THE ISIS FILES

Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning Through ISIS Education

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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
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About the Project

This project is a partnership between the George Washington (GW) University Program on Extremism and Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. This project analyzes education-related primary source ISIS documents that are part of the ISIS Files project.

In multiple trips to Iraq beginning in 2006, *The New York Times* correspondent Rukmini Callimachi collected thousands of files that were abandoned by ISIS in 11 cities as their strongholds were overtaken by the military campaign, with permission from local military units. Uncollected by local intelligence officials, the documents include land deeds showing how property was stolen from religious minorities, financial reports documenting the millions of dollars passing through their coffers, manuals detailing their operations, and detailed arrest warrants. The documents, which came to be known as “The ISIS Files,” constitute the largest collection of original files from ISIS held by any non-governmental entity. *The New York Times* understood the importance of making this collection available to the public.

In September 2018, *The New York Times* announced a partnership with the George Washington University (GW) to preserve, digitize, translate, and provide analysis of The ISIS Files documents and publish them on an open, searchable website. Immediately after digitization of the files, the original copies of the documents were hand delivered by *The New York Times* to the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Washington, DC. The ISIS Files project does not hold any original documents.

Translation, redaction, and analysis were undertaken by GW with the advice and partnership of *The Times*. All document redaction was done in line with an ethical framework developed and implemented by GW. *The Times* holds no responsibility for the redaction of documents.

In partnership with the GW Program on Extremism, Hedayah transcribed, translated, and analyzed the files related to education. The dataset analyzed in this report includes 29 textbooks (16 from primary grades, 10 from secondary grades, and 3 from unknown grades; 27 in
Arabic, 2 in English) and 40 additional files that are background documents (38 in Arabic, 2 in English). The background documents include homework assignments and notes from coursework, handouts, letters and decrees from the Ministry of Education of ISIS, exam rules and test scores. In analyzing these documents, the project aims to identify a better, in-depth understanding of how ISIS intended to use its education system to indoctrinate, incite and radicalize people within its territory. By sharing these analyses and findings, this report aims to equip practitioners (such as psychologists and religious leaders) with appropriate knowledge to counter the narratives and methods of ISIS, which may be useful to prevent the future spread of ISIS ideology as well as support processes for de-radicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration.

About the Partners and Sponsors
This research was primarily conducted by Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, neutral, and multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations. During the ministerial-level launch of the GCTF in New York in September 2011, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offered to serve as the host of Hedayah. In December 2012, Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, UAE. As a leader within the CVE community, Hedayah works to enhance understanding and share good practices to effectively build the capacity of CVE actors across the globe to promote tolerance, stability, and security. For more information visit, https://www.hedayahcenter.org/.

This project was sponsored and conducted in partnership with the European Institute for Counter-Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP). EICTP is a research association operating worldwide which aims at creating policy-related recommendations based on scientific research and expert assessments for stakeholders and decision-makers from diverse areas. As an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit institution
its main focus is on key topics around security policy-related issues, research on the causes and effects of terrorism and on suitable ways and means to prevent and counter terrorist activities. On the whole, EICTP wants to add value to confidence-building measures in the areas of security and stability.

This project was also sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Union Cooperation, Government of Spain.

The authors would like to thank Hemat Mustafa Hassan El-Shannawany for her extensive translation of the files, and Aymenn Al-Tamimi for his careful review of the translations. In addition to being an author of this report, Lilah ElSayed also extensively contributed to this project with her helpful review of the translated documents from Arabic to English. The authors would also like to thank Ahmed Al Qasimi, Ivo Veenkamp, Murat Uzunparmak, Denis Suljic and the reviewers at GW Program on Extremism and EICTP for their insights into the analysis contained in this report.

The views in this report are of the authors, and do not represent the views of GWU Program on Extremism, Hedayah, EICTP or the Government of Spain.
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Sara Zeiger is the Program Manager for the Department of Research and Analysis at Hedayah where she manages research tools and programs to include the annual International CVE Research Conference and Counter-Narrative Library. She was the creator of MASAR, an app for monitoring and evaluation for P/CVE programs. Her recent publications include a “Blueprint for a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center: Guiding Principles for Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Family Members”; several “How-To Guides” on how to undermine violent extremist narratives in Southeast Asia, East Africa and MENA; and a chapter on the “Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet” in the Handbook on Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness. She was also the Director of a NATO SPSS grant on the subject of women’s roles in P/CVE.

