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14. ABSTRACT The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) core leadership is a centralized bureaucracy that fuses Salafi cultural and social capital with Ba'athist expertise and network access. This combination enables ISIL to link tactical and strategic goals through the unification of ideology with practical leadership, resulting in an effective, durable organization. ISIL may appear to be a purely religious movement, but in reality its leadership is a combination of former Ba'ath party officials and Salafi ideologues. This gives the group and effective local strategy, through the Ba'athists, along with a compelling global narrative, through the Salafis. As an organization, ISIL is very centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. It demonstrates high levels of trust and cohesion: local commanders remain loyal while making decisions independent of ISIL's core leadership. The Taliban from 1994-2001 serves as a useful comparative case study. It too was centralized under a single ideology and core of leadership represented by Mullah Muhammed Omar. It endured several severe setbacks yet still managed achieve political control over most of Afghanistan. Through a comparative analysis, the Taliban and eighteen other historical case studies aid in understanding what makes certain violent extremist organizations endure, succeed, and fail.					
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Leadership in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Leadership in the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

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Thesis: The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) core leadership is a centralized bureaucracy that fuses *Salafi* cultural and social capital with Ba'athist expertise and network access. This combination enables ISIL to link tactical and strategic goals through the unification of ideology with practical leadership, resulting in an effective, durable organization.

Discussion: ISIL may appear to be a purely religious movement, but in reality its leadership is a combination of former Ba'ath party officials and *Salafi* ideologues. This gives the group an effective local strategy, through the Ba'athists, along with a compelling global narrative, through the *Salafis*. As an organization, ISIL is very centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. It demonstrates high levels of trust and cohesion: local commanders remain loyal while making decisions independent of ISIL's core leadership.

The Taliban from 1994-2001 serves as a useful comparative case study. It too was centralized under a single ideology and core of leadership represented by Mullah Muhammed Omar. It endured several severe setbacks yet still managed to achieve political control over most of Afghanistan. Through a comparative analysis, the Taliban and eighteen other historical case studies aid in understanding what makes certain violent extremist organizations endure, succeed, and fail.

Conclusion: ISIL has organized around an effective core of leadership that is driven as much by practical and organizational requirements as by the *Salafi-jihadist* ideology. Its leadership will likely endure decapitation. However, decapitation is also an opportunity to create chaos in the organization and degrade its capabilities in the short term. More broadly, a successful counter-ISIL strategy should include significant military force, deep pressure on its leadership, and suffocation of its finances. Anything less will likely result in stalemate and, at best, containment.

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Preface

I came to this topic for a readily apparent reason: we—the United States, the military—do not have a clear understanding of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. After attending a Strategic Multilayer Assessment conference in October 2014, I thought that there was clearly something special about this organization, something that separated it from the other *jihadi* groups in the area: its leaders. Months later, I remain convinced that ISIL will live or die by its ability to choose, generate, and transition capable leadership, and any US strategy aimed at its defeat must address this fact.

Many thanks go to my fellow members of Conference Group 2 at the Command and Staff College, in particular Dan Myers, with whom I collaborated extensively. Also thanks to Dr. Ben Jensen, my advisor, whose guidance and flexibility were critical to my efforts.

Special thanks go to my wife Karen, who encouraged me to finish this project, even though she fully understood that any personal gains would be intangible and knowing the time and effort required to finish it would weigh on her as well.

NOTE: Although the work below is mine, I conducted portions of the analysis and research with Major Daniel Myers, USMC, who studied the Islamic State's access to finance as I studied its leadership and organization. In particular, Maj Meyers and I collaborated on the predictive and comparative analyses.

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
DISCLAIMER	ii
Preface.....	iii
Leadership: ISIL's Key to Success.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Framework for Analysis	5
ISIL's Leadership and Organization.....	5
ISIL's Core Leadership.....	6
The Alloy of Ba'athism and Salafi-Jihadism.....	10
ISIL's Organizational Structure.....	11
Summary Analysis: Key Organizational Dynamics and Implications	13
Case Study: Leadership and Organization in the Taliban, 1994-2001	14
Mullah Omar: Rural Cleric and Amir-ul Momineen	15
Organization: Unified Strategic Effort.....	17
Conclusions: The Taliban Case Study	19
Comparative and Predictive Analyses: What is Next for ISIL	21
Explanation of the Comparative Analysis	21
Implications of the Comparative Analysis.....	23
Limitations of the Comparative Analysis	23

Explanation of the Predictive Analysis.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Four Forces	25
Predictive Analysis Vignettes	27
Conclusions	30
Appendix A. Critical Influences on the <i>Salafi-Jihadist</i> Ideology	34
Appendix B. Definitions of Comparative Analysis Terms	36
Appendix C. Predictive Analysis Diagram	37
Bibliography	38

List of Tables:

Table 1. Assessment of ISIL and Implications for US Strategy	13
Table 2. Assessment of the Taliban and Implications for ISIL	20
Table 3. Violent Extremist Organization Case Studies	21
Table 4. Critical Influences on the <i>Salafi-Jihadist</i> Ideology	33

List of Figures:

Fig 1. Predictive Analysis Diagram	35
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Leadership: ISIL's Key to Success

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) poses a particularly difficult problem for the United States. Although there is some question as to the severity of ISIL's threat, neither the US government nor people appear ready to let this wildfire burn. The fire feeds off an ever deepening Sunni-Shi'a divide as manifested by the current proxy war between varied Sunni interests on one side and Iranian Shi'a interests on the other. The interaction of these conditions with limited American will and diverse American interests leave strategists with a particularly difficult problem.

Also perplexing is ISIL's rise in a region that, though chaotic, is already crowded with numerous other political organizations: the sovereign governments of Iraq and Syria, *jihadi* groups like the al-Nusra Front and Khorasan, proxy militants like Hezbollah and the Free Syrian Army, and local institutions of varying capacity. Until its string of successes in the summer of 2014, ISIL was one of many militant Islamist organizations who, in aggregate, served Sunni interests as a hedge against Shi'a expansion. This assertion does not mean that ISIL lacked an independent will, however. It does indicate the organization's roots in Sunni transnationalism, which it has unified with militant Islamism. Locally, this unity means that ISIL capitalizes on broad Sunni grievances against the Syrian and Iraqi governments. As a result, ISIL's governance is an acceptable alternative to the status quo. Globally, ISIS has successfully marketed their ideology to disenfranchised Sunni minorities throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, generating thousands of recruits and supporters.¹

Local chaos and ISIL's ability to exploit regional politics fail to explain how the organization rose above many other similar violent extremist organizations (VEO), all with similar opportunities and ideologies. Unlike many other VEOs, including competitor *jihadi* groups, ISIL's leadership values organizational success and durability over personal power. This

attribute allows the core leadership to be an alloy—not just an alliance—of *Salafi-jihadism*^{*} and *Sunni Transnationalism*. Although the true structure of the core leadership and their interactions are opaque to outsiders, the examination below does reveal its outlines: it is a centralized bureaucracy that relies on a fusion of *Salafist* cultural and social capital with Ba’athist expertise and network access, resulting in an effective, durable organization. Additionally, ISIL’s leadership successfully integrates tactical success with its strategic goals; in other words, they understand the nature of the conflict, have a vision, and are implementing it. Security, governance, justice, and economic potential follow military victory, all of which is incorporated into a strategic communications network.

As the United States confronts ISIL, understanding its leadership is critical to finding vulnerabilities. To that end, this paper comprises four broad sections. First, a literature review lays the foundation for the analysis. Next is an examination of ISIL’s leadership, focusing on its fusion of *Salafi-jihadism* and Sunni transnationalism and what this means for the organization. Third, the Taliban—an insurgency with which ISIL has much in common—serves as a comparative case study. The paper concludes with an assessment of “what’s next” for ISIL using both a predictive model and a comparative analysis.

Literature Review

As with any political organization, ISIL as an organization is a complex system of leaders and organizations with varied interests and perspectives. This study thus requires a broad slice of literature on leadership and organizational theory, focusing on but not limited to military and political aspects. The following is a collection of such literature that establishes a broad framework for analysis that helps explain ISIL’s leadership and organizational dynamics.

