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THREE TRAITS OF THE ISLAMIC STATE’S INFORMATION WARFARE

HARORO J INGRAM

The success of the Islamic State throughout the ‘fertile crescent’ is a striking example of a modern insurgency, and information operations have played a central role in the group’s strategy. Drawing on primary sources, Haroro J Ingram analyses three traits of the Islamic State’s information warfare: the use of a multidimensional, multi-platform approach that simultaneously targets ‘friends and foes’ to enhance the reach, relevance and resonance of its messaging; the synchronisation of narrative and action to maximise operational and strategic ‘effects’ in the field; and the centrality of the Islamic State ‘brand’ to its entire campaign.

The Islamic State (IS) insurgency across Syria and northern Iraq is one of the more astonishing developments in modern Middle Eastern history. From the brink of annihilation after the simultaneous Sunni Awakening (sahawat) and the US military surge in Iraq in 2007, the group – less than a decade later – used the beginning of Ramadan 2014 to declare itself the first Caliphate since the Ottoman Empire and its leader, Sheikh Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the new Caliph for the global ummah. This was not mere grandstanding: IS has an ever-growing kitty and armoury, a presence across large swathes of territory on either side of the Syria-Iraq border including control over the major population centres of Ar-Raqqa (Syria) and Mosul (Iraq), and its ranks have swelled with its eastward and westward putsch through the ‘fertile crescent’. Information Operations (IO) have been a key feature of this campaign. Drawing on a vast array of primary source materials, this article analyses three important traits of IS’s information warfare to explore its central role in the group’s strategy.

Trait 1: Reach, Relevance and Resonance
The raison d’être of modern, small war forces is typically to win the population’s support in order to implement their particular ‘competitive system of control’ (that is, a politico-military apparatus) over that of their opponents. Modern insurgency thinking – from Mao and Guevara to Ho Chi Minh and Bin Laden – has long appreciated the importance of shaping the perceptions of contested populations; consequently, it considers IO as the central strategic mechanism through which politico-military activities should be framed. IS has built on this legacy and developed an IO campaign that is multidimensional, spread across different platforms and that simultaneously targets its ‘friends and foes’. Moreover, IS disseminates two streams of IO: official communicqué predominantly released by its media centre, Al-Hayat, and ‘unofficial’ communications by its members. With the use of simple messages, catchy phrases and striking imagery, all augmented by actions in the field, the fundamental purpose of IS’s IO is to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of its audiences.

Reach, relevance and resonance are the underlying imperatives guiding the group IO campaign. Of course, these three factors are closely related and operate interdependently. Reach – that is, the ability of a message to access its target audiences – matters little if the audience does not consider the message as relevant. However, relevance depends on the timeliness of the message and its significance within the context of socio-cultural and situational factors. The extent to which a message resonates with its audience – and thus influences their perceptions – will depend considerably on its reach and relevance. The interplay between these three factors is crucial to understanding the role and nuances of IS’s IO.

To maximise its reach, IS targets local, regional and global audiences with multilingual offerings using a broad range of platforms. Formally released communicqué use platforms such as billboards in areas that IS controls, online publications (such as Dabiq magazine) and videos (for instance, ‘Although the Disbelievers Dislike It’). In their ‘informal’ communicqué, IS members use mobile phones and social-media forums like Twitter, Diaspora and Facebook to send text, photo and video messages. This reach is complemented by the relevance of the group’s messaging which it pursues, for example, by referring to pertinent contemporary events and issues in its communicqué. Additionally, IS is quick to issue statements through a variety of channels following important
events. Such is the speed with which the group produces its publications that many of its articles read like news stories analysing current events, from the Assad regime’s targeting of IS ‘citizens’ in Ar-Raqqah to the distribution of food and charity to citizens during Ramadan, to the commemoration of the destruction of the Syria-Iraq border.

Speed is also an essential means through which IS maintains its presence in the theatre of information warfare. While it may be days or weeks before larger Al-Hayat productions are ready to be disseminated, IS – in the interim – releases brief messages via channels such as ‘Mujatweets’ – short videos promoting a particular aspect of life in IS-controlled areas (such as functioning markets⁸) or an event (for example, Eid celebrations⁹). Informal messages from members supplement this communication. The reach and speed with which IS releases its communiqués essentially allows it to shape the information environment and forces its opponents into a perpetually reactive cycle.

