THE ISIS FILES

Moral Dominance: Policing Minds, Spirits, Bodies, and Markets

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Abstract
This report attempts to cover existing literature gaps on the Islamic State Hisba’s origins, structure, operations, and overall raison d’être. Using a wide array of primary source materials, the authors start by providing an overview of its evolution and integral role in ‘commanding right and forbidding wrong’. Then, we shift our focus to the organizational hierarchy undergirding the various divisions that make up the Islamic State’s hisba. Informed by the extensive discussion on hisba’s origin and bureaucracy, our effort uncovers four overlapping lines of enforcement, namely: Thought policing, body policing, spiritual policing, and market policing. Taken together, the hisba’s mandate reveals a systemic effort to exact and maintain a state of moral domination that ensures ideological, social, political, and economic uniformity, as well as the internal security of the Islamic State before its territorial collapse. Our report concludes by demonstrating a model of moral domination, discussing its implication for theory and practice.
Introduction

*Hisba*, as a religious obligation to ‘commanding right and forbidding wrong’, originates from Quranic verses that implore Muslims to enforce such a duty.1 The Islamic State used *hisba* to police and surveil those who lived under its control. In so doing, it induced and maintained a state of fear among local populations to deter ‘violators’ and exasperate public distrust.

The full scope of *hisba’s* operations and functions as an entity charged with moral policing remain vague, both in terms of theory and practice. These ambiguities paved the way for governing authorities, whether contemporary states, non-state actors, or medieval societies, to utilize such an entity in order to improve state security, exact order, deter dissent, and implement social, political, and economic uniformity.

While there are notable exceptions, there is little systematic research and assessment on the operations of the Islamic State’s Department of *Hisba*.2 Redressing these gaps goes beyond the scope of one report. Our study is limited to the investigation of the Islamic State *hisba’s* evolution, administrative structure and manpower, mandate and operation, and overall objectives.

Our investigation uncovers that the Islamic State’s *hisba* department used a sophisticated organizational system to promote public uniformity and improve internal security. This organizational system clearly defined the shape of *hisba* within the group’s bureaucracy and the entity’s interdepartmental coordination, mandate, and jurisdiction. The *hisba’s* ecosystem allowed the group to enforce four lines of policing efforts. They include: Thought policing, body policing, spiritual policing, and market policing. Taken together, the measures used to implement *hisba’s* four lines of enforcement efforts demonstrate a model of moral dominance that anchors itself on absolute public uniformity and state security.

Our analysis relies on historical sources on *hisba*, the Islamic State’s publications and propaganda, as well as the group’s internal files.3 We compiled open-source *hisba*-related ideological publications, Islamic State’s bureaucratic documents, and gathered relevant propaganda.
materials for the period between August 2012 and January 2020. Given
the provenance of these materials, we included the full list in the
appendix. Several of these documents are part of the ISIS Files digital
repository.

To optimize validity, we used various measures, including triangulation
and contradictory evidence analysis. In so doing, we constantly
combined and cross-examined different sets of data (i.e., internal
documents, ideological publications, and propaganda materials). We
retained and accounted for deviant cases and contradictory evidence in
the interpretation of the findings. The data used in this report was treated
as a unified whole. This allowed us to identify unanticipated themes as
they emerged and from multiple sources. To this end, we individually
examined and then discussed our findings. Whenever analytical issues
arose, we sought additional information. When that failed to mitigate
doubts and resolve disagreements, the issue was excluded from our
analysis.

Figure 1: A frame from an Islamic State’s propaganda video featuring a ship
from afar. The group describes its hisba apparatus as the ship of salvation.

This report proceeds as follows. In the next section, we give an overview
of the historical roots and the Islamic State’s understanding of
commanding right and forbidding wrong, the two principal components
of hisba’s enforcement. After that, it scrutinizes this entity’s bureaucracy
and its intricacies; including hisba’s mandate and how it differs from
other entities such as the Islamic Police. The proceeding section discusses
the hisba’s four policing themes. The content analysis method used to
arrive to these themes is described above and discussed in the analytical sections. In the last part of this report, we consider our findings in aggregate, outlining a systematic model of moral domination. We conclude by identifying the report’s limitations and directions for future research.

**Origin & Evolution**

*Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them. A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it. No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.*

Sahih al-Bukhari; Sahih Muslim

Understanding *hisba* as an entity demands outlining its emergence and evolution. For one, the intricacies of *hisba’s* operations and functions are vague. These ambiguities have allowed governing authorities, whether contemporary states, non-state actors, or medieval societies, to fill the void in interpreting and institutionalizing the workings of this entity. The guiding principles of this obligation are embedded within Islamic scripture and traditions. Scholars often use the following Quranic verse to justify the institutionalization of this obligation: The Quran calls upon believers to “command right and forbid wrong” (*al-amr bi-l-ma’ruf wa-l-nahiya ʿan al-munkar*).

*Let there be among you a group who call to virtue, who command the good and forbid vice. These shall indeed prosper*[Q3:104]*

While the enforcement of certain functions of *hisba* took place during the period of the four so-called *Rightly Guided Caliphs* (632 to 661 C.E.), the concept was largely institutionalized during the Abbasid dynasty’s rule, sometime in the late 9th century. During the seventh century, commanding right and forbidding wrong fell on officially appointed individuals who came to be known as *muhtasibun* (plural of *muhtasib*).
These individuals were charged with monitoring social and economic public exchanges as well as publicly performed rituals.

Commanding right and forbidding wrong is either an individual obligation, a state responsibility, or both. Most Islamic scholars argued that commanding right and forbidding wrong is a collective duty (fard al-kifaya) that had to be fulfilled by the Muslim community as a whole. The basis for this interpretation is anchored in the aforementioned Quranic verse, particularly:

Let there be among you a group

Therefore, when a group assumes this collective responsibility, other Muslims within that group’s sphere of enforcement are absolved from this religious duty. In the absence of enforcers, commanding right and forbidding wrong may become an individual obligation (fard al-‘ayn).¹¹

The historical origins of hisba are obscure and have sparked controversies among scholars.¹² Some have argued that early iterations of hisba focused largely on the merchants-consumers dyad. Hadiths attributed to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad indicate his concerns about market monopolies, profiteering, illicit trade, and more broadly deceptive practices of merchants.¹³ The second caliph Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 644) inspected and enforced ‘proper’ trade conducts, carried out nightly patrols, and implored Muslims to pray on time. Umar took the first step to institutionalize hisba, commissioning several umala’ (plural of amil which means agents) to oversee market inspection.¹⁴ There is evidence that Umar assigned the first female enforcer to handle the tasks of amil.¹⁵ His two successors, Uthman b. Affan (d.656) and Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), followed suite and appointed market inspectors.¹⁶

Hisba as an official religious institution started taking shape during the time of the Umayyad dynasty caliphate (661 to 750 C.E). It was during later stages of Umayyad’s rule that those market inspectors and tax collectors took on themselves to police public morality and enforce religious codes, paving the way for state-orchestrated efforts to command right and forbid wrong.¹⁷
The institutionalization and scholarly investigations of *hisba* were notably advanced during the time of Abbasid dynasty caliphate (750 to 1258 C.E.). During that time period, *hisba* took its shape as an official government institution. Over time, Abbasid caliphs started appointing *hisba* enforcers in big cities. Such development was likely driven by caliphs’ desire to replace what was voluntary and spontaneous with a more institutionalized body, allowing them to further regulate the workings and operations of *hisba*. Islamic scholars of the Abbasid dynasty caliphate contributed to the expansion of *hisba*’s mandate. As part of that era governance initiatives, the *hisba* was further institutionalized to regulate markets and to oversee religious and moral affairs.

The first guiding framework of *hisba* as a state institution was conceived by Abu al-Hasan Ali b. Muhammad b. Habib al-Mawardi (a.k.a., al-Mawardi; d. 1058). Al-Mawardi offered a triplite framework for commanding right and forbidding wrong. His framework centered on rights that the *hisba* has to safeguard from violations, namely:

I. Rights of God, such as prayers and fasting.
II. Rights of man including possessions and public welfare.
III. God’s and man’s shared rights, like guardianship of women, childcare, and the protection of privacy.

Moreover, during the Mamluk Sultanate (1250 to 1517 CE), Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, a *hisba* enforcer himself, wrote a lengthy operational blueprint that detailed ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ and how to command the former and prohibit the later. Building on earlier writings and efforts to ensure the separation of the sexes, Ibn al-Ukhuwwa paired the concept of privacy, understood as a privilege, with the very existence of women. Al-Mawardi’s framework and Ibn al-Ukhuwwa’s operational blueprint informed more contemporary institutionalizations of *hisba*.