^{*} I have chosen the term “*Salafi-jihadist*” because this is the term ISIL itself uses in its magazine *Dabiq*. For a brief description of the tenets fundamental to this ideology, refer to Appendix A.

First, we must ask the question if leaders actually matter—a debate with a long history. In *War and Peace*, Leo Tolstoy asserted that leaders are slaves to broad social movements, while contemporary philosopher Thomas Carlyle argued that history is the story of the “Great Man.”² The truth is probably somewhere in-between.

In more recent and scholarly works, Jones and Olken examined sudden, unplanned changes in national leadership to isolate changes, specifically studying economic effects. They conclude that “on average, leaders have detectable, causative impacts” on those “levers” that the leader himself could pull, such as monetary policy, and that he/she had less effect on more complex issues such as trade and security policies. Additionally, autocratic leaders tended to have a greater effect than participatory leaders.³ By contrast, Jervis asserted that regardless of their political inclinations, American presidents have little effects on foreign policy decisions given. If leaders do not matter, he explained, this assumes a certain homogeneity of potential leaders, that bureaucracy and momentum might “capture” the leader, or that other structures limit their freedom of action.⁴

Nepstad and Bob used leadership in varied domestic and transnational political movement case studies to describe how leaders use cultural, social, and symbolic “leadership capital.” Leaders spend this capital to motivate around grievances, draw external support, and respond to the countermovement.⁵ Specifically focused on VEOs, Ligon and Derrick studied factors that influence such organizations’ leaders. Their study categorized these factors into three main forces: violence, ideology, and organizational needs. The sum of these forces’ vectors form their frame for rational decision making.⁶

In an attempt to describe the qualities of an effective business leader, Kaplan *et al* examined thirty leadership traits of chief executives in business. In general, the study concluded

that general leadership skills mattered more than specific technical or bureaucratic knowledge, and that “execution-related” skills (decisiveness, vision, etc) were more strongly correlated with success than “team-related” skills (consensus building, empathy).⁷ This is an interesting contrast to most military leadership literature, which emphasizes teamwork and personal skills. *Leading Marines* describes the fundamental characteristics of a successful leader as inspiration, technical proficiency, and moral responsibility. Organizational values include adaptability, innovation, and decentralization.⁸

Organizational structure and dynamics are as important as the leaders on top of them. Allison Graham divides outcomes of decision-making in government into three models: “rational actor” (Model I), “organizational process” (Model II) and “bureaucratic politics” (Model III).⁹ Each of these explain the convoluted, often opaque courses that sometimes create leadership path-dependencies. Model I is self-explanatory, although it should be noted that each actor’s mind defines its own “rational” logic. Model II describes a system of organizations, each with its own set of procedures; the aggregate output is often a product of “satisficing,” or selecting the first solution that adequately addresses the problem as seen by the involved organizations. Model III describes a systems of interactive interests—in other words, politics. The output is thus a function of varied goals and perspectives, often shaped by miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Finally, Sinno’s study *Organizations at War* examines the structure of various militant groups in an attempt to determine if and how organizational design affects success. He argues that the “. . . distribution of power within organizations . . . creates incentives that motivate the individual behavior of organizational members in ways that affect the organization’s ability to outlast its rivals.”¹⁰ He concludes that centralized leadership works best when the group has a

sanctuary, while decentralization works best when an insurgency does not. Both Sinno and Allison's theories explain how organizational structures shape a sum of rational actions into an irrational outcome.

Framework for Analysis

In aggregate, the varied theories above ask five inter-related questions that will serve as a framework for analysis. A table at the end of each section summarizes answers to these questions as well as detail their implications.

- 1) What leadership traits and styles best characterize ISIL's political elite, or core leadership? (Nepstad and Bob, Kaplan *et al*, *Leading Marines*)
- 2) How does ISIL use social, symbolic, and cultural capital? (Nepstad and Bob)
- 3) What is the relationship between the core leadership and ISIL as an organization? (Jones and Olken, Allison, Sinno, *Leading Marines*)
- 4) How centralized is power distribution? What is the relationship with local elites? (Allison, Sinno)
- 5) How do ISIL's leaders make decisions? What are the major influences on their decision-making process? (Ligon and Derrick, Allison, Sinno)

ISIL's Leadership and Organization

ISIL's leadership is the critical variable that has set it apart from its competitors, and understanding it is thus key to understanding the organization's success. ISIL's first leadership strength is its ability to link execution to vision—in other words, establish a mutually reinforcing link between rational, practical action and ideological strategic vision. Supporting this strength is its second: ISIL's fusion of Ba'athists with *Salafis*. An understanding of how ISIL distributes power—its organizational structure—is also important. The following section explores these

ideas and concludes with an analysis of the framework questions above. Any discussion of ISIL's senior leadership should begin with the core and its "caliph," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

ISIL's Core Leadership

ISIL changed direction significantly after the Shura Council placed al-Baghdadi at its head in 2010. Under his leadership, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) began a sustained campaign to integrate Ba'athists into the core leadership. Soon thereafter, ISI transitioned from one of many *Salafi-jihadist* terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaida to the independent pseudo-state it is today. We lack conclusive evidence regarding his actual role in the organization, be it political ruler, spiritual guide, or symbolic figurehead. ISIL's trajectory following his ascension in 2010 does indicate that his appointment—by a Ba'athist-dominated Shura Council¹¹—as significant, however, and thus his leadership is worth examination. This said, al-Baghdadi is not the sum of ISIL's leadership, and the discussion below also analyzes the core leadership, roughly defined as the Shura and Shari'a Councils.

Because of the purposefully opaque nature of ISIL's leadership, it is not possible to draw more than a sketch of al-Baghdadi's biography and personality. Regardless, what we know or can infer is still significant. Born Ibrahim bin Awad and also known as Doctor (of Islamic Studies) Abu Du'a, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is a *Salafist* scholar and experienced *jihadi*. His education is doubly important: he almost certainly had substantive Ba'ath Party connections to gain access to graduate studies in 1990s Baghdad. His "official" biography, doubtlessly shaped to fit organizational values and thus of dubious veracity, is nevertheless important as an indicator of those values.¹² Published by several jihadi websites in the summer of 2014, this document emphasizes al-Baghdadi's credentials as a religious scholar and his family's pedigree; it mentions, but does not emphasize, his experience as an insurgent fighter after the US invasion in

2003.¹³ The high quality of his classical Arabic and his ability as an orator support his claim to higher education.¹⁴ This background grants al-Baghdadi deep wells of social and cultural capital. ISI's Shura Council likely understood this in 2010, and appointed him as the *emir* who could use this capital as a path back to power for Iraqi Ba'athists.

Leadership Personality Profile

Unlike al-Qaida's leadership, ISIL's core leadership keep themselves hidden. Al-Baghdadi may have learned a tough lesson from his two predecessors—Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—who were both targeted and killed by American airstrikes. He thus uses public appearances sparingly and only when they achieve the greatest effect. His speech after the declaration of the Caliphate an example his ability to use symbolic and cultural leadership capital. It also serves as an example of ISIL's skill at linking tactical success to strategic goals, then broadcasting their success in a manner that is globally meaningful and supportive to their ideology.¹⁵

Al-Baghdadi's personality appears congruent with the leadership outline above. One study, after analyzing his limited public profile, described his style as "socialized pragmatic." Such leaders are typically analytical, flexible, practical, and visualize incremental steps toward mission accomplishment. Al-Baghdadi has achieved particular success in attracting talent through a combination of "rational action" that draws talented leadership and "bold action" that attracts domestic and foreign fighters.¹⁶ He appears to value skill and expertise as much as loyalty among their subordinates. Unlike many other VEO leaders, he is not threatened by subordinates' success and allows them to act on their own initiative.

A comparison with other *Salafi-jihadist* leaders is informative. Abu Bakr Shekau, nominal leader of Boko Haram, appears as more gangster than spiritual leader.¹⁷ He has none of

the erudition or gravitas associated with al-Baghdadi; he is more like al-Zarqawi. Ayman al-Zawahiri, successor to Osama bin Laden, appears intolerant of dissent, overbearing, and insecure in his public appearances.¹⁸ Neither is as successful a leader as al-Baghdadi, although Mullah Mohammed Omar of the Taliban (see more below) is an interested contrast.

