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EDUC 485 Multimedia Literacy

24 November 2014

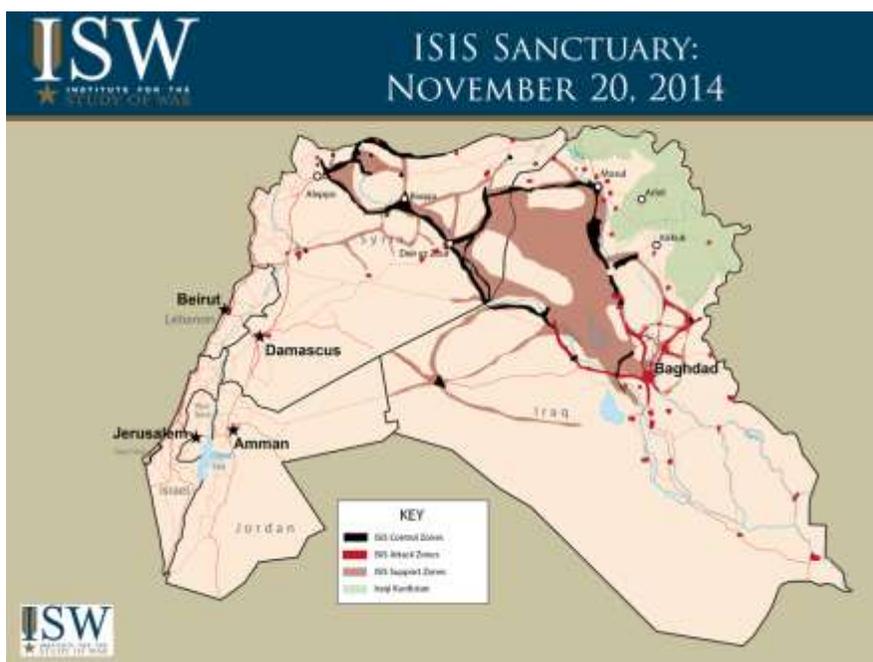
### **ISIL's Utilization of Multimedia to Fulfill Their Quest of Creating a New Islamic State**

The terrorist group known as ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and also known as ISIS) has grown from a diminutive group of 300 fighters at its origination to over 30,000 fighters today by utilizing the power of multimedia. This group has differentiated itself from other terrorist groups by creating a marketing arm that controls and disseminates its messaging instead of relying on traditional media outlets to convey their message. Utilizing Twitter, Facebook and other platforms they fine tune and disseminate their message minute by minute to recruit fighters, acquire financial support and terrorize.

The rise of ISIL has its roots in the inept toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 which left a vacuum of leadership, a wave of sectarian violence between the Sunni and Shia ethnic groups and an anti-coalition force insurgency. Those responsible for our rush into the war did not plan sufficiently for the aftermath even though they were warned by foreign leaders and U.S. Secretary of State at the time, Colin Powell who said it perfectly, "If you break it, you own it." "The collapse of Saddam's regime has left a power vacuum that has taken America by surprise. The Iraqi opposition parties, long-time bitter rivals, resumed their squabbling yesterday... A putative bid to establish an early interim government at a special meeting of the exile groups billed for Nassiriya, in southern Iraq, has already created chaos" (MacAskill, 2003). The marginalization of Sunni's, the ethnic group of former leader Saddam Hussein, in the

government and other entities was the catalyst that brought ISIL to power. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia Muslim, who governed from 2006 to August 2014, marginalized Sunni's partly due to his paranoia that he would be killed like his relatives who were killed by Saddam's regime. Refusing to accommodate Sunnis and to create common ground, he built a Shia sectarian state. He used anti-terrorism laws to mass-arrest Sunni civilians and kill peaceful Sunni protestors. This gave ISIL the ability to recruit new fighters by putting Sunni sectarianism at the heart of its message.

### The Goal of the Organization



Current ISILTerritory (Ali, et. al, 2014 )

The goal of ISIL is to create caliphate which is an Islamic state. It's led by a political and religious leader that is a successor (*caliph*) to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The power and authority of the caliph is absolute. How ISIL funds its goals is through extortion and oil.

They have built a mini-state in Syria by exporting oil and collecting taxes to fund their activities. These revenue streams have made ISIL much more effective on the battlefield than other militant groups. They have been able to lure away soldiers from both the Iraqi and Syrian militaries due to their ability to pay better salaries plus the fact that Sunni soldiers do not want to fight other

Sunnis. ISIL's strategy for territory acquisition is to gain control of oil refineries which enables them to have an internal revenue stream so they don't rely solely on external funding like most other terrorist organizations. The strategic method by which they are acquiring territory shows that they are a skilled military organization who does not plan attacks randomly. They are moving from tactics like car bombs and improvised explosive devices to controlling cities.