*Hisba* and its principal rule in commanding right and forbidding wrong were at the center of the Islamic State’s governance ambitions. Its enforcement was likely the most conspicuous aspect of the group’s rule as
a territorial entity. The Islamic State considers *hisba* as a means of achieving a stable, safe, and sovereign state. According to the group’s ideologues, humans are incapable by themselves to create such a society, and thus, a sovereign state on the ‘prophetic’ methodology requires a system (*nizam*) that allows monitoring the public discourse to guide or discipline them according to a set of socio-economic and ideological principles. In other words, the establishment of a department to command right and forbid wrong is a prerequisite to consolidating and ruling a sovereign Islamic state. The group frames *hisba* as a state obligation to implement Islamic laws. The importance of *hisba* as an institutionalized entity is particularly emphasized through dozens of its propaganda videos and publications.

The Islamic State cited a hadith to reinforce the pivotal role of *hisba* as a state institution in several propaganda videos. This hadith goes as follow:

> The likeness of the man who observes the limits prescribed by God and that of the man who transgresses them is like a group of people who get on board a ship after casting lots. Some of them are in its lower deck and some of them in its upper (deck). Those who are in its lower (deck), when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck, and say to them: ‘If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.’ If they (the occupants of the upper deck) leave them to carry out their design they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead (with their plan), all of them will remain safe.

Building on this logic, the Islamic State frames *hisba* as the ummah’s (Muslim community) “ship of salvation” (*safinat al-naja*). Its operations, therefore, extend beyond regulating ritualistic practices to preventing a perceived moral decay from spreading. The group ‘reasoned’ that such an undertaking requires an institutionalized body that monitors and guides public conduct.

For the Islamic State, *hisba* is one of the main institutional pillars of its caliphate. It is a coercive means that promotes public conformity to the group’s moral, social, political, and economic regulations. The *hisba*
department works on ensuring total compliance and is charged with punishing individuals who disobey or deviate from the Islamic State’s strict restrictions.29

Our investigation suggests that the Islamic State’s efforts to institutionalize and orchestrate the operations of the hisba relied on the works of four Islamic scholars, namely: al-Mawardi, Ibn al-Farra’, Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, and Ali Ibn Khalil al-Tarabulusi.30

These sources display a variety of themes, including:

I. Hisba’s mandate in the context of Islamic governance.
II. Hisba manuals to guide enforcing right and forbidding wrong.
III. The jurisdiction of hisba.

The thorough analysis of the Islamic State’s publications indicates that al-Mawardi’s work is particularly influential in contextualizing the operations of the hisba.31 In fact, it is fair to say that his book The Ordinances of Government informed the group’s understanding and dominated its discussion of hisba’s role in Islamic governance.

As well as the above scholarly and historical sources, the Islamic State understanding and enforcement of hisba is informed by its predecessor iterations and other jihadi groups such as Ansar al-Islam in northern Iraq.32 While intriguing, tracing the group’s adaptation of hisba as used by different jihadi groups goes beyond the scope of this paper. For one, we rely on the Islamic State’s publications to piece together the evolution of its hisba department. Such material did not attribute much to earlier iterations or other jihadi groups.
The Bureaucracy

The Islamic State’s *hisba* used a number of tools to command right and forbid wrong, the entity’s guiding principles. In territories controlled by the Islamic State, members of *hisba* patrolled the streets to ensure that people observed and abided by the group’s strict Salafi convictions. In this section, we discuss the jurisdiction, workflow as well as the organizational structure that undergirds the Islamic State’s *hisba*. Its core components are divided in terms of scope and reach. This includes the central ministerial department, provincial departments, and district-based centers. The expansive role of *hisba* and its interaction with other functional departments is discussed in the sections on jurisdiction, workflow, as well as throughout the different enforcement themes.

**Jurisdiction**

The Islamic State tried to bring back an institutional system that resembles a caliphate as detailed in treatises like that of al-Mawardi. According to his writings, *hisba* enforcers have the authority to adjudicate and carry out punishments. As it relates to *hisba*, sharia law distinguishes between two sets of punishments: (i) Fixed punishments (*hudud*) that are mentioned in the Quran and Sunna; and (ii) discretionary punishments (*ta’zir*). When witnessing offenses that do not rise to the levels of *hudud* but meet the required criteria of *ta’zir*, a state-appointed *hisba* enforcer was authorized to carry out the punishments at his own discretion.

According to al-Mawardi, the jurisdiction of *hisba* enforcers fall between judges and the sultan’s tribunals (*mazalim* or grievances). Judges look into cases after receiving them from enforcing departments such as the Islamic Police or *hisba*. On the other hand, *hisba* enforcers patrol the streets and can proactively investigate cases and transgressions. Such investigations are limited to the mandate of *hisba* and thus, should not go beyond issues that occur in public. Matters that require formal procedures such as hearings, meetings, witness statements are under purview of judges and are beyond the jurisdiction of *hisba* enforcers. The mandate of the grievances department is fundamentally different from that of the *hisba* department. The former is similar to an appeal board
that looks into complaints that challenge judges’ ability to provide clear rulings.\textsuperscript{37}

In general, judges authorize the enforcement of \textit{hudud}. The process leading to carrying out punishment involves a procedure that requires the oversight of Islamic courts. \textit{Hudud} are enforced for ‘offenses’ like adultery, homosexual intercourse, consuming alcohol, slander, theft, and banditry.\textsuperscript{38} Several Islamic State’s videos claim that the group followed jurisdictional procedures before carrying out punishments.\textsuperscript{39} Examples from such propaganda materials outline that \textit{hisba} enforcers, in some cases, apprehended individuals for committing ‘offenses’ that rise to the level of \textit{hudud}. On such occasions, \textit{hisba} enforcers were instructed to take such cases to courts or authorized judges.\textsuperscript{40} These punishments were carried out in public and in front of a witnessing audience.\textsuperscript{41} According to the Islamic State’s internal files and propaganda,\textsuperscript{42} each \textit{hisba} center has at least one inhouse sharia specialist who is authorized to sentence and to prescribe punishments for cases that fall under the purview of \textit{hisba} such as smoking and pigeon keeping.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Hisba} enforcers work on forbidding wrongs committed in public, without spying on people.\textsuperscript{44} Traditionally, individuals’ privacy is protected from \textit{hisba} enforcement.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, \textit{hisba} enforcers are not authorized to gain information about ‘wrongdoings’ that occurred in the privacy of one’s home. Every conduct or possession as long as it is not publicly displayed is protected by the privilege of privacy. Several scholars have argued that spying and raiding homes to inspect or confirm a ‘wrongdoing’ is prohibited.\textsuperscript{46} Privacy is a complex construct and the restrictions for \textit{hisba} enforcers that come with it are often situation dependent.

The data used to examine the Islamic State’ \textit{hisba} do not provide details about the group’s understanding of the concept of privacy in the context of commanding right and forbidding wrong. Internal Islamic State’s files and propaganda materials suggest that the group did not adhere to the restrictions associated with privacy.\textsuperscript{47} For example, individuals were arrested for having ‘inappropriate’ photos on their cellphones.\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Hisba} enforcers inspected such private items to ensure the absence and removal
Moreover, multiple Islamic State’s propaganda videos showed how *hisba* enforcers raided houses and inspected and disassembled vehicles to confiscate banned items and punish ‘offenders’.50

**Figure 2:** A frame from an Islamic State Propaganda features hisba enforcers dissembling a vehicle and confiscating alcohol.51

**The Muhtasib**

The duties of the *hisba* enforcer (*muhtasib*) are not specified in the Quran beyond the call for a group from the community to command right and forbid wrong. Al-Mawardi provided one of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of the role of the *muhtasib*.52 Based on his assessment, the *muhtasib* has to be:53

I. A free man;
II. just and of good character;
III. zealous and uncompromising in matters of religion; and
IV. learned in issues pertaining to violations committed in public (*almunkarat al-zahira*).

According to al-Mawardi, there are differences in terms of authorities and responsibilities between official *hisba* enforcers and those carrying out this religious duty on a voluntary basis. Unlike officially appointed *hisba*
enforcers, volunteers are not authorized to carry out discretionary (ta’zir) punishments.\textsuperscript{54} In terms of responsibilities and duties, the Islamic State seems to follow al-Mawardi’s distinction between those assuming the role of muhtasib and volunteers.\textsuperscript{55}

An Islamic State’s recruitment announcement from the province of Nineveh allowed us to piece together the criteria that the group used to select members of the hisba apparatus.\textsuperscript{56} The list goes as follow:

1. The applicant must not be less than (25) years or over (40) years of age.
2. The applicant must be of good character and conduct.
3. The applicant must be proficient in reading the Quran (the reading according to the rules for proper pronunciation) and must have memorized three parts of the Noble Quran and Al-Nawawi’s Forty Hadiths.\textsuperscript{57}
4. The applicant must be free from any physical defects that impede his ability to enforce hisba and from any speech impediments and articulation disorders.
5. The applicant must be committed to the creed of the Righteous Predecessors and to the outward Prophetic example.
6. The applicant must pass the Sharia exam pertaining to hisba.
7. The applicant must have a sponsor exclusively from the Mujahedeen Brothers.