Practical Leadership

ISIL's core leadership is, above all, practical and politically astute. Soon after al-Baghdadi assumed leadership in 2010, ISI changed its tactics and strategy to match an immediate realization of their goal of establishing a legitimized *Salafi* government. ISI shifted their focus from terrorism, aimed at garnering public attention, to attacks with more tangible tactical goals, such as capture of territory. One of ISI's most successful campaigns during this time was the "Breaking of the Walls," a series of prison breaks which netted recruits from disenfranchised or radicalized Sunni leadership.¹⁹ Soon after, ISI shifted strategy again, this by time moving into Syria and establishing a sanctuary there. The leadership linked this move with a name change that added "al-Sham," or the Levant, while skillfully maneuvering against and among competitor *jihadi* groups. It appears that ISIL planned for the confrontation with the al-Nusra Front and al-Qaida Central and was prepared for multiple eventualities; ISIL did not take any irrevocable action until they had secured alternative sources of money, i.e. oil.²⁰

One of ISIL's most important attributes is its exceptional skill at maneuvering through local politics. ISIL and its opponents—various factions of Arab Sunnis, Kurds, Shi'a, and others—are fighting over ground long-contested.²¹ The chaos following Saddam Hussein's removal and subsequent insurgencies is an opportunity for local leaders to assert new territorial claims. The character of this battlefield is thus very local. Much like the Taliban (see below for detail), ISIL has proven themselves skilled at maneuvering through local politics—identifying

political surfaces and gaps, exploiting weaknesses, co-opting or removing key leaders, and tailoring its approach to each locality. The strategy and tactics for conquest are, like ISIL's leadership, a fusion of Ba'athist autocratic suppression and *Salafist-jihadi* political doctrine as recorded in *The Management of Savagery*.[†] Their operations involve patient development of detailed intelligence, exploitation of identified weaknesses through alliances and blackmail, and a “combined arms” approach that integrates violence and information operations alongside political maneuver.²²

ISIL approaches each locality or group differently. Al-Baghdadi prioritizes use of religious leaders and takes great care to avoid alienating them.²³ Having exploited misrule of local tribal elites,²⁴ ISIL is also mindful of their continued role in solidifying its legitimacy. To that end, ISIL has created a head of “Tribal Affairs” in the Shura Council. It sends specific messages to specific tribal leaders while simultaneously publishing religious justifications for violence against those same tribes.²⁵ ISIL has also systematically removed uncooperative local leaders in Iraq and Syria. After publically killing more than 1300 members of the Al-Anbar “Awakening”—a key to US success in the region from 2007-2010—ISIL began offering “amnesty” to Arab Sunnis who submitted. Far from senseless violence, the campaigns supported two critical strategic ends: weakening local leadership and discrediting the Iraqi government's legitimacy among Arab Sunnis. The limits of coercion on local politics are not yet clear, but the core leadership will likely adapt different tactics as their control solidifies, perhaps emphasizing positive means of control, such as justice, commerce, and government, over the negative, such as violence and coercion.

[†] See Appendix A for more information on this key *jihadi* publication.

The Alloy of Ba’athism and Salafi-Jihadism

Al-Baghdadi’s most meaningful achievement as leader of ISIL has been the fusion of two apparently contradictory ideologies: traditionally secular Ba’athism and religiously puritanical *Salafi-jihadism*. Ba’athism is traditionally a secular nationalist movement of the type ISIL denounces in its published literature,²⁶ but the Ba’ath party under Saddam Hussein adopted some *Salafi* ideology during the “Return to Faith” campaign of the 1990s.²⁷ Regardless of the differences in core creed, the ideologies share the same target audience—disenfranchised Sunnis—and use a similar narrative that blames neo-Colonialism and Shi’a/Allawi misrule. Importantly, both ideologies also rely extensively on coercion, fear, and terrorism as enforcement mechanisms.²⁸

“Neo-Ba’athists”—mostly former Iraqi military and intelligence officers—now form a critical cadre of leadership for ISIL. The alliance between them and the *Salafi-jihadis* first gained traction in 2008, in the wake of a general Sunni rejection of Al-Qaida in Iraq’s (AQI) use of violence and terror; the groups’ integration accelerated rapidly after al-Baghdadi to the reigns in 2010.²⁹ Currently, it appears that most senior ISIL leaders are former Ba’ath Party members. These Iraqis make most of the consequential decisions and occupy the most important posts.³⁰

Both ideologies have much to gain from this merger. The *Salafis* gain crucial technical expertise in security and intelligence operation, illicit network access, and assistance in dealing with local elites (e.g. Sunni tribal leaders). The tactical expertise and political connections that Ba’athist brought were likely critical to the capture of Mosul. More recently, ISIL has prioritized governance efforts—law enforcement, dispute resolution and courts, market stability—in an effort to ensure local acquiescence and eventually support.³¹ Ba’athist expertise will likely remain a critical part of this effort. In return, the Ba’athists gain a transnational ideology, religious legitimacy, a path back to authority in Iraq, and gainful employment.³² As the former

leaders of Iraq under Hussein, they are the most disenfranchised of all Sunni constituencies, and thus easily co-opted or radicalized. There are a variety of reasons why a formerly secular Ba'athist might join a puritanical movement such as ISIL: he had always been religious, he had never really believed in the Ba'ath movement, he may still believe but espouse *Salafi* ideas as an expedient, or any combination of the above. Regardless, the ideologies are certainly mixed at both the individual and group levels, and it is the collective outcome that matters more rather than any member's particular beliefs.

Journalists and scholars disagree regarding the character of the integration of these ideologies amongst the senior leadership. Is the alliance a tactical one of convenience or is it, as I have asserted, something more enduring? Many argue that the alliance is purely tactical, as ISIL's ideology and actions have generated little popular support in Iraq; the alliance is built upon a broadly shared grievance of Sunni maltreatment under the Iraqi government and may soon dissolve.³³ However, the depth of the integration—al-Baghdadi himself was a Ba'athist, although the extent of his involvement in the party is unknown—argues that the groups are more fused than allied, and factionalization will come along different fault lines at the senior core leadership level. Fissures may, however, develop in less cohesive parts of the organization.

ISIL's Organizational Structure

Journalists and analysts often use the term “terrorist” group to describe ISIL. Although accurate in that ISIL makes extensive use of terror as a tactic, it is also misleading. Terrorist groups are typically flat, cell-based networks that are either local and centralized or international and decentralized. ISIL is neither. It is highly centralized, hierarchical, and increasingly bureaucratized. In many ways, ISIL's organizational design is much like the state it claims to be. At the top, the “caliph” (head of state) makes policy and strategy with the assistance of a “Shura

Council” (cabinet) and “Shari’a Council” (state court). The Shura Council comprises various portfolios recognizable to any state: military, intelligence, etc. These organs of government extend to the local level, under the direction of several *walis*, or local rulers, with their own advisory councils.³⁴

In this apparently federal system, ISIL’s ideological emphasis on *tawhid*—monotheism or unity—is informative. This is not just a religious doctrine, but also an exhortation to unify under the banner of al-Baghdadi.³⁵ This unity may signify autocracy, but it does not imply complete centralization of decision-making authority. The core leadership grants local political and military leaders substantial autonomy, allowing for decentralized execution under “national” strategy, while also encouraging lateral cooperation and communication. Despite this autonomy, ISIL does not appear to suffer from lack of coordination, discipline problems, or disobedience.³⁶ The fact that this system works implies a high degree of trust between core and local leadership as well as strong cohesion throughout the organization.

The emphasis on political *tawhid* extends to other jihadi groups outside of ISIL’s political authority. ISIL’s magazine *Dabiq* regularly contains long discourses using interpreted Islamic jurisprudence and historical precedent to discredit global rivals, such as al-Qaida and the Taliban, while encouraging *jihadis* everywhere to swear allegiance to al-Baghdadi.³⁷ ISIL is uninterested in partnerships, long-term alliances, or state sponsorship, likely to maintain its political freedom of action. It has rejected al-Qaida, and ISIL tends to subsume or dominate rather than cooperate with other *jihadi* groups.³⁸ Even its incorporation of Ba’athists requires their subordination to the *Salafi-jihadist* ideology—everyone must obey and submit, and those that do not are killed.³⁹

Summary Analysis: Key Organizational Dynamics and Implications

Two critical implications emerge from the above analysis:

1) *ISIL has capable, dangerous leadership.* Their ability to operate using *auftragstaktik*—what the US military calls “mission tactics”—implies a great deal of trust and effective communication between leaders. If this is the case, then ISIL’s leaders are a cohesive group that will be difficult to factionalize. This should be of particular concern to American strategists because separating Sunni trans-nationalism from the *Salafi-jihadist* ideology is critical to success in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, ISIL appears to have developed a succession plan. Although still young as an insurgency, it seems to be developing an organizational culture that supports leadership development and is durable through crises.

