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IHS Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism

Islamic State

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Key Facts

Name: Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya, or the Islamic State.

Aliases: The Islamic State was previously known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and prior to that it operated as a front organisation for Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) until it was disowned by Al-Qaeda and its affiliate status revoked in February 2014.

Scope: Transnational **Orientation:** Sunni Islamic **Objective:** Revolutionary.

Status: Active since being formed in October 2004.

Leader: Ibrahim al-Badri (alias Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi).

Summary: The Islamic State, previously known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), is a Sunni militant Islamist group that was founded in Iraq in October 2004 when the leader of Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, pledged fealty to then Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and changed the name of his group. While initially known as Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn, or Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the group subsequently created a series of front organisations, the longest lasting of which was the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), which became ISIL in 2013. However, the disavowal of the group by the Al-Qaeda central leadership in early 2014 meant that ISIL was no longer a front organisation for an Al-Qaeda affiliate and should be considered a group in its own right. After the group's announcement in June 2014 that it had established the khilafa, or caliphate, in territory running from the Syrian governorate of Aleppo in the west to the Iraqi province of Diyala in the east, it renamed itself the Islamic State. The group has become notorious for its use of indiscriminate, mass-casualty attacks, frequently including suicide bombers. Such attacks have often been sectarian in nature, targeting Iraq's Shia Muslim community, and by 2006-2007 these efforts had led to extreme levels of sectarian violence in the country. In addition, the Islamic State has carried out repeated high-profile attacks on government targets in Baghdad. However, efforts by United States-led coalition forces, combined with the rise of the Sunni Arab Awakening Council movement from 2006, forced the group to abandon the territory it controlled, reduced the group's popular support, and degraded its capabilities. Nevertheless, it proved itself capable of recovering from such setbacks - including the loss of its senior leadership in 2006 and 2010 - and the Islamic State continues to carry out high-profile, mass-casualty attacks across the country. Since 2010, it has sought to capitalise upon the weakness of Iraq's nascent democratic government - which is dominated by Shia politicians - by launching a renewed series of sectarian attacks across the country. While this failed to provoke the retaliatory Shia violence the Islamic State sought, the group continued to demonstrate its operational capabilities with frequent mass-casualty operations through 2010-2013. Furthermore, the group was able to exploit mounting popular Sunni discontent with the government during this period, as evidenced by its ability to seize and occupy the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar province in January 2014. While Ramadi was recaptured shortly after, the Islamic State's control of Fallujah, in conjunction with smaller Sunni insurgent and anti-government groups, continued over the following six months, and the group's territorial campaign spread to northern Iraq in June. The group seized control of the city of Mosul, the second largest city in the country, before advancing further south and seizing further territory in Salah ad-Din and Diyala provinces over the following days. As Islamic State forces advanced further south towards Baghdad in mid-June, the offensive served to highlight the significant level of threat posed by the group to the Iraqi state. In addition, since April 2013, the Islamic State has been operating openly in



the anti-government insurgency in Syria, where it maintains a substantial presence in the north and east of the country and represents one of the key anti-government actors.

Overview

Group Formation

Following the United States-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, militant Islamist group Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, or the Monotheism and Jihad Group - led by Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Kalaylah (alias Abu Musab al-Zarqawi) - carried out a series of attacks on coalition forces and the international community, most notably when it was blamed for a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attack in Baghdad in August which killed the UN Special Representative to Iraq. In October 2004, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to then Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, and the group was renamed Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn or Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

In a largely unsuccessful attempt to unify the various Sunni jihadist factions operating in Iraq under its own command, AQI subsequently formed a series of umbrella organisations, culminating in the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) - led by Iraqi national Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) - in October 2006.

Although the US military initially claimed such alliances were simply Iraqi front organisations for the foreign-led AQI, it claimed Abu Omar and other Iraqi commanders became more influential after Zarqawi was killed by US forces in June 2006, and was succeeded as AQI emir by the Egyptian Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir).

Abu Hamza and Abu Omar were both killed in April 2010, and Iraqi national Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi subsequently became the emir of both AQI and the ISI. In April 2013, Qurashi changed the name of AQI's front organisation from the ISI to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and subsequent AQI operations in Iraq and Syria have been claimed in this name. Qurashi also claimed that Syrian militant Islamist group Jabhat al-Nusra - which AQI had helped establish - would henceforth operate under the ISIL's command. However, Jabhat al-Nusra emir Al-Fateh Abu Mohammad al-Golani responded by issuing a statement in which he refused to be integrated into the ISIL, and pledged allegiance directly to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Golani's position was supported by Zawahiri, and on 9 June 2013 Al-Jazeera claimed to have a copy of a letter written by Zawahiri to both Golani and Qurashi in which Zawahiri dissolved ISIL and commanded that Jabhat al-Nusra remain an independent Al-Qaeda affiliate, with Qurashi's remit limited to Iraq.

However, in open defiance of Zawahiri, Qurashi issued an audio statement late on 14 June 2013 rejecting these demands and insisting that "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant will remain, as long as we have a vein pumping or an eye blinking. It remains and we will not give it up". Following an outbreak of fierce fighting between the ISIL and an array of Syrian jihadist groups - including Jabhat al-Nusra - in January 2014, Zawahiri issued an audio statement on 22 January calling for a ceasefire. When ISIL directly contravened this order and launched a series of attacks on 1 February, Al-Qaeda responded on 3 February with a statement that disavowed the group, stating that the ISIL was "not a branch of Al-Qaeda and we have no organisational relationship with it", and adding that it was not responsible for ISIL's "actions and behaviours". The statement represented the official end of ISIL's affiliate status with Al-Qaeda, with the group now more accurately described as an independent organisation in its own right.



In the statement on 29 June 2014, ISIL's main spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, announced the establishment of the khilafa, or caliphate, in territory running from the Syrian governorate of Aleppo in the west to the Iraqi province of Diyala in the east. Adnani also announced that Qurashi was the khalifa, or caliph, of this new structure and that, henceforth, the official name for the group would simply be the Islamic State.

Aims and Objectives

When AQI, the forerunner of the Islamic State, was founded in late 2004, its initial aims were to wage jihad to expel foreign forces from Iraq - specifically coalition forces participating in the United States-led 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of the country - and to overthrow Iraq's new government and replace it with a Sunni Islamist state governed according to its radical interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). Implicit in this latter aim was the suppression of Shia Islam in Iraq, which resulted in Shia communities being a particular focus of the group's operations since its formation.

Following the completion of the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq in December 2011, AQI's primary objective became the overthrow of the Shia-dominated government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, and the group has correspondingly intensified its targeting of Shia communities in 2012-2014 in an apparent attempt to incite renewed sectarian conflict.

In addition, the group has objectives beyond Iraq. Following its formation, letters from Al-Qaeda leaders to AQI founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi recommended the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq as a base for operations against other Arab countries and Israel. While little progress was made on this front, following the onset of the so-called Arab Spring anti-government uprising in neighbouring Syria in 2011, AQI played a key role in forming and supporting Jabhat al-Nusra, and from April 2013 began operating openly in Syria.

In the initial years following its formation, AQI attempted to establish itself as the protector of the Sunni population in Iraq. During the sectarian conflict engulfing the country - which was exacerbated by AQI attacks targeting Shia Muslims and reached its peak in 2006-2007 - AQI promoted itself as the only force capable of protecting Sunni citizens from Shia death squads and the Shia-dominated security forces. As such, the group was accepted, if not supported, by many Sunni Arabs in central and western Iraq.

However, the group's uncompromising and aggressive agenda, and its brutal tactics - which were increasingly directed at its own Sunni constituencies - undermined its claim to be the guardian of ordinary Sunnis, and from late 2005 AQI began facing mounting opposition in Anbar and other strongholds from a coalition of Sunni tribal militias, which evolved into the US-backed Awakening Council in 2006.

This widespread rejection of AQI by its Sunni constituency significantly reduced the group's freedom of operation over the following years. However, mounting Sunni grievances with Maliki's government in 2012-2013 - while not translating into direct support for AQI or later for the Islamic State - provided the group with an opportunity to reassert itself, as was demonstrated by its seizure and occupation of the largely Sunni cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar in January 2014, following local Sunni protests at perceived discrimination by the government. The group further exploited Sunni opposition to, and disillusionment with, the government in June 2014 to facilitate its capture of further territory in northern Iraq.



In Syria, the Islamic State carried out various public relations activities in a bid to cultivate popular support following its formal emergence in April 2013 - including hosting Ramadan street parties and establishing 'complaints departments'. However, as in Iraq, increasingly brutal and assertive behaviour in its areas of operation prompted a coalition of former rebel allies to turn on ISIL in January 2014 in an attempt to oust it from the country, and the available evidence does not indicate a substantial level of popular support for the group in Syria.

Area of Operation

The Islamic State, and previously as AQI, is primarily active in central, northern (although not in the Kurdish region), and western Iraq, as well as in the capital Baghdad. As such, the movement's operational areas have tended to coincide with concentrations of Sunni Arabs, and areas where sectarian and ethnic fault lines offer the potential to be exploited to foment civil war.

South of Baghdad, the triangle of territory formed by Al-Iskandariyya, Al-Mahmudiyya, and Al-Yusufiyya in Babil province traditionally formed a key recruiting base and area of operations for the group, and the area long served as a jumping-off point for attacks into the predominantly Shia cities of Najaf and Karbala, as well as attacks on pilgrim routes during Shia festivals. Other sectarian fault lines like Mosul and Kirkuk in the north have also been important operating areas.

Following the emergence of the Awakening Council movement in Anbar in 2005-2006, AQI was driven out of most of the northern and western Euphrates river valley towns (Al-Qaim, Al-Haditha, and Hit), and the western Baghdad approaches of Abu Ghurayb, Fallujah, and Ramadi were likewise secured by an alliance of local tribesmen and Iraqi forces. Consequently, eastern Iraq and the Tigris and Diyala river valleys became an increasingly important AQI base area and supply line.

As of 2013, the group was primarily operational in the capital Baghdad and in the governorates to the north and west of the city, namely Diyala, Salah ad-Din, Anbar, Ninawa, and Kirkuk. However, regular operations are carried out throughout the country as part of a deliberate campaign to assert its influence. AQI's ongoing capability to mount co-ordinated operations across the country was demonstrated by the onset of its "Destroying the Walls" offensive in July 2012, which featured a series of simultaneous attacks on multiple cities across the country - notably a 16 August 2012 operation in which at least 120 people were killed in 19 different cities.

In January 2014, the group launched a major offensive in Anbar province, seizing and occupying the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. While Ramadi was quickly captured by security forces and pro-government tribesmen, Fallujah remained under the group's control over the following months. The Islamic State's territorial control was further expanded in June 2014 when it launched a series of operations in northern Iraq. In particular, the group seized control of the majority of the city of Mosul - the second largest city in the county - before advancing further east and south into Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Diyala, capturing cities such as Tikrit and Kirkuk, although control of Kirkuk was retaken shortly after by Peshmerga (Kurdish security forces). The group also expressed its intention to march on Baghdad, although it seems unlikely that the group would be capable of capturing the capital.



Two Islamic State militants standing over the body of a dead soldier in the city of Tikrit in Iraq's Salah ad Din province in June 2014. The image was shared on social media by an Islamic State-affiliated Twitter account. (IHS Jane's/JTIC)

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International

In August 2005, the Islamic State - then operating as AQI - claimed responsibility for a rocket attack on United States naval vessels moored off the Jordanian port of Aqaba. Subsequently, on 9 November 2005, the group - then led by the Jordanian national Abu Musab al-Zarqawi - carried out the high-profile suicide bombing of three international hotels in the Jordanian capital Amman, after which it threatened further attacks in the country. However, these international attacks proved an exception, and in the years following its initial formation AQI remained strongly focused on operations inside Iraq. US intelligence officials also assessed at the time that the group did not present an active threat to countries outside the region.

However, the expansion of operations into the wider region has been a long-term secondary goal of AQI, and on 16 February 2012, the US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, claimed that the organisation had begun "extending its reach" into Syria during the ongoing anti-government uprising against the administration of President Bashar al-Assad. Subsequently, in December 2012 the US Department of State designated Jabhat al-Nusra - then the leading Syrian jihadist group - as an alias of AQI.

In April 2013, AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi revealed that Jabhat al-Nusra had indeed been formed by AQI militants, and claimed it would now operate as a formal branch of AQI under the aegis of ISIL. However, this was resisted by Jabhat al-Nusra leader Al-Fateh abu



Muhammad al-Golani, who acknowledged AQI's role in establishing his group, but insisted on reporting directly to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. While Zawahiri subsequently ruled that Jabhat al-Nusra would remain Al-Qaeda's nominated affiliate in Syria, and that AQI's remit should be limited to Iraq, Qurashi's forces continued to operate under the new ISIL name, both in Iraq and in Syria. Over the remainder of 2013 and into 2014, ISIL was primarily operational in the north and east of Syria, notably in Aleppo, Idlib, Al-Raqqa, Deir ez Zour, and Hama governorates. In particular, ISIL controls the city of Al-Raqqa, capital of the governorate - the only governorate capital controlled by anti-government insurgents in Syria as of July 2014.

Alliances and Rivalries

The Islamic State maintains relations with a range of sub-state actors throughout Iraq and abroad:

Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)

In the years following its initial formation, AQI formed a series of umbrella organisations in an apparent attempt to assimilate other Sunni jihadist groups in Iraq, and to distance itself from its image of being an organisation dominated by foreigners. This initiative followed the promptings of Al-Qaeda leadership figures such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, who urged AQI founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi to develop better relations in Iraq and spend more effort on cultivating alliances.

In January 2006 AQI formed the Majlis Shura Mujahideen fil-Iraq, or Mujahedin Shura Council in Iraq (MSC), whose nominal leader was an Iraqi known as Abu Abdullah al-Rashid al-Baghdadi. However, the groups that joined were all inconsequential Iraqi Salafist movements, and the alliance seemed primarily intended to mask the central role being played within AQI by foreigners such as Zarqawi. AQI's MSC allies included Jaish al-Taifa al-Mansura, or Army of the Victorious Sect, the only movement of the five to have carried out high-profile attacks; Saraya Ansar al-Tawhid, or Partisan Brigades of Monotheism; Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, or Islamic Jihad Brigades; Saraya al-Ghuraba, or Strangers Brigade; Kataib al-Ahwal, or Battalions of Horrors; and Jaish Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamaa, or Army of the Community of the People of the Traditions.

On 12 October 2006, jihadist websites posted a video announcing an alliance between the MSC and three other minor Iraqi jihadist groups: Jund al-Sahaba, or Army of Companions of the Prophet Muhammad; Kataib Ansar al-Tawhid wa al-Sunna, or Battalions of the Partisans of Monotheism and Prophetic Tradition; and Jaish al-Fatahin, or Army of Liberators - though doubt was immediately cast over whether some, all, or none of the latter's brigades had actually joined the alliance, known as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).

The spokesman named the ISI's emir as Abu Omar al-Baghdadi - subsequently identified as Iraqi national Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi - and called on Sunni insurgents, clerics, and tribal leaders to pledge allegiance to him. On 29 November 2006, the ISI's Ministry of Information announced that Saraya Fursan al-Tawhid, or Brigade of the Knights of Monotheism, and Saraya Millat al-Ibrahim, or Brigade of the Creed of Abraham - two previously unknown jihadist groups - had pledged allegiance to Abu Omar.

The then AQI leader, Egyptian national Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) - who had replaced Zarqawi following his death in June 2006 - officially held the position of ISI Minister of War, and was also named as the ISI's prime minister in September 2009. While the US military initially assessed that Abu Omar and the ISI were simply an Iraqi front for the Abu Hamza-led and foreign-dominated AQI, by the time Abu Hamza and Abu Omar were killed in April 2010, this assessment had been revised as Iraqi commanders had become more influential within the organisation.