Diversity of messaging also plays a crucial role in maximising the relevance of IS’s IO campaign. Al-Hayat’s publications range from major releases such as Dabiq magazine¹⁰ – which is similar in style and format to Inspire magazine, produced by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and Azan magazine, produced by the Taliban in Khurasan – to shorter communiqués such as speech transcripts by prominent IS figures released on JustPaste.it and disseminated online.¹¹ This diversity is also reflected in IS film productions which range from hour-long videos – such as ‘Flames of War’¹², which even had a trailer preceding its release – and shorter productions promoting certain events, such as ‘The End of Sykes-Picot’¹³ to clips targeting a specific audience, such as Western Muslims or Indonesian Muslims.¹⁴ Even the language used in the group’s communiqués varies from Al-Baghdadi’s eloquent Mosul address to more colloquial appeals from IS members such as in the Mujatweet series.¹⁵

A clear example of IS’s attempt to cater to specific audiences with diverse messaging is its series of videos primarily targeting the West: ‘A Message to America’, ‘A Second Message to America’, ‘A Message to the Allies of America’ and ‘Another Message to America and its Allies’ were formulaic productions that featured the beheadings of American and British hostages kidnapped by IS.¹⁶ To maximise the reach of this series, the videos were less graphic than usual – that is, the actual beheading scene was excluded, unlike many other IS so-called ‘beheading videos’ – so that the production could be shown largely uncensored on television. IS followed this series of beheading videos with the ‘Lend Me Your Ears’ series,¹⁷ featuring kidnapped British journalist John

Islamic State fighters parade in a vehicle commandeered from Iraqi forces in Mosul, Iraq, June 2014. Courtesy of AP Photo.
Cantlie speaking directly to the camera. The series is designed to provide a ‘personalised’ counter-narrative to Western media reporting and anti-IS rhetoric more broadly. For example, the fourth episode of ‘Lend Me Your Ear’ mocks President Obama’s identification of IS attacks on the Yazidis as justification for military action, with Cantlie reading: ‘But since when has America cared about the fate of a minority in Muslim lands?’

He goes on to say: ‘Ironic, isn’t it, that the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons near Damascus a year ago wasn’t even enough to draw the US and its allies into armed intervention’.20 In a format shift, Cantlie was featured in a video entitled ‘Inside ‘ayn al-Islam’, apparently filmed on location in Kobane, as proof that Western officials and media outlets were falsely reporting on the state of the conflict.21

In another shift, ‘Although the Disbelievers Dislike It’ is a highly graphic video featuring a mass beheading and confirmation of another American hostage’s beheading.22 Almost sixteen minutes in length, it is easy to focus on the video’s brutality and miss the significance of its structure and use of symbols: establishing context by outlining IS’s various organisational, name and leadership transitions; establishing crisis with historical narrative and contemporary footage of the bloody aftermath of airstrikes; footage then follows of an ethnically diverse assembly of IS members beheading captured pilots and military officers. The phrase ‘although the disbelievers dislike it’ is used to transition between scenes, perhaps to juxtapose an expected post hoc outcry against the beheading of a Westerner but little abhorrence for the footage of children killed in airstrikes.23

In dynamic information environments, IS is conscious of the need to diversify its messages to ensure that its reach does not dilute the relevance of its narrative. Resonance is the key to ensuring that IO is not just an information tool but a mechanism of influence. The slick production design of Al-Hayat’s releases is impressive and may functionally enhance the resonance of its messaging but, ultimately, this is merely the packaging. IS seeks to maximise the resonance of its IO in three key ways: exploiting powerful

psychosocial forces in its audiences; engaging in an active counter-narrative campaign; and synchronising its narrative and actions.

