense of shared citizenship. This somewhat intangible requisite to a state's ability to effectively govern represents a critical aspect of nation-statehood that neither successive Iraqi governments nor the Syrian regime were ever really able to accomplish. This has enabled IS to exploit Sunni perceptions of injustice and indignity that they believe they have suffered at the hands of secular, sectarian, and "apostate" powers. The Caliphate offers a sense of belonging to disaffected Sunnis who are highly vulnerable to manipulation, and it has aligned its rhetoric with widely held Sunni narratives that revolve around the following beliefs:[83]

- Sunnis have been unfairly subjugated since the demise of the Golden Age of Islam.
- This aggression was first perpetrated by heretical Eastern and later, Western imperial forces, the latter of whom established false territorial boundaries through which they could divide and rule (i.e., the Sykes-Picot Agreement).
- The secular, dictatorial governments that came to power following independence were self-serving and beholden to outside interests.
- The modern state is in essence oppressive and its orientation inimical to the concerns of Islam and regular Muslims.
- The West has always supported apostate and illegitimate regimes that have oppressed regular Muslims and inhibited their economic, political, religious, and social development.
- The U.S.-led Global War on Terror, itself the product of conspiracy, not only failed to deter terror but emboldened oppressive regimes throughout the Arab World and handed the Shi'a axis control over much of the Middle East. Innocent people were attacked and their livelihoods destroyed by repressive governments in the name of stability and democracy.
- Affected communities cannot move and have no option but to join jihadist movements whose resistance to the West and apostate regimes seems effective. Those who

join can earn money and credentials as fighters for justice and Islam in ways that no other vocation offers.

Capitalizing on these narratives, IS purports to provide a "way back" to Islamic unity, justice, and faith through citizenship in the Caliphate—a historical political entity governed by Islamic law and tradition—the notion of which remains powerful, even among more secular-minded Muslims.[84] Having materialized well into the information age, IS utilizes social media to recruit soldiers, administrators, and immigrants and to encourage followers abroad to take up arms against their home governments by messaging the image of a righteous struggle against imperialist apostates. IS's distribution of identification cards, which meticulously restrict and designate all citizens' freedom of movement, and its promises to begin issuing passports and the Caliphate's own currency[85] further substantiate the organization's commitment to developing a sense of citizenship. Finally, IS's employment of millenarian Islamic imagery and rhetoric, which emphasize the role of their jihad in the prophesied apocalypse, can be seen as both justification and objective, providing a teleology and methodology to the arc of the Caliphate's development.

Broad-based efforts have been made by respected Islamic scholars, MENA experts and human rights activists, as well as mainstream Muslim communities the world over to expose and nullify IS's tactics of manipulation.[86] However, these instances of ideological challenge seem unlikely to penetrate IS's target populations, because the latter are already coming from an alienated and revolutionary perspective. Moreover, if competitors like JN maintain even modest momentum on the ground within the strictures of more widely accepted Jihadi ideas and methods, local Sunni communities may come to accept and embrace them as more moderate alternatives to IS. Should this ideological synthesis occur, it could very well generate an atmosphere supportive of only a slightly different brand of militant political Islam, which could validate and institutionalize many aspects of the Caliphate's reinvention of Sunni citizenship.

Conclusions and analysis

IS's strengths and vulnerabilities in perspective

By exploiting conditions of nation and state collapse in Iraq and Syria, IS has effectively invented a new state and nation from the ashes of old ones. Presently, airstrikes and oppositional ground forces are weakening IS's territorial and governance gains but such strikes also embolden IS's nation-making process by supporting the Caliphate's narratives used to draw support. IS is propagating the view that Western imperialist forces are partnering with Shi'a entities (Iranian, Syrian, and Iraqi) and Saudi-led, "apostate" GCC states in order to subjugate and persecute the Sunni nation—the nation that the Caliphate seeks to rebuild, protect, and empower. Although IS's barbarism is alienating many, the organization's brutality also strengthens the Caliphate by cleansing it of dissent and intensifying hard-line Sunni extremism inside the State's population.