Iraqi national Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi succeeded Abu Hamza and Abu Omar as head of AQI/ISI, and in April 2013 he announced that the ISI was being succeeded by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Subsequent AQI operations in Iraq and Syria have been claimed in this name. Since the removal of AQI's affiliate status in early 2014, the Islamic State has become an organisation in its own right.

Rival Sunni insurgent groups

Despite its record of attempting to assimilate fellow Sunni insurgent groups into a succession of umbrella movements, in practice the Islamic State has alienated many Sunni insurgent factions in Iraq as a result of its record of intimidation in Sunni Arab communities. The causes of resentment are numerous: uncompromising imposition of sharia (Islamic law); assassination of tribal elders and clerics; execution and corporal punishment of citizens; bans against involvement in elections and referenda; and statements concerning AQI's eventual aim of extinguishing all other power bases in its operating area.

Iraqi Sunni tribes emerged as a key rival to the Islamic State in many key areas from 2005 onwards, after the latter alienated the largest Sunni tribal confederations in Iraq - the Shammar, Jirba, Dulaym and Jubur. This closed off key operating areas in Anbar governorate, along the Euphrates and around the western, northwest, and northern approaches to Basra.

Although AQI sought to reconcile itself with tribal groups from late 2006, it failed to win back major tribal confederations or large tribes to its cause. On the contrary, tribal engagement by the Iraqi government and coalition forces spread beyond Anbar into Ninawa, Salah-al-Din and Diyala governorates, resulting in the incorporation of some Islamist-nationalist insurgent groups into the anti-AQI campaign.

The 1920 Revolution Brigades chapters in western Baghdad and Diyala province were key examples. These forces, signed up as provincial security forces (such as the Baqubah Guardians), engaged AQI elements in fierce fighting from 2007. The defection of the 1920 Revolution Brigades was caused by the killing of Harith Tahrir al-Dari, a commander with the group, as well as the leader of the Zuba tribe and nephew of prominent cleric Harith al-Dari, on 27 March 2007.

Nonetheless, the Islamic State's offensive in western and northern Iraq in early-to-mid 2014 saw the group co-ordinate with smaller Sunni insurgent and anti-government groups in order to capture and occupy territory. However, as of mid-June it remains to be seen whether the group is capable of building lasting relationships with such groups, or whether it considers them to be temporary alliances of convenience.

International

Al-Qaeda

The Islamic State became an Al-Qaeda affiliate - known as AQI - in October 2004, owing fealty initially to Osama bin Laden, and subsequently to his successor Ayman al-Zawahiri. However, while formally part of the wider Al-Qaeda movement, the Islamic State operated with a high degree of autonomy, and not always in line with the will of Al-Qaeda's central leadership.

In the early years of the insurgency, the Islamic State's affiliation with Al-Qaeda proved mutually beneficial, with the Al-Qaeda brand helping the group to attract foreign recruits and eclipse rival jihadist factions in Iraq, while the Al-Qaeda leadership benefited from its association with an insurgency that enjoyed considerable support across the Muslim world at that time. The Al-Qaeda leadership also saw the conflict in Iraq as an opportunity to pursue its ultimate objective of



establishing a caliphate in the Middle East, and in an intercepted letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi dated 9 July 2005, Zawahiri laid out a four-point strategy to expel US forces from Iraq, establish an Islamic state, expand operations into neighbouring countries, and take on Israel.

However, while the Al-Qaeda leadership's ability to influence Zarqawi was seemingly demonstrated by the formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in January 2006 - which appeared in line with Zawahiri's instruction to lay the groundwork for an Islamic state by building a popular support base - Zarqawi ignored other directives, such as Zawahiri's advice to end the group's controversial attacks on Shia civilians.

Apparently frustrated at Zarqawi's disobedience, the Al-Qaeda leadership sent another letter, this time written by Atiyatallah, an old Libyan comrade of Zarqawi, to reiterate its points. Dated 12 December 2005, the letter told Zarqawi to form alliances with moderate Sunnis, rather than kill them, and advised him to follow the orders of Bin Laden and Zawahiri on major strategic issues such as the war on Shia Muslims.

While this letter, which was found at the safe house where Zarqawi was killed in June 2006, indicated that relations between the Islamic State and the leadership were not good at that time, Zarqawi was succeeded as emir by Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) - a veteran member of Zawahiri's old Egyptian group El-Jihad - providing the Al-Qaeda leadership with an opportunity to increase its influence over its Iraqi affiliate.

Although the Islamic State appeared to be adhering to Zawahiri's strategy when it formed the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) a few months later, in practice the move served to exacerbate tensions between the group and other Sunni jihadist groups, which resented the Islamic State's perceived unilateralism. Meanwhile, mass-casualty attacks on Shia Muslims in Iraq continued. In a video released in October 2007, Bin Laden said the Iraqi insurgency had made "mistakes"; although he seemed to be criticising the infighting in the insurgency more generally, the message was widely perceived to be a criticism of the Islamic State in particular.

Irrespective, following the death of Zarqawi and the formation of the ISI, the group became an increasingly Iraqi-dominated organisation, with ISI leader Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) apparently largely immune to foreign influence.

The Islamic State's complex relationship with the central Al-Qaeda leadership continued following the deaths of Abu Hamza and Abu Omar in April 2010, with the April 2013 decision by AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi to rebrand the ISI as ISIL occurring despite Zawahiri's opposition. The breakdown in the relationship between Al-Qaeda and ISIL culminated in early February 2014 with a statement from the Al-Qaeda leadership disavowing any link with ISIL and effectively withdrawing its official affiliate status.

While ISIL did not immediately respond to Al-Qaeda's disavowal, the group was suspected of killing Abu Khalid al-Suri, Al-Qaeda's emissary to Syria, during an attack on 23 February. Suri - also a senior Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya commander who had been ordered by Zawahiri to mediate the ongoing dispute between ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra - was among seven people killed in an attack by militants on a Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya position in the Al-Halq area of the city of Aleppo in Syria's Aleppo governorate. Militant sources, cited by Reuters that day, claimed that the attack had been carried out by at least one suicide bomber who penetrated the compound along with four other attackers, prompting an engagement with those at the base before they were killed. ISIL did not confirm or deny involvement in the attack.

ISIL eventually clarified its position towards Al-Qaeda in a statement released on 22 April 2014. A spokesperson for the group, identified as Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, accused Al-Qaeda on betraying



the jihadist cause, stating: "Al-Qaeda today is no longer a base of jihad. The leaders of Al-Qaeda have deviated from the correct path." Adnani also alleged Al-Qaeda had "divided the ranks of the mujahideen in every place" and in particular with regard to ISIL, stating: "Its leadership has become a hammer to break the project of the Islamic State".

Zawahiri responded by releasing another statement on 2 May in which he again criticised ISIL's involvement in Syria, calling it "a political disaster" and claiming it had resulted in a "waterfall of blood", a reference to infighting between ISIL and other Islamist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra. He urged ISIL to withdraw from Syria and "busy itself with Iraq, which needs double its efforts".

Ten days later, on 12 May, Adnani released a response, rejecting Zawahiri's request, stating ISIL would not restrict its activities to Iraq, calling such a task "impossible because it is unreasonable, unrealistic, and illegitimate". He also launched a personal attack on Zawahiri and his leadership, declaring: "Sheikh Osama [bin Laden] gathered all the mujahedeen with one word, but you divided them and tore them apart." Adnani called on Zawahiri to remove the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Fateh Abu Muhammad al-Golani, stating: "You make the mujahedeen sad, and make the enemy of the mujahedeen gloat because you support the traitor [Golani]", saying "either you continue with your mistake and remain stubborn, and the division and fighting among the mujahedeen will continue, or you confess to your mistake and correct it".

Jabhat al-Nusra and Syrian Insurgent Groups

The US government designated Syrian jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusra as an alias of AQI, and a Foreign Terrorist Organisation, in December 2012. The designation stated that the group was controlled by AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi, who also "issues strategic guidance" to Jabhat Al-Nusra's emir, Al-Fateh Abu Muhammad al-Golani.

This was seemingly confirmed on 9 April 2013 when a Qurashi statement claimed that he had sent Golani to Syria in July 2011 to form a militant group with purported AQI militants already present inside the country. According to Qurashi, confirmation of the ties between the two groups had been delayed in order to allow the Syrian people to evaluate Jabhat al-Nusra without the Al-Qaeda label being formally attached to the group. Unspecified "security reasons" were also listed as a cause for delaying the announcement. The statement also claimed that AQI split its finances equally with Jabhat al-Nusra, and provided the Syrian group with plans and strategies. Qurashi further expressed a willingness to ally with other unspecified groups in Syria "on the condition that the country and its citizens be governed according to the rules dictated by Allah".

However, while Qurashi claimed that the time for such secrecy had passed, and Jabhat al-Nusra would henceforth operate as part of AQI under the aegis of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), this was publicly rejected by Jabhat al-Nusra leader Golani the following day. In a seven-minute audio message, Golani swore allegiance directly to Al-Qaeda leader Zawahiri, and insisted his group - which would continue to be known as Jabhat al-Nusra - would remain loyal to Al-Qaeda's senior leadership rather than to ISIL.

Golani's position was seemingly supported by Zawahiri. On 9 June 2013 Al-Jazeera claimed to have a copy of a letter written by the latter and addressed to both Golani and Qurashi in which the Al-Qaeda leader ordered that Jabhat al-Nusra remain an independent Al-Qaeda affiliate and that Qurashi's remit should remain within Iraq. In the letter Zawahiri also claimed that he had appointed Abu Khaled al-Suri as a "personal emissary" to implement this order inside Syria. However, Qurashi issued an audio statement late on 14 June 2013 rejecting these demands and insisting that "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant will remain, as long as we have a vein pumping or an eye blinking. It remains and we will not give it up".



Islamic State forces continued to operate in Syria, separate from Jabhat al-Nusra, and in June 2013 Jaish al-Muhajireen wal Ansar, or the Army of Emigrants and Partisans - a jihadist group based in north Latakia and in Aleppo, and composed entirely of non-Syrian fighters - joined ISIL. The group's leader, Chechen national Abu Omar al-Shishani, assumed command of the Islamic State's operations in Aleppo and Latakia, and attacks subsequently carried out by the group's members in July were claimed in the Islamic State's name.

However, the Islamic State's operations in Syria have also brought it into conflict with a range of Syrian militant groups, particularly the ethnic Kurdish Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG). On 17 July 2013, YPG militants launched attacks on the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra militants in the town of Ras al-Ayn, in Syria's Al-Hasakah governorate, forcing them out of the town and seizing control of its border crossing with the town of Ceylanpinar, in Turkey's Sanliurfa province. The following day, a joint force of the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra militants and members of another militant Islamist group, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, attacked at least 10 nearby villages and towns controlled by the YPG, and fighting continued for at least five more days. Similar clashes between the Islamic State and the YPG continued throughout 2013.

From mid-2013, the Islamic State also clashed with Syrian rebel groups with which it was nominally allied in the battle against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad. Notably, Islamic State forces seized the city of Al-Raqqah, provincial capital of Al-Raqqah governorate, from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on 14 August, following clashes with the FSA's Ahfad al-Rasul brigade. The clashes reportedly began over a week earlier when the Islamic State attacked Ahfad al-Rasul positions in an attempt to seize their ammunition and weapons. The fighting culminated in a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack outside the city's main train station which killed five Ahfad al-Rasul militants, including commanders Abu Mazen and Fahd Hussein al-Kajwan, before the Islamic State overran the brigade's headquarters. The city of Al-Raqqah was of strategic importance, being the only provincial capital remaining under the control of anti-government militants at that time.

In a statement on 12 September 2013, the Islamic State announced the launch of Operation "Cleansing Evil" in Aleppo governorate. As well as targeting security forces and pro-government militias, the Islamic State stated that it would also target anti-government groups that it alleged had attacked it, including Kataib al-Farouq and Liwa al-Nasr. The Islamic State accused the two groups of participating in an attack targeting the Islamic State in Aleppo in co-ordination with security forces. Meanwhile, an agreement was signed between the Islamic State and Asifat al-Shamal, an FSA-aligned group loyal to the Syrian Military Council (SMC), on 20 September 2013 to halt ongoing clashes between the two groups in the northern Syrian city of Azaz, which the Islamic State had seized on 18 September. The agreement called for an immediate ceasefire, the immediate release of all detainees, and the return of equipment seized by each group from one another. It also called for the Al-Tawhid Brigade, a moderate Islamist group with loose links to the SMC, to set up a checkpoint between the two sides until the conflict in Azaz was resolved. However, a little over a week later, on 28 September, Islamic State militants seized control of the town following renewed clashes with Asifat al-Shamal militants.

In response, six anti-government groups - Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Liwa al-Tawhid, Jaish al-Islam, Suqur al-Sham, Kataib al-Furqan, and Liwa al-Haq - released a joint statement on 3 October 2013 calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the Islamic State to withdraw from Azaz. Also that month, on 11 October Islamic State militants seized control of the Intharat neighbourhood in the city of Aleppo, in Aleppo governorate, following violent clashes with Ghurabaa al-Sham that began the previous day and culminated in the killing of 50 combatants in Intharat and two other districts of the



city.

Elsewhere in the country Islamic State forces continued to operate alongside other jihadist groups, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra, despite the dispute between them earlier in the year. In late October and early November 2013, the Islamic State fought alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, Katibat al-Khadra, Liwa Maghawwir Baba Amr, Liwa Maghawwir Suriyya, Jaish al-Islam, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Suqor al-Fateh, and Liwa Ahl al-Athr in various offensives.

However, conflict with other groups persisted. In one notable inter-factional incident, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the leader of Ghurabaa al-Sham and six of his fighters were publicly executed by the Islamic State for alleged corruption in the town of Al-Atareb in Syria's Aleppo governorate on 27 November 2013.

Following further attacks on it, the Islamic State threatened to withdraw from the city of Aleppo, leaving it vulnerable to government forces, unless attacks against it stopped. Irrespective, on 8 January 2014, the Islamic State's Syrian headquarters in Aleppo was captured by rival rebel groups, including militant Islamist coalition the Islamic Front. Significantly, in an audio message posted on Twitter that day, Jabhat al-Nusra leader Golani accused the Islamic State of pursuing a "flawed policy" which had played "a key role in fuelling the conflict", and appealed to the Islamic State for a ceasefire, stating: "The regime will gain new life when it was close to collapse... [the infighting] risks costing us dearly on the ground if it continues."

However, hours later, the Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani called on supporters to "crush them [rival groups] totally and kill the conspiracy at birth", and also threatened the main Syrian opposition coalition, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), stating: "Everyone who belongs to this entity is a legitimate target for us, in all places, unless he publicly declares his rejection of that group and of fighting the mujahideen."

On 10 January 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 482 people - 85 civilians, 240 rebels and 157 Islamic State fighters - had been killed in the inter-factional fighting since 3 January, adding that the Islamic State had killed 42 prisoners in Aleppo, while 47 Islamic State members had been executed by its rival groups. The infighting escalated further in early February, when Islamic State militants carried out an SVBIED attack on the local headquarters of Islamic Front component group Liwa al-Tawhid in Aleppo, killing 26 people including a senior commander. On the same day the Islamic State killed a senior commander of Islamic Front component group Suqor al-Sham in Hama.