IS’s IO leverages potent psychosocial dynamics in its audiences by attaching perceptions of crisis to ‘out-group’ identities – that is, anyone not aligned with IS – and solutions to ‘in-group’ identities represented by IS-aligned Sunni Muslims. This strategy of divided identities is often used by militant insurgent groups as a means to fundamentally shape how a conflict is perceived.24 IS communicates capitalise on these polarised identities to exacerbate prevailing perceptions of crisis amongst its supporters – such as the harsh conditions of war in Syria or the marginalisation of Sunnis in Iraq – and attach this malaise to the complicit malevolence of out-groups like Shia Muslims or Western nations. Indeed, in his first public appearance as Caliph, Al-Baghdadi claimed that, ‘[t]he world today has been divided into two camps and two trenches, with no third camp present: the camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of kufr [disbelief] and hypocrisy’.25

This polarity is a constant theme in IS’s IO, and the group often uses statements from its opponents in its own IO messaging in order to reinforce this approach. For example, statements by Presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama are featured at the beginning of ‘Flames of War’,26 and a quotation by John McCain is the focus of an article entitled ‘The Islamic State in the Words of the Enemy’.27 According to IS, the only solution to the current crisis afflicting Sunnis is commitment to Islam and the destruction of all out-group identities. As IS’s spokesman, Abu Muhammad Al-‘Adnani, declared, ‘The time has come for those generations that were drowning in the oceans of disgrace, being nursed on the milk of humiliation, and being ruled by the vilest of all people, after their long slumber in the darkness of neglect – the time has come for them to rise’.28

To maximise the resonance of this narrative, IS portrays itself as the quintessence and protector of the Sunnis. Al-Baghdadi implores IS members ‘to attend to the Muslims and the tribes of Ahlus-Sunnah (the Sunnis) with goodness. Stay awake guarding them so they can be safe and at rest. Be their support. Respond with kindness if they do you wrong … Know that today you are the defenders of the religion and the guards of the land of Islam’.29 By framing Sunni Muslims as the ‘in-group’, IS seeks to imbue its narrative with a transnational appeal. The use of English-speaking recruits from the West,30 multilingual versions of IS statements and videos,31 and the prominent role of non-Arab figures in IS’s IO campaign (for instance, Abu Omar Al-Shishani32) not only aids IS’s appeal to diverse global audiences, but is the embodiment of a major theme in IS narratives: national borders are constructs of the kufr and therefore Muslims need to unite transnationally to confront the threat. This central theme in IS’s IO is reinforced by the symbolism in its videos. For example, while Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi’s ‘beheading video’ to the West featured several masked men wearing colours that suggested they heralded from across the Middle East – as was the case, for instance, in the Nick Berg beheading video in 2004 – IS’s beheading videos aimed at the West feature a lone, black-clad militant,32 or, as in ‘Although the Disbelievers Dislike It’, an ethnically diverse group of IS members.33

IS also has a reputation for using IO to vigorously confront criticisms from its rivals, reflecting a recognition that its relevance and resonance rely heavily on its perceived legitimacy. While the series of videos featuring John Cantlie is designed to counter Western narratives, denunciations of IS by Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qa’ida have been a major focus of its counter-narrative campaign, especially in its Arabic-language releases.34 Significant strategic ramifications are at stake because fundamental differences regarding the legitimate methodology (manhaj) for achieving Islamist goals are at the heart of the split between IS and Al-Qa’ida and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Four speeches by Al-‘Adnani have been at the forefront of this particular counter-narrative strategy. First, the article ‘They Shall by no Means Harm You but with a Slight Evil’ methodically counters several key criticisms of IS including accusations that it has no political project and that it is unecessarily violent.35 Second, ‘This is Not Our Methodology nor Will It Ever Be’
condemns Al-Qa’ida for deviating from the ‘pure’ methodology of leaders like Bin Laden and Al-Zarqawi. Third, ‘This is the Promise of Allah’ jurisprudentially defends IS’s establishment of a caliphate. Fourth, ‘Sorry, Amir of Al-Qaedat presents IS’s jurisprudential and strategic case against Al-Qa’ida.’

These four key publications have been supported by other articles – for example, ‘From Hijrah to Khilafah’, which outlines the five stages of the correct methodology and a suite of impressively produced videos. For instance, the nine-part series ‘The Establishment of the Islamic State’ features messages of support offered by the likes of Bin Laden, Al-Zarqawi and Anwar Al-Awlaki issued when the Islamic State in Iraq was first declared in 2006. With the words of these prominent figures as the voiceover for emotive and often violent video footage, this series is designed to be juxtaposed with contemporary criticisms from Al-Qa’ida and Jabhat Al-Nusra.