The list suggests that the Islamic State built on al-Mawardi’s writing regarding the qualifications of the muhtasib or hisba enforcers. Nevertheless, the group was more restrictive in terms of who qualifies to enlist in the hisba’s ranks. The pre-conditions on age limits, physical wellbeing, and the need for an Islamic State’s fighter to act as a guarantor indicates that the group was either selective and had to deal with more applicants than needed, was meticulous about the working of hisba, or both. As an institutional bureaucracy, the group examined applicants’ knowledge to ensure the recruitment of qualified applicants. The sponsorship “from the Mujahedeen Brothers” was likely in place as a layer of scrutiny to vet such applicants.
Applicants who met the 7 listed criteria had to appear in person to fill in official recruitment forms during the application period. A recent publication on the Islamic State’s personnel forms suggest that the group experienced a growing organizational need for personnel information to manage its complex bureaucracy and guard itself from exploitation. A different form of Islamic State’s personnel files provides anecdotal support to the previous argument. It is likely that applicants for positions within the hisba department provided a wide range of personal and professional information in order for the group’s human resources office to determine whether they qualify for such positions. Taken together, the listed items speak to an intentional pursuit for committed and trustworthy enlistees. It is unclear whether the Islamic State process for recruitment and selection of hisba enforcers was strategically designed but it is consistent with managerial practices that ensure hiring candidates who would go above and beyond to deliver on their organizational duties.

**Workflow**

As shown in the administrative hierarchy of the hisba in figure 7, each office in district-based centers had a field squad. For instance, the women’s hisba office participated in patrolling the streets and ensuring that females who resided in areas under the Islamic State’s control were adherent to the group’s strict rules and restrictions. Each office at the district level has its own mandate and oversaw the enforcement of department-specific regulations. The monitoring and inspection division, for example, was charged with overseeing commercial activities in local markets and business, ensuring the implementation of regulations issued by the leadership of the Islamic State, and arresting ‘violators.’

The Department of Hisba implemented strict travel restrictions. Civilians who lived under the Islamic State’s control needed to provide evidence of extenuating circumstances such as undergoing a medical surgery that is only available outside of the group’s former territorial holdings to receive travel permits. District-based hisba centers ran offices that issued permits to enter or exit the Islamic State-controlled territories. This office was known as maktab al-safar (the travel office).
Hisba enforcers operated alongside members of the Islamic State’s security department to monitor travelers’ activities and man border crossings and checkpoints.63 These operations allowed members of the hisba apparatus to keep and maintain records pertaining to travel and trade.64 This in turn, facilitated hisba enforcers’ efforts to ensure the adherence of traders and travelers to the group’s regulations and restrictions.65

In addition, hisba operatives gathered information on ‘violators’ through their department’s various field squads and networks of local informants. When operatives of the hisba apparatus received such information, they were expected to inform the managers of their divisions, such as the manager of the office for monitoring and inspection. These officials cannot carry out raids and investigations without securing a permit from the center’s oversight officer or his deputy (a.k.a., field officer). Once a permission is granted, investigation and raid squads are deployed to inspect whether such violations took place and if so, arrest those who committed them. On occasions, members of the women’s squad participated in investigations and raids when suspected women ‘violators’ were involved.66 This collaboration between the women’s squad and others within the hisba apparatus was, ironically, enforced to ensure sex segregation.67

Figure 3: This Frame captures a scene from a propaganda video that shows civilians applying for travel permit at a hisba center.68
Those who were captured or detained by members of *hisba* were either brought to an inhouse sharia specialist or to an Islamic State court before their imprisonment. In some cases, the Islamic Police, another enforcement department, transported detainees from its custody to that of the *hisba*. This was only the case when such individuals were found to commit ‘offenses’ that fall under the purview of the *hisba*. An internal Islamic Police file from a precinct in Tall Kayf, Iraq highlights limits imposed on jurisdictional areas of responsibilities. Particularly, detaining individuals for committing ‘offenses’ that involve commanding right and forbidding wrong were determined to be outside the purview of the Islamic Police. Therefore, those prisoners were transferred to the *hisba’s* custody. The following figure provides details on the breakdown of their ‘offenses.’

**Prisoners Referred to Hisba**

![Bar chart showing the breakdown of offenses referred to Hisba.]

*Figure 4: Prisoners Referred to Hisba*

While *hisba* enforcers were featured enacting punishments in the Islamic State’s propaganda, it is hard to pin down their involvement in capturing, detaining, and executing individuals. The sharia specialists within local *hisba* centers were charged with determining the appropriate procedures
pertaining to the detention and punishment of ‘offenders.’ Based on their jurisdictional areas of responsibilities, they made decisions on whether it is necessary to get the Islamic State’s courts (i.e., Judiciary and Grievances) involved in the process. For severe types of punishments, captured ‘violators’ were transported directly to the department of judiciary and grievances.73 These officials maintained and updated lists of certain violations and their respective discretionary punishments.74

Central Ministerial Department

The Islamic State does not detail the duties, responsibilities, and scope of the central ministerial department of hisba in its manual that appears online.75 It is likely that this layer in the hisba hierarchy oversaw the operations of different provincial departments. However, there is a lack of available material to ascertain the scope and limits of such an oversight. The cited manual demonstrates the ministerial department in the organizational structure of hisba.76 This suggests that the leader(s) of this top level of the hisba report and receive directives from the groups executive body, the Delegated Committee.77

The top levels’ coordination and collaboration between the central ministerial department of hisba and its functional counterparts remain vague. Nevertheless, this report discusses how all other lower levels of the hisba down to individual enforcers work with other entities, including: Judiciary and Grievances, Islamic Police, members of the Security department, Media department and the like. While these collaborations and coordination take place at the provincial and district levels, they are likely designed and approved by those in the highest managerial level of functional ministerial departments.

Provincial Hisba Departments

The Islamic State’s central ministerial department of hisba comprised a set of branches in each wilaya (province).78 Each provincial department has an emir (director) and a deputy. These officials were charged with a host of tasks, including:79
I. Coordinating with the central ministerial department of *hisba* and the *wali* (governor) of their respective province regarding military affairs.

II. Overseeing the work of district-based *hisba* centers within the province.

III. Working with specialized ministerial departments and committees on issues of religious violations.

IV. Looking into complaints filed against members of *hisba*.

V. Collaborating with other Islamic State’s ministerial departments to resolve administrative disputes.

VI. Taking in and guiding newly assigned members.

VII. Compiling and sharing performance reports with the central ministerial department of *hisba*.

The emirs of *hisba* provincial departments are ordered to put their directives in writing and coordinate them with the *wali* of their respective province as well as the central ministerial department of *hisba*.

*Figure 5:* A frame from an Islamic State’s propaganda featuring a page of a biweekly report of *hisba* enforcement.
Each *hisba* department has three offices, namely: (i) Oversight; (ii) administrative and financial; and (iii) machinery. The administrative and financial officer handles the day-to-day operations of the provincial department of *hisba*. This officer compiles and prepares monthly reports and updates on members of *hisba* centers in said province. 81 He coordinates with the central ministerial department of *hisba* regarding organizational affairs. 82 This officer works with the administrative official of the province on managerial and financial matters. He disperses the salaries and reimburses the costs of running *hisba* centers within the province. 83 Other responsibilities include: locating operational bases and equipping them in coordination with the administrator of the province; filing communications with other institutions to the central ministerial department; and distributing directives and announcements of the central ministerial department to *hisba* centers within the province.84

Each of the provincial *hisba* departments also had an in-house machinery office. This entity works on receiving, tracking usage, and maintaining machineries (i.e., vehicles). The machinery office drafts monthly reports, including, vehicles under maintenance, and required spare parts and vehicles.85 The last office within the provincial department hosts officials overseeing the work of subordinate *hisba* centers.