IS's competitive advantages in state making—capturing and defending territory, extracting revenues, and instituting governance and rule of law—also represent the Caliphate's primary vulnerabilities. The performance of each of these requires robust, renewable, and territorially bounded capabilities, ones that are therefore targetable by

coalition action. But fostering a sense of citizenship through the invention of a new Sunni nationalism rooted in religious legitimacy is without a doubt the Caliphate's leading strength. The intensity with which such ideology resonates among sympathetic Sunni communities is difficult to quantify and largely intangible, and therefore, more challenging to combat.

Addressing the nation failure problem

Through continued successful coalitional military efforts to degrade and destroy IS and interagency initiatives to contribute to state building in Iraq and Syria, the U.S. and partners can effectively erode some of IS's gravitational appeal by exposing the Caliphate's vulnerabilities. Besides degrading their military force, this also includes obstructing IS's seductive ability to provide stability, services, and rule of law, and offering an alternative to the Caliphate's barbaric policies. However, in lieu of effective nation-building efforts, these state-building projects are unlikely to be successful because they do not respond to contrasting patterns of social identity that have resulted from the region's conflicts. Without effectively halting and reversing the failure of both state and nation in Iraq and Syria, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which either state can survive in forms resembling those of the past.

Therefore, it is critical that coalition partners design and implement nation-building initiatives alongside their state-building missions in Iraq and Syria that help stop the erosion of national unity and rebuild viable national identities. Although this is a task that will require significant political, financial, and intellectual commitment, including profound subject matter expertise, it will entail: providing opportunities for Iraqis and Syrians to relink their increasingly separate identities; reestablishing areas of inter-communal cooperation; and stabilizing and opening existing institutions to be more accountable and impartial. Finally, because externally designed and managed nation building can easily be seen by the region's populations as an attempt to undermine self-determination, it is essential for these missions to avoid creating the impression that they are simply a guise for advancing outsiders' imperial interests.[87]

Enacting such recommendations is not only difficult for external actors to advocate or implement, but also unlikely to succeed in the short term. However, as the rise of IS has shown, violent extremist ideologies will continue to find fertile ground in the region unless efforts at nation building alongside state building are fostered at the regional, national, and local levels.