The Islamic State was also suspected of killing Abu Khalid al-Suri, a senior Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya commander and Al-Qaeda's emissary to Syria, during an attack in the city of Aleppo on 23 February 2014. While the Islamic State did not confirm or deny involvement in the attack, days later, on 25 February, Golani warned the Islamic State that it would be driven both from Syria and "even from Iraq" if it failed to accept mediation to end infighting between militant groups in the Syria that began in early 2014. Golani gave the Islamic State a five-day ultimatum to respond, saying, "If you... do not stop your arrogant overlordship over the Muslim nation, then [we] will be forced to launch an assault against this aggressive, ignorant ideology and will expel it". The ultimatum was ignored, though, and clashes between the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra continued periodically across early-to-mid 2014.

State Sponsorship

Despite varying accusations of state support for the Islamic State there is no verifiable evidence in open sources of the group having received funding or support from foreign governments.



Organisation

Command and Control

The concept of an overall emir to whom commanders pledge their fealty through oaths is a central tenet of the Islamic State's organisational structure. In the book *Informing the People about the Birth of the Islamic State in Iraq*, authored by Uthman bin Abd-al-Rahman al-Tamimi and released by Al-Furqan in January 2007, the concept of loyalty to an emir is described as being a theologically necessary component of any Islamic state.

After AQI's October 2006 formation of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), the group was nominally led by the ISI emir, an Iraqi named Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi). In theory, the ISI also had a legislature of sorts, in the shape of an expanded shura council. However, US intelligence reports consistently claimed that ISI was simply an Iraqi front for the foreign-led AQI, and that the organisation remained under the control of then AQI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), even claiming that Abu Omar was a fictitious character.

While the relative authority of AQI leader Abu Hamza and ISI leader Abu Omar remained unclear, by the time the pair were killed in April 2010 US military intelligence officers had revised their assessment, pointing to evidence that Abu Omar had successfully grown into the role of ISI leader, and was asserting his own authority. Indeed, the US military told *IHS Jane's* in July 2009: "Abu Omar may originally have been a fictional or composite personality created by AQI/ISI to give ISI a recognisable Iraqi leader and thereby improve its image among Iraqi nationalists. Abu Omar is now probably synonymous with an actual ISI leader named Hamid al-Zawi."

In mid-May 2010, the ISI announced that Abu Omar and Abu Hamza had been replaced by a single new emir of AQI/ISI, identified as Iraqi national Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi, with Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Hassani al-Qurashi named as his deputy. The group also named Al-Nasir Li-Din Allah Abu Sulayman (alias Noman Salman) as the ISI's Minister of War, but he was killed by Iraqi security forces during an operation in the town of Hit in Anbar province on 25 February 2011.

Under Qurashi, AQI adopted a looser command and control system in response to increased security force pressure. Iraqi military intelligence officer Captain Nabil Abdul-Hussein stated in May 2010: "Our intelligence information says Al-Qaeda's local leaders have started following a decentralised system."

Following the rebranding of ISI as ISIL in April 2013, and again as the Islamic State in June 2014, Qurashi remained as overall emir and it is highly likely that the group simply adopted the existing organisational structure of the ISI.

Personnel and Recruitment

While many of the Islamic State's leaders were initially foreigners, most of its fighters have always been Iraqi Sunnis, and the latter eventually took control of the group. This was confirmed by US General Ray Odierno in November 2009, who stated: "Al-Qaeda in Iraq has transformed significantly in the last two years. What once was dominated by foreign individuals has now become more and more dominated by Iraqi citizens".

Key recruitment areas include Baghdad; the triangle formed by Al-Iskandariyya, Al-Mahmudiyya and Al-Yusufiyya south of Baghdad; the western Baghdad approaches of Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, and Ramadi; areas of Diyala province; and segments of the population from Mosul and Kirkuk.

While tribal affiliation is not a determinant of Islamic State membership, the concentration of the group's recruitment in certain Sunni areas in the past gave it certain tribal biases, and the Ubayd, Bani Said, Janabi, and Khazraj tribes proved strong recruiting pools for the group in its early years. Other historical support bases such as the Jabur, Dulaym, Shammar, and Jirba confederations, plus the Ghurayr, Majama, and Zuba tribes, provided progressively fewer recruits as tribal opposition to AQI developed as part of the so-called Awakening movement from 2005-2006 onwards.



Islamic State militants pose for a photo in Iraq in June 2014. The image was shared on social media by an Islamic State-affiliated Twitter account. (IHS Jane's/JTIC)

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Foreign Fighters

The role of foreigners in the Islamic State remains a controversial subject, with contending opinions on issues such as the size of individual foreign contingents and the significance of foreign fighters in the group's overall campaign.

On the first count, various reports have used martyrdom videos and announcements to gauge the relative balance of different nationalities. In 2005, Reuven Paz, an Israeli expert on terrorism, stated that 61% of the martyrs he surveyed were Saudi, with Syrians, Iraqis and Kuwaitis together accounting for a further 25%. Other studies have posited a more balanced proportion of nationalities, but Saudis tend to remain the largest minority share. An analysis conducted by the



West Point Combating Terrorism Center in November 2007 and based on records of foreign fighters compiled by AQI and its affiliates, the Mujahidin Shura Council and ISI, from August 2006 to August 2007 showed that, of a total of 595 records indicating the nationality of the fighter, Saudi nationals represented 41% of the total. Libya was the next most common country of origin (18.8%), followed by Syria (8.2%), Yemen (8.1%), and Algeria (7.2%).

Schematics of the AQI chain of command produced by the US military suggest that Saudis, Yemenis, Egyptians, and Tunisians were the four major groups, with each contingent having a commander represented in the shura, or advisory council. Of note, the Islamic State is a far more pan-Arab undertaking than it is a pan-Islamic effort, and there are notably fewer non-Arabs fighting in Iraq than other jihadist theatres.

Since the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings in early 2011, it is likely that foreign fighters have increasingly been diverted to conflicts other than Iraq, and as of 2013 the available evidence indicated that Syria was absorbing the vast majority of foreign volunteers arriving in the region. However, the Islamic State's participation in anti-government insurgency in Syria from April 2013 may have given it access to new streams of foreign recruits in Islamic State-controlled areas of Syria. For example, at least seven soldiers were killed and five others wounded when two the Islamic State militants of Saudi nationality detonated two suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) at a security checkpoint in the town of Al-Nabk in the Qalamoun region in the north of Syria's Rif Dimashq governorate early on 20 November 2013. The group's schism with Al-Qaeda and emergence as the most extremist group operating in Syria has also seen the Islamic State act as a lightning rod for the most extreme foreign fighters.

Leadership Figures

The following have been identified as senior leadership figures in the Islamic State:

Ibrahim al-Badri (alias Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi)

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi - likely an alias - is an Iraqi national and the current emir of the Islamic State. A statement in June 2014 by the Islamic State confirmed Qurashi was in fact Ibrahim al-Badri and a native of Samarra, Salah ad-Din province. This was confirmed by the Islamic State in the declaration of the caliphate in late July 2014.

Qurashi was reportedly a lecturer of Islamic studies and an imam at mosques in both Baghdad and Fallujah before being detained by US forces on 4 June 2004, according to a 13 February 2014 Al-Arabiya report.

According to unconfirmed local media reports, Qurashi was previously the leader of Jaish al-Taifa al-Mansura, or Army of the Victorious Sect, which became one of the first Iraqi jihadist groups to formally merge with AQI in January 2006, when it joined the Majlis Shura Mujahideen fil-Iraq, or Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq (MSC) - the forerunner of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the Islamic State.

Qurashi became emir after previous AQI emir Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) and ISI emir Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) were killed by security forces in April 2010.

In April 2013, Qurashi renamed the ISI as ISIL so as to encompass the group's growing operations in Syria, and on 10 August 2013 the US Department of State claimed that Qurashi had relocated to Syria. In social media posts across 2013 and early 2014, ISIL claimed that Qurashi had personally led



insurgent operations in both Iraq and Syria. While such reports are credible to a degree, they could not be independently verified.

In the statement on 29 June 2014, the ISIL's main spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, announced the establishment of the khilafa, or caliphate, in territory running from the Syrian governorate of Aleppo in the west to the Iraqi province of Diyala in the east. Adnani also announced that Qurashi was the khalifa, or caliph, of this new structure and that, henceforth, the official name for the group would simply be the Islamic State.

Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Hassani al-Qurashi

Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Hassani al-Qurashi - likely an alias - is the deputy emir of AQI and prime minister of the ISI and its successors, ISIL and the Islamic State. His position was announced in an ISI statement released in May 2010 following the deaths of Abu Hamza and Abu Omar in April 2010.

Abu Ayman al-Iraqi

A 13 February 2014 Al-Arabiya report claimed that Anu Ayman al-Iraqi was one of the main leaders of the Islamic State and also a member of the organisation's military council. He worked in air force intelligence prior to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, according to the report, and was in jail between 2007 and 2010. After his release, Iraqi moved to Syria, and as of early 2014, he was reportedly commanding Islamic State forces in Idlib, Aleppo, and Latakia governorates.

Waleed Jassem al-Alwani (alias Abu Ahmad al-Alwani)

According to a 23 February 2014 Al-Arabiya report, Alwani was a member of the Iraqi army prior to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and is currently a member of the the Islamic State military council. It was unclear from the report whether he was based in Iraq or Syria.

The following leadership figures are no longer active:

Ahmad Fadl Nazzal al-Khalayilah (alias Abu Musab al-Zarqawi)

Ahmad Fadl Nazzal al-Khalayilah (alias Abu Musab al-Zarqawi), a Jordanian from the city of Al-Zarqa, was the original founder of AQI, and by far the most prominent jihadist leader in Iraq until his death in June 2006. He is widely credited with pioneering most of the tactical developments in the Iraqi insurgency and being a master of information warfare. He was also linked to a wide variety of jihadist activity elsewhere in the region and Europe.

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US government identified Zarqawi as an Al-Qaeda commander who had escaped Afghanistan and taken refuge in Iraq. It said he was responsible for killing a US diplomat in Jordan in October 2002 and was regrouping his forces in northeast Iraq, where he had set up a chemical weapons production facility. It subsequently emerged that Zarqawi was not formally affiliated to Al-Qaeda and instead ran an independent Afghan training camp for a group of predominantly Jordanian and Palestinian jihadists.

According to a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report released in 2006, a senior Al-Qaeda member in US custody had claimed that Zarqawi rebuffed several attempts by Osama bin Laden to recruit him on the basis of religious and strategic differences. The report stated that the CIA assessed in April 2003 that Zarqawi planned and directed independent terrorist operations without Al-Qaeda direction, but that he "most likely contracts out his network's services to Al-Qaeda in return for material and financial assistance from key Al-Qaeda facilitators."

Zarqawi subsequently re-emerged in Iraq as the leader of a group called Jamaat Tawhid wal-Jihad, which made a name for itself in May 2004 when it released a video showing abducted US national



Nicolas Berg being beheaded. The video was titled *Abu Musab al-Zarqawi slaughters an American*, suggesting Zarqawi was the masked man who carried out the decapitation.

In the same month, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attack outside the US military headquarters in Baghdad on 6 May; another that killed Abd-al-Zahran Uthman Muhammad alias Izz-al-Din Salim, the head of the US-appointed Governing Council, on 17 May; and a third that wounded Iraq's deputy interior minister on 22 May. At the end of the month, Zarqawi released a statement saying: "I am now in Iraq fighting with my brothers to establish a homeland for Islam and a state for the Quran."

Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad's campaign of violence continued until October 2004, when it was renamed Tanzim al-Qaeda al-Jihad fi Balad al-Rafidain, or AQI, after Zarqawi released a statement pledging allegiance to Bin Laden. This rebranding initiative was probably more of a publicity stunt to help attract recruits and money than a subordination of Iraqi operations to Bin Laden.

The limits of Al-Qaeda's control over Zarqawi was reflected in private letters written by its leaders based in Pakistan's tribal areas, who implored him to end the bloody spectacles and focus on building a popular support base. He apparently ignored the advice and continued his attempts to destabilise Iraq by inciting sectarian violence.

Zarqawi courted more controversy when he expanded his operations into neighbouring Jordan. In August 2005, AQI claimed responsibility for a rocket attack on US naval vessels moored off Aqaba. This was followed by suicide bombings at three hotels in Amman on 9 November 2005. Claimed by AQI, the attack killed 60 and provoked widespread outrage in Zarqawi's homeland.

On 7 June 2006, Zarqawi was tracked to a safe house near the small town of Habhab in Diyala province and killed in a US air strike along with his teenaged wife and their baby daughter. Although criticised by Al-Qaeda leaders and influential jihadist ideologues such as his former mentor Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Zarqawi remains a revered martyr in jihadist circles.



Former AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, killed by a US airstrike in Diyala Province in June 2006. (PA)

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Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir)

After the death of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006, US military spokesman Major General William Caldwell identified Abu Ayyub al-Masri (an alias that indicates he is from Egypt) as a leading candidate to take over as AQI leader. The US military had already listed Abu Ayyub as a wanted terrorist in February 2005, offering a USD50,000 reward. Maj Gen Caldwell said Abu Ayyub was an Egyptian bomb maker who met Zarqawi at the Al-Faruq training camp in Afghanistan sometime in 2001-2002, arrived in Iraq before Zarqawi in 2003, established the first Al-Qaeda cell in the country, and had communications with Ayman al-Zawahiri.

A few days later, AQI identified its new emir as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, an alias that indicated he was a foreigner of unspecified nationality. ISI statements also referred to him as Abd-al-Munim al-Badawi, leading to speculation that this was his real name. Maj Gen Caldwell subsequently announced that Abu Hamza was another alias for Abu Ayyub al-Masri. He said Abu Ayyub was involved with Ayman al-Zawahiri's El-Jihad since 1982. The US spokesman added that the new AQI leader faced internal challenges from other senior figures, such as Abd-al-Rahman al-Iraqi, whom AQI statements identified as Zarqawi's deputy, and Abdullah bin Rashid al-Baghdadi, the alias used by the leader of the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC). US officials told *The Washington Post* that Abu Ayyub was also known as Yusif al-Dardiri.

After the formation of the ISI was announced in October 2006, the group identified Abu Hamza as its



minister of war, serving under the overall emir identified as Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi). In a cabinet reshuffle announced in October 2009, Abu Hamza was given the additional role of prime minister.

The promotion of a veteran Egyptian jihadist with ties to Zawahiri prompted speculation that AQI would shift its strategy in accordance with recommendations from the Al-Qaeda leadership, which had criticised Zaraqawi's campaign of extreme violence for alienating potential supporters. However, the group continued to follow Zaraqawi's strategy of inciting sectarian violence and it increasingly clashed with other Sunni militias and insurgent groups. The perceived importance of Abu Hamza subsequently declined. Having upped the reward offered for information leading to his death or capture to USD5 million after he took over as AQI leader, the US military dropped it to USD100,000 in 2008.

US and Iraqi officials announced that Abu Hamza was killed along with Abu Omar in a raid on a remote safe house in the Al-Tharthar area of Salah-ad-Din province on 18 April 2010. His identity was confirmed by US forces using DNA testing. The ISI subsequently released a statement confirming that Abu Hamza had been killed along with Abu Omar.

Abu Ayyoub Al-Masri
AKA Sheikh Abu Hamza Al-Muhajer
أبو أيوب المصري والمعروف ب الشيخ أبو حمزة المهاجر



UNCLASS//FOUO

Former AQI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), killed in April 2010. (PA)

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Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi)

When the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was formed by AQI in October 2006, it identified its emir as Iraqi national Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. The US military later claimed that this was a fictitious character invented to give the impression that the group was led by an Iraqi, rather than by AQI's then Egyptian leader Abu Hamza al-Muhajir. US military spokesman Brigadier General Kevin Berger said in July 2007 that AQI had employed an actor to produce the Abu Omar audio recordings released by the group.