**District-based *Hisba* Centers**

As mentioned above, oversight officials have an office within the provincial *hisba* department. Those individuals lead district-based *hisba* centers, acting as the contact point for the provincial *hisba* department. They file details of new enlistees, compile performance reports for the provincial department, and authorize inspections and raids.86 Oversight officials had a powerful impact on civilians who lived under the Islamic State’s rule, including their movement to areas beyond the Islamic State’s territorial control.87 Their deputies (a.k.a., field officials) could also grant such permissions. These field officials are general coordinators who are charged with planning field operations. They work closely with the oversight official, in-house sharia (jurisprudential) specialist, and inspection and field squads to resolve religious violations even those committed within one’s household.88
Like provincial departments, district-based hisba centers have an administrative and financial office. The leadership of this office executed the day-to-day administrative functions, including:

I. Compiling and drafting the monthly reports of the center’s various offices.
II. Updating the list of new members.
III. Coordinating and tracking organizational affairs with the administrator of the district or the emir of the city.
IV. Disbursing monthly salaries and needed funds to cover the center’s operational cost.
V. Locating appropriate operational bases in collaboration with the administrator of the district or the emir of the city.
VI. Providing the provincial hisba department with all correspondences between the oversight official and other institutions.

Hisba centers are the executive arm of the provincial hisba department and thus, they carry out a wide array of operations. They have nine additional functional offices, namely, jurisprudence, tracking, women squads, monitoring and inspection, investigation squads, prisons, machineries, civil units, and travel offices. As demonstrated in figure 7, each of these offices has a manager, deputy, and two subdivisions, including an administrative and financial as well as field squads’ divisions. Together they allow managers of each operational office to execute their tasks. The Islamic State’s manual and video message from 2016 provided detailed lists of such tasks.

For example, the office for the jurisprudential specialist is charged with issuing enforcement rulings and tracking their implementation. It drafted referral notices of and tracked cases that required the oversight of a judge. This office was responsible for ensuring that arrest reports met all required criteria. Jurisprudential specialists implemented awareness programs in prisons. They collaborated with students and da’wa (proselytization) officials. Their offices tracked prisoners’ ‘violations’ of
religious codes, monitored prisoners after their release, and maintained records of religious misconduct by hisba members.94

Prison officials, who oversaw one of the functional offices of the hisba centers, handled several tasks. These responsibilities are as follows: 95

I. Taking custody and holding captured individuals in ‘well’ maintained detention facilities.

II. Ensuring the immediate referral of prisoners to the jurisprudential specialist.

III. Drafting daily reports on the status of prisoners.

IV. Separating minors from adults in the custody of the hisba.

V. Maintaining an area to interrogate prisoners.

VI. Prohibiting individuals from entering the prison without the approval of the oversight official or the jurisprudential specialist.

VII. Guaranteeing operational opacity around prisoners’ handover or transfer.

The office for monitoring and inspection oversaw the enforcement of the Islamic State’s market regulations. Such responsibilities consisted of monitoring businesses and markets, combating deceptive practices, arresting violators, and ensuring the safety of produce.96 This office relied on technically skilled personnel, such as health inspectors and veterinarians.97

Another vital hisba’s office is the institution that oversaw women’s affairs. This office carried out several key functions, including:98

I. Locating proper operational bases for women and ensuring that such offices are separate from other hisba facilities.

II. Monitoring civilian women and capturing those who violate religious codes.

III. Disbursing female members’ salaries.

IV. Providing religious dressing to civilians through women field squads.
V. Inspecting violations across stores designated to sell products or provide services to women.

VI. Patrolling women’s schools, institutes, and collages to provide ‘advice.’

VII. Arresting ‘violators.’

VIII. Drafting reports regarding the office’s operations and submitting them to the oversight official of their respective center.

IX. ‘Advising’ captured and detained women.

X. Sniffing women suspected of drinking alcohol or wearing perfume.

XI. Accompanying field or investigation squads to carry out raids and inspect captured women whenever possible.

Figure 6: A frame from an Islamic State video that shows a bus of women squad.99

While the above details are based on a hisba manual authored in November 2014, an internal Islamic State document shows that the wali of Mosul in Iraq only approved a hisba women office by July 2015.100

According to the Islamic State’s publications, district-based hisba centers had three additional functional offices, including: Civil units, travel, and
The tasks of the latter mirror those carried out by their counterparts at the wilaya level.

The office for travel issued permits to exit the group-controlled territories. It worked closely with the director and deputy of district-based hisba centers. This office ensured adherence to travel restriction, like those pertaining to women.101

Lastly, the office of civil units was charged with guiding and disciplining civilians in matters related to ‘proper’ conduct.102 It enforced dress codes and participated in the destruction of cultural property, such as churches, shrines, antiquities, and the like.103

**Figure 7:** The Administrative Hierarchy of the Islamic State's Hisba
Enforcement

Our thematic analysis of internal Islamic State’s files and publications, both propaganda and ideological writings, arrived to four essential lines of hisba enforcement, namely: (i) thought and cultural policing; (ii) body policing; (iii) spiritual policing; and (iv) market policing. It is noteworthy, however, that the four lines of enforcement often intersect with one another. For example, the enforcement of travel restrictions targeted the transportation of goods and the movement of civilians in and out of the Islamic State-controlled territories. Thus, as the following discussion suggests, one can argue that travel restrictions fall between market policing and body policing.104

Thought Policing

The Islamic State’s quest for religious purity during its time as a territorial entity went beyond fighting local and cultural practices. The group made it clear that anything that can be construed as un-Islamic had no place in territories under its control. Thought policing as a major enforcement theme encompasses different lines of efforts to ban or restrict access to information, technology, art, and language use. Another target of thought policing was cultural property including any symbols of cultural heritage. The group documented and took pride in burning books and manuscripts, limiting access to information and communication technology, and destroying sculptures and artifacts that belong to ancient civilizations.

Outreach

Commanding right and forbidding wrong was one of the Islamic State’s means to delegitimize dissident voices and outlaw competing ideas. Through religious outreach and enforcement of the group’s regulations, the hisba department tried to promote absolute public conformity. Hisba enforcers played an important role in proselytization efforts, including outreach programs to promote the Islamic State’s various regulations.105 Public lectures, airing speeches through loudspeakers, newsletters, leaflets, banners, and the like were used to inform civilians of ‘proper’ conducts and the penalties associated with violating the group’s various bans and restrictions. 106
Hisba enforcers patrolled the streets and instructed civilians using amplified speakers on issues ranging from dress codes to extramarital affairs. The jurisdiction of hisba enforcers as well as the nuances of commanding right and forbidding wrong require an active role in religious and public outreach. For example, not every ‘offense’ that falls under the purview of hisba is punishable. In some cases, verbal reprimand and ‘advice’ were sufficient as a means to forbid wrong. Hisba enforcers also participated and took an active role in indoctrinating, recruiting, and enlisting child soldiers.\textsuperscript{107}

Hisba’s role in religious outreach is complex and extends to other organizational functions. According to documents found in the possession of a deceased Islamic State’s leader, members of this entity have a strategic role in pre-consolidation efforts to influence and infiltrate local populations.\textsuperscript{108} In so doing, they were embedded within the group’s security apparatus to provide a supportive role in pre-territorial phases of the Islamic State’s life cycle.\textsuperscript{109}

During the group’s time as a territorial entity, hisba enforcers were featured in numerous propaganda videos. These materials capture different operations, ranging from the enforcement of dress codes to the destruction of cultural properties.\textsuperscript{110} Such activities are also a form of social and religious outreach.

Nevertheless, their role in the Islamic State’s media extends to supportive functions and ground media operations.\textsuperscript{111} We argue that such efforts were in place to promote certain ideological views and suppress opposing ideas, and thus, a form of thought policing. While intriguing and worthy of serious investigation, the examination of the larger role of hisba in proselytization and other forms of outreach goes beyond the scope of this report.

**Books and Printed Materials**

Hisba enforcers waged an information war on printed books, magazines, newspapers, and the like as part of their department’s mandate to command right and forbid wrong.\textsuperscript{112} Also, this line of enforcement targeted posters, photographs, and mainstream and dissident media
The burning of books and printed materials was one of the hisba’s earliest measures to curb access to information. Working closely with the media department, through a chain of integrated offices and media cadre, hisba enforcers replaced books and printed materials accessible to the public. The burning of books and printed materials and their subsequent replacement with ideological texts supportive of the group were part of the Islamic State’s strategy to control the type of information consumed by the public.

Figure 8: A frame from an Islamic State’s propaganda featuring books burned at the hand of hisba enforcers.