In addition, Sara leads a portfolio on PVE and Education, to include initiating a capacity-building program for teachers in East Africa, South East Asia and South Asia. Sara also led the drafting and development of the Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Education and Countering Violent Extremism and follow-on Abu Dhabi Action Plan, a framework document of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). She was also the chair for the World Leadership Alliance/Club de Madrid’s Working Group on Education for Preventing Violent Extremism (EPVE) through their Education for Shared Societies (E4SS) initiative in 2018.

Prior to Hedayah, Sara conducted research at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University and was a Teaching Fellow at the Harvard Extension School for classes on Middle Eastern history and politics. Sara graduated valedictorian from Ohio Northern University with a B.A. in Religion and Psychology, and holds a M.A. from Boston University in International Relations and Religion.

Farangiz Atamuradova is a Research Associate for the Department of Research and Analysis at Hedayah. Her research interests lie in understanding various factors leading individuals to violent extremism, as well as evolving methods leveraged in the process of radicalization to better shape and understand effective approaches to prevent and counter
the process. Since joining Hedayah, Farangiz supported and co-led on different programs including the annual International CVE Research Conference, Counter Extremism Hub, Radical Right Counter Narrative Collection, and the Monitoring, Measurement, and Evaluation App, MASAR. She also participated in curriculum development as well as the delivery of trainings to various stakeholders and practitioners in the field in East Africa and Central Asia. Farangiz co-edited two volumes of the Research Conference publication and co-authored a chapter on “Commissioning Research on Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from the STRIVE Global Program” in RESOLVE Network’s Edited Volume.

Prior to Hedayah, Farangiz worked as an analyst at the Delma Institute where she focused on geopolitical research in the Middle East and Central Asia. Farangiz holds a B.A. in Politics with International Studies from the University of Warwick and an M.Litt. in Terrorism Studies from the University of St. Andrews.

Lilah Elsayed joined Hedayah in February 2013 and she is a Program Associate at the Dialogue and Communications Department. Lilah focuses on counter-messaging and strategic communications for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Her recent publications include a contributed chapter titled “MENA Governments’ Efforts for Alternative and Counter-Narratives: Religious and Gender Lens” to the DPT – German Prevention Congress PV&E International Conference 2018 Edited Volume titled “International Perspectives of Crime Prevention 11” (December 2020); a co-authored journal article titled “Linkages as a Lens: An Exploration of Strategic Communications in P/CVE” published in the Journal for Deradicalization in September 2019. Lilah was also a co-editor and contributing author to the NATO SPSS publication, “Enhancing Women’s Roles in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE),” and the co-editor and contributing author for “Contemporary P/CVE Research and Practice,” Hedayah’s annual publication. In addition, Lilah is the main author for “Undermining Violent Extremist Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa: A How-To Guide”, a 9-step framework for developing alternative and counter-narratives, available in English, Arabic, and French (forthcoming).
From 2018-2020, Lilah has been supporting cross-departmental activities in Hedayah to include the development and delivery of CVE Training Curriculum for the MENA region to raise awareness on collaborative CVE approaches among governments and civil societies, while better equipping them to prevent and counter violent extremism. She has also led the development of a curriculum for a capacity-building workshop on alternative and counter-narrative development for religious leaders in Singapore. Lilah also supported the design and virtual delivery of a CVE Toolkit for civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-traditional groups engaged in CVE in Kenya.

Lilah has two Master’s Degrees, one in Religion, Politics and Citizenship from the University of Padua-University of Eastern Piedmont in 2020, and another M.A. in International Law, Diplomacy and International Relations from Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi in 2016.

**Muna Chung** is a native Arab speaker journalist and researcher focused on Violent Extremism. She has previously worked with BBC Media Action and the U.S. Department of State conducting research and training journalists on the relation between mass media and terrorism.