2) *ISIL is skilled at local political maneuver as well as global messaging.* In essence, there are two important components to ISIL’s strategy and messaging: one local, one global, and ISIL varies its ends, ways, and means accordingly. Locally, control of territory, people, and resources is the goal, and exploitation of local politics is the way, and the resources of the Caliphate are the means. Globally, the Caliphate is the end, ideology the way, and local success brings the means. Additionally, it is important to understand that the Ba’athist’s ends are local, and the *Salafi-jihadist* goals are global.

Table 1. Assessment of ISIL and Implications for US Strategy

Question	Assessment for ISIL	Implications for US Strategy
Personality traits and leadership style?	- al-Baghdadi assessed socialized-pragmatic personality - al-Baghdadi is not the sum of ISIL leadership - Core leadership is reclusive and opaque	- Separating core leadership from al-Baghdadi would be difficult - Decapitation may harm ISIL but would likely have only limited, temporary effects - Detailed knowledge core leaders will be very difficult to gain
Use of social, symbolic, and cultural capital?	- al-Baghdadi retains significant cultural, social, and symbolic capital: combination of <i>jihadi</i> experience, <i>Salafi</i> education, and Qureshi status are particularly	- al-Baghdadi might be hard to replace - Limited public appearances and contact with “rang-and-file” may make information campaign aimed

	important - ability to use capital sometimes hampered by security concerns	at driving a wedge between the two easier
Relationship between leader and organization?	- Specifics of al-Baghdadi's role remain unclear, but it appears he serves an important unifying role between Ba'athists and <i>Salafi-jihadists</i> - Most power held by minority of Ba'athist Iraqis, even in Syria	- Removing al-Baghdadi would almost certainly weaken the organization, although a succession is likely in place - Power consolidation in Iraqis likely alienates others with talent, making them available for exploitation
How centralized? Relationship with local elite?	- Centralized planning and strategy, decentralized execution; local commanders given autonomy - Skillful but sometimes heavy-handed management of local elites; coercion has its limits, but ISIL likely understands this	- Reliance on "mission tactics" might suffer if leadership is degraded by coalition targeting; ISIL may need to centralize if large numbers of skilled leaders are killed - ISIL's short- to mid-term struggle will continue to be local, and success will depend on its ability to govern and exploit local political fault lines (Sunni, Kurdish, tribal, commercial, etc)
Decision making model and influences?	- Strategic decisions are practical compromises between local (Ba'athist agenda) and global (<i>Salafi-jihadist</i> agenda) - Both Ba'athists and <i>Salafi-jihadists</i> capable and willing to use violence to establish a security state	- Strategic objectives between ideologies have thus far been mutually supportive, but this may not continue - Violence will need to be tempered by organizational needs to establish durable governance

Case Study: Leadership and Organization in the Taliban, 1994-2001

In 1994, a small group of religious warriors known as the Taliban joined the Afghan civil war, a field already dense with competing military and political organizations. Within months it had captured Kandahar; in September 1996 it took Kabul; and by the time of the US invasion in 2001 the Taliban controlled every major city and nearly all of the countryside of Afghanistan. In their rapid ascent from rural war-band to dominant political power, the Taliban suffered several considerable setbacks, including a major political and military defeat around Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998. Critical to the Taliban's ability to sustain success through these setbacks were its leadership and political organization under Mullah Mohammed Omar. Similar in ideology and organization to ISIL—which is currently suffering a string of tactical defeats—a case study of

the early Taliban is particularly informative. This section first examines the character of Omar's leadership, Taliban's organization as a political entity, and the relationship between the two. It concludes with an assessment of the framework questions established above.

Mullah Omar: Rural Cleric and Amir-ul Momineen

To this day, Mullah Mohamed Omar serves as the Afghan Taliban's "head of state" and provides strategic guidance across a disparate, decentralized network of clients. Two decades ago, Omar was the nexus⁴⁰ of a highly successful, centralized organization. This is not to imply that the Taliban of the 1990s was homogenous or monolithic, but his dominance of the organization during its rise and fall is the reason for this case study. Despite his significance, Omar was and remains a recluse, making a detailed analysis of speeches, documents, and dialogue impossible. Nevertheless it is still possible to conduct substantive analysis from the contours available.

Mullah Omar grew up in rural Uruzgan Province. He was born c. 1960 into an important Pashto tribal confederation, the Ghilzani, which along with the Durrani confederation would dominate the Taliban's leadership. As a young adult he attended a *madrassa* in Kandahar; it appears both that this was the limit of his formal education and that he is a true *Salafi-jihadist* believer—for Omar, ideology was not a means but the end. He fought the Soviets during the 1980s, and enjoyed enough success that by the time the Soviets withdrew, he commanded a small group of *mujahideen*. Importantly, Omar also served with informal Islamic courts that mediated local disputes (more on this below).⁴¹

The origins of the Taliban lie in the post-Soviet chaos when Omar served as a village mullah outside Kandahar. According to the Taliban's foundation story, villagers approached Omar asking for help in two cases involving young Afghans from the sexual predation of local

warlords. In both cases, Omar led small groups of fighters and, against the odds, prevailed.⁴²

Although plausible, their veracity is not as important as the values they, and by extension Omar, represent: order and justice amongst chaos and moral depravity. Even as the Taliban progressed to rule large tracts of land, their stated goals changed little: restoration of order, disarmament of the warlords, the rule of law (*sharia*), and defense of Afghanistan (*dar al-Islam*).⁴³

Omar's leadership reflected these ideas, and he proved nearly inflexible in his pursuit of what he saw as right. His leadership style is best described as isolated, centralized, and ideological. Public appearances were exceedingly rare and photographs prohibited, in stark contrast to Osama Bin Laden's international public profile; a contemporary Department of State profile described Omar as "idiosyncratic" and "obscurantist".⁴⁴ He rarely left Kandahar and restricted access to his person. The most notable exception to this was his public appearance in Kandahar on 4 April 1996, when he donned the Cloak of the Prophet and declared himself "*Amir-ul Momineen*" (Prince of the Faithful). Two significant implications follow: a) Omar saw himself as a "religious figure of historical importance",⁴⁵ and b) the title implies authority over all Muslims everywhere, not just Afghanistan. First-hand accounts describe him as rural and traditional in worldview, with limited education and deliberate but not intellectual in his thinking.⁴⁶ The aggregate of evidence indicates that although he consulted the *shuras* and close advisors, Omar did not seek consensus. His decisions were typically final, inflexible, and uncompromising, although there are indications that he did make practical exceptions to ideology on minor, local issues;⁴⁷ these might reflect more the limits of his power than a purposeful flexibility, as the Taliban seemed unconcerned about the unpopularity of its implementing its ideology.⁴⁸ However personalized his leadership, Omar was not interested in

power for power's sake. In his most consequential decision—to protect bin Laden after 9/11—he chose loyalty and principle over practicality and accused others of loving power too much.⁴⁹

Organization: Unified Strategic Effort

Ultimately, of course, Omar's decision to shelter bin Laden led to the US intervention that defeated the Taliban. If for no other reason, this fact demonstrates the central role he served in the organization. Regardless, the Taliban was not a monolith; the character of its organization and its relationship with Omar are also critical to understanding its success before the US intervention. Of Graham Allison's three decision-making models,⁵⁰ a combination of "rational actor" (Mullah Omar) and "bureaucratic politics" (the varied interests and actors incorporated within the movement) best describes the Taliban's organizational outcomes. The following paragraphs detail its strategy and structure in the context of strong leadership concentrated in Omar himself; note that "rational" in this sense describes Omar's ideological self-interest.