Technology

Monitoring and restricting the use of technologies that enable access to entertainments and competing sources of information was, in the word of the Islamic State, part of the group’s effort to mitigate the impact of the ‘intellectual raid’ (ghazwa fikriyya) waged against it. Like books and printed materials, the group’s sought to censor the type of information consumed by civilians living under its control. Internal Islamic State’s files suggest that the hisba department spearheaded the enforcements of various measures to restrict access to communication technology and foreign media. It is noteworthy that hisba also collaborated with key
institutions, such as the security department, to ensure adherence to the groups’ restrictions and regulations. The Islamic State tried to monitor and restrict the use of the internet and smartphones. The *hisba* department played a supportive role in enforcing such regulations. For example, the provincial department of security in Nineveh and Euphrates Province ordered internet providers to share their data on users’ information. The department of judiciary and grievances banned the use of phones in public places across Fallujah, Iraq, citing moral and security hazards. It also threatened those who disobey with punishment. An internal file for prisoners’ handover, outline a *hisba* enforcement role in regulating the use of smartphones. The document in question justifies the handover of dozens of prisoners to *hisba’s* custody. Four of them were transferred for having ‘inappropriate’ phone contents. While members of *hisba* inspected phones to restrict access to such contents, the extent of these enforcement measures remains unclear.

The Islamic State’s information censorship was not only limited to internet and smartphone use. The ban on satellite devices was another one of these measures, which was likely issued by the Islamic State’s executive body. The *hisba* department led the group’s effort to remove and destroy satellite devices. To implement this measure, *hisba* enforcers ordered the handover of such devices to its offices and operatives. Subsequently, *hisba* enforcers inspected houses and punished ‘violators.’ An Islamic State’s announcement highlights the *hisba’s* role in implementing the ban on satellite devices:

[I]t has become obligatory for every Muslim to remove all of these wicked devices and accessories in his possession and surrender them to the brothers in charge of collecting and destroying them. The brothers in the Department of Hisba in coordination with the Department of Services will be patrolling the areas, the residential quarters, streets, and alleys to collect these devices from people’s homes. We hope that you cooperate with them. Each Muslim who has a satellite device and accessories in his possession should bring them out and put them in front of his home when the brothers are patrolling their neighborhoods.
Immediately after this order has been circulated, the Brothers will begin performing their duties. Any individual refusing to surrender his (satellite) will be held accountable in accordance with Sharia Laws and subject to discretionary punishment determined by the Department of Hisba. Then, the mere possession of this device will be considered an offense similar to other offenses punishable by the Department of Hisba.

*Figure 9:* A frame from an Islamic State’s video featuring the dumping ground of satellite dishes.127

Based on the Islamic State’s publications, the group sought a strict form of thought policing.128 It warned about the danger of consuming entertainment contents and materials from foreign media.129 In their views, such information stands to influence thoughts and therefore, shape attitudes, faith, and behavior. 130 For the Islamic State, banning access to media other than its own was a vital security measure.131

**Culture and Art**

The Islamic State rejects all forms of art beyond ‘legitimate’ Islamic symbolism, including icons, paintings, sculptures, and images, be they ancient or modern. In short, most representations of animate beings, particularly humans and animals. Regardless of the context and meaning
behind artworks, the group views such expressions as idolatry. And thus, access to art is prohibited, and when possible removed, by *hisba*.

According to the Islamic State, all of these practices constitute a form of worship of beings other than God. Since Salafis consider God as the sole influencer of worldly affairs, inspirations and traditions related to art and culture are largely considered heretical innovations. For example, using artwork on tombs and visiting, venerating, or processing grief next to graves are condemned by Salafis. Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab spearheaded the campaign to eradicate ‘idolatrous’ acts and symbols in the Arabian Peninsula during the 18th century. The Islamic State relied on his work to justify its fierce contempt for various forms of artistic expressions and cultural practices.

![Figure 10](image.png)

*Figure 10: A frame from a *hisba* propaganda video that captures the destruction of the remains in Nimrud, the ancient capital of the Assyrian civilization.*

The Islamic State ‘reasoned’ that the removal of artwork and ancient artifacts fall under the obligation to command right and forbid wrong. Therefore, the Department of *Hisba* oversaw operations aiming at preventing ‘un-Islamic’ influences and at reshaping history. In the following pages, we look into the group’s effort to obliterate cultural property, including the remains of ancient civilizations.
Based on available open source materials, the authors compiled a list of cultural properties in Syria and Iraq that were targeted by the Islamic State. As well as these incidents, we scrutinized propaganda materials featuring the destruction of cultural properties. Based on the data that emerged, we divided the motives behind the destruction into four categories, namely:

(I) Ideological: Destruction of cultural property that was not featured in propaganda materials, wherein the damage was not inflicted to repurpose cultural properties.


(III) Repurposing: Converting cultural property into different facilities such as turning an ancient church into an armory for the group’s militants.

(IV) Unclear: Cases that raise doubt regarding the identities and motives of the perpetrators.

Notwithstanding that motives behind the destruction of cultural property across the first three categories are all, indeed, intentional, this breakdown allows examining whether such crimes were committed for propagandistic reasons, material needs, or merely out of religious conviction.

Figure 11: The Islamic State’s Destruction of Cultural Property & the Group’s Motives: Iraq and Syria.
As shown in the above figure, the damage appears to be largely inflicted upon cultural property for ideological motives; ideologically driven destruction of cultural property is 2.07 times higher than all other categories combined.

The Islamic State orchestrated and implemented a long list of crimes and abuses. This particular offense carries significant legal implications. Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, a former member of the Malian Ansar Dine, pleaded guilty in front of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for carrying out war crimes; particularly, for orchestrating the attacks on cultural property and a World Heritage Site.\(^{138}\) Al-Mahdi’s case should serve as a legal precedent and an impetus for investigating the Islamic State’s leadership and institutions behind the planning and implementation of the destruction of cultural property as an organizational mandate.\(^{139}\) Chief among these intuitions, like in the case of al-Mahdi, is the Department of \textit{Hisba}. As well as \textit{hisba}, the department of natural resources is thought to be implicated in such war crimes.

\textbf{Language}

Regulating the use of language was part of the \textit{hisba}’s mandate. The Islamic State’s censorship targeted the use of language across public facilities and schools. The \textit{hisba} department also tried to ban the use of common local phrases that are believed to convey notions of ‘unbelief’ (\textit{kufr}) or ‘idolatry’ (\textit{shirk}). In schools, the entity altered the way students referred to modern nation-states and institutions. For example, instead of using ‘the Republic of Iraq,’ teachers and students were only allowed to refer to territories under the control of the group as the Islamic State and their said provinces.\(^{140}\)

‘\textit{O Muhammad},’ a phrase often used to convey surprise, is one of the expressions that \textit{hisba} tried to ban. According to the Islamic State’s logic, ‘\textit{O} can only be used when appealing to (\textit{nada’}) or seeking help from God. The group views both contexts as forms of worship that must be directed only to God. In other words, the expression ‘\textit{O Muhammad} according to the Islamic State’s interpretation implies worshiping someone other than God and, thus, constitutes an idolatrous practice that infringes on God’s oneness (\textit{tawhid}).\(^{141}\)
A more extensive list of prohibited expressions was published by the hisba office of the Islamic State-affiliated Jaysh Khalid ibn Walid (Khalid ibn Walid Army). The list distinguishes between two sets of expressions: (i) those ‘unambiguously’ constitute; and (ii) others that merely ‘denote’ unbelief (kufr). Nevertheless, while the publications of the Islamic State on this matter show that the group was concerned with the use of language, evidence on language policing does not indicate a widespread effort to prohibit banned words and phrases. Moreover, enforcing such guidelines is well-nigh impossible, not only because of the ubiquitous use of such expressions but also due to the cultural differences between its members and varying priorities of the group’s branches and networks.

**Body Policing**

The Islamic State maintains a rigid understanding of the human body, its ownership, and individual’s responsibilities to preserve its health and integrity. In terms of ownership, humans are thought to have a mere stewardship of their bodies. This stewardship comes with a set of general restrictions (e.g., tattoos, piercing, etc.) and instructions for care. Acts that can be construed as deliberate and cause a long lasting change to the body are not permissible. This includes anything from cosmetic surgeries to eyebrow plucking.

The Islamic State considers such conduct as forms of body modification. Procedures and practices under this category are associated with tampering with God’s design. Thus, prohibiting them falls under the purview of hisba. Body policing as a major enforcement theme includes additional measures such as policing dress codes and banning items that ‘compromise’ the integrity of the human body.

**Dress Codes**

The Islamic State enforced restrictions on dress codes for men and women according to strict Salafi precepts. The group maintains an ultra-conservative position on women in public life, including on women’s sexuality. According to the group’s thinking, failing to impose strict measures on sex segregation and women veiling in society threatens to
bring entropy and moral decline. The Islamic State’s ideology dictates that the entire female body is ‘awra (the parts of the body that must be covered from sight). Thus, the group sought to enforce a strict veiling that meets several criteria, namely:

I. Thick and nontransparent.
II. Loose.
III. Cover the whole body.
IV. Dowdy.
V. Distinctive from ‘infidels’ and men’s attires.
VI. Unstylish and not worn to attract attention.
VII. Unscented and unironed.