However, in May 2008, the police chief of Al-Hadithah, in Al-Anbar province, identified Abu Omar as a real person named Hamid al-Zawi, who had served in Iraq's security apparatus in the 1980s, but was sacked for his hardline views and became a militant preacher. He allegedly joined the insurgency after the US-led invasion in 2003, rose through the ranks of AQI until he became a leading religious figure, and was then appointed as the ISI's emir.

Confusion followed in April 2009, when Major General Qassim Atta, the spokesman for the Baghdad Operations Command, announced that Abu Omar had been captured. Iraqi television broadcast footage of a man called Ahmad al-Mujammai, who confessed to being the ISI's emir, but was clearly not the man in the photograph produced by Al-Hadithah's police chief.

The US military declined to confirm that Mujammai was the ISI leader, telling IHS Jane's in July 2009: "Abu Omar may originally have been a fictional or composite personality created by AQI/ISI to give ISI a recognisable Iraqi leader and thereby improve its image among Iraqi nationalists. Abu Omar is now probably synonymous with an actual ISI leader named Hamid al-Zawi."

When Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced that both Abu Omar and Abu Hamza had been killed on 18 April 2010, he showed a photograph of a man who appeared to be the same individual identified by Al-Hadithah's police chief nearly two years earlier. It was subsequently confirmed that Abu Omar was Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi.

Haji Bakr

According to a report released by Al-Arabiya on 13 February 2014, Haji Bakr was a former officer in the Iraqi army prior to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and was subsequently held at the US Camp Bucca detainment centre in Basra province before being released. He reportedly later moved to Syria and became a prominent ISIL commander. Bakr was killed by self-identified Free Syrian Army (FSA) militants during fighting near the city of Aleppo in Aleppo governorate on 27 January 2014. The killing of Bakr was announced on a purported FSA-linked Twitter account, along with two photos of his remains, and his death was later confirmed by the group.

Abu Abdulrahman al-Bilawi

According to a 13 February 2014 Al-Arabiya reported, Abu Abdulrahman al-Bilawi was part of the ISI military council and a former head of the group's shura council before he was detained by US forces on 27 January 2005. After his release, the report claimed that Bilawi was killed in the Al-Khalidiya area of Iraq's Anbar province; however, details as to how and when he was killed were not provided.

Abu Fatima al-Jaheishi

Abu Fatima al-Jaheishi was initially in charge of Islamic State operations in southern Iraq before he moved to the northern city of Kirkuk, according to a report by Al-Arabiya released on 13 February 2014. It was unclear from the report whether Al-Jaheishi was still involved with the Islamic State.

Order of Battle



The following individuals have been identified as having senior roles within the Islamic State:

Abu Mohammed al-Adnani identified himself as an Islamic State spokesman in an 8 January 2014 statement calling on Islamic State's supporters in Syria to "crush" rival Syrian rebel groups with which the Islamic State was then engaged in inter-factional fighting. Adnani also threatened attacks on Syrian opposition coalition, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC).

The Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) last formally identified its cabinet structure in October 2009, when the following roles and individuals were identified:

- First/Prime Minister and Minister of War: Abu Hamza al-Muhajir;
- Minister of Sharia Institutions: Abd-al-Wahhab al-Mashadani;
- Minister of Public Relations: Muhammad al-Dulaymi;
- Minister of Martyr and Prisoner Affairs: Hassan al-Jaburi;
- Minister of Security: Abd-al-Razzaq al-Shammari;
- Minister of Health: Abdullah Qaisi;
- Minister of Information: Usama al-Lahibi;
- Minister of Finance: Yunus al-Hamadani (allegedly replaced by Ibrahim Muhammad Ahmad al-Juburi who was himself subsequently detained in March 2011).

Operations

Targets

Operations by the Islamic State have been recorded targeting the following sectors:

Security Forces

AQI's founding objectives included the expulsion of all foreign security forces from Iraq, specifically those military forces that participated in the US-led invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in 2003. Consequently, such coalition security forces were a priority target for AQI, and were subjected to a sustained and high-intensity campaign of attacks, until the last US troops were withdrawn in December 2011.

During this period, Iraqi security forces trained and equipped by the US and its allies - including tribal forces operating as part of the pro-government Awakening Council - were also a priority target, and have remained such following the withdrawal of coalition forces, continuing to be routinely targeted in ambush, assault, and assassination operations.

While AQI has largely avoided engaging security forces from the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, on 29 September 2013 at least six people were killed and 40 others were wounded when four vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), at least two of which involving suspected AQI suicide bombers, exploded consecutively outside the headquarters of the Asayish ethnic Kurdish intelligence force in Erbil - the first such attacks in the city since May 2007.

In addition, since its expansion into Syria, the Islamic State has also openly participated in combat with security forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria. Fighting alongside Syrian groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, the Islamic State forces have taken part in high-profile assaults on Syrian military bases. Some such operations, such as the assault and seizure of a large arms depot complex in the Mahin area of Syria's Homs governorate on 5 November 2013, resulted in the Islamic State and other rebel groups acquiring extensive supplies of weapons, ammunition and other material.



Government & Governance

In addition to expelling foreign security forces, AQI's other core objective is the overthrow of Iraq's democratic government, and the establishment in its place of an Islamic state that would be governed according to AQI's radical interpretation of sharia (Islamic law). As well as regarding democracy as a heretical form of man-made governance, AQI propaganda portrays the Shia-dominated government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as a hostile threat to Iraq's Sunni population. Consequently, government personnel and the institutions within which they work have been subjected to routine attacks since they were first established.

Following the outbreak of civil war in Syria in early 2011, AQI has also participated in attempts by largely Sunni Syrian rebel forces to overthrow the Shia-dominated government of President Bashar al-Assad in neighbouring Syria.

On 4 March 2013, at least 48 unarmed Syrian soldiers and nine Iraqi military guards were killed and an unspecified number were wounded when AQI militants ambushed an Iraqi military convoy transporting the Syrian soldiers - who had earlier been forced to retreat into Iraq - to a border crossing with Syria in Iraq's Anbar governorate. In a subsequent 11 March statement, AQI claimed that its "military detachments succeeded in annihilating an entire column of the Safavid army" - a reference to the dynasty which ruled Shia Iran from the 16th to 18th centuries - and claimed the presence of Syrian government forces in Iraq was proof of collusion between the Shia-led governments of Iraq and Syria.

Although operations in Syria itself were initially carried out through its proxy, Jabhat al-Nusra, following the announcement of the formation of ISIL in April 2013, AQI ground forces are openly participating in the rebellion against Assad's government.

Identity Groups

In parallel with its insurgency against the Iraqi government, the Islamic State has also waged a brutal and systematic campaign against Iraq's Shia Muslim population, and against other religious identity groups it wishes to suppress in its quest to establish its interpretation of a pure, Sunni Islamic state in Iraq.

Sectarian attacks on Shia communities and religious festivals were a particular feature of AQI's early campaign, seemingly in a bid to destabilise the country by fomenting civil war, and reached a peak in 2006-2007. Following the withdrawal of US troops from urban centres in June 2009, AQI placed renewed emphasis on sectarian targeting, and this trend has accelerated since the final US withdrawal in December 2011, with a number of high-profile mass-casualty attacks recorded through 2012 and 2013. Notably, on 7 January 2013, AQI claimed responsibility for a spate of attacks in over a dozen towns and cities targeting Shia Muslims during Karbala commemorations on 31 December 2012, in which 23 people were killed and 83 wounded.

During 2013, AQI also began targeting Shia communities in neighbouring Syria, where its forces were playing an increasingly open and influential role in the largely Sunni-led rebellion against the Shia-dominated government of President Bashar al-Assad. On 14 June 2013, suspected ISIL militants used explosive devices to destroy a Shia Muslim religious building in the village of Hatla in Syria's Deir ez Zour governorate, and have also engaged in indiscriminate shelling of Shia communities in areas outside ISIL's control. On 10 September 2013, ISIL militants launched a series of mortars and Grad rockets at Alawite Shia areas of the villages of Al-Masoudiya, Buthayna Shaban, and Jib al-Jarah in Syria's Homs governorate, causing an unknown number of casualties.

AQI has also targeted Sufi Muslim communities in areas of Syria temporarily under its control, primarily with low-level attacks. On 12 October 2013, suspected ISIL militants destroyed a Sufi



Muslim shrine in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in the town of Busaira, in Syria's Deir ez Zour governorate.

In addition to sectarian attacks, AQI has also targeted Iraq's tiny Christian minority. The group claimed responsibility for a high-profile attack on the Assyrian Catholic church in Karadah district of Baghdad on 31 October 2010, during which more than 100 worshippers were taken hostage and 58 people - including 34 civilians, 17 security force personnel, two priests and five militants - were reportedly killed. During the siege the ISI released a statement threatening to kill the hostages unless the Egyptian Coptic church released female Muslim prisoners. This appeared to be an attempt to tap into popular outrage prompted by inflammatory and uncorroborated stories that Copts in Egypt were holding captive their wives who had attempted to divorce their Christian husbands by converting to Islam.

Similar targeting of Christian communities by the Islamic State has been evident in Syria. On 28 October 2013, Islamic State militants set fire to an Armenian Church in Tel Abyad in Syria's Al-Raqqah governorate, while on 26 September suspected Islamic State militants attacked two churches, causing damage to the interiors and exteriors, in the city of Al-Raqqah in Syria's Al-Raqqah governorate. In a particularly high-profile attack, Islamic State militants kidnapped Italian Jesuit Priest Paolo Dall'Oglio in Al-Raqqah governorate on 29 July 2013.

Meanwhile, the sub-state rivalry which broke out in mid-2013 between Islamic State and Kurdish militant groups in Syria - particularly the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) - has also resulted in AQI forces carrying out indiscriminate attacks on Syria's Kurdish population. In one targeted attack on 25 July 2013, Islamic State militants used explosive devices to destroy the homes of several ethnic Kurdish families in the city of Tas Abyad, in Syria's Al-Raqqah governorate.

Social Groups

Since its initial formation, AQI has repeatedly adopted a brutal and uncompromising style of governance in areas of Iraq where it has been able to establish temporary territorial control, and carries out regular woundings and executions of people whose behaviour it considers criminal or amoral.

AQI has also periodically carried out mass-casualty attacks on venues it considers propagate amoral behaviour, including targets outside its areas of territorial control. In one such example, five civilians were killed and seven others wounded when an improvised explosive device (IED), emplaced by suspected AQI militants, exploded outside a café showing a football match in the Doura district of the Iraqi capital Baghdad on 6 November 2013.

During 2013, such behaviours also became increasingly evident in areas of neighbouring Syria where Islamic State forces had succeeded in asserting themselves. Local activists reported a man in the city of Aleppo, in Syria's Aleppo governorate, was flogged 50 times by Islamic State militants on 22 October 2013 after being found guilty of blasphemy, while in another Islamic State-controlled area of Aleppo governorate, four civilians were executed by suspected ISIL militants in the town of Azaz on 18 December 2013 after they were accused of committing theft.

Civil Society

Following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, one of the priorities of AQI - and its predecessor group, Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad - was to destabilise Iraq, and prevent the re-establishment of effective governance. As part of this strategy, non-government organisations (NGOs) and other civil society groups involved in aid or reconstruction and development were heavily targeted in the initial months of the occupation.



Particularly notable was the 19 August 2003 SVBIED attack on the hotel housing the UN facility in Baghdad, which killed at least 22 people - including the head of the UN mission in Iraq, Sérgio Vieira de Mello - and wounded over 100. AQI founder Ahmad Fadil Nazzal al-Kalaylah (alias Abu Musab al-Zarqawi) later claimed responsibility.

AQI continues to target local Iraqi aid and civil society groups engaged in activities of which it disapproves, although such attacks tend to be low-level and highly discriminate, such as assassinations. On 1 December 2013, suspected AQI militants killed a local protest organiser and his son when they ambushed his vehicle with small-arms fire in Fallujah in Anbar governorate.

The group has also previously targeted Iraqi journalists and news organisations, and in late 2013 began carrying out similar attacks on targets in Syria. A Spanish journalist working for *El Mundo*, identified as Javier Espinosa, was abducted along with a photographer by suspected ISIL militants from a checkpoint near the city of Al-Raqqa in Syria's Al-Raqqa governorate on 16 September 2013, while an Iraqi journalist working in Syria was kidnapped and killed by the Islamic State in an unspecified location in Aleppo governorate on 5 December 2013. Islamic State militants also raided the offices of a local activist television station in the city of Aleppo in Aleppo governorate on 29 October 2013, accusing its staff of working for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). No casualties were reported, but the militants seized all of the station's equipment.

National Infrastructure

Since its initial formation, AQI has carried out periodic and at times regular attacks on Iraqi national infrastructure in a bid to undermine the functioning of the state - and particularly the economic infrastructure that sustains it - and to erode confidence in the national government.

Iraqi oil infrastructure was routinely targeted by AQI and other insurgent groups in the early years of the occupation by US-led forces from 2003, severely curtailing Iraq's oil output and attendant revenues. In June 2010, AQI also launched a campaign targeting Iraq's financial sector. In the first attack, on 13 June, 16 people were killed and 60 others were wounded when 15 AQI militants attacked the Central Bank building in Baghdad. A further 26 people were then killed on 20 June when two SVBIEDs were detonated simultaneously outside the headquarters of the Trade Bank of Iraq in the Mansur district of the capital. AQI released a statement on 23 June in which it alleged that the Trade Bank of Iraq was involved in "the robbery of the country's oil revenues and overseas funds" that were then transferred "to the pockets of senior government officials".

Oil infrastructure and other targets associated with Iraq's economic infrastructure continue to be periodically targeted in AQI operations. On 30 May 2013, security forces foiled a suspected AQI attack on an oil facility in Baiji district in Salah ad Din province, detaining nine suspected AQI militants who had reportedly planned to attack the facility using rockets and mortar rounds before launching a small-arms assault. Despite not representing a priority target during AQI's "Breaking the Walls" campaign from July 2012 to July 2013, attacks against vulnerable critical infrastructure may become a more regular feature of the group's campaign in 2013-2014.

Within Syria, suspected Islamic State militants carried out a mortar attack targeting Damascus International Airport on the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus on 23 October 2013, causing a section of gas pipeline to explode.

Tactics

Operations by the Islamic State have been recorded employing the following tactics:



Ambush

AQI militants have routinely employed ambush tactics since the group was first established, and such tactics were a particular feature of AQI's asymmetric conflict with US-led coalition forces during the 2003-2011 occupation of Iraq. Ambush attacks on coalition forces typically utilised IEDs emplaced as roadside bombs which were used to disable vehicles prior to a small-arms engagement. The Islamic State continues to make extensive use of ambush tactics against Iraqi security forces, notably ambushing an Iraqi military convoy in Anbar on 4 March 2013 and killing 48 unarmed Syrian soldiers and nine Iraqi military guards.

The Islamic State also uses ambush tactics against civilian targets, typically by establishing fake security checkpoints on roads outside towns. On 5 June 2013, 10 security force personnel and five civilian residents of the largely Shia Muslim province of Karbala were executed by suspected AQI militants when their bus was stopped at a fake checkpoint near the town of Nukhaib in Anbar.

Assault

AQI's assault tactics evolved rapidly in the early years of the insurgency, and AQI quickly established a reputation for mounting complex assaults on hard targets, involving the co-ordinated use of small-arms fire teams and suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs). In some such operations, SVBIEDs were used to provide an initial breach of a target's perimeter security enabling penetration by an assault team. Alternatively, on occasion a small-arms assault would be used to clear the way for an SVBIED to penetrate into the heart of a facility.

A notable early example of such tactics, and the sophisticated reconnaissance that accompanied these operations, was the 9 March 2005 attack on the Hotel al-Sadir in Al-Andalus Square in Baghdad. A small-arms fire attack was undertaken at the neighbouring Ministry of Agriculture gatehouse and used as cover to infiltrate jihadists dressed as police into the guardhouse area. These attackers killed the guards and opened the gate. A garbage truck carrying a 1,500 kg device moved through the ministry car park and crashed through a spot in the wall that separated the ministry car park from that of the actual target, the Hotel al-Sadir, before detonating.