Notes on contributors

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Notes

1. Kathy Gilsinanaug, "The Many Ways to Map the Islamic 'State,'" *The Atlantic*, August 27, 2014.
2. However, persistent rivalries between these two sides represent a second layer of conflict that continues to undermine the mission of defeating IS.
3. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Iraq Crisis: Key Players in Sunni Rebellion," *BBC News Middle East*, July 1, 2014.
4. Coalition action in Syria and Iraq also represents an opportunity for IS, bolstering its legitimacy and recruitment as it gels with dominant narratives about Western interests in the Muslim World.
5. Joakim Kreutz, "How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (2010): 243–50.
6. Those ethno-nationalist movements who would redraw national boundaries to conform to their peoples' territories, the Kurds and Tuareg for instance, can mostly be interpreted as furtherance of a post-colonial, nationalist, self-determination dynamic witnessed throughout the developing world since the 1960s. The newer strains of Islamist territorial separatism, including Al-Shabbab in Somalia, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Ansar al-Din in Mali, and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, are arguably different in their total rejection of common (largely European) mores of modern nation-states such as discrete national sovereignty, integration with international governance, economic, and regulatory systems, and democratic rule at home. However, these Islamist movements also represent a sharp departure from other forms of separatist nationalism in that they advance the concept of the global Muslim community (Umma) as a supra-national political entity and often advocate the establishment of an integrated military-political power governed by universal principles (Sharia). See Fred Halliday, "The Politics of the Umma: States and Community in Islamic Movements," *Mediterranean Politics* 7, no. 3 (2002): 20–41. And Sayed Khatab, "Arabism and Islamism in Sayyid Qutb's Thought on Nationalism," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 2 (2004, April): 217–44.
7. While the Taliban enjoyed some advantages and achieved many of the same aims held by IS, including the establishment of a monopoly on force within much of Afghanistan, the institution of Sharia-based rule of law and some governance activities, as well as the capture of what few resources were available, they differed in two important ways. First, while the Taliban emerged as the main victor in Afghanistan's civil war, they focused primarily on imposing order and religious observance on war-weary Afghans, particularly Pashtuns, activities that resemble *state building* more closely than *state making*. Second, as the Taliban appealed almost exclusively to a Pashtun constituency, they neither attempted to appeal in earnest to the global Muslim community (although the honorific title of Emir-al-Muminin—Leader of the Faithful—was conferred upon Mullah Omar in 1996, this title might only establish authority over the area of Afghanistan, rather than as Caliph of all Muslims) nor did they attempt to build a viable alternative nationalism in the way that IS has, resembling *nation building* more than *nation making*. The Taliban were essentially a messianic military-religious reformation project to re-conquer a defined state. However, it should be noted that the Taliban achieved something that IS apparently eschews, a measure of official external state recognition. Although the UN never acknowledged the Taliban as the legitimate government in Afghanistan, its patrons in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the UAE initially recognized the Taliban regime. Thus, in their clientelist position the Taliban can also be seen to practice revolutionary *state and nation building* rather than *state and nation making*. The fact that other insurgent groups had not previously attempted to initiate nation- and state-making agendas nor accomplished what IS has, may have led analysts to overlook IS's nation-state-making agenda.
8. Although Boko Haram in northern Nigeria and groups aligned with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in northern Mali have declared emirates that aimed to supplant state functions, opposition from state and international forces, lackluster governance efforts on the part of the

insurgents, and a lack of support among local populations strain the credibility of their projects, conditions which are not presently facing IS.

9. Zoe Scott, "Literature Review on State-building" (Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, 2007).
10. Mark Berger, "From Nation-Building to State-Building: The Geopolitics of Development and the Changing Global Order," in *From Nation-Building to State-Building*, edited by Mark Berger (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).
11. Scott (see note 9 above), 3.
12. Scott (see note 9 above), 7.
13. See Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back in*, edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Charles Tilly, "The State of Nationalism," *Critical Review* 10 (1996): 299–306.
14. Tilly (1985) (see note 13 above), 181.
15. Rogers Brubaker, "Charles Tilly as a Theorist of Nationalism," *The American Sociologist* 41, no. 4 (2010, December), 376.
16. According to Tilly (1996, 303–4), this variety of elite-manufactured nation making took two forms: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down nationalism represented the insistence that the nation's collective interest, as interpreted by the state's current rulers, should take priority over all particularisms. This served to guide all doctrines and practices in implementing their visions of the nation. Bottom-up nationalism was represented by political entrepreneurs who had strong investments in alternative nationalisms and who responded to top-down nationalism by rallying supporters in the name of oppressed and threatened nations.
17. Researchers such as Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, Shadi Hamid, Kenneth Pollack, Charles Lister, and Graeme Wood (among many others) have published prolifically on the Islamic State.
18. R. I. Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators," in *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, edited by R. I. Rotberg (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003).
19. Armin von Bogdandy, Stefan Häußler, Felix Hanschmann, and Raphael Utz, "State-Building, Nation-Building, and Constitutional Politics in Post-Conflict Situations: Conceptual Clarifications and an Appraisal of Different Approaches," in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, edited by A. Bogdandy and R. Wolfrum, vol. 9 (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005), 579–613.
20. For a deeper contextual understanding of nation failure, see von Bogdandy et al. (see note 19 above), 585. These authors describe nation failure as "an aggravated form of state failure particularly relevant to multi-community states. The individual communities may define themselves by shared religion, class, language, or ethnicity, different to that of the other communities. Along these characteristics, irreconcilable dissensions can emerge that make it unlikely if not impossible that government decisions will be adhered to."
21. von Bogdandy et al. (see note 19 above), 579–613.
22. J. J. Messner, Nate Haken, Patricia Taft, Hannah Blyth, Kendall Lawrence, Sebastian Pavlou Graham, Felipe Umaña, *Fragile State's Index: The Book* (Washington, DC: Fund for Peace, 2014), 10.
23. For the full catalogue of *Fragile States Index* indicator descriptions, see: Ibid., 10.
24. Fragile States Index 2015 data were collected from January 1 to December 31, 2014.
25. Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" (see note 13 above)).
26. Tilly, "The State of Nationalism" (see note 13 above).
27. This model combines Charles Tilly's early criteria for state making in, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," with his later work on the role of nationalism in state-making in, "The State of Nationalism" (see note 13 above). For more on perspectives related to this topic, see Scott (see note 9 above).
28. The model contains five descriptive indicators: *increasing, stable, somewhat, decreasing*, and *not applicable*. The indicators located in the model describe fundamental trends in each of its