As part of the hisba’s mandate to regulate public life, women were not allowed to appear in public without being accompanied by a male guardian (mahram) and when doing so, they were not allowed to raise their voices. Based on Islamic State’s statements, failing to adhere to the imposed codes, including clothing, is met with punishments for both female ‘violators’ and their ‘guardians.’ Particularly, the male ‘guardians’ receive up to 30 lashes and have to buy the ‘proper’ female attire. Women ‘violators’ have to attend a weeklong mandatory sharia course. These ‘violations’ were detected by hisba enforcers who patrolled the streets and who, themselves, carried out such punishments. To further ensure the adherence to dress codes, the hisba department inspected the type of clothing sold in stores, prohibiting all garments that went against its regulations.

Hisba enforcers gave ‘advice’ to men and distributed leaflets on restrictions pertaining to look and dress code. These restrictions dealt with haircuts, beard grooming, plucking eyebrows, and the length of men’s clothing. Based on the group’s publications, the impetus for regulating men’s look and dress code is derived from a perceived connectivity to Salafi identity. Regarding dress codes, the Islamic State deterred men from wearing clothes that extend below their ankles. The group went even further to deter trimming and shaving beard, declaring
"whoever defames the beard, mocks it, and ridicules it, then he has disbelieved (apostatized) and has left the folds of Islam." Those who violated such codes were harassed and punished. The punishment for shaving beard was up to 30 lashes. Plucking eyebrows was another ‘violation’ that resulted in up to 20 lashes. Hisba enforcers inspected barbershops to capture and punish ‘violators,’ advise those running such businesses on the regulations associated with haircuts and beard shaving, and confiscate banned items such as razors. It is hard to gauge the Islamic State’s effort to enforce its regulations when it comes to men’s look and dress code.

Figure 12: A frame from a hisba’s propaganda video featuring a barbershop that declines to offer various forms of beard shave and trimming

Tattoos
Tattoo culture is visible among the Bedouin and Kurdish communities in Syria and Iraq as well as in the larger Middle East and North Africa. It is especially common and noticeable among older Bedouin and Kurdish women. This form of expression is associated with spirituality and identity within these communities. The Islamic State, like many other Salafi groups, categorically rejects unremovable tattoos, especially for women. The hisba department was charged with forbidding this
practice because the group associate tattooing with the modification of God’s design.\textsuperscript{170}

For example, an internal Islamic State file tells the story of a teenage boy who has a tattoo of a football teammate.\textsuperscript{171} This case was handled by the \textit{hisba} department. The document in question refers to tattooing as an offence, for which the teenage boy was detained.\textsuperscript{172} The author of that document also insinuated accusations of homosexuality among members of the football team and the arrested teenager was interrogated to provide more details about his team’s conduct. The punishment for homosexuality in the Islamic State’s former controlled territories is death.\textsuperscript{173} The \textit{hisba} department is among the chief perpetrators of abuses committed against homosexuals, particularly, against gay men.\textsuperscript{174}

**Tobacco and Alcohol**

The bases for banning tobacco and alcohol are anchored in the regulations pertaining to the health and the integrity of the human mind and body.\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Hisba} enforcers oversaw the implementation of the Islamic State’s ban on tobacco and alcohol, two products considered harmful and impermissible.\textsuperscript{176} For example, the Islamic State justifies its ban on tobacco based on the following rulings:\textsuperscript{177}

I. Smoking causes harm to smokers’ health and results in death.
II. Secondhand smoking is harmful.
III. Smoking is an abominable deed.
IV. Smoking is wasteful.
V. Smoking is similar to alcohol regarding intoxication and addiction.
VI. Smoking constitutes an imitation of Christians’ ways of life.
VII. Smoking supports the economy of ‘infidels’ and ‘polytheists.’
VIII. Smoking and trading tobacco are banned by the guardian of Muslims (i.e., the leader of the Islamic State).

The Islamic State’s war on narcotics was all encompassing, including anything from opium to alcohol and tobacco. Their bans on such substances targeted both processed drugs and their natural sources (e.g.,
opium poppy). The hisba department oversaw the enforcement of these regulations, including the confiscation and disposal of such products. To further deter the use of controlled products, hisba enforcers punished those who disobeyed. For example, the penalties for drinking alcohol was up to 80 lashes. That said, it is hard to assess the effectiveness of the Islamic State’s enforcement of regulations pertaining to tobacco and alcohol. Documentary evidence suggests that the group struggled to enforce such bans on both its members and civilians.

Figure 13: A frame of a hisba propaganda video featuring the burning of confiscated cigarettes.

**Spiritual Policing**

Overseeing religious conformity, as manifested through ritualistic practices (e.g., prayers, fasting, etc.), is another prime responsibility of hisba enforcers. They surveilled and ensured the adherence to religious duties. Hisba enforcers also warned about and carried out discretionary punishments (ta‘zir). Initiatives under spiritual policing intersect with other themes. This theme of policing works in tandem with a wide range of hisba regulations. Its interrelatedness emanates from its integral role in enforcing the hisba’s mandate as it pertains to outreach, books and printed materials, technology, art and culture, language use, dress codes, cosmetic items and procedures, controlled products, and market regulations.
Ensuring observance of Fridays’ prayer and fasting were among the key elements of the *hisba*’s efforts to police spirituality. Its enforcers patrolled the streets and ordered individuals to congregate in mosques to attend Fridays’ prayers. There is evidence that the group took serious effort to surveil and ensure adherence to mandatory rituals. In fact, *hisba* enforcers went beyond mandatory duties, including surveilling individuals who do not observe selective religious practices, such as delivering the first and last prayers of the day in mosques.\(^\text{185}\)

Failing to adhere to such regulations was documented and punished by *hisba*.\(^\text{186}\) Its enforcers took initiatives to regulate individuals’ spiritual lives. These initiatives encompassed keeping prayers’ attendance sheets, confiscating the identification cards of ‘violators,’ and imprisoning those failing to observe the various rituals in accordance with the group’s interpretations.\(^\text{187}\) For example, when street vendors and shopkeepers failed to close their businesses during prayers’ time, members of the *hisba* enforced a 48 hours shutdown on commercial activities of ‘violators.’\(^\text{188}\)

**Market Policing**

Market regulation is probably one of *hisba*’s earliest initiatives as both a voluntary duty and an institutionalized bureaucracy.\(^\text{189}\) During the Islamic State’s time as a territorial entity, *hisba* enforcers oversaw the implementation of a wide array of economic exchanges. As shown in figure 7, the unit charged with the host of responsibilities to police markets is known as the Monitoring and Inspection Office.\(^\text{190}\) It reports to the directors of district-based centers and their deputies across the Islamic State’s various formerly controlled towns and cities.\(^\text{191}\) This office is made up of three divisions, namely: health, management, and computer.

Enforcers of the monitoring and inspection office ran multiple lines of efforts to regulate market activities, including:\(^\text{192}\)

I. Monitoring prices and goods’ expiration dates.

II. Surveilling ‘illicit’ economic activities, including profiteering and monopolization.

III. Inspecting and investigating businesses’ misconducts.
IV. Curtailing on the sales of banned products such as alcohol, tobacco, magazines, music instruments, and the like.

V. Customer ‘protection.’

VI. Regulating prices.

VII. Quality control.

VIII. Familiarizing businesses with various Islamic State’s regulations.

IX. Ensuring the adherence to the group’s religious codes.

*Figure 14:* A frame from an Islamic State’s propaganda video featuring three hisba enforcers destroying musical instruments. 193

These enforcers work with members of the computer division to draft operational reports before archiving and sharing them with the management division. 194 This process allows them to keep records of ‘violators’ and flag repeated ‘offenders.’ Businesses that failed to adhere to the Islamic State’s various regulations were punished. 195 All products and services that violated such regulations were confiscated and disposed of. 196 On occasions, the management division refers certain cases to the Islamic State’s courts. 197


**Moral Domination**

In the words of Hannah Arendt, “total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions.”

Our findings suggest that the Islamic State’s *hisba* department used a sophisticated organizational system to create an environment conducive to public uniformity and internal security. We contend that the group utilized its *hisba* apparatus as a means to reduce individual differences and to implement its understanding of ideological, social, economic, and political order. The evidence presented in this report suggests that the Islamic State used a Pavlovian deterrence measure to reduce differences of identities and improve its state security. This philosophy and security approach strived to project a system wherein deviations from absolute uniformity is met with severe and certain punishments.