AQI continued to make extensive use of such complex assault tactics, and has repeatedly demonstrated an ongoing capability to successfully attack well-defended targets, including security force facilities. Notably, on 28 September 2012 AQI carried out a complex assault on the Tasfirat prison in the city of Tikrit which killed at least 12 prison guards and freed 100 prisoners, including 47 AQI inmates reportedly on death row. Militants used a combination of VBIEDs, mortars, grenades, explosive belts and small weapons, some of which had been smuggled into the prison, the group claimed in a statement the following month. Similarly, on 21 July 2013, at least 10 police officers were killed and 19 soldiers wounded when AQI militants assaulted Abu Ghraib Prison in Baghdad using SVBIEDs, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) in an attempt to free prisoners. AQI also attacked a prison in the town of Taji in Baghdad province that same night.

In addition, since emerging openly as an actor in the Syrian rebellion in early 2013, AQI forces have participated alongside Syrian jihadist groups in a series of high-profile assaults on military bases in Syria, often employing the same complex tactics perfected in Iraq. On 5 August 2013, Islamic State militants - fighting alongside Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Liwa al-Fateh, and Asafat al-Shamal - seized control of the Minnagh Air Base north of the city of Aleppo in Aleppo governorate, with the final assault involving two suicide bombers detonating an SVBIED at the base's main gate, adjacent to the base command centre.



Stand-off/Area Attack

The Islamic State routinely uses area attack tactics against both security force and civilian targets, and the use of explosive devices to target people and property in mass-casualty urban attacks has been a favoured tactic of the group since its first formation.

AQI was particularly well-known for its use of suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) against both hardened targets and crowds. In the former role, SVBIEDs have been used to attack government and security force offices, international organisations, hotels, bridges, checkpoints and bases. In the latter role, SVBIEDs are best known for their employment against crowded markets, Shia festivals, and - particularly in the early years of the insurgency - the queues of applicants outside police and army recruiting stations.

In addition to using a range of vehicles (ambulances, fire trucks, security force vehicles) to skirt outer defences at targets, AQI quickly adopted other techniques to reduce the distinctive features of bomb vehicles, such as spreading the weight of devices across the vehicle so the rear suspension is not suspiciously overloaded, or using vehicles normally associated with heavy loads. In one particularly notable attack on 14 August 2007, AQI deployed multiple SVBIEDs borne in fuel trucks to attack villages in the Sinjar district west of Mosul in northern Iraq, laying waste to an entire residential area and killing at least 500 Iraqi civilians, mostly from the Yazidi sect, in what was the single most deadly insurgent attack since the conflict began.

Person-borne suicide attacks have also been extensively used by AQI to access targets within pedestrian areas and particularly to reach high-value targets within government buildings and hotels. These attacks have sometimes been simple affairs involving single bombers used to attack queues of police or army recruits, or else to penetrate Shia crowds at shrines, mosques, or pilgrimage marches. On other occasions, the suicide attack has been supported by extensive intelligence preparation and fabrication or theft of identification to allow deep penetration of a government facility. Female suicide bombers have also been used to access certain targets where they are less likely to be searched, and diversionary conventional attacks have also been used as cover for infiltrators to enter a building.

The Islamic State continues to make extensive use of such tactics, and carried out a particularly intense campaign of high-profile mass-casualty area attacks in 2013, often involving the co-ordinated use of multiple devices deployed near simultaneously against a range of targets in different Iraqi cities.

The group released a statement on 18 January 2013 claiming responsibility for a series of explosive device attacks which killed at least 88 people throughout Iraq between 15 and 17 January 2013. Subsequently, at least 37 people were killed and more than 100 others wounded in at least 10 VBIED and IED attacks in largely Shia areas of Baghdad on 17 February 2013; while the following month, at least 38 people were killed and 146 wounded in a series of at least 10 co-ordinated IED and VBIED attacks, also in various districts of the capital Baghdad, on 19 March.

Such operations continued throughout the year, with other notable examples including a series of VBIED attacks in the cities of Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Karbala, and in Babil and Dhi Qar governorates, on 10 August 2013 which killed at least 21 people and wounded 108; a series of similar attacks across the country on 28 August in which at least 82 people were killed; and a series of 16 VBIED attacks in various districts of Baghdad on 30 September in which at least 38 people were killed and 166 wounded.

In addition to its specialisation in explosive-based area attacks, the group also makes regular use of mortars, rockets, and other indirect fire weapons to carry out area attacks on both security force

and civilian targets. Such tactics have been particularly evident in the group's operations in Syria, where looted army weapons depots have furnished the group with a ready supply of mortars, rockets and other conventional weapons. Islamic State militants, along with other jihadist groups, launched a series of Grad rockets into the ethnic Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG)-controlled cities of Ras al-Ayn and Tel Temer in Syria's Al-Hasakah governorate on 24 July 2013, inflicting an unspecified number of casualties; while five civilians were killed on 23 October 2013 when suspected Islamic State militants launched several mortar shells into the Al-Qassa district of the Syrian capital Damascus.



Iraqis walk through the Yazidi residential neighbourhood destroyed by attacks on 14 August 2007. The enormity of the devices used and the mud-brick construction of the buildings resulted in widespread destruction and loss of life. (PA)

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Assassination

AQI has carried out regular assassinations since its inception, but it became a favoured tactic from 2010 as the group sought to adapt to an increasingly effective counter-insurgency campaign which had seen AQI and ISI emirs Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and Abu Omar al-Baghdad killed in an intelligence-led operation in April of that year.

While continuing to attempt mass casualty attacks, US military assessments claimed AQI began to adopt a more decentralised system, and to focus on targeted killings of police officers, tribal leaders, government officials and members of the Awakening Councils. These assassinations have been conducted by gunmen armed with silenced weapons and through the use of so-called 'sticky bombs',



which are generally attached to target vehicles using adhesives or magnets.

Such tactics remain a key component of AQI operations. A senior provincial counter-terrorism officer was killed and three nearby civilians were wounded when a sticky bomb was attached to his vehicle by suspected AQI militants as he was returning to his residence in the Salman Bek area in Salah ad Din province on 17 April 2013. In other examples, two police officers were assassinated at home in front of their families in separate attacks in the Al-Hawijah district of Kirkuk province on 11 June 2013; while eight local Awakening Council militiamen were kidnapped and executed by suspected AQI militants in the Al-Mishahida area on the outskirts of Baghdad on 1 July.

Raid

Islamic State militants attacked and seized control of parts of Anbar provincial capital Ramadi, and all of Fallujah - the other key city in Anbar - on 1 January 2014, following fighting which broke out on 31 December when security forces dismantled a Sunni Muslim protest camp in Ramadi, claiming it was a base for AQI. The seizure of the cities was the first time the Islamic State had exerted open control of a major population centre since the height of the insurgency, and while the attack prompted a large-scale response by security forces, the group was able to maintain pockets of control in both cities and their surrounding areas for several months.

The Islamic State again underlined its ability to seize and control large parts of territory in Iraq in early June 2014. After five days of fighting, the group seized control of the city of Mosul - the second largest city in Iraq after Baghdad - in the northern Ninawa province. This was followed by a rapid advance south through parts of Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah ad Din provinces, during which the group attacked and overran several small towns and villages. However, by 13 June, Iraqi security forces began forcing the group out of some of these areas, despite the significant resistance put forth by the Islamic State.

Engagement

While the Islamic State has become defined by its terrorist tactics, in the early days of the insurgency it initially showed far more interest in conventional force-on-force attacks on coalition units. In the twin battles of Fallujah in 2004, AQI elements made a stand against coalition forces in fierce street fighting, and AQI launched a number of attacks in 2005 that attempted to overrun isolated coalition outposts and liberate prisoners. Even later in the insurgency, AQI used to periodically stand and fight in an attempt to hold ground, an example being the partial barricading and mining of Baqubah in advance of coalition operations to clear the town in June 2007.

Moreover, in early 2014 an emboldened Islamic State attacked and seized control of parts of Anbar provincial capital Ramadi, and all of Fallujah - the other key city in Anbar - on 1 January, engaging in positional warfare with the Iraqi army in defence of a major territorial holding for the first time since the height of the insurgency. The Islamic State again engaged in extensive positional warfare with security forces in June as it attempted to seize and hold large swathes of territory in the north of the country.

Kidnap

In the years after its formation, AQI also became notorious for undertaking less sophisticated attacks involving the abduction - and often torture and execution - of neutrals and opponents, although the use of this tactic declined in the years following the death of AQI founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In the case of high value targets (such as politicians, clerics and tribal sheikhs) the first step is surveillance of an individual and the observation of routines. The snatch or immediate assassination

will often occur at the place of work or home. Attacks on individuals in transit are less frequent, but typically involve the use of illegal vehicle checkpoints manned by AQI elements wearing fake police or army uniforms. In the early years of the insurgency, kidnap victims were often sold to AQI by kidnap gangs, although this practice soon declined.

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A screen shot from a video made on 18 September 2004 by Zarqawi's Jamaat Tawhid wal-Jihad group showing (left to right) UK national Kenneth Bigley and US nationals Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley, taken hostage by the group. They were all later beheaded on video by the militants. By October 2004, Jamaat Tawhid wal-Jihad had been formally renamed Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). (PA)

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Siege, Hostage, Hijack

While long associated with kidnap operations, AQI has made only infrequent use of siege, hostage



and hijack tactics - whereby targets are seized and held during a stand-off with security forces. However, one such notable attack was that targeting of the Assyrian Catholic church in Karadah district of Baghdad on 31 October 2010, during which more than 100 worshippers were taken hostage and 58 people - including 34 civilians, 17 security force personnel, two priests and five militants - were reportedly killed. During the siege AQI released a statement threatening to kill the hostages unless the Egyptian Coptic church released female Muslim prisoners.

Weapons

Iraq remains awash with Soviet-pattern small-arms and heavy weapons, plus almost unlimited amounts of military high-explosives and materials for the fabrication of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Although the US-led coalition consolidated and secured the contents of many ammunition dumps, Iraqis distributed and cached many thousands of tonnes of munitions to sustain the resistance effort. AQI initially looted and purchased such weapons just like other Iraqi factions. Over time, the group began to intimidate and coerce weak factions into handing over munitions, and from 2006 began intensively raiding and confiscating the caches held by other insurgent groups. Additionally, the group undoubtedly benefit from the wide-spread proliferation of weapons as part of the Syria conflict.

Explosives

The Islamic State makes extensive use of explosives in its operations, and deploys them in a range of forms, including emplaced IEDs and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs); and suicide attacks involving person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIEDs) and suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs).

The Islamic State has perfected a range of triggering techniques for emplaced devices, including timer, command wire, remote-controlled, and victim-operated systems. The group has also experimented with irregular tactics, and has been known to fill the executed corpses of kidnapped security personnel with explosives as a type of booby-trap. One such example of this tactic came in June 2013 when a member of a local Awakening Council was kidnapped, tortured, executed, and his abdomen filled with explosives and left on the roadside in an apparent attempt to kill anyone who came to recover his body.

In addition to carrying out large-scale mass-casualty area attacks, explosives were used to particular effect in the early years of the insurgency in an intensive campaign of roadside bomb attacks on coalition convoys and patrols, and the Islamic State operatives developed increasingly sophisticated devices - including the use of shaped charges - in response to the evolution of security force counter-measures.

Such advances were supported by an active information campaign, such as the 2007 release by ISI's Al-Furqan media wing of a detailed 26-minute instructional video on how to destroy coalition route clearance vehicles, entitled *Hunters of Minesweepers: Volume One*.

Many of the group's IEDs are constructed by adapting conventional weapons such as artillery shells, or recovering the explosive material from such munitions; and also through the manufacture of various forms of homemade explosive (HME).

Direct Fire Infantry

The Islamic State makes extensive use of small-arms in its operations, particularly AK-series assault



rifles looted from former regime stockpiles, or seized from caches established by rival insurgent groups.

Since early 2011, the group has made growing use of silenced small-arms as part of its campaign of assassinations and assaults on lightly-armoured targets. The first notable such attack came on 10 May 2011 when AQI co-ordinated a series of silenced small-arms attacks on at least six checkpoints across Baghdad. These attacks continued throughout the year, including an attack against a checkpoint in Diyala on 31 December 2011 in which five Awakening Council militiamen were killed.

Indirect Fire Tactical

The Islamic State makes routine use of short-range indirect fire weapons, such as mortars and rockets, in attacks against civilian and security force positions. The group has also repeatedly demonstrated the capability to employ indirect fire in support of an advance by ground forces, or an assault on a hardened target - as in the case of the 21 July 2013 assault on Abu Ghurayb Prison. Such weapons were typically seized from Iraqi government stockpiles in the early years of the insurgency, and more recently from armouries in neighbouring Syria, where anti-government rebels have captured a number of large stockpiles. Following the capture of large arms depot complex in the Mahin area of Syria's Homs governorate by ISIL and other jihadist groups on 5 November 2013, the rebels released imagery on 7 November of warehouses piled high with weapons, including 120mm and 240mm mortar shells.

Indirect Fire Strategic

The Islamic State has made more limited use of longer-range indirect fire weapons to carry out attacks outside the immediate battle-space, but Grad and Katyusha rockets continue to be employed in Iraq, and are periodically recovered - often along with locally-made improvised launchers - in counter-terrorism operations and searches.

In Syria, a video released on 7 November 2013 showed ISIL and allied jihadist groups in possession of large stocks of 122mm Grad rockets following the earlier capture of an arms depot, and such weapons were used in a number of attacks on ethnic Kurdish towns controlled by rival militant group Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) in the latter half of the year.

Guided Missile

The Islamic State does not make extensive use of guided missiles owing to their relative lack of availability, but the group is known to have acquired stocks of anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) following the capture of various arms depots and military facilities in neighbouring Syria over the course of 2013, which have been documented in insurgent videos.

CBRN

When parts of Fallujah fell to US forces on 23 November 2004, the latter uncovered what was described as a chemical weapons factory co-located with an explosives workshop. Against a backdrop of the banner of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, the rudimentary laboratory contained instructions downloaded from the internet on the creation of chemical weapons and notebooks in Arabic in which details concerning anthrax and blood agents had been transcribed. The jihadists were likely aiming to utilise a mixture of cyanogen chloride (CK), hydrogen cyanide (HCN), and hydrochloric acid (HCl) to create a crude chemical weapon that could be activated either by an explosion or by simply throwing or dropping it.

Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad elements were also accused of planning to use a chemical IED in Jordan in 2004. Suspected militants arrested in Jordan told interrogators that they were informed they



would take part in the "first chemical attack by Al-Qaeda", though no further substantiation was provided.

However, while AQI has demonstrated a long-term interest in acquiring chemical or biological weapons, as intimated by Abu Ayyub al Masri alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir's February 2007 call for scientists to engage in nuclear and biological experimentation, there is no indication AQI has developed the capability to carry out an effective CBRN-based attack. In the first half of 2007, AQI experimented with attaching chlorine gas cylinders to SVBIEDs, but this inflicted few additional casualties.

Nevertheless, in a 2 June 2013 statement, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence claimed to have neutralised a five-man AQI cell that had allegedly been manufacturing sarin nerve gas and mustard gas in three facilities in unspecified locations. Spokesman Mohammed al-Askari claimed the men, who had been monitored for three months prior to their arrest and had allegedly all since admitted the allegations made against them, had planned to carry out attacks in Iraq, Europe, and North America, beginning with a purported plot to spray chemical agents from remote-controlled toy airplanes targeting Shia Muslims during upcoming festivals in the country.