four categories since the establishment of the Islamic State and do not reflect ongoing gains and losses in the U.S.-led coalition's war against IS.

29. Kurdish groupings that are competing for some of the same territories as IS represent constituents with a different national identity but are more unified and capable than other state and non-state actors.
30. Erika Solomon and Daniel Dombey, "Chaos in Syria and Iraq Revives Kurds Nationalist Ambitions," *Financial Times*, October 23, 2014.
31. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The Return of Iraqi Shi'i Militias to Syria," *Middle East Institute*, March 16, 2015.
32. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "State of War: The Iraqi Sunni Actors Taking on the Islamic State," *IHS Jane's Terrorism & Insurgency Monitor*, November 2, 2014.
33. Derek Harvey and Michael Pregent, "Who's to Blame for Iraq Crisis," *CNN*, June 12, 2014.
34. Suhaib Anjarini, "The Evolution of ISIS," *Al-Monitor*, November 1, 2013. Note: corroborating sources for this figure could not be located at the time of writing.
35. Although prominent ex-Ba'athists, who had been excluded from participation in the state, had been a part of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) since the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, many more joined ISI after the Surge, bringing their extensive networks and helping develop ISI's military capabilities and organizational structure. Following the deaths of Abu Hamza al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in April 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed leader of ISI, a move reportedly "engineered" by ex-Ba'athist colonel of the Revolutionary Guard, Hajji Bakr (Samir al-Khlifawi). Subsequently, Al-Baghdadi and Hajji Bakr rebuilt the organization, purging it of non-Iraqis and filling its senior leadership with ex-Ba'athist security officers. See Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State," *The Soufan Group*, November 2014, 24–25 and Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State," *Brookings Institution*, November 2014, 19. Some contend that ex-Ba'athists have been sidelined by *Salafi/takfiris* since the declaration of the Caliphate, reflecting the amplified role of ideology in controlling and motivating IS cadres. See Barrett (see above), 19, and Antonio Giustozzi, "The Art of Coercion: Armed Force in the Context of State Building" (London: London School of Economics, 2008), 7.
36. Decentralization of decision making required strict discipline (and ideological uniformity) among ISI's cadres, with which ISI reportedly had only limited success. Fishman argues that decentralization and a lack of training and indoctrination were largely responsible for the violent excesses of regional commanders before the Surge. ISI consequently issued a set of guidelines in September 2007 intended to curb behavior that alienated Iraqis. See Brian Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State: The Rise and Fall of Al Qaeda in Iraq," National Security Studies Program Policy Paper, *The New America Foundation*, August 2011, 9–10. See also Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 10.
37. A renewed focus on building religious legitimacy through information operations, underpinned the nation-state project. See Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 10.
38. See Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" (see note 13 above) and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).
39. Giustozzi (see note 35 above), 14–16.
40. Syria's armed forces, which stood at 300,000 before the war, are estimated to have shrunk by 30–50%, leaving them with between 150,000–210,000 troops. Iraq's security apparatus, consisting of 400,000 on paper, may in fact only comprise 85,000 active troops after the collapse of several divisions following the ISIS assault in June 2014 and the revelation that up to 50,000 "Ghost troops" were on the payroll. See Sylvia Westall, "Assad's Army Stretched but Still Seen Strong in Syria's War," *Reuters*, September 18, 2014.
41. "Syria Crisis: Guide to Armed and Political Opposition," *BBC News*, December 13, 2013. Another estimate put the combined troop strength of ISIS and JN in Syria at 7,000–10,000 in September 2013. See Charles Lister, "Syria's Insurgency Beyond Good Guys and Bad Guys," *Foreign Policy*, September 9, 2013.
42. Jim Sciutto, Jaimie Crawford, and Chelsea J. Carter, "ISIS Can 'Muster' between 20,000 and 31,500 Fighters, CIA Says," *CNN*, September 12, 2014.