Finally, because IS’s IO simultaneously targets ‘friends and foes’, each message acts as both a promotional and counter-narrative tool; a crucial trait in modern information environments whereby it is essentially impossible for IO messaging to be isolated to a single target audience. Therefore, when IS uses IO to promote its governance initiatives, for example, this messaging is designed to promote its ‘competitive system of control’ and to counter ‘enemy’ narratives that accuse IS of having no political agenda. Similarly, IS’s dissemination of photos and videos of violent torture and bloody executions is a means of terrorising its enemies and breaking their psychological resolve, while also coercing the support of civilians. The success of this strategy was apparent in the capitulation of the Iraqi army preceding the fall of Mosul. These examples also reflect the next trait of the group’s IO: IS’s synchronisation of narrative and action.

**Tactic 2: IO is Synchronised with Politico-Military Action**

While a multidimensional IO campaign is the centrepiece of IS’s strategy, a narrative that does not reflect realities on the ground or the actions of its messengers is highly unlikely to resonate with audiences. Hence, IS uses IO as the central strategic mechanism through which its politico-military activities are framed. Militarily, IS has adopted a phased guerrilla-warfare strategy over many years. After IS forces captured Mosul in June 2014, IS reminded its supporters that these military triumphs merely represented a ‘new phase’ in a strategy built on a history of regional politico-military engagement. As stated in *Islamic State Report* (Issue 3):

This past Monday, the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham liberated the city of Mosul in its entirety ... This followed a shift in the Islamic State’s strategy, which now saw its forces leaving their desert strongholds in Iraq and making their way into the cities. Since the start of the jihad in 2003, the province of Anbar has traditionally been the stronghold of the mujahdin, with Fallujah serving as its jihadi capital. In spite of the advantage of having a strong power base, the Islamic State understood that having just a single power base in any given region would work against them by giving their enemies a point of focus for their strikes.

This declaration echoes Mao Zedong’s principle of sacrificing territory for time to win popular support. IO played an important role in these military successes by acting as a tool of psychological warfare preceding IS’s military operations and then as a means to promote its successes. Al-Hayat has produced several formal publications hailing, for instance, the liberation of Mosul and other battles. Simultaneously, IS fighters have flooded social media with almost real-time photos, videos and reports from the front-lines. However, military force is merely the mechanism for facilitating IS’s primary goal, which is the expansion of its territory and the implementation of its ‘competitive system of control’; and its IO reflects this dynamic.

Much attention is given to the brutality with which IS implements and upholds its authority. There is no doubt that coercion is a key mechanism for ensuring the collaboration of civilian populations in IS-controlled regions. However, to simply dismiss IS’s ‘competitive system of control’ as a brutality-based system of governance trivialises the complexity and significance of the events occurring in the region. According to CIA reporting released in September 2014, IS had a fighting force of 20,000–31,500 stretched across approximately one-third of Syria and Iraq. Without the support of local populations IS would have little hope of militarily holding the territory under its control, let alone implementing its highly bureaucratised governance apparatus. IS has achieved its successes by stepping into the socio-political vacuum created by the Syrian civil war and the sense of governmental abandonment felt by many Sunnis in Iraq. It is offering these populations an alternative authority based on a system and identity that has deep traditional and historical roots. In its strongholds of Ar-Raqqa and Mosul, IS has maintained a military presence to secure its civilians, collected taxes and contributed to charity, established a police force and court system to enforce its criminal and civil codes, re-opened trade and markets, set up health, social welfare and educational facilities, and even started issuing parking tickets.

**IS has used IO to give its audiences the perception of an accountable and transparent authority**

At the forefront of IS’s promotion of its system of control are Al-Hayat publications such as *Islamic State News*, *Islamic State Report* and now Dabiq. A by-product of IS’s synchronisation of narrative and action is that its politico-military efforts are themselves forms of communication designed to act as tangible evidence of its narrative’s validity. By stepping into a socio-political vacuum, IS wants to present the image of an authority that is distinct from its predecessor not just in its identity (Muslim versus *kufr*) but its functionality.
as a politico-military system. For example, IS has used IO to give its audiences the perception of an accountable and transparent authority. It has established a ‘Consumer Protection Authority’ which it promoted in an article entitled, ‘On Patrol with the Office of Consumer Protection’. This article featured an interview with the head of consumer complaints and included the unit’s contact details. Furthermore, a Mujatweet episode featured a short interview with an Ar-Raqqa restaurant worker who stated that business was good under IS and that occupational health and hygiene inspections were working well. The message to the average citizen is clear: under IS rule your society will function effectively, your government is accountable and you are fulfilling God’s will. While reality is likely to be starkly different from the image presented by IS, its use of IO to promote its system of control is still pertinent to understanding the group’s strategic mindset. Indeed, IS’s synchronisation of narrative and action is a powerful mechanism underlying the third trait of its information warfare.