### **Social Media Expertise**

ISIL differs from other terrorist groups due to its sophistication and brutality. An example is their publishing of an annual report. "On March 31, 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham published a new edition of "al-Naba" [The Report], its "annual report" covering the period of November 2012 to November 2013. The Arabic language report, over 400 pages long, was first published by the I'tisaam Media Foundation, ISIS's main media arm, and then re-posted online by secondary sources" (Bilger, 2014). The attack metrics produced in this report enables them to show they have a strong central command with a long term strategy to reach their goals, attract potential donors and recruitments to fight for their cause, and intimidate rival terrorist groups. ISIL also has Twitter pages for each Wilayat (each local town with an ISIL governance structure). This enables them to display their violent attacks more often and to intimidate local populations by showing their school, library or government building attacked. It is important to remember that in many areas of Iraq and Syria journalists have been silenced therefore ISIL's metrics and postings may be exaggerated.

The grisly videos released online of the beheadings of American journalists and aid workers are also part of their media strategy. "So why the beheadings? In a word, publicity: They increase the group's profile as the biggest challenger to the supposed greatest enemy of Islam. This allows ISIL to draw from a significantly larger pool of recruits, many with strong anti-

American sentiment, which ISIL desperately needs to fight local battles as the group tries to carve out a de facto state” (Pape, et.al, 2014). ISIL has also launched “al-Zawra,” an online campaign specifically geared at women to recruit wives for jihadists, teach domestic skills and how to use weaponry. In addition, the campaign aims to teach women recruits software design and editing to help in spreading their message.

ISIL has had great success utilizing Twitter by creating an Arabic-language app called The Dawn of Glad Tidings. It is promoted as a way to stay abreast of the jihadi group’s latest headlines. They also use organized hashtag campaigns to repetitively tweet hashtags at certain times of day so that they trend on Twitter. This makes the hashtag trend even more because it is retweeted by the group’s followers. Through this more people are exposed to their messaging. The combination of their online strategies enables ISIL to project strength and promote engagement online, and some would say puts American multimedia gurus to shame.

The U.S. military has been combatting ISIL by setting up their own messaging campaign on Facebook, Twitter and other online outlets. For example, the FBI is trolling Facebook to see what people are posting - specifically if they are endorsing jihad or trying to establish contact with one of the terrorist groups in Iraq or Syria. Undercover FBI agents then begin a dialog with them proposing to put them in touch with fictitious connections and flights to the Mideast. If individuals follow through they are then arrested at airports or other points to exit the country. An FBI informant stated to NBC News that "ISIS recruits are more likely to reach out in the online universe seeking advice on how to reach the land of jihad than to consult the guidance of a traditional cleric or local community leader," he said. "FBI and other law enforcement officials hope that by infiltrating that universe and creating honeypots to draw in and capture potential ISIS recruits, they can help sow doubts in the minds of would-be jihadists in the overall

reliability of the Internet as a medium for recruitment” (Windrem, 2014).

Other social media sites like Twitter and YouTube have played their part by shutting down threatening accounts and removing videos. Individuals have also started hashtags like #ISISMediaBlackout to combat ISIL’s message. Interestingly though Twitter supports free speech and fights government requests to release information or delete accounts, “As long as it doesn't make direct threats, impersonate people, or pirate music, ISIS can exploit Twitter—but those looking to defeat ISIS can use Twitter to watch and track people who would use modern-day technology to impose a barbaric regime rooted far in the past” (McLaughlin, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

We may not understand ISIL’s barbaric ways but they are seen as freedom fighters by many Sunni’s who have been marginalized and terrorized by their government. However, their brutality may have started to turn the tide against them and surprisingly is one of the reasons that they are no longer affiliated with Al Qaeda. In addition, due to mistreatment there are Sunni tribes who are willing to fight against them. Muslims around the world, not only those in Western countries, are decrying their actions and believe they are hijacking their religion in the name of terrorism. Islamic scholars are also outraged because ISIL has removed passages from the Quran to fit their ideology – specifically passages about respecting other religions and killing. Muslim women in Britain started the #MakingAStand campaign on social media to stop vulnerable young women who may feel marginalized from joining the Islamic State. Even Pope Francis, when visiting Turkey, has called for dialog with Muslims to counter fanaticism and fundamentalism, and “denounced people who say that "all Muslims are terrorists.” As we cannot say that all Christians are fundamentalists.”

The United States will need to walk a fine line not to overstep in our military actions

against the group. President Obama wants to limit U.S troops on the ground and has employed airstrikes and local fighters to battle ISIL. If there are heavy casualties of innocent civilians this will stoke the anti-American propaganda ISIL has exploited so efficiently.

Also Malaki's successor, Haider al-Abadi, needs to quickly create a government that will unite Iraqis across ethnicity and sect because the current makeup of Shia rule cannot bring Iraq back together. ISIL is an adversary with great multimedia, marketing and military skills that requires a multi-faceted strategy to defeat it, or it may become a permanent state in the Middle East.

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