Other Activities

Funding

Sunni Arabs across the region and particularly in the Gulf Co-operation Council states were the principle source of funding for Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) during the initial years of its campaign - a trend that has continued as the group expanded into Syria. It is likely that an important element of former AQI leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's decision to pledge fealty to Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was to gain access to the funding streams controlled by Al-Qaeda. These funding streams were presumed to be reliant on the ongoing good will of Arab 'armchair jihadists', making it important for AQI to appear to be active, successful and gaining ground. This meant that the AQI propaganda effort was of critical importance to the fundraising effort.

Access to these funds may have given former AQI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) a powerful means of controlling his scattered organisation and other Sunni insurgent groups. As captured AQI official Khalid al-Mashadani noted in July 2007: "Al-Masri started overpowering us and acted on his own accord, by controlling the distribution of funding."

However, foreign funding was not necessarily always reliable or sufficient and there are strong indicators that crime has increasingly made up a growing proportion of AQI's funding. Since 2010, the group has increasingly been relying on organised crime rackets involving kidnap for ransom and protection payment from large Iraqi companies. Alongside intimidation to gain access to arms caches, AQI has previously extorted cash and monetary tribute from other insurgent groups and community leaders. Where AQI can, it extorts shop owners and truck drivers in an attempt at controlling fuel and other markets. Controlling the fuels derivative market (gasoline, cooking gas and diesel) has proven to be a particularly lucrative sector for AQI, which has diverted shipments of fuel to external markets (Jordan, Syria) to take advantage of higher prices there. This kind of activity has earned AQI particular opprobrium throughout fuel-starved Sunni communities. The arrest of suspected senior AQI leaders in April 2010 also revealed that AQI targeted oil companies and small businesses for extortion. This appears an accelerating trend, particularly in remote desert areas out of the reach of Iraqi security forces.



In 2010, US commanders pointed to a series of bank robberies as a further sign that the group was turning to crime. "You have decentralised cells that are attempting to continue to execute the last orders given - I think bank robberies and other things are a sign that the funding has been cut," he said. In June 2013, Iraqi officials estimated that AQI militants were earning between USD1,000,000 to USD1,500,000 per month in the city of Mosul in Ninawa province by demanding protection money from small-scale shop owners, pharmacies, gas stations, supermarkets, and goldsmiths, and threatening violence against them unless they complied. Local traders in the city claimed that in April the militants detonated an explosive device inside the shop of a businessman who refused to pay them and claimed the attack "forced everybody to pay, because we don't see the security forces doing anything to end this situation". A food wholesaler, identified only as Abu Younis, stated he and other traders resumed paying a USD200 a month fee to AQI after receiving threatening letters at the market hall where they worked.

Following the Islamic State's capture of Mosul in June 2014, the group raided several banks in the city, stealing an estimated USD500 million, although the full amount remains unconfirmed.

Political

The Islamic State maintains a position of opposition to all involvement in the current political system and has tried to develop an alternative state structure, which is representative of key groups, but not democratic or pluralistic in any sense. As a result, it has no actual representation in any political system.

Propaganda

The Islamic State is acutely aware of the value of successful information operations. Media operations were vital to AQI because the popular perception of the organisation can have important effects on recruitment and fundraising inside and outside Iraq.

US military intelligence officers have previously stated that many of the attack videos released by the group were produced by mercenary cells who were contracted to carry out an operation and produce a video to prove they had done so. These videos were then branded with the logo of AQI's video production unit, Al-Furqan, and released to jihadist internet forums, thereby giving the impression that the group was engaged in more anti-coalition activity than was actually the case.

Al-Furqan no longer releases these kind of attack videos, suggesting AQI's ability to network with other insurgents has been much reduced. Al-Furqan continues to release occasional videos, such as the Knights of Martyrdom series, but most attack claims are now released as text statements by the ISI's Ministry of Information.

AQI also appears to have learned how to generate smear campaigns and capitalise on relevant media stories. One example is that of Sabrin al-Janabi, a Sunni woman who in February 2007 accused security forces of abducting and raping her. The government said her story was fabricated. Nevertheless, AQI used the claims to rally popular support and justify subsequent attacks. In an audio recording, then AQI leader Abu Hamza claimed that within a few hours of hearing about the rape, 300 men, many of them from Janabi's tribe, had volunteered to carry out suicide bombings. The group then released a series of statements claiming that captured members of the Iraqi security forces had been killed because the government had rejected its demand to hand over her assailants.

It also claimed that the 25 June 2007 bombing of Baghdad's Mansour Hotel, which killed several Sunni tribal leaders, was retaliation for the alleged rape.

Key Islamic State media outlets include:

- Al-Furqan Media: This is the video production arm for AQI/the Islamic State. It is presumed to consist of a network of cells that support the production and distribution of videos showing AQI-claimed attacks (or those of allied insurgent groups) and celebrating the deaths of martyrs. High-volume CD copying operations with dozens of hard drives have been uncovered, each capable of making around 160 CDs per day. Key publications include the Biographies of Notable Martyrs and Expedition of the Prisoners series.
- Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF): This is a jihadist media organisation that supports various groups operating in different countries, including AQI/the Islamic State. It specialises in translations, ideological tracts and essays on strategy that are not necessarily official releases from a specific group.
- Other outlets: Other outlets such as jihadist internet forums and blogs function as unofficial but highly effective platforms through which Al-Furqan videos and statements from the ISI's Ministry of Information are distributed.



A screen shot from an ISI publicity video showing a militant planting explosive under a US armoured infantry fighting vehicle. The device later exploded, destroying the vehicle. (PA)

Campaign Narrative

Background

Salafist jihadists were present in Iraq throughout the 1990s, with the northern Kurdish areas initially functioning as a transit point for jihadists moving from Afghanistan to Europe or the Maghreb. Iraq also appears to have been developed as a potential operational base against targets in Europe and the Middle East, for instance Jordan and Turkey. As the Baathist state was deeply hostile to any armed group operating within its territory, jihadists operated in covert desert encampments modelled on Afghan training camps or else were hosted by (and gradually came to control) enclaves created by Kurdish Sunni Islamists.

2003-2004

Arab volunteers arriving immediately before the 2003 US invasion were mainly state-controlled, having their passports confiscated and being bussed to major theatres of action, particularly Baghdad. Following the fall of the Baathist regime, such volunteers kept arriving and were principally streamed to Iraq using the Iraq-Syria-Lebanon people-moving networks established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the 1990s. Zarqawi's group was called Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Group of Monotheism and the Holy Struggle, or Unity and Jihad).

Zarqawi is believed to have undertaken extensive operational activity in 2003. He has been held responsible for devastating suicide bomb attacks and truck bombings against the international non-government organisation (NGO) community, coalition forces, Jordanian targets and the Shia community in Iraq in the latter four months of that year, although his group did not begin claiming responsibility for operations until 2004.

Although small in number, these attacks immediately stunted international involvement in Iraq, with serious strategic consequences for the entire Iraq venture. Zarqawi filled a niche within the Iraqi insurgency: that of the perpetrator of true terrorist attacks capable of creating strategic effects. By early 2004, Zarqawi was in active discussions with the Al-Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri concerning a merger with the broader Al-Qaeda organisation, which occurred in October 2004.

Alongside well-publicised terrorist attacks against foreign civilians (including high-profile beheadings) and large-scale sectarian bombings, 2004 also saw Zarqawi and his followers participate in an iconic double battle in Al-Fallujah. The April-May 2004 stand-off and the subsequent intense coalition clearance of the city in November 2004 saw Zarqawi's network fighting alongside Sunni insurgent groups in open battle.

As important, but less obvious, was the appearance of the first splits between the Iraqi-led nationalist insurgency and the foreign-led jihadist groups. While Al-Fallujah festered as an insurgent base, these two groups found co-existence difficult as foreign-led jihadists sought to impose strict religious codes on their self-styled Islamic state.



2005-2007

As part of the new relationship between Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and the broader Al-Qaeda network, Ayman al-Zawahiri sent the former a four-stage plan in 2005 - which included expelling US forces from Iraq, establishing an Islamic state, spreading the conflict to Iraq's secular neighbours, and engaging in battle with Israel. Zarqawi's own operations were more scattered, involving successful operations to coerce the foreign diplomatic community into limiting its presence in, and therefore recognition of, Iraq. Zarqawi remained openly committed to the provocation of a Sunni-Shia civil war and suicide car bombings against Shia and security force targets became far more numerous.

The latter part of 2005 seemed to witness setbacks for AQI. The organisation's strong grip on Anbar province was loosened by well-planned and well-executed US and Iraqi operations along the Euphrates, leaving only Ramadi as a firm jihadist base by the end of 2005. AQI arguably relocated many of its key personnel eastwards to Salah al-Din and Diyala province. As importantly, Sunnis turned out to vote in both the October 2005 referendum and the December 2005 election, against Zarqawi's express orders. AQI's retaliation against Sunni civilians and tribal sheikhs further reduced its support base.

These developments were temporarily reversed by events in the first half of 2006. As the year started, AQI pursued a dual policy of strongly intimidating Sunni tribal sheikhs and establishing a Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) that was intended to bring together insurgent groups under an ostensibly Iraqi-led umbrella group. More importantly, the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askariyya shrine in Samarra saw Zarqawi successfully foment civil war conditions and a massive increase in sectarian violence. All anti-AQI efforts were effectively frozen as the US and Iraqi-led coalition fought to regain its balance. This proved to be Zarqawi's swan song as he was killed in June 2006.

His successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), faced growing challenges in the latter half of 2006. After some months of hiatus, the US-led effort to engage Sunni tribes began to pay dividends. By September 2006, the Anbar Salvation Council had swung most tribes in Al-Anbar behind the anti-AQI effort. AQI's new effort to portray itself as an Iraqi-led organisation saw the announcement of new alliances and a new caliphate - the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) - in October 2006.

2007-2009

This ploy did not check the growing tide of ill-will towards AQI, and from the beginning of 2007, AQI resorted to increasingly desperate and unsuccessful methods of intimidating the Sunni community through chemical attacks, assassinations and massacres.

Despite these setbacks, the group maintained a steady operational tempo throughout 2008-2009, and senior US commander General Charles Jacoby stated on 10 September 2009 that AQI was "still able to generate...high-profile attacks" and warned that the group, although "greatly diminished", would "continue to test the Iraqi security forces." This was clearly evidenced when the group claimed responsibility for the 19 August 2009 suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attacks in Baghdad which killed 95 civilians and injured 563 others, and the 25 October 2009 SVBIED attacks targeting the Ministry of Justice and Baghdad's governorate headquarters



which killed at least 155 people and wounded more than 500 others - the deadliest attack on the capital in more than two years.

The renewed series of mass-casualty attacks perpetrated by the group demonstrates its continued ability to exploit weaknesses in the Iraqi national security apparatus, and three factors in particular have allowed the group to seize back operational momentum following a series of setbacks since the US surge. Firstly, the US military withdrawal from Iraq's urban areas in June, under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), left the security of Iraq's cities in the hands of less capable government security forces - lapses in security by these forces were most aptly demonstrated by the fact that the trucks used in the October SVBIED attacks managed to enter a heavily-guarded area in which all vehicles are supposedly banned in daylight hours. Secondly, the group has been able to exploit increasing ethnic and religious tension in the country to its advantage, most notably regarding the Arab-Kurdish disputes over territory in Ninawa province and the government's reluctance to integrate Sunni Awakening Council fighters into the Shia-dominated security forces. These disputes have allowed AQI to recover operational space, and support among the Sunni Arab community, that had been increasingly denied to it following the establishment of the Awakening Councils in Anbar, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din.

US General Ray Odierno and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki also reiterated in November 2009 that the group was still considered a major threat, and warned that attacks were expected to intensify in the lead up to the elections set for January 2010. The continuing threat from AQI was exemplified on 8 December when the group detonated a series of five VBIEDs consecutively in Baghdad killing 112 civilians and wounding 425. As with the October attacks, the bombings primarily targeted government and security force installations, but a university and a fine arts institute were also targeted.

2010

Attacks by the group continued into 2010, with two notable attacks in late January. On 25 January, at least 41 civilians were killed when the group detonated three SVBIEDs consecutively targeting three hotels in Baghdad. This was followed on 26 January by a SVBIED attack on the major criminal forensic laboratory in Baghdad which killed at least 22 civilians and government employees. Another high profile attack, attributed to AQI by police, was carried out on 26 March when two large IEDs were detonated in the town of al-Khalis in Diyala province, killing 52 civilians and wounding 73 others.

However, security forces continued to exert pressure on the group, and on 1 April 2010 the US military released a statement in which it claimed that six senior AQI militants had been killed or captured in operations in Mosul in Ninawa province between 18 and 24 March. Such losses did not neutralise the group's capability to carry out high-casualty attacks on fortified targets, however. This continuing capability was demonstrated on 4 April when the group detonated three consecutive SVBIEDs in Baghdad - one targeting the Iranian embassy, and two targeting the Egyptian, Syrian, and German embassies - leaving at least 41 people dead and over 200 wounded. In a statement claiming responsibility for the attack, AQI stated that the embassy of any country which provided support to the Iraqi government was liable to be targeted in future such attacks, adding: "The mujahideen will not hesitate to strike, wherever its location and no matter the level of fortification."



A significant blow was dealt to the group early on 18 April 2010 when ISI emir Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi (alias Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) and Abu Ayyub al-Masri (alias Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), who replaced Zarqawi as AQI leader and served as the ISI's prime minister and minister of war, were killed during a counter-terrorism operation near Tikrit in Salah-al-Din province. Their deaths were confirmed by the group in a statement released on 24 April 2010. Although Abu Omar had previously been portrayed by the US as a fictitious character invented to give AQI an illusion of Iraqi leadership, by the time he was killed the US military believed that Hamid al-Zawi had emerged as a serious leader under that alias. This is corroborated by recovered AQI documents that show that some foreign members of AQI and senior leaders of Al-Qaeda based in Pakistan were urging Abu Hamza to replace him and change the ISI's name. However, Abu Hamza was either unwilling or unable to do this.

The deaths of Abu Omar and Abu Hamza were the most high-profile in a series of security operations that killed or captured numerous senior leaders of the group in March and April 2010. On 20 April, Ahmed al-Obeidi alias Abu Suhaib - a senior AQI commander allegedly in charge of operations in the provinces of Ninawa, Salah ad-Din, and Kirkuk - was killed by US and Iraqi forces in Ninawa. Security forces also arrested the alleged AQI "Emir of Baghdad", Abdulrehim al-Rawi (alias Falah Abu Hayder), during an operation in the capital on 11 March, as well as the suspected leader of AQI in Anbar province, Mahmoud Suleiman, in Ramadi on 23 April. Following Rawi's arrest, Major General Qassim Atta said: "This person is responsible for killing thousands of our citizens - women, children and elderly."

However, 55 civilians were killed and 73 others were wounded when suspected AQI militants launched a number of bomb attacks targeting Shia Muslim sites across Baghdad on 23 April. The group was further blamed for a series of attacks across the country on 10 May which left at least 85 people dead and more than 300 injured. The attacks, which security officials described as revenge strikes for the killing of its leaders, indicated that the group remained capable of carrying out substantial operations despite the loss of key leaders. The security spokesman for Baghdad, Major General Qassim al-Moussawi, stated: "Despite strong strikes that broke Al-Qaeda, there are some cells still working, attempting to prove their existence and their influence".