A. H. Sinno, in his insightful analysis *Organizations at War: In Afghanistan and Beyond*, asks an important question: how did the Taliban prevail in a space already crowded with capable military leaders and veteran fighters?⁵¹ Commonly cited reasons, such as Pakistan's sponsorship, cross-border sanctuary, and a supposed "political vacuum" in Afghanistan, are important but not unique to the Taliban; their primary rivals enjoyed the same conditions. Sinno asserts that the Taliban's successful exploitation of the physical, political, and financial sanctuary of their base in Pakistan allowed them to centralize.⁵² This facilitated unity of effort. While decentralization might help weaker, "adolescent" organizations survive, the Taliban's ability to combine "grand jihad with local politics"⁵³—that is, unity of tactical and strategic effort—made the movement durable through serious setbacks and mistakes.

This unity was manifest in the Taliban's ability to combine tactical military success with a keen understanding of local politics, ultimately resulting in effective governance (see stated goals above). To this end, the Taliban were as much a political as military entity, as with any successful insurgency. Taliban leaders moved in and around local politics adeptly, especially within the patron-client system that characterized much of it. Time and again, the Taliban proved themselves a better patron, or least one not worth fighting. Political maneuver was closely tied to military maneuver, meaning tactical success contributed toward strategic success.⁵⁴ The local elite were granted relative autonomy so long as they submitted to the Taliban (*bayan*) and followed broad guidelines often communicated through their *mullah*. As part of Omar's political exchange with the *ulema* (see below), the local *mullah* enjoyed increased prestige and political power.⁵⁵ Additionally, it is difficult to underestimate the popular support gained from a promise of much-desired order and justice. As indicated by the Taliban's origin stories, this was a message consistently communicated to local people and elites, and their ability to mediate disputes proved the most effect aspect of their local governance.⁵⁶ This is not meant to imply that the Taliban were universally accepted without coercion. Many Afghans, Pashto and non-Pashto, rejected their rule, and some actively rebelled when the Taliban substituted coercion for governance.⁵⁷ Given a few more years in power, these cracks may have proven beyond Omar's ability to repair.

At the state level, the Taliban used a model similar in many ways to the Islamic Republic of Iran: all authority vested in a nominally appointed supreme leader who receives legitimacy from the *ulema*. In exchange, the leader regularly consults the *ulema*, who enjoy greater political power and prestige. In addition to the leader, the Taliban government included three *shura* councils.⁵⁸ Omar resisted sharing power and these councils implemented more than decided

policy, especially following the Taliban's major successes and his appearance in Kandahar in 1996. Even those close to him were reduced to administrative positions; the Taliban, as a whole, seems to have accepted this.⁵⁹ Omar valued loyalty and familiarity over expertise and diversity, and this is apparent in two important ways. First, the vast majority of administrators, even over non-Pashto areas, were Pashto of the Ghilzani and Durrani tribes. Most of the core government (the three *shura*) were also from one madrassa or had fought together in years prior.⁶⁰ Even among this core, Omar rotated ministers, military commanders, and other key leaders around in an apparent effort to prevent them from gaining an independent political base. Omar's primary rival in the Taliban, Mullah Mohamed Rabbani, resented Arab influence in Afghanistan and specifically opposed providing shelter to bin Laden; Omar successfully marginalized Rabanni, however, and at the latter's death in 2001 he had already ceased to be a significant influence.⁶¹ This political maneuvering may have made administration difficult—ministers also serving as military commanders cannot do both well—but it did ensure that important decisions remained in the hands of Omar himself.

Thus the Taliban was a centralized organization, intolerant of political factions, but capable of only limited control over autonomous local leadership. Omar carefully but effectively managed potential political rivals, the *ulema*, and local elites and kept the organization unified along his strategic vision. Decision outcomes were typically rational according to their ideology and Omar's personal principles, primary among which were order, justice, loyalty, and defense of Islam.

Conclusions: The Taliban Case Study

One critical implication emerges from this discussion. A centralized organization built around a leader (or council) with significant cultural and social capital served the Taliban well;

given the more homogenous physical and cultural terrain of the Middle East, ISIL will experience even more success with this type of leadership. Absent significant pressure, ISIL will continue to centralize, facilitating unity of effort and increasing their durability. Table 2 below examines framework questions in detail.

Table 2. Assessment of the Taliban and Implications for ISIL

Question	Assessment for the Taliban	Implications for ISIL
Personality traits and leadership style?	-Personal and centralized -Reclusive and secretive	-Reclusive leadership will likely be difficult to understand and target, even given months/years of analysis - Regular public appearances not necessary to maintain moral and strategic leadership
Use of social, symbolic, and cultural capital?	- Used social connections from <i>mujahedeen</i> and madrassa; relied on Pashto Ghilzani and Durrani - Heavy use of Islamic symbolism for legitimacy, e.g. Cloak of the Prophet, title of <i>Amir-ul Momineen</i> - Effective synthesis of Pashto and Islamic cultures, especially in dispute resolution—small step toward more effective local governance equated to significant political gains - Order and justice are as, if not more, important than “hearts and minds”	- Claiming title “Caliph” in Mosul had granted al-Baghdadi the cultural and symbolic capital necessary to sustain ISIL through significant defeats - Social connections with fellow Iraq war <i>mujahedeen</i> and prisoners are a significant strength - Choice of loyalty and social bonds over leadership ability may hinder development of governance - Small gains in local governance can build significant legitimacy (e.g. stability in Raqqa, Mosul) - Local elites and people will likely value order and justice over essential services and democracy
Relationship between leader and organization?	- Omar increasingly central as Taliban grew - No significant factionalization from inception to 2001 - Some tactical actions still at odds with strategic vision (e.g. repression) – Taliban still successful	- Rotation among ISIL leadership may be in an effort to keep political rivals off-balance; those leaders who stay in place are not rivals to al-Baghdadi - Even tight, centralized leadership cannot guarantee complete discipline (unity of effort), but will prevent factionalization of ISIL
How centralized? Relationship with local elite?	- Very centralized - Increasingly centralized as Mullah Omar consolidated his political position - Challenged by historical, ethnic, and geographic diversity of Afghanistan - Taliban’s use of local <i>mullahs</i> for influence, control, and communication was effective	-Centralized leadership will be easier to target -Centralization will be less of a problem in Arab Middle East (less culturally and geographically diverse than Afghanistan) - Local religious leaders <i>may</i> be critical to influencing local elites -Allowing local autonomy requires good governance in exchange for

	- Sustained coercion unable to compensate for lack of governance at the political margins.	submission; coercion works for limited time only
Decision making model and influences?	-Primary rational actor -Secondary bureaucratic politics -Must understand “rational” from Omar’s perspective (Islam, Pashto, rural) – ideology, personal principle primary forces	- Not every action ISIL takes is rational, or even completely understood by al-Baghdadi or his inner circle - Some decisions are a compromise between <i>Salafis</i> , Ba’athists, and local elites - Rational action may include ideological self-interest; understanding al-Baghdadi’s world view will help to predict and understand ISIL actions

Comparative and Predictive Analyses: What is next for ISIL?

This section takes two complimentary tools, comparative and predictive analyses, to develop a better understanding of ISIL’s leadership and organization and assess possible future scenarios. The comparative analysis takes a series of VEO case studies and then applies Mill’s methods of logic to gain an understanding for how military force, finance, and leadership variables might affect outcomes.⁶² The predictive analysis identifies four driving forces, then manipulates the same three variables (military force, finance, and leadership) to produce various possible outcomes.

Explanation of the Comparative Analysis

Table 3 lists twenty-two VEOs, each subject of a historical case study contributing to the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment effort. To qualify for this analysis, each VEO must have used violence as a tool towards political ends, must have been transnational (broadly defined), and must have ended (i.e., it excludes current VEOs, such as Boko Haram). The analysis examined each and assigned scores of “very high,” “high,” “low,” or “very low” to three critical variables: external military force applied against the VEO, the organization’s access to finance and other resources, and the efficacy of its leadership and organization. Next, the analysis assessed the

VEO's "durability" as "high," "medium," or "low." Finally, the organization's end is described as either "defeat," "compromise," or "victory." For a more detailed description of the variables and scores, see Appendix B.