Our investigation of *hisba* as an enforcement institution outlines a strategic model that aims to promote and maintain moral dominance. The Islamic State associates measures used to achieve these objectives with the security of controlled territories. Moreover, the group links public uniformity with order and security. The following model summarizes our findings.

*Figure 15: Systematic model of moral domination.*
According to our analysis, the Islamic State’s *hisba* spearheaded four major enforcement efforts to establish and sustain uniformity and security. These mandates include thought policing, body policing, spiritual policing, and market policing. Each line of effort pursued the enforcement of multiple initiatives. For example, *hisba* carried out public outreach and proselytization campaigns, banned books and printed materials, restricted access to media and information, targeted and destroyed artworks and cultural property, and regulated language use. Under that veil, the *hisba* apparatus enforced its different policing efforts to minimize public deviation from the Islamic State’s desired order.

The top-down and bottom-up scrutiny of the bureaucracy undergirding the Islamic State’s *hisba* suggests a degree of organizational sophistication and specialization. The centralized *hisba* structure shows a top to bottom flow of authority, connecting the ministerial department with provincial branches and individual district-based centers. The flow of information is unidirectional. Directives and regulations are communicated by specialized executive officers, such as the directors of provincial departments, to subordinate divisions. District-based *hisba* centers provide performance and operational reports to their superiors across different provincial branches. Interdepartmental cooperation between *hisba* and other institutions is clearly defined. *Hisba*’s jurisdictional areas of responsibilities and procedural workflow clarifies the scope and limits of its mandate. This bureaucracy as a whole speaks to a design that allows the *hisba* apparatus to pursue the enforcement of its different lines of policing efforts.

This report relies on the Islamic State’s publications, both propaganda and ideological texts, as well as internal documents. Addressing the full spectrum of *hisba*’s operations goes beyond the scope of one study. Our findings are limited by the availability of internal documents and the group’s own narrative. Therefore, the above model is not comprehensive. Future research may consider interviewing individuals detained for charges related to their involvement with the *hisba* apparatus. Such efforts can scrutinize covert *hisba* operations, such as its role in outreach and social infiltration during pre-consolidation periods. Studying the effectiveness of the group’s systematic model of moral domination will benefit greatly from drawing on the experiences of individuals who suffered and witnessed *hisba*’s different lines of policing efforts.
## Appendix

*Table 1: Hisba-related Propaganda Videos*

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Men of Ḥisba 1
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Table 2: Hisba-related Internal Documents in the ISIS Files Database

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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 35_001592</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 36_001648_48</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 25_001347</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 33_001517</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
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<td>The ISIS Files: 1_000947</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
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<td>The ISIS Files: 16_001041</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 26_001354</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 26_001359_02</td>
<td>Unknown Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISIS Files: 26_001362</td>
<td>Unknown Date</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 3: *Hisba*-related Material in the OpenSource

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flyer: Qualities of the Shari‘ī Hijāb</td>
<td>September 18, 2015</td>
<td><a href="https://jihadology.net/2015/09/18/new-dawah-literature-from-the-islamic-state-qualities-of-the-shariah-%e1%b8%a5ijab/">https://jihadology.net/2015/09/18/new-dawah-literature-from-the-islamic-state-qualities-of-the-shariah-%e1%b8%a5ijab/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisba between the Understanding of the Tyrants and the People of tawḥīd</td>
<td>Mu’assasat Al-Wafā’, 2016</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Ordinances of Government and the Religious Authorities</td>
<td>Maktabat al-Himma, 2016</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisba in Islam</td>
<td>Mu’assasat al-Wafā’, 2016</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Flyer: Forbidding Smoking and the Punishment of the Smoker</td>
<td>Maktabat al-Himma, Unknown Date</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyer: These are the Ḥudūd of God so do not come close to them</td>
<td>Maktabat al-Himma, Unknown Date</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyer: The Inviolability of Extending Men's clothing below the ankles</td>
<td>Maktabat al-Himma, Unknown Date</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flyer: The Beard is the Way of the Muslims</td>
<td>Maktabat al-Himma, Unknown Date</td>
<td>This file is part of the personal collection of the authors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Specimen</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Office of Monitoring and Inspection at Hisbah Center Announces its Need for Hiring Civilian Employees</td>
<td>November 11, 2014</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Specimen 6I: Notification on ID cards etc. in Hisbah Offices, Deir az-Zor Province</td>
<td>June 18, 2015</td>
<td><a href="https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-the-islamic-state-administrative-documents">https://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-the-islamic-state-administrative-documents</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Specimen</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12G</td>
<td>Ban on satellite reception apparatuses [i.e. satellite TV]</td>
<td>December 2, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19F</td>
<td>Warning against certain expressions that fall into clearly express kufr [disbelief], from IS-linked Jaysh Khalid ibn al-Waleed Hisba office in southwest Deraa</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9J</td>
<td>Referral by the Hisba of an individual to the Da'wa and Masajid centre for Shari'a session</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specimen R: Hisba regulations on women's dress, Hit, Anbar Province</td>
<td>Unknown Date</td>
<td><a href="https://jihadology.net/2015/08/24/the-archivist-26-unseen-islamic-state-administrative-documents-overview-translation-analysis/">https://jihadology.net/2015/08/24/the-archivist-26-unseen-islamic-state-administrative-documents-overview-translation-analysis/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The obligation to commanding right and forbidding wrong appears in the following Quranic verses: Q3:104, Q3:110, Q3:114, Q7:157, Q9:71; Q9:112, Q22:41, and Q31:17.


This report benefited from propaganda material and internal Islamic State files available on Aaron Zelin’s and Aymenn Al-Tamimi’s websites: https://www.aymennjawad.org/ and https://jihadology.net/.


Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Vol. 4, Book 20, No. 4496.; Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 9; Book 89, No. 252.


These and all ensuing Quranic translations are quoted from: Khalidi, Tarif, The Qur’an (London: Penguin Classics 2009).

For a detailed historical overview of the development of ḥisba from early Islam to the Abbasid Caliphate, see: Ghabin, Ḥisba, Arts and Craft in Islam, pp. 15-62.

This position can be found in the writings of the renowned Muslim scholar al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) who argued that every Muslim is obliged to perform ḫīṣa if a wrong occurs in his or her immediate surrounding. Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, Iḥyāʿ ʿulūm al-dīn (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), p. 782.; Other scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya limited the obligation by relating it to a person’s ability (qudra). Only those capable should enforce ḫīṣa. Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ’Abd Al-Ḥalīm, al-Ḥisba fi al-Islām aw ważīfat al-ḥukūma al-islāmiyya, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, n.d.), p. 11. The shāfiʿī scholar al-Mawārizī qualifies the obligation and distinguishes between the person who is officially appointed to enforce ḫīṣa – the muḥtaṣib – for whom ḫīṣa is an individual duty, and the volunteer (mutaṭawwīʾa) who can transfer the duty to others and for whom the obligation drops with the appointment of the state-appointed ḫīṣa enforcers. For more on this, see: al-Māʿwardī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn-Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb, al-ʿAḥkām al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-wilāyāt al-diniyya (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabī, 1973), pp. 240f. For a brief discussion regarding the different positions of ḫīṣa as an individual and collective obligation, see: Abdelsalam, “The Practice of Violence in the ḥisba-Theories,” pp. 548-551.

These debates address questions such as whether and to what extend ḫīṣa was influenced by the Hellenistic institution of the agoranomos, who oversaw the workings of marketplaces in the Greek polis. Some considered the agoranomos a precursor to the muḥtaṣib and argued that his position was integrated into the nascent bureaucracy of early Islamic Governments. For more on the debate regarding the origin of ḫīṣa, see: Ghabin, Ḥisba, Arts and Craft in Islam; Foster, Benjamin R., “Agoranomos and Muḥtaṣib.”

For example, he is reported to have forbidden traders from purchasing merchandise before it arrives to the market. For more on this see: Ghabin, Ḥisba, Arts and Craft in Islam, p. 32.

Ibid., p. 40.

The idea that Umar appointed a woman called al-Shifa bint Abdullah to oversee the market was circulated in a hadith, which can be found in: Shaybānī, Ibn ‘Abū Āṣim Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Amr al-, Al-ʿĀḥd wa-l-mathānī, Vol 6. (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Rāyā 1991), p. 4.

The first known ḫīṣa manual dates back to the 9th century and associates ḫīṣa with the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abī Talib. This manual describes Ali as going around markets addressing merchants, giving them instructions, and ordering the removal of obstacles from the public roads. Ghabin, Ḥisba, Arts and Craft in Islam, p. 41.