This was further evidenced on 13 June when 15 AQI militants, including seven suicide bombers, attacked the Central Bank building in Baghdad. Sixteen bank employees were killed in the attack and some 60 people, including both civilians and members of the security forces, were wounded. Additionally, on 20 June, 26 people - five guards, two police officers, and 19 civilians - were killed and 53 others were wounded when two SVBIEDs were detonated simultaneously outside the headquarters of the Trade Bank of Iraq in the Mansour district of Baghdad. Moreover, on 27 August, AQI claimed responsibility for a series of attacks across the country during the holy month of Ramadan. The statement claimed that the attacks had targeted "headquarters, centres and security checkpoints for the army and apostate police."

Another significant incident occurred on 31 October 2010 when AQI militants attacked the Iraqi stock exchange with a VBIED, and assaulted a nearby Assyrian Catholic church in the Karadah district of Baghdad. Over 100 Christian worshippers were taken hostage during the attack and 58 people - including 34 civilians, 17 security force personnel, two priests and five militants - were reported killed following a subsequent security operation.



2011

AQI's continued ability to plan and execute mass casualty attacks was demonstrated in January 2011, when a series of bombings across three cities in different parts of the country left almost 150 people dead and hundreds more wounded. The latest wave of bombings started with a series of attacks targeting security force personnel in the cities of Baqubah in Diyala province and Tikrit in Salah ad Din, where both suicide vests and SVBIEDs were used with a devastating effect. On 18 January, a suicide bomber attacked a group of volunteers outside a police recruitment centre in Tikrit, killing at least 60 people. The following day, a SVBIED attack targeting a police recruitment centre in Baqubah killed at least 15 people, including both police officers and civilians. A second attack against security force personnel in Baqubah occurred on 20 January, with an SVBIED attack on a police building, killing two police officers and three civilians. On the same day, AQI militants carried out a series of attacks targeting Shia Muslim pilgrims attending the Arbaeen festival in the city of Karbala in Karbala province. An SVBIED attack in the north of the city killed at least 20 people, followed 20 minutes later by another SVBIED attack south of the city, which left at least 25 people dead. Then on 24 February, a dual VBIED attack targeting a bus terminal in the Al-Ibrahimi area east of the city left at least seven civilians dead while another VBIED attack in the al-Daaom area south of the city killed at least 18 civilians.

Security force operations continued to degrade AQI's leadership hierarchy in February and March, most notably with the killing of ISI Minister of War Al-Nasir Li-Din Allah Abu Sulayman (alias Noman Salman) by security forces in the town of Hit in Anbar province on 25 February, which was followed by the arrest of the alleged ISI Minister of Finance, Ibrahim Muhammad Ahmad al-Juburi, south of the city of Mosul in Ninawa province on 8 March. Another suspected senior AQI militant, identified by security officials as Nasser Ibrahim, was also arrested in the Pigwaniya area south of Mosul in Ninawa province on 31 March.

Despite such arrests, AQI proved soon after that it was still able to conduct complex, mass casualty assaults against government installations. On 29 March 2011, 58 people were killed and 98 others were wounded when a group of at least eight AQI militants, dressed in Iraqi military uniform, assaulted the provincial council office in the city of Tikrit in Salah ad Din province. One of the militants conducted an SVBIED attack at the entrance to the complex before the remaining militants stormed the building and began killing council employees using grenades and small-arms. An unspecified number of employees were subsequently taken hostage and systematically executed on the second floor of the building, before security forces launched a counter-attack and killed the remaining militants. This operation was followed on 5 May by an SVBIED attack targeting the police headquarters in the city of Hilla, Babil province. The attack, which local officials attributed to AQI, was timed to take place during a shift change at the station - with many police personnel outside the building - and left 20 dead and over 40 wounded. Several days later, the alleged detained AQI emir in Baghdad - identified as Abu Huzaifa al-Batawi - was killed along with nine other suspected AQI militants during an attempted prison escape in Baghdad on 8 May. Security officials claimed that Batawi seized the weapon of a security guard and opened fire - killing at least six people, including the head of counter-terrorism in Baghdad's Karadah district - before he was killed in retaliatory fire.

In August 2011, despite concerted security force pressure, AQI demonstrated its continued ability to carry out mass-casualty attacks with a series of operations targeting government and police compounds as well as security force personnel on 15 August in 17 separate locations across the



country that left as many as 70 dead. The most damaging of the attacks that day included a combined IED and VBIED attack in the centre of the city of Kut in Wasit province, which left at least 37 people dead; a suicide attack on a high-security prison in a failed attempt to free suspected AQI inmates in the city of Tikrit in Salah ad Din province, which left three police officers dead; a VBIED attack targeting the police headquarters in the city of Hindiya in Karbala province, in which four people were killed; a dual VBIED attack targeting a police compound in the city of Najaf in Najaf province that killed at least six people; an SVBIED attack targeting a municipal building in the city of Khan Bani Saad in Diyala that killed at least eight people; and a small-arms attack at the al-Tawab mosque in the town of Yusufiyah, Babil, that left seven Awakening Councils militiamen dead. While the attacks represented the deadliest day in Iraq in 2011, the discovery of five unexploded VBIEDs in Najaf, Diyala, and Salah ad Din meant that the death toll could have been even higher.

Iraqi authorities accused AQI of responsibility for a series of further mass-casualty attacks through September and October 2011. Firstly, 25 Shia pilgrims were shot dead at a fake military checkpoint in the Rutbah area of Anbar on 12 September, followed by a series of attacks across urban centres in southern Iraq. A VBIED attack near Hilla, Babil province, on 14 September killed 13 civilians, while another VBIED attack outside a Shia mosque in the city on 30 September left a further 18 civilians dead. In addition, two IEDs and two VBIEDs were detonated in quick succession in the southern city of Karbala on 25 September, leaving at least 17 dead. The attack methods and sectarian characteristics of these attacks - either specifically targeting Shia civilians or carried out in Shia-dominated cities - suggested AQI's responsibility. Similar attacks were launched in October, with a double VBIED attack in the Shia-dominated Sadr City district of Baghdad on 14 October that killed at least 18, while a double IED attack in the Shia-dominated Adhamiyah district on 27 October left a further 30 dead.

AQI was accused by authorities of responsibility for a further series of mass-casualty attacks in the southern city of Basra in November 2011, including a triple IED attack on 24 November that left 50 civilians dead. However, as with the attacks over the previous two months, AQI did not release a formal claim of responsibility, and as such the operations cannot definitively be attributed to the group.

On 22 December, a series of bombings across Baghdad claimed by AQI resulted in the death of at least 72 people. While AQI continued such bomb attacks, the group also intensified its campaign of targeted assassinations using silenced small-arms, such as the killing of Judge Mohammed Shyaaa in western Baghdad on 17 December. The group followed this with an attack on a checkpoint manned by Awakening Council militiamen in Diyala on 31 December in which they used silenced weapons to kill five militiamen.

2012

Following the completion of the US military withdrawal from Iraq on 18 December 2011, AQI launched a series of mass-casualty attacks targeting Shia civilians in early 2012 in an apparent attempt to incite sectarian violence in the country and undermine confidence in the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Notably, an AQI suicide attack near the town of Nasiriyya in Dhi Qar province on 5 January, during the annual Arbaeen commemoration, left 45 Shia Muslim pilgrims dead. On the same day, at least 25 people were killed when AQI militants detonated two IEDs and two VBIEDs in Shia-dominated areas of Baghdad. Then, on 14 January at least 64 people were killed



when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives targeting Shia Muslim pilgrims at a security checkpoint in the town of Al Zubair in Basra province. In a subsequent statement on 6 February, AQI's front organisation, the ISI, claimed responsibility for these attacks, describing the perpetrators as "Sunni heroes of heroes" who had infiltrated Shia religious processions and killed large numbers of "nonbelievers and Iranian agents".

On 16 February 2012, the US Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, alleged that AQI had begun "extending its reach" into Syria during the ongoing anti-government uprising against the administration of President Bashar al-Assad. The statement, made before the Senate Armed Services Committee, came soon after several unnamed US security officials alleged that AQI had been behind two suicide bombings in the Syrian capital Damascus and in the city of Aleppo on 6 January and 10 February respectively. However, the attacks were subsequently claimed by Syrian militant Islamist group Jabhat al-Nusra.

On 19 February 2012, at least 19 people were killed when AQI militants carried out an SVBIED attack targeting a group of police cadets outside a police training academy in northeast Baghdad. Then, on 23 February AQI executed a series of co-ordinated attacks across Iraq, killing at least 63 people. The attacks - which occurred in Baghdad and in towns across the provinces of Babil, Salah ad-Din, Diyala, and Kirkuk - employed multiple IEDs and VBIEDs, as well as small-arms, on security forces, government officials, and Shia Muslim targets. This was followed on 5 March when at least 27 police officers were killed by a large group of AQI militants, reportedly driving in a 13 vehicle convoy designed to imitate those used by the Ministry of the Interior, in a series of small-arms attacks on security checkpoints across the city of Haditha, in Anbar province. A further two senior police commanders were kidnapped and executed by the militants in the city that morning. AQI claimed responsibility for a further series of co-ordinated bomb attacks across Iraq on 19 April. At least 20 attacks were launched - a combination of SVBIEDs, VBIEDs, suicide bombers, and IEDs - in Baghdad and in locations throughout the provinces of Diyala, Salah ad-Din, Anbar, and Kirkuk, killing at least 36 people and wounding over 150 others.

A further series of co-ordinated bomb attacks were carried out by AQI across Baghdad and the provinces of Diyala, Salah ad-Din, Anbar, and Kirkuk on 19 May 2012, killing at least 36 people and wounding over 150 others. Among the violence was a double VBIED attack in Ramadi, Anbar, which killed four people; a VBIED attack in the Kadhimiyah district of Baghdad which killed five people; an SVBIED attack in Al Tarmia, Salah ad-Din, which killed a soldier; and a VBIED attack targeting the convoy of the minister of health in Baghdad, which killed two people - although the minister was unhurt. Three weeks later, on 10 June, 26 people were killed and 190 others were wounded when an AQI suicide bomber detonated an SVBIED outside an office of a Shia Muslim cultural institute in Baghdad. The attack on the Shia cultural institute seemed to herald a series of further attacks on the Shia community ahead of commemorations of the death of Imam Musa Khadim, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. On 12 and 13 June, at least 29 explosive devices - ranging from IEDs to VBIEDs - were detonated targeting Shia pilgrims, as well as security forces, across the country, leaving at least 75 people dead. AQI claimed responsibility for more than 73 attacks targeting Shia Muslims and security personnel throughout Iraq during the month of June, including the attacks on 12 and 13 June in a statement released on Islamist forums on 10 July. Also that day, AQI militants detonated two SVBIEDs separately targeting Shia pilgrims in the capital Baghdad, leaving at least 32 dead.



On 21 July 2012, AQI leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi released an audio statement in which he announced the initiation of a new offensive, named "Destroying the Walls", with the aim of eroding security force control across Iraq and increasing the group's areas of operation and influence. On several occasions in the months following the announcement, AQI militants carried out multiple attacks in several cities across the country within hours of each other. The first of these multiple attack operations came only two days after Qurashi's statement, when AQI militants killed at least 91 people and wounded 224 others in 22 attacks in 14 cities across the country. On 16 August, the group killed at least 120 people in a series of attacks in 19 cities across Iraq, and on 9 September, 30 attacks by AQI militants across the country left at least 81 people dead and 195 others wounded. Meanwhile, AQI continued to claim responsibility for other individually distinct attacks throughout the country.

The "Destroying the Walls" offensive continued into October and November 2012, with several notable days of violence. On 27 October, at least 46 people were killed in 14 attacks in Diyala, Babil, Salah ad Din, Ninawa, and Baghdad provinces; and on 27 November, at least 35 people were killed in 23 attacks in eight provinces of the country. AQI subsequently claimed responsibility for a series of explosive and small-arms attacks throughout Iraq on 31 December, which killed at least 23 people and wounded 83.

2013

AQI's strategy of sustained low-level violence across Iraq continued into early 2013 when the group claimed responsibility for a series of attacks conducted throughout the country between 15 and 17 January, which killed a total of 88 people. AQI claimed the attacks were carried out in retaliation for the detaining of female Sunni Muslims by the government.

On 4 March, AQI militants killed 48 unarmed Syrian soldiers and nine Iraqi military guards in an ambush of a convoy near the village of Akashat in Anbar province on 4 March. The Syrian soldiers had earlier been forced into Iraq after being attacked by Jabhat al-Nusra militants in Syria's Deir ez Zour governorate. In a statement released on 11 March, AQI claimed that its "military detachments succeeded in annihilating an entire column of the Safavid army" - a reference to the dynasty which ruled Shia Iran from the 16th to 18th centuries - and claimed the presence of Syrian government forces in Iraq was proof of collusion between the Shia-led governments of Iraq and Syria. Also that month, at least 38 people were killed and 146 wounded in a series of at least 10 co-ordinated IED and VBIED attacks in various districts of Baghdad on 19 March. AQI subsequently claimed responsibility

Meanwhile, on 9 April AQI leader Qurashi attempted to subsume Syria-based Jabhat al-Nusra into its ISI front group, which he announced was being renamed the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). However, 36 hours later, Jabhat al-Nusra leader Al-Fateh abu Muhammad al-Golani publicly rejected Qurashi's statement and announced his group would remain independent of ISIL.

Despite the furore caused by the divergent moves of AQI and Jabhat al-Nusra in April, by mid-May, ISIL had emerged as an operational militant group in Syria and had begun claiming responsibility for attacks across the north and east of the country. However, in Iraq it suffered a setback when security forces in Anbar province claimed on 25 May to have seized control of the largest AQI camp in the western quarter of the province during a recent counter-terrorism operation. Security forces also



foiled a suspected AQI attack on an oil facility in Baiji district in Iraq's Salah ad Din province on 30 May. Nine suspected AQI militants were detained during the operation, and had reportedly planned to attack the facility using rockets and mortar rounds before launching an assault involving small-arms.

The dispute over AQI's unilateral formation of the ISIL took a further twist on 9 June, when Al-Jazeera claimed to have received a leaked copy of a letter written by Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in which he formally dissolved ISIL. Al-Jazeera's claim and the reliability of the alleged letter could not be verified, but on 14 June Qurashi released a statement rejecting Zawahiri's instruction to dissolve ISIL, stating ISIL "will remain, as long as we have a vein pumping or an eye blinking. It remains and we will not compromise nor give it up."

These developments coincided with increased tension between ISIL and other rebel groups in Syria, and on 5 July an unspecified number of militants - reported to be "dozens" - were killed in armed clashes between ISIL and unknown rebels in the city of Idlib in Syria's Idlib governorate. Subsequently, Free Syrian Army (FSA) spokesman Qassem Saadeddine claimed on 11 July that a member of the group's Supreme Military Council, identified as Abu Bassel al-Ladkani, had been killed by ISIL militants in the city of Latakia in Syria's Latakia governorate earlier that day. According to Saadeddine, the two groups had reportedly held a meeting in the city to "discuss battle plans". He also claimed that ISIL had called him and claimed responsibility for the killing.

On 17 July 2013, Syrian ethnic Kurdish Yekineyen Parastina Gel (YPG) militants launched attacks on ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra militants in the town of Ras al-Ayn in Syria's Al-Hasakah governorate, forcing them out of the town altogether and seizing control of its border crossing with the town of Ceylanpinar in Turkey's Sanliurfa province. The following day, a joint force of ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra militants and members of another militant Islamist group, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, attacked at least 10 nearby villages and towns controlled by the YPG and fighting continued for at least five more days, with no casualty information immediately available. Similar clashes between ISIL and the YPG continued throughout 2013.