Trait 3: The IS ‘Brand’ is Central to its Campaign

IS has demonstrated a deep strategic appreciation for its ‘brand’ as a symbol of its narrative and action. This is best evidenced by IS’s willingness to build partnerships with other organisations (for instance, tribal groups) and also to change its name in order to formalise those relationships and maximise the perceived benefits. IS is very open about its numerous organisational transitions since its inception in the 1990s. It strategically portrays these changes as indicative of its receptivity to the needs of its community of potential support (Sunni Muslims) and its perpetual commitment to confronting its enemies. When Al-Baghdadi declared the group’s fifth name change – from the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) to the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) – he used the opportunity to provide a chronology of the group’s transformations and the strategic and operational rationale that underpinned them. Indeed, Al-Baghdadi framed these name changes as milestones marking the group’s evolution and rising authority.

The names of the Jihadi groups aren’t names revealed from the sky or names of tribes or clans which cannot be abandoned or changed or replaced, rather they are names that were founded due to the legitimate necessity, and the supreme legitimate necessity permits to cancel and replace it with others to be at the level of growth and sublimity. This ascending needs new names that carry the fragment of Islam in its expansion and extending and spreading for the Ummah to carry the hope of returning.

The IS leadership clearly recognises the strategic benefits of aligning its brand, message and actions. For instance, Al-Baghdadi describes how IS first emerged as Al-Tawhid wa Al-Jihad, ‘in the land of the Afghans in the mid-nineties’, but then, ‘after that group had a presence in the media and battlefield, the sheikh [Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi] moved to a superior location and higher level and gave Baya’a [an oath of allegiance] to the mujahid Amir of Al-Qaeda Organization sheikh Osama bin Laden’. The rationale for joining the ‘al-Qaeda adhracy’ and adopting the name ‘Qaeda Al-Jihad Organization in Mesopotamia’ (AQI) was two-fold, to benefit from Bin Laden’s ‘charismatic capital’, and Al-Zarqawi is quoted as saying, ‘I didn’t need from him [Bin Laden] money or weapons or men but I saw in him a symbol for the Ummah’, and to facilitate ‘that blessed expansion from the circle of Iraq to be associated to the global jihad circle’. Again, underscoring the leadership’s strategic awareness, Al-Baghdadi states that for all the ‘costs’ associated with the Al-Qaeda affiliation (for instance, being led by coalition forces), the AQI brand benefited the group because it ‘terrorized the enemies of Allah’, has a global resonance and is associated to [sic] the name of the mujahid sheikh Osama bin Laden’. The speech goes on to describe how AQI then became the Mujahideen Shura Council, reflecting its collaboration with tribal and other militant groups in Iraq, and subsequently adopted the name ISI and eventually ISIS to formalise its presence across northern Syria and Iraq. The establishment of the Islamic Caliphate was both an ideological and strategic move designed to jurisprudentially compel Muslims to migrate towards and defend their new Caliphate. The evolution from Al-Tawhid wa Al-Jihad to IS reveals an organisation that recognises its ‘brand’ not only as a central feature of its IO, but as a symbol of its entire campaign.

Conclusion

The strategic primacy that IS places on IO is not unique; it is built on a legacy that stretches at least as far back as the writings of Mao Zedong. What is unique is IS’s successes in adapting this strategic principle for not just the twenty-first century but for the unique operational and strategic requirements of its campaign. An analysis of the three key traits of IS’s IO campaign reveals a sophisticated systems approach to IO that is intimately tied to its politico-military actions in the field. However, rather than one trait being the key to IS’s IO successes, it is the cumulative impact of all of these traits that really sets IS apart from any of its predecessors or contemporaries. Given the recognition by senior commanders of operations in Afghanistan that IO has been a strategic weakness for Western counter-insurgency forces, IS represents a considerably greater challenge than the Taliban in the information-warfare theatre. The first step towards winning the information war, and potentially an important step towards defeating IS in the long run, will therefore be to understand the role and nuances of its IO campaign.