Table 3. Military Force, Resources, and Leadership in VEOs

Case	External Military Force	Finance and Resources	Leadership and Organization	Durability	End
Almoravids	High	High	Low	High	Defeat
Assassins	Very High	High	Very High	High	Defeat
AUC	Low	High	High	Med	Defeat
Ghostdance	Very High	Very Low	Low	Low	Defeat
GIA	Low	High	Low	Med	Defeat
Jacobites	Very High	Low	High	Med	Defeat
John Brown	Very High	Very High	High	Low	Defeat
Knights Templar	High	Very High	Very High	High	Defeat
Mad Mahdi	Very High	Low	High	Low	Defeat
Muslim Brotherhood (violent splinter)	High	High	High	High	Compromise
MEK	High	Low	Low	Med	Defeat
Early Islam	Very High	High	High	High	Victory
Wahhabism	High	Low	Very High	High	Victory
Sikh	Very High	High	Low	High	Defeat
Taliban (1994-2001)	High	High	Very High	High	Victory
Tenskwatawa	Very High	Very Low	Low	Low	Defeat
Tupac Amaru	High	Low	Low	Low	Defeat
Mormons	High	Very High	High	High	Compromise
Zapatistas	Low	Low	Low	Med	Compromise

Implications of the Comparative Analysis

- 1) *“External military force” has the strongest correlation with “ends”.* Although a few cases deviate, military force appears to be the most critical variable in determining how the group ends. The correlation between military force and durability is less clear. Most VEOs that achieved victory or high durability in the face of a strong military threat—Wahhabism, Early Islam, and the Knights Templar for example—did so by building or co-opting a strong military force of their own.
- 2) *Finance and leadership are important.* Individually, the finance and leadership variables’ correlation with durability and ends is inconclusive. Taken together, however—e.g., high finance and high leadership—VEOs tend to be more durable and likely to achieve their ends.
- 3) *There is no one critical variable.* Although military force has the strongest correlation, none of the three variables appears to be a “silver bullet.” This observation indicates that each VEO is subject to its own context and character, and thus there is no one critical variable. A few interesting “exceptions” to the expected outcomes are instructive. First, Wahhabism achieved victory through combination of a puritanical ideology with a ethno-political movement—much like ISIL. Second, the AUC fell apart as a result of systematic government coercion, rather than direct application of military force. Third, the Knights Templar appear to have experienced a failure of ideology that contributed to a perception of weakness and corruption following tactical losses in the Holy Land. This in turn led to lost legitimacy amongst the clergy and nobility. Thus, when the French king challenged the organization, it lacked broad support and collapsed despite its financial strength and organizational cohesion.

Limitations of the Comparative Analysis

A few key limitations comprise the structure of this analysis. First, leadership efficacy is a nebulous concept that is difficult to quantify. Although this analysis attempted to measure the

results of good leadership, namely cohesion and ability to transition, one could measure leadership in many other ways. Second, each of the variables were assessed as aggregates over the life of the organization, while an assessment at critical points—crises, key changes to the environment, etc—might provide different insights. Third, the analysis measures only the “quantity” of military forces and finance, and not their “character.” The sources of revenue, for example, or the type of military intervention, might be important variables. Finally, most of the cases studies were the result of a single author’s study, resulting in a narrow focus of subjective judgment. Multiple perspectives on each case study would have resulted in a stronger analysis.

Explanation of the Predictive Analysis

The framework below incorporates elements from Robert Clark’s “Predictive Analysis” model as well as tendency and potential assessments as defined by joint planning doctrine.⁶³ This model is a useful means of understanding key influences and relationships among the forces that interact with ISIL. It incorporates an analysis of the recent past and present to understand possible future outcomes. The adapted model below uses four steps. The first step seeks to identify and map social, economic, and political forces critical to the context of the problem. Second, the model describes how these forces interacted to create the current situation. The third step involves manipulation of individual forces to develop several scenarios, each controlled for a different variable. The fourth step introduces a new force—or, in the case below, it changes the character of an existing force—and examines the implications for a final scenario.[‡] Following these steps, the section below identifies four critical forces acting on ISIL, then explores possible scenarios, each written as fictional yet plausible newspaper articles. Finally, this paper concludes with an assessment of risks and opportunities for US policy. Although this model is broadly

[‡] See Figure 1 in Appendix C.

applicable, this analysis builds upon the earlier sections of this paper and thus focuses on ISIL's leadership.

The Four Forces

The Sunni-Shia Proxy War

ISIL's rise and future trajectory cannot be understood outside the context of regional politics, specifically rapidly intensifying Sunni-Shia hostility. ISIL is, in part, a Sunni transnationalist movement, and has capitalized on Syrian and Iraqi misrule. Excepting the government of Iraq, it appears as if ISIL is second on everyone's list of enemies: Saudi Arabia and Egypt are more concerned with Iranian-sponsored Shia incursions; Iran's strategic objectives run through ISIL, but are not limited to it; even the Iraqi Kurds, inimical enemies of ISIL, have benefitted from its presence. In other words, the reality of this regional struggle makes each actor's calculus complex, but regional actors appear to have aligned along either side of the Sunni-Shia fault line. Scenarios that result in reduced Sunni-Shia tension appear very unlikely; for this reason, this force remains at a *constant increase in intensity* throughout the model.

Long-Term US-led Coalition Presence

The US and its coalition partners have maintained a near constant presence in the region since the Gulf War in 1991. Regional actors perceive the durable US presence as neocolonial, Crusader-Zionist, or alternately supporting one faction against another. US military forces based in Saudi Arabia served as one of al-Qaeda's primary grievances, and continued presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere remains offensive to many in the region. US vital interests—oil, Israel, and terrorism—have remained constant while pursuit of softer interests, such as democracy promotion and regional balance, has made American foreign policy appear

ambiguous or inconsistent. Thus the primary characteristics of this critical force are its *divisiveness and inconsistency*.

ISIL's Revenue Stream

Since it began to govern territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIL's primary revenue source has been petroleum. Although ISIL has developed alternative sources of revenue it is still dependent on illicit oil exports. When global oil prices dropped in mid-2014, ISIL experienced a corresponding drop in revenues, causing significant pressure to the organization and possibly contributing to a subsequent lack of territorial gains in the region.⁶⁴ ISIL needs to pay its fighters, provide services to its people, and operate a bureaucracy—all of which require money.

Dependence on oil and increasing internal pressure thus characterize this critical force. As this paper focuses on ISIL's leadership, this force remains constant for the purposes of the analysis.

ISIL's Leadership

Like the Taliban, ISIL's leadership remains reclusive and opaque; its outlines, however, are still visible and informative. ISIL appears to be a centralized, hierarchical, and disciplined organization, as contrasted with peer *Salafi-jihadist* organizations such as al-Qaeda and Boko Haram, which are typically flat, loosely aligned networks. ISIL's organizational alloy of *Salafis* and Ba'athists indicate that their decisions are shaped equally by *Salafi* ideology, Sunni nationalism, and technical (military and bureaucratic) expertise. Its success throughout 2014 also indicates a talent for practical exploitation of local politics, although it appears to have relied on violent, coercive measures thus far. It is unclear if ISIL is capable of sustained governance. Thus, leadership as a critical force is characterized primarily by its *effectiveness, ideology, centralization, and violence*.

Present Target Model: "Stalemate and Sustainability"

In sum, these four forces create a situation in which ISIL can sustain itself for the near term but cannot break the current stalemate. Meanwhile, a coalition of uncertain political will and mixed risk tolerance attempts to accomplish varied, ambiguous, and competitive strategic objectives. Increasing sectarian violence in under- or mis-governed territory is the chaotic space in which ISIL thrives and maintains strategic initiative. However, ISIL faces declining revenues that have already increased internal tensions and restricted its means. Finally, although the international community rejected the “caliphate” as illegitimate, ISIL has achieved local acquiescence and continues to deepen its control and governance capacity. Although its ability to govern remains in doubt, should it prove a viable alternative to the regional *status quo* it will also prove a durable, dangerous movement.

Predictive Analysis Vignettes

The following vignettes manipulate two variables—coalition presence and leadership—to explore three potential outcomes for ISIL. Framed as the first paragraph of newspaper articles, they each describe what might happen as the vector or character of each driving force changes.