43. Officials suggest that the dramatic increase in manpower estimates is also due to underestimation of them previously. See Sciutto et al. Ibid.
44. Philip Ross, "ISIS Recruitment Reaches 'Unprecedented Scale' With 15,000 Foreign Jihadists Joining Militant Fighters," *International Business Times*, October 30, 2014.
45. In a 2005 letter to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Musab al-Zarqawi, AQ deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote to "encourage AQI to prepare to establish an Islamic State in Iraq." Zawahiri viewed Iraq as the test case for Jihadi self-governance and described a strategy that has essentially come to fruition through IS: "The first stage: Expel the Americans from Iraq. The second stage: Establish an Islamic authority or amirate, then develop it and support it until it achieves the level of a Caliphate—over as much territory as you can to spread its power in Iraq, i.e., in Sunni areas, is in order to fill the void stemming from the departure of the Americans… . The third stage: Extend the jihad wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq." *Federation of American Scientists*: http://fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf.
46. Bill Rogio, "Analysis: ISIS, Allies Reviving 'Baghdad Belts' Battle Plan," *The Long War Journal*, June 14, 2014.
47. For example, the Abbasid Caliphate was centered in Raqqa at the turn of the 9th century CE. The symbolic significance of its selection as ISIS's capital would make sense when the Caliphate was declared less than a year later. See Barrett (see note 35 above), 36.
48. Syria's minority-led elite maintains the same authoritarian advantage but lacks popular sympathy or control over its territory in many places.
49. SOHR, "About 2000 People Killed by the Islamic State since the Establishment of 'Caliphate,'" *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, December 28, 2014.
50. Giustozzi (see note 35 above), 8.
51. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, IS allegedly executed 120 of its own fighters who attempted to return home between June and December 2014, although officially they were accused of having "exceeded the limits of religion." SOHR (see note 49 above). See also Adam Taylor, "Report Says 120 Islamic State Fighters Executed by Islamic State," *The Washington Post*, December 29, 2014.
52. Giustozzi (see note 35 above), 15.
53. Ibid., 16.
54. See Giustozzi (see note 35 above), 7–8, for a historical perspective on embedding political commissars in fighting units.
55. Ibid., 7.
56. Ibid., 17.
57. A. D. Kendall, "ISIS Annual Income Nears 3 Billion: Estimate," *Money Jihad*, December 19, 2014.
58. Thomson Reuters Accelus Webcast, "ISIS/ISIL Funding Methods and Financial Crime Risks," http://info.accelus.thomsonreuters.biz/ISFundingMethods (accessed November 24, 2014).
59. The World Bank, "GDP ranking 2013" (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2014).
60. Charles Lister, "Cutting Off ISIS' Cash Flow" (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2014).
61. According to Lister, IS is estimated to have been financially independent for 8 years prior to declaring the Caliphate by virtue of its criminal activities inside of Iraq. See Lister, Ibid.
62. Kendall (see note 57 above).
63. Kate Brannen, "Pentagon: Oil No Longer the Islamic State's Main Source of Revenue," *Foreign Policy*, February 3, 2015.
64. Lister, "Cutting Off ISIS' Cash Flow" (see note 60 above).
65. Ibid.
66. In both Iraq and Syria, the government continues to pay public salaries on which IS personnel go door-to-door collecting taxes. For more detailed information on IS's tax collections see: Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 10, 25–27, and Aki Peritz, "How Iraq Subsidizes The Islamic State," *Foreign Policy*, February 5, 2015.
67. Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 10.