For the past five years, Muna has dedicated her career to understanding extremism and supporting broadcasters in affected areas with countering extremist ideology. During her time with BBC Media Action (2015 - 2016), she produced analyses on ISIS propaganda in Iraq and technical guidance documents to aid partner Iraqi radio stations in countering the effects of ISIS propaganda. As a consultant for the U.S. Department of State from (2018 – 2020), she worked closely with Algerian stakeholders—including academics, journalists and imams—to produce the first-of-its-kind de-radicalization training manual for use by Algerian journalists. Additionally, Muna volunteered to run multiple training workshops for 40 journalists from over 20 of Algeria’s provinces during 2018 and 2019 on the basics of investigative journalism and de-radicalization. Her work has attracted additional funding from the U.S. Department of State, to replicate the Algeria module in some neighboring countries.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic Term</th>
<th>English Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Al Hisba</strong></td>
<td>Morality police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Al-Wala’ wal Bara’</strong></td>
<td>Loyalty to God and dissociation from polytheists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bay’a</strong></td>
<td>Allegiance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bid’a</strong></td>
<td>Heresy or innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dar al-Harb</strong></td>
<td>House of war</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dar al-Islam</strong></td>
<td>House of Islam</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Daw’a</strong></td>
<td>Proselytization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diwan Al Talim</strong></td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hadith</strong></td>
<td>The sayings/teachings of Prophet Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iman</strong></td>
<td>Faith, belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jahiliyya</strong></td>
<td>Pre-Islamic era (usually reference to pre-Islamic tribes of the Arab peninsula region) or State of ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jihad</strong></td>
<td>Struggle or fight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kafir, Kufar/Kafaruun</strong></td>
<td>Infidel, infidels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kufur</strong></td>
<td>Infidelity to the oneness of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muwahhid</strong></td>
<td>Monotheist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mujahid, Mujahideen/ Mujahiduun</strong></td>
<td>Fighter, fighters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Munafiqun/ Munafeen</strong></td>
<td>Hypocrites or fake Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Murtad, Murtaduun/ Murtadeen</strong></td>
<td>Apostle, apostates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mushrik, Mushrikuun/ Mushrikeen</strong></td>
<td>Polytheist, polytheists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nawaqid Al-Islam</strong></td>
<td>Nullifiers of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rafidi, Rafida, Rawafid</strong></td>
<td>Rejectionist(s) derogative term to name Shia Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharia</strong></td>
<td>Islamic law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shirk</strong></td>
<td>Polytheism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Takbir</strong></td>
<td>A proclamation of the greatness of God. This is usually used when calling for, opening and performing prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Takfir</strong></td>
<td>Excommunication from Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid</strong></td>
<td>Monotheism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid al-Asma wa’l-Sifaat</strong></td>
<td>The belief in the Oneness of Allah’s many names and attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid al-Rububiyah</strong></td>
<td>The belief that there is only one God (Allah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid al-Uluhiyah</strong></td>
<td>The belief that Allah is the only One God who is worthy of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Umma</strong></td>
<td>The Muslim community; community of believers in tenents of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wiliyah, wiliyat</strong></td>
<td>Governorate/ governorates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wudu’</strong></td>
<td>Ablution, the act of cleansing in preparation to perform prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zakat</strong></td>
<td>Alms giving (charity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Introduction

The territorial defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was a big achievement in eradicating the physical presence of a terrorist group in the Middle East. However, the ideology of this group continues to inspire individuals around the world to carry out atrocious acts of violence. For example, in October and November 2020, attacks and beheadings in countries such as Austria, France, and Mozambique proved that the threat from ISIS’s adherents persists globally despite the absence of the group’s physical stronghold.\(^1\) ISIS has also claimed a series of attacks in Afghanistan, including the death of a female TV presenter in December 2020.\(^2\) Moreover, ISIS has demonstrated that they still intend to operate (and may successfully be able to do so) in Iraq in twin suicide bombings in Baghdad in January 2021.\(^3\)

As practitioners and researchers continue to carefully study the rhetoric of ISIS to inspire these acts outside the Middle East, it is equally important to analyze the reality ISIS created and sometimes forced upon individuals living under their control. This is particularly the case for the narratives aimed at children and through the ISIS education system. Since the fall of ISIS’s territorial strongholds, approximately 80,000 former ISIS men, women, and children were moved to detention centers and internally displaced person (IDP) camps around Iraq and Syria. While governments from several parts of the world continue to work on the repatriation of their citizens and the local governments work towards a way to rebuild and rehabilitate communities, conditions in these camps and centers continue to deteriorate. These conditions allow for violent extremist groups to reiterate and strengthen their ideology among followers and recruit new sympathizers.