Extrapolated Future Model: “Expanding Regional Crisis”

- 1) All four variables remain constant.
- 2) Vignette extrapolates to approximately one year from present.

“Presidential Candidates Face Limited Options against the Expanding Islamic State”

WASHINGTON, DC—As the November elections approach rapidly, both presidential candidates have actively avoided answering specific questions regarding their strategy to combat the expanding Islamic State. The US-led coalition of nations, sixty-strong a year ago, has lost most of its Sunni Arab participants following the successful Iranian nuclear deal. Although US interests are now strongly aligned with Tehran and even Damascus, cooperation with them

remains a political non-starter. European Union partners have refocused to domestic counter-terror efforts following a series of deadly attacks in Germany, France, and Spain. In the Middle East, Jordan is drowning in refugees from the conflict, and King Abdullah faces increasing dissent following expansion of the war into the Kingdom.

The Islamic State, despite sustained coalition airstrikes and a succession of Iraqi ground offensives, has consolidated its hold territory in Syria and Iraq, while also expanding its operations into northern Lebanon and Jordan. Local Sunni tribes appear to have been coerced into compliance; indeed, many have willingly joined the Islamic State as sectarian tensions deepen. Oil revenues remain flat, however, and reports from Syria indicate that factions among the estimated 50,000 foreign fighters are becoming restless after not having been paid for many months . . .

Projected Future Model: “Succession or Decentralization”

- 1) Sunni-Shia proxy war, coalition presence, and ISIL revenue stream remain constant.
- 2) ISIL experiences a leadership crisis.
- 3) Vignette projects 1-2 years from present date.

“Future of the Islamic State Uncertain after Death of the Caliph”

BAGHDAD—The Islamic State is facing a succession crisis as multiple reports confirm the death of caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Although some details of his death remain uncertain, it does appear to be the result of an Iranian Quds force raid into rural Syria. Tehran has remained silent on the matter, but Islamic State social media is afire with vows of vengeance. Saudi Arabia and Egypt, already reluctant partners in the US-led coalition against the Islamic State, have both voiced concerns about growing Iranian influence in the region. Combined with the recent reports

of Shia militia atrocities in Mosul, these concerns make the coalition appear likely to lose its Sunni partners.

The Islamic State has proclaimed Umar al-Anbari, believed to be a former member of the secretive Sharia Council, as al-Baghdadi's successor. However, the succession is contested and has exposed fault lines within the upper tiers of the organization. Several members of the Shura Council have denounced al-Anbari as having been corrupted by the narcotics trade. Two of al-Anbari's close associates were recently killed in northern Lebanon, allegedly while engaged in a firefight with Hezbollah cocaine smugglers . . .

Forecasted Future Model: "Extreme Pressure"

- 1) Sunni-Shia proxy war and revenue stream remain constant.
- 2) A unified coalition executes a ground offensive against ISIL.
- 3) Simultaneously, ISIL experiences a leadership crisis.
- 4) Vignette forecasts 2-3 years from present day.

"Revitalized Coalition Pressuring the Islamic State from Every Corner"

WASHINGTON—European, Arab, and American political will to counter the Islamic State appears revitalized following last month's terror attacks in Mecca and Paris. Acting under the authority of the revised Authorization for the Use of Military Force, the president has given the green-light to a large ground offensive comprising more than 50,000 coalition troops. This invasion, coming soon after reports that caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a coalition airstrike last week, may spell the end for the Islamic State. . .

"US-Iran Troops Clash following Victory against the Islamic State"

BAGHDAD—Two service members are dead and Pentagon officials are answering tough questions this week after US advisor teams clashed with Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps

troops outside Mosul. Although the recent coalition ground offensive has pushed the Islamic State completely out of Iraq, the US may soon find itself in a direct confrontation with Iran . . .

“Islamist Militants Demonstrate Increasing Sophistication, Stymie African Union Efforts”

LAGOS—In spite of significant aid from the United States and France, the African Union coalition formed last year has failed to make significant progress against the Islamic State in West Africa. The increasing frequency and sophistication of terrorist attacks in Nigeria, Niger, and Mali might be attributable to the presence of foreign fighters with experience fighting in the Middle East, some experts say . . .

Conclusions: What is Next for ISIL?

In a complex adaptive system, predictions of first order effects—to say nothing of effects beyond the first order—are educated guesses at best. Regardless, the models and analyses above are still useful predictive tools. This section, informed by the research on ISIL and the Taliban alongside the comparative and predictive analyses, examines a few potentialities for the future of ISIL’s leadership.

Pressuring ISIL’s Leadership

A typical counterinsurgency or counterterrorism approach to a VEO includes targeting its leadership, i.e. decapitation efforts. The general efficacy of these efforts is debatable.[§] Increased pressure or successful decapitation may result in unintended decentralization of ISIL. While less capable, ISIL may also thus become more complex, less predictable, and more difficult to target. Decentralization may, however, be a desirable effect. A factionalized ISIL will likely be easier to contain, if not completely defeat. The Taliban provide an instructive example: although their defeat in 2001-2 may not have been “total,” they no longer pose a threat to the US or its vital

[§] See, for example Jenna Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,” *Security Studies* (18, 2009), 719–755; Patrick Johnston, “Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns,” *International Security* (Spring 2012, 36:4), 47-79.

interests. In essence, decapitation operations will introduce chaos to the system that is ISIL; outcomes may not be predictable but they are most likely favorable to the US. A sustained campaign against ISIL's leadership is thus likely critical *supporting* effort.

Separating the Ba'athists from the Salafi-Jihadists

ISIL's strength is its ability to link tactical (local, Ba'athist driven) success to strategic (regional and global, *Salafi-jihadist* driven) goals. The Ba'athist-*Salafi* alloy is the critical requirement that supports this capability. Separating these two groups—for example, by exposing *Salafi* hypocrisy to the ideologically motivated foreign fighters—is likely a vital part of any strategy aimed at defeating ISIL. Although the core leadership appears to be a fusion of these two groups and ideologies, as ISIL becomes larger it becomes more vulnerable to factionalization.

Change in the Decision Calculus

As ISIL acts more like the state it aspires to be, it may need to mitigate its violence. ISIL is, for the time being, committed to unlimited war while simultaneously violently coercing conquered territory. Continuing these two efforts will require resources that its revenue streams cannot currently sustain and eventually work against ISIL's governance efforts. As ISIL reaches the limits of violent political coercion, the leadership's decision calculus will likely change to reflect the needs of the organization rather than violent *jihad*. Although ISIL has thus far effectively integrated its ideology with practical action, a shift to interest-based decisions may conflict with its *Salafi* principles. Turning to narco-trafficking as a source of revenue, for example, weakens the social and cultural capital available to its leadership.

¹ For example, see summary narrative of ISIL's exploitation of Sunni grievances in al-Anbar, see *The Rise of ISIS*, Dir. Martin Smith, Frontline, (WGBH 2014), documentary.

- ² Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Anthony Briggs (Penguin Classics: New York, 2007); Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Another Leaf Press: 2012).
- ³ Benjamin Jones and Benjamin Olken, "Do Leaders Matter? National Leadership and Growth since World War II," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 120.3 (2005): 835-864.
- ⁴ Robert Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know," *Security Studies* 22 (2013): 153-179.
- ⁵ Sharon Nepstad and Clifford Bob, "When Do Leaders Matter? Hypothesis on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movement," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 11.1 (2011): 1-22.
- ⁶ G. S. Ligon and Douglas C. Derrick, "The Science of VEO Leaders' Decision Making: Expected Errors," National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 25 March 2015, presentation.
- ⁷ Steven Kaplan, Mark Kelbanov, and Morten Sorensen, "Which CEO Characteristics and Abilities Matter," NBER Working Paper Series (July 2008).
- ⁸ Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Leading Marines*, (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps, 2014).
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Appendix A. Critical Influences on the Salafi-Jihadist Ideology