68. Hannah Allam, "Records Show How Iraqi Extremists Withstood U.S. Anti-terror Efforts," *McClatchy News*, June 23, 2014.
69. Ibid.
70. Estimate based on the figure of $1.75 per household for trash collection cited by Al-Tamimi. Households estimated by the author as averaging 8 family members and overall population estimates that range between 1.3 million and 1.8 million since June 2014. Shops and businesses are required to pay up to $4.40 per month. See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Aspects of Islamic State (IS) Administration in Ninawa Province: Part II," *Iraq Insurgent Profiles*, January 20, 2015.
71. Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 25–27.
72. Jenna Lefter, "Life Under ISIS in Mosul" (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2014).
73. For a deeper understanding of the relationship between rewards, punishments, and cooperation, see James Andreoni, William Harbaugh, and Lise Vesterlund, "The Carrot or the Stick: Rewards, Punishments, and Cooperation," *The American Economic Review* 93, no. 3 (2003, June), 893–902.
74. While IS is known for its barbaric practices, including savagely killing and enslaving non-Muslims and Muslims accused of heretical behavior, on December 6, 2014 IS released a 136-page document that details the Caliphate's ten Islamic rulings governing the treatment of prisoners of war. The rulings specify the conditions under which prisoners may be killed, decapitated, tortured, enslaved, or mutilated, and they are each scrupulously supported with Qur'anic verses, representing IS's doctrine on the law of war and rules of engagement. For more information on IS's legal infrastructure, see Mara Revkin, "The Legal Foundations of the Islamic State," *Syria Comment*, December 17, 2014 and Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above).
75. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents," *Aymenn Tamimi's Blog*, January 27, 2015, http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents.
76. Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 27.
77. The consensus in the social sciences is that totalitarianism is a political system in which the state holds total authority over the society and seeks to control all aspects of public and private life wherever possible. Political philosophers, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (1956), developed a theoretical model, derived from the history of the twentieth century that had six key features: 1) an official ideology to which general adherence was demanded, the ideology intended to achieve a perfect final stage of mankind; 2) a single mass party, hierarchically organized, closely interwoven with the state bureaucracy and typically led by one man; 3) monopolistic control of the armed forces; 4) a similar monopoly of the means of effective mass communication; 5) system of terroristic police control; and 6) central control and direction of the entire economy.
78. Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).
79. Revkin (see note 74 above).
80. Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State" (see note 35 above), 27.
81. al-Tamimi, "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents" (see note 75 above).
82. Ibid.
83. These narratives are drawn from the authors' field research in Syria, Iraq, and the wider MENA region (2004–present), and they are corroborated by interviews with regional experts in "Multi-method Assessment of ISIL in Support of SOCCENT: Subject Matter Expert Elicitation Summary Report (July—November 2014)," *Strategic Multi-layer Assessment Program*, January 2015.
84. Shadi Hamid, "The Roots of the Islamic State's Appeal," *The Atlantic*, October 31, 2014.
85. Revkin (see note 74 above).
86. Ahmed Melloud, "The ISIS Challenge to Moderate Islamism" (Washington, DC: Middle East Policy Council, 2015).
87. von Bogdandy et al. (see note 19 above), 588.