Children who have continuously been exposed to the mental and physical hardships under ISIS as well as at the detention camps require a specific approach in rehabilitation and reintegration. As of October 2020, the Al Hol camp on the Syria-Iraq border alone holds around 43,000 children who have lived under ISIS control.\(^4\) While the level of exposure to violence may vary between these children, with those recruited to be child soldiers likely to have the highest level of post-traumatic stress disorders,\(^5\) it is clear that children living in ISIS-held territories were exposed to the
group’s ideology and way of life and thinking. While not all of the people living under ISIS necessarily agreed with ISIS ideology or practices, and indeed some merely submitted to the situation that ISIS imposed upon them, the ideology was nonetheless part of the social, religious and cultural framework of those that were at one point living under ISIS territory. A failure to fully analyze and recognize the context they were brought up in could potentially lead to a generation of children with a distorted identity and worldview that ISIS or other groups could leverage in the near future.

In order to understand the narratives and values aimed at children under ISIS, this research analyzes the ISIS Files related to education. The ISIS Files provide a unique look into the mindset, values, and goals of the terrorist group that have significant implications on finding these solutions to rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly for children and juveniles. The dataset includes 29 textbooks (16 from primary grades, 10 from secondary grades, and 3 from unknown grades; 27 in Arabic, 2 in English) and 40 additional files that are background documents. The background documents include homework assignments and notes from coursework, handouts, letters and decrees from the Diwan al Talim (Ministry of Education) of ISIS, exam rules, and test scores. The documents were taken from the Nineveh province in Iraq in early 2017, are mainly dated 2015-2016, and provide a snapshot of what life may have been like in those areas when ISIS was in control.

What is contained in this report is a comprehensive analysis of the education-related documents of the ISIS Files mentioned above, including excerpts and photos from the textbooks themselves. This report first uses Haroro Ingram’s concept of creating a ‘competitive system of meaning’ as a basic framework for understanding narratives, and applies this framework to the education system under ISIS. Next, the report describes the methodology utilized in the data analysis, which includes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to understand the textbooks included in the dataset. Then, this report contextualizes the textbooks and educational documents by providing an overview of the experiences of children under ISIS in Iraq. Following this, the main themes, values and norms of the ISIS Files in this dataset are deconstructed and analyzed. Finally, the
report concludes with the next steps and recommendations for policy and practice related to preventing violent extremism as well as rehabilitation and reintegration.

The central argument for this research is that the education-related ISIS Files reveal the comprehensive, systematized, and institutionalized approach that ISIS took in shaping the norms and values of its community. While some may view education as a necessary yet secondary component of its propaganda efforts, this research reveals that education is actually at the heart of ISIS’s approach to sustaining its perpetual war. For ISIS, education is a mechanism to plant the seeds of its values for generations to come and to prepare its followers to fight violently to sustain its future.

It is important to mention that despite the attempts of ISIS to set up a functional education system, the education system of ISIS failed due to the circumstances and conditions around the fall of the ‘caliphate’ and the loss of territory. However, the education system under ISIS did not fail because of the content in the curriculum. Moreover, the values, norms, and narratives contained in the ISIS Files documents related to education speak to the intentions of growing the future generation of its ‘caliphate’ to be groomed as fighters in defense of their lands and ideology. That is — despite the failure of ISIS’s formal education system due to circumstance, the norms and values contained in that comprehensive system and educational curriculums need to be studied and understood because they were — and still are—propagated elsewhere.

That being said, the results of this research have significant implications for the children that have been affiliated with ISIS also referred to as ‘cubs of the caliphate,’ to include those that may have also been radicalized through their families or online that never made it to ISIS territory. This research is of particular importance in a time when better dealing with the issue of children associated with terrorism requires nuanced and transparent approaches. The research results apply to children that remain in Iraq and Syria awaiting reintegration into their local communities, as well as those awaiting repatriation (or those who have already returned) to their home countries such as in Europe, North
America, North and East Africa, Central Asia, the Balkans, and South and Southeast Asia. The insights gained through this analysis also have implications for potential future iterations of ISIS or a similar group which may try again to establish a ‘caliphate’ and an entire alternative society in which their followers can live. Moreover, policymakers and practitioners working on de-radicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration can leverage the results of this study to find better methods for reversing the process of radicalization and preventing recidivism. Finally, the glimpse into the mindset, values, and intentions of ISIS can also have implications for education systems worldwide—to ensure the worldview of ISIS and other violent extremist groups are countered in the narratives and systems established through formal and informal education.