Table 4. Salafi-Jihadist Ideology

THEORIST	KEY TEXT/KEY IDEAS	IMPLICATIONS
Taqi ibn Taymiyyah 13th -14th century Syria	<i>A Great Compilation of Fatwa</i> (among many others) - emphasized Islam as practiced by the first three generations following the Prophet (the “ <i>salaf</i> ”) - originated idea of “ <i>takfir</i> ,” declaring apostate those who are not “true” Muslims - Harshly critical of Christians, Jews, Sufism, and Shi’a - Unity of Islam and political authority	- Foundation of Islamist political philosophy - No possibility of a “modern” interpretation of Islam - <i>Takfir</i> provides moral justification for war against fellow Muslims
Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahab 18th Century Arabia	<i>The Book of Monotheism [tawhid]</i> - Strict textual interpretation of the Qur’an - Narrow definition of <i>tawhid</i> (unity) of God; Muslims who practiced otherwise were not Muslims at all - Political-religious union with Saud family	- Offensive <i>jihad</i> against <i>shirk</i> (polytheism) - <i>Shirk</i> includes many practices of Sunni and Shi’a Islam, Sufism - Alliance with Saudi rulers associated Wahhabism with Mecca and Medina, granting them significant cultural capital
Sayyid Qutb Muslim Brotherhood	<i>Milestones</i> - Ultimate goal is re-establishment of Caliphate - <i>Shari’a</i> is a way of life - Requirement for “pioneering vanguard” that awakens <i>umma</i> - Rescue world from <i>jahiliyya</i>	- Caliph is infallible and sole source of truth; demands absolute, global obedience; totalitarian - Vanguard sees itself as elite; not subject to common morality - Justifies use of extreme means; violence used to “waken” <i>umma</i> is acceptable
S. K. Malik Pakistani Army	<i>The Quranic Concept of War</i> - War serves God, not politics; ultimate target is the soul of the enemy - <i>jihad</i> is an obligatory response to those who block Islam’s spread, called “counter-initiatory” forces	- War is God’s will; peace is a means to an end, not an end itself - Islam is in perpetual conflict with non-Islam; <i>jihad</i> is a defensive effort against non-Islamic offensive action - Strategy of <i>jihad</i> is long-term (generations) and durable through setbacks
Abdullah Yusef Azzam “Father of Global Jihad”	<i>Defense of Muslim Lands</i> - Defensive <i>jihad</i> is every individual’s obligation (<i>fard ‘ayn</i>) until <i>dar al-Islam</i> is free from foreign occupation and Caliphate is established	- Encourages global recruitment and migration to places of <i>jihad</i> - Framing <i>jihad</i> as defensive permits extreme measures
Ayman al-Zawahiri Leader, Al-Qaeda	<i>Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner</i> - Historical perspective: centuries-long fight against Crusader-Zionists; narrative of Muslim victimization - Synthesis of “near” (secular Muslim states) and “far” (Western) enemies – both are equal priority - Need for <i>jihad</i> sanctuary to prepare and train, e.g. Afghanistan	- Islam and Western norms are not reconcilable; ideology is its own logic and therefore not susceptible to “rational” negotiation - More attacks directly on Western targets, e.g. “lone-wolf”; <i>jihad</i> has a global theater - Global <i>jihad</i> will migrate to areas in which the geography, politics, etc., support insurgency
Abu Bakr Naji Information Operations, Al-Qaeda	<i>Management of Savagery</i> - <i>Jihadi</i> violence can create chaos through which the Islamic State can	- Global <i>Jihadi</i> worldview and methods are similar to other ideological insurgencies (e.g. Che Guevara, Carlos

	grow and eventually govern - War of attrition through insurgency and political violence will erode legitimacy of Muslim governments and expose weakness of Western states - Ultimate goal is legitimate governance of the Islamic State (i.e., the Caliphate)	Marighella) - Violence is a tool used to a) create disorder; b) exhaust the enemy; c) provoke and over-response - Strategy must account for practicalities governance - Appears to be a “handbook” for ISIL strategy and tactics
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Appendix B. Definitions of Comparative Analysis Terms

External Military Force. An aggregate measure of externally applied military force. Very Low/Low indicates little effective military force. Very High/High indicates significant, effective, sustained military force applied against group

Access to Finance and Resources. An aggregate measure of access to a sustainable source of revenue and other resources. Very High/High indicates the group developed or sourced lucrative, long-term supplies of money and resources. Very Low/Low indicates the group had only sporadic or limited access to money and other resources.

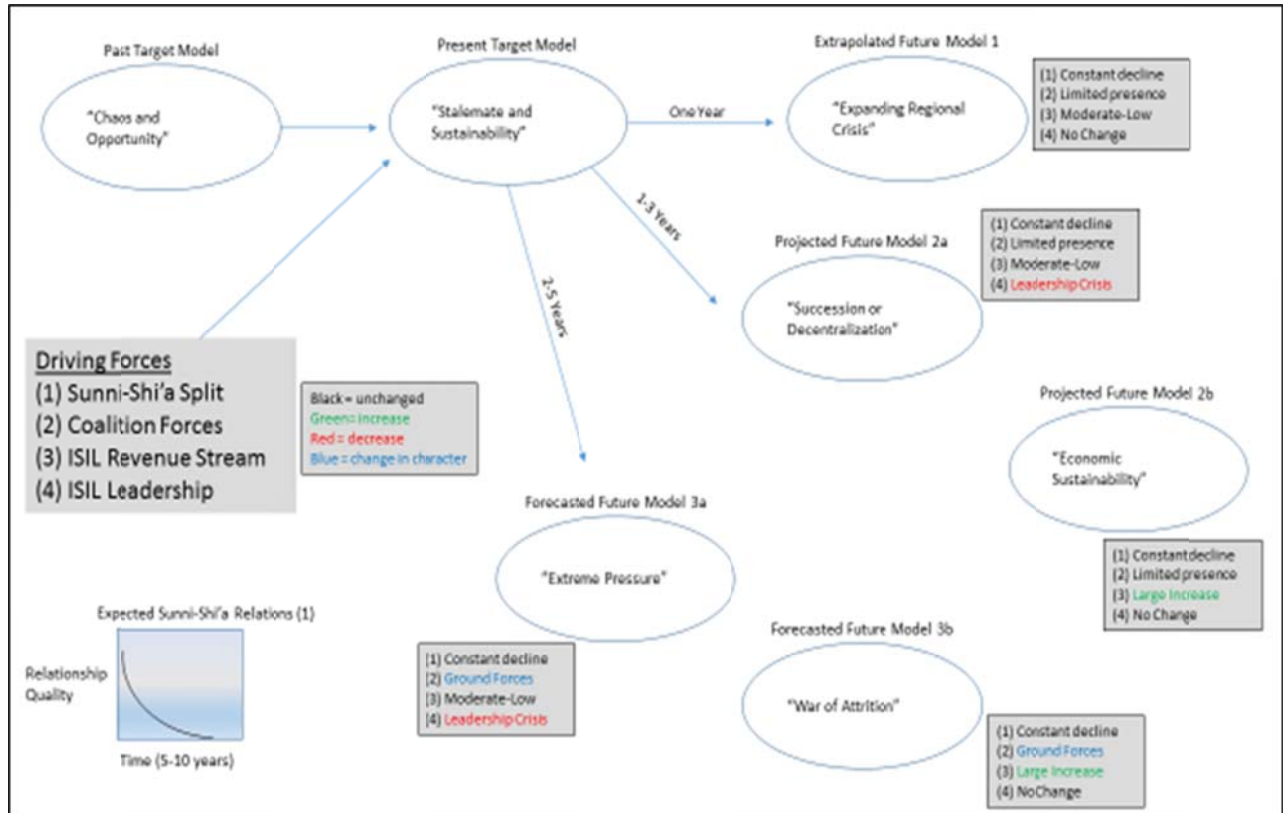
Leadership and Organizational Efficacy. A qualitative assessment of the organization's cohesion and ability to transition leaders. High/Very High indicates a history of effective succession, unity of effort, and limited factionalization. Very Low/Low indicates that the organization was unable to transition leaders and high levels of factionalization.

Organizational Durability. A qualitative assessment of how long and through how many crises the VEO endured.

End. A description of how the VEO ended. “Political defeat” means that the VEO failed to accomplish its goals and either disappeared or was marginalized. “Political compromise” means the organization gained some concessions and transitioned away from violent means, or that the *status quo* power incorporated the VEO. “Political victory” means that the VEO replaced the *status quo* power.

Appendix C. Predictive Analysis Diagram

Figure 1. Predictive Analysis Diagram



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