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Notes

1 The group has been known by various names throughout its history. For the sake of consistency and to avoid confusion, this article uses the group’s current name, the Islamic State (IS), when referring to the organisation, regardless of the historical period.


11 Content released on JustPaste.it is regularly removed and so no links are included in this article.


16 Links to ‘beheading videos’ are not included in this list, as they are regularly removed from the Internet.


19 Ibid.


22 Ibid.

23 For more on how militant groups play upon identity and crisis to influence communities of potential support, see Haroro Ingram, The Charismatic Leadership Phenomenon in Radical and Militant Islamism (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 95–100.

24 Al-Baghdadi, ‘A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan’, p. 3.

25 Al-Hayat Media, ‘Flames of War’.


29 A video featuring English-speaking Israeli fighters from the UK and Australia appeals to members of Muslim diasporas to support IS and travel to Iraq and Syria to engage in jihad. Al-Hayat Media, ‘There is No Life Without Jihad’, 2014.

30 For example, the transcripts of Abu Muhammad Al-‘Adnani’s speech ‘This is the Promise of Allah’ are available in Arabic, English, Russian, French and German. Smaller Al-Hayat productions are also multilingual; for example, ‘Mujawtweets Episode #4’ features a young mujahid speaking in German (with English subtitles); visiting injured fighters in an
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32 Online links to ‘beheading videos’ have not been included in this list due to their regular removal from the Internet.

33 Clarion Project, ‘Gruesome Islamic State Video Announces Death of Peter Kassig’.

34 For example, Jabhat al-Nusra released an interview with its spokesman Sheikh Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir, which heavily criticised ISIS (as the group was then known) for its strategic and jurisprudential deviations. Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir, ‘An interview with Sheikh Abu Sulayman Al-Muhajir’, 12 April 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQjUkFBsSw>, accessed 7 November 2014. For the Al-Qa’ida statement of 3 February 2014 declaring that IS is no longer affiliated with Al-Qa’ida, see Al-Qa’ida General Command, ‘Translation of Al-Qa’ida Statement on Feb. 3, 2014 Acknowledging ISIS officially isn’t part of AQ’, 2014.


37 Al-’Adnani, ‘This Is The Promise of Allah’, p. 4.


41 For example, Al-’Adnani, ‘They Shall By No Means Harm You but With A Slight Evil’, p. 9.


43 Prevailing modern thought on insurgency recommends a phased military strategy based on the principle encapsulated in Mao Zedong’s maxim that a guerrilla movement should sacrifice territorial gain for time in which to win popular support.

44 See Islamic State Report, No. 3.


46 AFP, ‘CIA Says Number of Islamic State Fighters in Iraq and Syria Has Swelled to between 20,000 and 31,500’, 12 September 2014.


51 Islamic News Report, No. 1, includes articles on IS aid and educational initiatives; see <http://jihadology.net/2014/05/31/al-%e1%b8%a5ayat-media-center-presents-a-new-issue-of-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-shams/>.

52 An unverified report on Twitter suggests IS is issuing parking tickets in Ar-Raqqa; see <https://mobile.twitter.com/TheSyrianWar/status/507606291154345984>, accessed 17 November 2014.


57 IS Report, ‘Interview: Interview with Abu Muhammad (AM), Head of the Consumer Complaints Division’, Issue 1, Al-Hayat Media, p. 6.


61 Ibid., p. 2.

62 Ibid., p. 3.

63 Ibid.


65 Ibid., pp. 174–75.

66 Al-Baghdadi, “‘Good News to the Believers’, p. 3.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., p. 4.

69 Ibid.

70 Al-Baghdadi’s declaration of ISIS, thus dissolving the separate titles of the ‘Islamic State of Iraq’ and ‘Jabhat Al-Nusra’ by incorporating them under the one name, was a major catalyst for the breakdown of its relationship with Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qa’ida. See ibid., pp. 4–5.


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