For a discussion of the role of ḫīṣa during the Umayyad Caliphate, see: Ibid., pp. 41-43.

Ibid., pp. 53-62.

Ibid.

al-Māʿwardī, Al-ʿAḥkām al-sulṭāniyya.
21 Ibid., pp. 243-247.


24 Zelin, “The Islamic State’s Territorial Methodology.”


31 His al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya has been referred to and mentioned across various publications. An example of such reference can be found at: The Islamic State, “Mukhtaṣar al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya.”


33 Al-Mawǎrdi, al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya.

34 Ibid., pp. 241-243.


36 Traditionally, individuals’ privacy is protected from ḥisba enforcement. In other words, ḥisba enforcers are not authorized to gain information about sins or ‘wrongdoings’ that occurred in the privacy of one’s home. See: Stilt and Mottahedeh, “Public and Private,” pp.740f. and 742f.


42 Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Ḥisba.”; The Islamic State, Video Message, “A Tour in the Administrations of the State.”

43 The ISIS Files: 25_001347.
44 Islamic State, Video Message, “Al-Ḥisba.”


46 For a detailed discussion on the tension between privacy and the obligation to command right and forbid wrong, see: Cook, Commanding Right, pp. 479-487.


48 The ISIS Files: 5_001347.


52 Al-Māwarzī, al-ʾAḥkām al-sulṭāniyya.

53 Ibid., p. 241.

54 Al-Mawārdī mentions nine differences, relating to the obligatory nature of ḥisba, role, and the authorized means of enforcing it. Al-Mawārdī, al-ʾAḥkām al-sulṭāniyya, pp. 240f.

55 The Islamic State, “Mukhtasar al-ʾaḥkām al-sulṭāniyya.”

56 The ISIS Files: 36_001648_48.

57 This refers to the hadith compilation by written the Sunni Jurists al-Nawawī (d.1277), which provides a concise presentation of forty hadiths on a variety of creedal issues.


59 The ISIS Files: 35_001592AU.


61 Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”

62 The Islamic State, Video Message, “A Tour in the Administrations of the State.”
As noted by one of the reviewers another department was also involved in regulating travel in and out of the Islamic State’s former territories. However, it is unclear why the role of the ḥisba department became more dominant in this regard. For review, see: Al-Tamimi, Aymenn, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.- IV),” aymennjawad.org, August 28, 2017. Accessed at: http://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/09/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents-3.; and Al-Tamimi, Aymenn, “The Islamic State, Turkey & Transportation,” aymennjawad.org, January 11, 2016. Accessed at: https://www.aymennjawad.org/2016/01/the-islamic-state-turkey-transportation.

64 Ibid.
65 The Islamic State, Video Message, “Enjoining What is Right and Forbidding what is Wrong – Wilāyat Ḥomṣ.”
66 Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”
68 Ibid.
69 The ISIS Files: 25_001347.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Zelin, “The Islamic State’s Territorial Methodology.”
80 The Islamic State, Video Message, “The Best Umma.”
81 Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”
82 Ibid.

Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”

Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”


Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”


Al-Tamimi, “The Internal Structure of the Islamic State’s Hisba Apparatus.”


The Islamic State, Video Message, “A Tour in the Administrations of the State.”; The Islamic State, Video Message, “Enjoining What is Right and Forbidding what is Wrong – Wilâyat Ḥoms.”

For more on travel restrictions, please view the section on *hisba’s* workflow.

Ibid.; and The Islamic State, Video Message, “Protect Yourselves and Your Families from a Fire.”


The Islamic State, Video Message, “Maintenance of Virtue in Deterring Immorality – Wilāyat Ninawā.”

115 Almohammad and Winter, “From Directorate of Intelligence to Directorate of Everything,” and Almohammad and Winter, “From Battlefront to Cyberspace. Demystifying the Islamic State’s Media Machine.”

116 The Islamic State, Video Message, “And Warning the Believers – Wilāyat Ninawā.”

117 The Islamic State, Video Message, “Protect Yourselves and Your Families from a Fire – Wilāyat al-Khayr.”

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.; Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”; and The ISIS Files: 11_000947.

120 Ibid.

121 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”; and “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents.”

122 Ibid.

123 The ISIS Files: 25_001347.

124 The ISIS Files: 11_000947.

125 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents.”

126 Ibid.

127 The Islamic State, Video Message, “And Warning the Believers – Wilāyat Ninawā.”


129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.


The Islamic State issued a list of restrictions on grieving. For details on banned practices, please review: Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (continued...again).”

At the time of Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab, worship of stones and sacred trees was a widespread practice on the Arabian Peninsula, along with the veneration of the graves of the saints. He addressed such practices in his book of tawḥīd, which until today, serves as an essential reference for jihadi-Salafi movements. Olidort, Jacob, “Who was Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab?” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 21, 2015. Accessed at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/who-was-ibn-abd-al-wahhab.

Beránek and Ťupek, The Temptation of Graves; The ISIS Files: 26_001359.

The Islamic State, Video Message, “The Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice 3 - Wilāyat Ninawā.”


The legal basis for the indictment and consequential conviction for war crimes resides in two main articles:
- Article 53 I Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions
- Article 8 of the ICC Statute.

Under these two provisions especially under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the voluntary destruction of cultural heritage represents a violation of human rights. Nonetheless, before the ICC prosecution against Al-Mahdi, such crime had never been addressed under the perspective of international criminal law. The conviction of the latter has been, therefore, considered, and in fact represents, a new beginning for the jurisprudence of the ICC as it sets a precedent, constituting the first real application of the aforementioned articles. The ICC referred to the destruction of cultural heritage as a war crime. We intend as such the destruction of cultural heritage adopted as a terror strategy and used as a cultural-religious cleansing tactic. Although there have been many other cases of destruction of important cultural sites (such as the Temple of Bel (Palmyra) and the Great Mosque of Aleppo) the ICC has been unable to address them or prosecute them due to the non-binding character of the ICC Statute for those countries which are not part of it. Syria, for example, has not – indeed – ratified the Statute and, consequently, it is not part of the ICC; this hinders the ICC’s ability to start an investigation and prosecute on its own initiative the crimes committed in Syria or by a Syrian citizen. There is, in any case – even though hard to effectively use – a specific power reserved to the UNSC pertaining the activation of the jurisdiction of the Court in relation to grave situations regardless of the nationality of the culprit or the place where the violation was carried out.

140 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents.”
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”
146 Ibid.
147 This file indicates that even ‘minor offenses’ such as eyebrow grooming led to the imprisonment of civilians: The ISIS Files: 25_001347.
148 The ISIS Files: 33_001517.
149 For a more detailed description of the group effort to enforce sex segregation, please review: Vale, “Piety Is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat.”
151 Al-Tamimi, “The Archivist: 26 Unseen Islamic State Administrative Documents.”
152 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”
153 Ibid.
154 Al-Tamimi, “The Archivist: 26 Unseen Islamic State Administrative Documents.”
155 Ibid.

156 Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”

157 For details on banned items such as shoes, please review: Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (continued...again).”

158 The ISIS Files: 001347_04.


163 Ibid.

164 The ISIS Files: 26_001354.

165 The Islamic State, Video Message, “Preserving the Borders of God – Wilāyat Ṭarābulus.”


167 Ibid.

168 The culture and symbolism around tattoos evolved over the years. For review, please see: Bailey, Diane, Tattoo art around the world (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011).

169 The Islamic State reject tattooing as a form of expression, especially when it is done as a form of body art. A handful of hadiths expressed prohibitive ruling on tattoos, particularly for women. For example, see: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; Volume 7, Book 72, Number 815.

170 Ibid.

171 The ISIS Files: 26_001358.

172 Ibid.


Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”; The announcement informed civilians of an increase of penalties on smoking.

The Islamic State, Da’wa Literature, “Forbidding Smoking.”


The ISIS Files: 26_001359_02.

The Islamic State, Video Message, “Maintenance of Virtue in Deterring Immorality – Wilāyat Ninawā.”

Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (cont.).”


Al-Tamimi, “Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents (continued...again).”


The ISIS Files: 26_001362.

The ISIS Files: 26_001361; and The ISIS Files: 16_001041.

Ibid.

Al Aqeedi, “Hisba in Mosul: Systematic Oppression in the Name of Virtue.”


For a detailed description of the mandate of this office, please refer to the section on bureaucracy.


The Islamic State, Video Message, “Preserving the Borders of God – Wilāyat Ṭarābulus.”

Ibid.

The Islamic State, Video Message, “The Office of Monitoring and Investigation – Wilāyat al-Raqqa.”

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

The previous section discusses the enforcement of these initiatives.