Meanwhile, in Iraq at least 26 security force personnel were killed and 38 others wounded when two large groups of ISIL militants launched seemingly co-ordinated assaults - involving SVBIEDs, mortars, and other heavy weapons - on the Abu Ghurayb Central Prison and the Taji Prison in Baghdad province late on 21 July. Iraqi officials subsequently claimed that at least 500 prisoners had escaped from Abu Ghraib prison during the attack, including a large number of ISIL militants. The attacks were claimed by ISIL on 23 July. The attacks were launched on the first anniversary of the announcement of the Destroying the Walls campaign.

On 30 July 2013, ISIL claimed responsibility for a series of explosive attacks across Iraq the previous day, which killed at least 58 people. In claiming responsibility, ISIL stated that the attacks had represented the first day of a new stage of operations, known as the Battle of the Ten Days, which it claimed was in response to the perceived repression of the Sunni population in Iraq.

A joint force of Islamist militants, including members of ISIL constituent group Jaish al-Muhajireen wa Ansar, seized control of the Minnagh Air Base, north of the city of Aleppo in Syria's Aleppo governorate, late on 5 August 2013. The capture of the base followed a 10-month siege, which had been increasingly dominated by ISIL forces since early June. Two ISIL militants, including a Saudi



national, detonated a large SVBIED at the base's main entrance early on 5 August and several tanks were neutralised with anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), thereby facilitating a ground assault later that day. While a casualty report was not immediately available, Jaish al-Muhajireen wa Ansar leader Abu Omar al-Shishani claimed responsibility for the operation in an interview with Al-Jazeera Arabic on 6 August.

However, tensions between ISIL and the FSA continued, and 16 members of the ISIL and the FSA-affiliated Liwa Ahfad al-Rasoul were killed during major inter-factional clashes between the two groups over control of the city of Al-Raqqah in Syria's Al-Raqqah governorate on 14 August.

In Iraq, at least 21 people were killed and 108 wounded in a series of eight VBIED and double VBIED attacks in the cities of Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Karbala, and in Babil and Dhi Qar governorates on 10 August. Later that month, on 30 August, ISIL released a statement claiming responsibility for a series of attacks, including the coordinated use of VBIEDs, that took place predominantly in Shia areas of Baghdad on 28 August and killed at least 82 civilians. ISIL claimed that the attack was in response to the execution of 17 Sunni prisoners on 19 August, all but one of whom had been convicted on terrorism-related charges.

On 16 September, ISIL announced it would begin targeting the Syrian anti-government militant groups the Kataib al-Farouq and Liwa al-Nasr as part of an operation called "Cleansing Evil". ISIL alleged the groups were "regime collaborators" and accused them of attacking its members, stating: "Their cowardly involvement and incitement has been proven." The following day, militants from Alwia Ahfad al-Rasoul engaged in sustained clashes with members of ISIL in the city of Deir ez Zour in Syria's Deir ez Zour governorate, with the fighting continuing into 18 September.

Also on 18 September, at least five Asifat al-Shamal militants were killed and more than 100 people were taken captive during heavy clashes between Asifat al-Shamal and the ISIL in the strategic town of Azaaz in Syria's Aleppo governorate, 5 km from the border with Turkey. Reports, citing local activists, claimed the clashes erupted when Asifat al-Shamal militants forcefully prevented ISIL militants from attempting to capture a German doctor volunteering in the town, who had allegedly been seen taking photographs of the local ISIL headquarters. ISIL seized control of Azaaz later that day

Meanwhile in Iraq, at least six people were killed and 40 others wounded when four VBIEDs - at least two of which involved suspected ISIL suicide bombers - exploded consecutively outside the headquarters of the Asayish ethnic Kurdish intelligence force in the city of Erbil in the Kurdistan Region on 29 September. The attacks were notable for being the first of their kind to strike the city since May 2007. The following day, a series of VBIED attacks by ISIL militants in Shia areas of Baghdad left 55 people dead. As with other recent attacks on Shia communities, ISIL claimed the attacks were retaliation for the perceived persecution of Sunni Muslims by the Shia-dominated government and security forces.

In October, ISIL forces in Syria continued to clash with other anti-government militant groups. On 11 October, ISIL militants seized control of the Intharat neighbourhood in the city of Aleppo, in Aleppo governorate, following violent clashes with rival group Ghurabaa al-Sham that began the previous day. Clashes continued into 12 October, when a total of 50 combatants were killed in Intharat and two other districts of the city.



Nevertheless, elsewhere in the country ISIL forces continued to operate alongside other jihadist groups, particularly Jabhat al-Nusra, despite the dispute between them earlier in the year. In late October, ISIL fought alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, Katibat al-Khadra, and Liwa Maghawir Baba Amr in defence of the town of Sadad in Syria's Homs governorate, before being forced to abandon the town by security forces on 28 October. In addition, on 29 October, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya released a video showing Muhanna Faisal al-Fayyad al-Nasser - a member of Syria's Majlis al-Shaab, or People's Council and head of the Al-Busaraya tribe - who was kidnapped along with 71 men by ISIL and Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya militants during armed clashes in the town of Al-Shamitiya in Deir ez Zour governorate on 26 and 27 October.

Notably, ISIL forces participated in a major offensive in early November alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, Liwa Maghawir Suriyya, Jaish al-Islam, Katibat al-Khadra, Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya, Suqor al-Fateh, and Liwa Ahl al-Athr, ultimately seizing control of a large arms depot complex in the Mahin area of Syria's Homs governorate on 5 November. Imagery released on 7 November showed warehouses piled floor-to-ceiling with crates of 122mm Grad rockets, anti-aircraft gun ammunition, 120mm and 240mm mortar shells, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs) and other unidentified weapons crates, all of which was in militant possession.

However, conflict with other groups persisted. In one notable inter-factional incident, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the leader of Ghurabaa al-Sham and six of his fighters were publicly executed by the ISIL for alleged corruption in the town of Al-Atareb in Syria's Aleppo governorate on 27 November. The following month, ongoing fighting with the Kurdish YPG in Al-Hasakah governorate forced ISIL to concede a number of towns in the governorate, with YPG forces occupying Bizoniye, Tell Brak, Ebu Xere and Xenamiye after armed clashes with ISIL on 26 December; and the towns of Til Hemis, Ebu Tiwena and Quwetle ve Metmuse on 29 December.

2014

Clashes between ISIL and rival Syrian jihadist groups intensified in early 2014. Twenty-six ISIL militants were killed in armed clashes with militants from Jaish al-Mujahideen in the town of Al-Atareb in Syria's Aleppo governorate on 3 January. The same day, a new coalition of Islamist groups opposed to ISIL - the Islamic Front - launched a co-ordinated offensive against ISIL positions in the provinces of Aleppo, Hama, Al-Raqqahm, and Idlib, ousting ISIL from a number of positions in fighting on 4 and 5 January.

The clashes reportedly began when ISIL refused to hand over members accused by local residents and the Islamic Front of killing a doctor, but came against a backdrop of mounting opposition by more moderate militant groups to ISIL's attempts to impose its own brand of Islam in the areas under its control. Following the attacks, ISIL reportedly threatened to withdraw from the city of Aleppo, leaving it vulnerable to government forces, unless attacks against it stopped. Irrespective, on 8 January, ISIL's Syrian headquarters in Aleppo was captured by rival rebel groups. On 10 January, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 482 people - 85 civilians, 240 rebels and 157 ISIL fighters - had been killed in the fighting since 3 January, adding that ISIL had killed 42 prisoners in Aleppo, while 47 ISIL members had been executed by its rival groups.

The infighting escalated further in early February, when ISIL militants carried out an SVBIED attack on the local headquarters of Islamic Front component group Liwa al-Tawhid in Aleppo, killing 26



people including a senior commander. On the same day ISIL killed a senior commander of Islamic Front component group Suqor al-Sham in Hama. ISIL was also suspected of killing Abu Khalid al-Suri, a senior Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya commander and Al-Qaeda's emissary to Syria, during an attack in the city of Aleppo on 23 February. While ISIL did not confirm or deny involvement in the attack, days later, on 25 February, Golani warned ISIL that it would be driven both from Syria and "even from Iraq" if it failed to accept mediation to end infighting between militant groups in the Syria that began in early 2014. Golani give ISIL a five-day ultimatum to respond, saying, "If you... do not stop your arrogant overlording over the Muslim nation, then [we] will be forced to launch an assault against this aggressive, ignorant ideology and will expel it".

Meanwhile, in a particularly significant development in Iraq, ISIL militants attacked and seized control of parts of Anbar provincial capital Ramadi, and all of Fallujah - the other key city in Anbar - on 1 January, following fighting which broke out on 31 December when security forces dismantled a Sunni Muslim protest camp in Ramadi, claiming it was a base for ISIL. The seizure of the cities was the first time ISIL had exerted open control of a major population centre since the height of the insurgency, and a sign of its growing ability to exploit local Sunni grievances with the Shia-dominated government to assert itself. While army and police forces launched a major offensive against ISIL over the following weeks, as of early February, ISIL militants still controlled parts of each city as well as some of the surrounding areas.

Turkish military officials on 29 January stated that the army forces had opened fire on a convoy of suspected ISIL vehicles, destroying three of those, in an unspecified location on the border with Syria the day before. The officials also stated that the fighting began after two Turkish military vehicles were fired at by the convoy at the Çobanbey border post in Turkey's southern province of Kilis. No casualties were reported on the Turkish side. The incident came amid ongoing armed confrontations between ISIL and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) along the border with Turkey, with both groups seeking control of border-crossing points that are crucial for the movement of people and material.

Also at the end of January, ISIL militants assaulted a Ministry of Transportation office in the northeast of Iraq's capital Baghdad on 30 January, killing 24 people and wounded 40 others. Eight militants stormed the building and took a number of people hostage, before engaging in a small-arms clash with security forces. Four of the militants detonated explosive vests during the attack, while four others were shot dead by security forces.

Days later, 26 people, including senior Liwa al-Tawhid commander Adnan Bakour, were killed in an SVBIED attack by ISIL militants in the city of Aleppo in Aleppo governorate on 1 February. On the same day, another prominent commander of Suqor al-Sham, identified as Abu Hussein Al-Dik, was killed in an ambush by suspected ISIL militants near the city of Hama in Hama governorate. It was the latest in string of intense fighting between ISIL and other Islamist militant groups in Syria.

Consequently, on 3 February, Al-Qaeda released a statement effectively severing all ties with the group and declaring that ISIL had no links with it, stating that the group "is not a branch of Al-Qaeda and we have no organisational relationship with it", adding that it was not responsible for the group's "actions and behaviours". The statement effectively ended ISIL status as an Al-Qaeda affiliate.



ISIL did not immediately respond to Al-Qaeda's disavowal, and its violent campaign continued unabated. On 7 February, four people were killed and 27 others were wounded in an SVBIED attack by a suspected ISIL militant at a market in the town of Al-Tawz, located 90 km east of the city of Tikrit, in Iraq's province of Salah ad Din. Days later on 11 February, 32 soldiers were killed when an SVBIED was detonated by a Jordanian ISIL militant between two government buildings between Jobar and eastern Ghouta in Syria's Rif Dimashq governorate.

Yet, seemingly in an official response to Al-Qaeda, ISIL was suspected of killing Abu Khalid al-Suri, Al-Qaeda's emissary to Syria, during an attack on 23 February. Suri - also a senior Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya commander who had been ordered by Zawahiri to mediate the ongoing dispute between ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra - was among seven people killed in an attack by militants on a Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya position in the Al-Halq area of the city of Aleppo in Syria's Aleppo governorate. Militant sources, cited by Reuters that day, claimed that the attack had been carried out by at least one suicide bomber who penetrated the compound along with four other attackers, prompting an engagement with those at the base before they were killed. ISIL did not confirm or deny involvement in the attack.

In March, an Israeli army patrol was targeted with small-arms fire in an unspecified location on the Israeli border with Lebanon, causing no casualties. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack on a Twitter account purportedly run by the group, although the veracity of the claim could not be independently verified.

ISIL eventually clarified its position towards Al-Qaeda in a statement released on 22 April 2014. A spokesperson for the group, identified as Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, accused Al-Qaeda of betraying the jihadist cause, stating: "Al-Qaeda today is no longer a base of jihad. The leaders of Al-Qaeda have deviated from the correct path". Adnani also alleged Al-Qaeda had "divided the ranks of the mujahideen in every place" and in particular with regard to ISIL, stating: "Its leadership has become a hammer to break the project of the Islamic State".

Zawahiri responded by releasing another statement on 2 May in which he again criticised ISIL's involvement in Syria, calling it "a political disaster" and claiming it had resulted in a "waterfall of blood", a reference to infighting between ISIL and other Islamist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra. He urged ISIL to withdraw from Syria and "busy itself with Iraq, which needs double its efforts".

Ten days later, on 12 May, Adnani released a response, rejecting Zawahiri's request, stating ISIL would not restrict its activities to Iraq, calling such a task "impossible because it is unreasonable, unrealistic, and illegitimate." He also launched a personal attack on Zawahiri and his leadership, declaring: "Sheikh Osama [bin Laden] gathered all the mujahideen with one word, but you divided them and tore them apart." Adnani called on Zawahiri to remove the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Fateh Abu Muhammad al-Golani, stating: "You make the mujahideen sad, and make the enemy of the mujahideen gloat because you support the traitor [Golani]", saying "either you continue with your mistake and remain stubborn, and the division and fighting among the mujahideen will continue, or you confess to your mistake and correct it".

Following five days of fighting, ISIL seized control of the city of Mosul in Iraq's northern Ninawa province on 10 June. The loss of Mosul, the second-largest city in the country, represented a serious setback for the central government and underlined the extremely potent threat posed by ISIL to the

stability and security of Iraq. Hundreds of heavily-armed ISIL militants overran the entire western bank of the city late on 9 June and by early the next morning had secured the central and southern parts of the city, including the provincial government headquarters, the city's main airport, and multiple television and radio stations. The militants also destroyed numerous police stations before overrunning at least two prisons and the army's operational headquarters. According to multiple Iraqi news reports, as well as witnesses cited by international media organisations, the majority of soldiers and police abandoned their posts during the attack on the city, facilitating ISIL's rapid advance. Images and videos posted to social media over the course of 10 June purportedly showed security forces withdrawing from the city and even discarding uniforms on the roadside. Over the following days, ISIL militants advanced further east and south, seizing territory in Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din, and Diyala provinces. Following the advance, ISIL militants captured scores of Iraqi security force personnel. The group carried out several mass executions over the following days, posting images of the killings on social media.



ISIL militants kill dozens of security force members as part of a mass execution in Iraq's Salah ad Din province in mid-June 2014. The image was shared on social media by an ISIL-affiliated Twitter account. (IHS Jane's/JTIC)

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The group continued to hold much of its seized territory for the month of June and released a series of video and audio messages on 29 June to mark the beginning of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Among these releases was a highly significant audio statement by Adnani, entitled *This is the Promise of Allah*. In the statement, Adnani announced the establishment of the khilafa, or caliphate, in territory running from the Syrian governorate of Aleppo in the west to the Iraqi province of Diyala in the east, and that, henceforth, the official name for the group would simply be the Islamic State.



In the statement, Adnani listed the purported achievements of the group in establishing proper Islamic conditions - according to its interpretation of sharia - in the territory currently under its control in Iraq and Syria. As such, he claimed that the Islamic State's shura (consultative council) had concluded that the group had sufficient credentials to establish the khilafa and that, in the purported absence of any sharia constraint, it would be unjust or sinful of it to not do so. The group's emir, Quraishi - whose identity was confirmed as Ibrahim al-Badri - was named as khalifa, or caliph.

With the establishment of the khilafa, Adnani stated that it was now incumbent on all Muslims worldwide to pledge their loyalty and obedience to Khalifa Ibrahim and support him. Specific reference was also made to "the soldiers of... [other] organisations", with Adnani claiming that "the legality of your groups and organisations has become invalid" with the establishment of the khilafa.

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