A System of Meaning through Education

It is known that ISIS has a strategy when it comes to disseminating its propaganda and ensuring that its message is received by the targeted individuals in a way that leads them to shape perceptions, polarize support and eventually mobilize to violent action. This approach is, of course, also used by other terrorist groups such as al-Qaida. In describing ISIS’s strategy for propaganda, Haroro Ingram argues that “the potential appeal of extremist propaganda is largely dependent on how such messaging is strategically designed to leverage psychosocial forces and strategic factors that are pertinent to its target audiences.” To strengthen its narratives and ensure internalization in the minds of its audience, ISIS creates what Ingram calls a “competitive system of meaning,” which “acts as a lens through which supporters are compelled to perceive and judge the world. These powerful mental models – or perhaps more accurately a network of mental models – are designed to fundamentally shape its audiences’ perceptions by strategically leveraging and interplaying identity, solution, and crisis constructs via a combination of narratives and imagery.”

Evaluating ISIS propaganda through this framework of a ‘competitive system of meaning’ has been utilized in several studies to articulate the meaning and intent of ISIS content, particularly in the online space. For example, J.M. Berger evaluated an audio message by ISIS spokesperson
Abu Hasan al-Muhajir using Ingram’s linkage-based approach (system of meaning) in order to identify potential content for counter-messaging. Similarly, Joe Whittaker and Lilah Elsayed used this linkage-based approach to evaluate counter-messaging campaigns aimed at ISIS.

The same line of thought in analyzing its propaganda can be applied in the analysis of the ISIS education system. ISIS leverages education to instill its norms, values, and ‘system of meaning’ in children, who act as “empty blank pages that can be affected precisely according to the ISIS vision and objectives.” According to Ingram, the “fundamental building blocks for the ‘competitive systems of meaning’” – identity, solution, and crisis constructs – are closely interlinked. Ingram argues that human minds are likely to effortlessly believe in something when facing a threat or having a perception of being in threat or ‘crisis.’ The presence of that ‘crisis’ mode that ‘others’ are against them and seek to undermine their identity and ‘state’ makes it easier for ISIS to manipulate these individuals. In the case of children under ISIS, they were brought up to believe that their identity is under attack by an enemy or ‘the other,’ and they should affiliate themselves with the known identity (the Islamic State) and use means such as violence to ensure the preservation of themselves and their peers.

Studies show that education itself is an important tool to shaping a child’s values, understanding of the outside world, associations, relationships to other people, and his/her identity as part of society. Through education, generations pass on information and knowledge as well as define the perceptions and worldviews of future generations. Education acts as a foundation on which society is built. Education also “transmits the lore, beliefs, customs, values, rites, and ceremonies that shape a society and govern its function[s]...education transmits culture.” Randall Bass explains that one of the functions of education is to train students, thereby creating “products of the system [who] should think the same way, speak the same way, and perform the same way.” Notably, education is a neutral function—it can be leveraged to shape future generations positively or negatively, depending on the structure, content and curriculum.
Given ISIS' goal of creating a centralized Islamic ‘state,’ it is no surprise that ISIS deliberately set up an education system that attempted to transmit its own customs and values to the younger generations of its ‘citizens’ and ‘fighters.’ Of course, ISIS is not the first negative actor to use education in this way. Under Nazi Germany, education was viewed as a mechanism for “shaping and forging... national identity, as well as self-perception and the perception of ‘other.’”17 This approach to education helped strengthen the identity of the Nazi state as Aryan, ensure loyalty to Hitler, train citizens how to be effective citizens, and ensure the average Nazi citizen perceived their everyday life “as a perpetual struggle for the national cause and against the ‘enemies’ of the state.”18 In their curriculum, the Nazi government only allowed for subjects that served this aim and discarded those that contradicted it. For instance, subjects such as biology were tailored to include Nazi ideology, promoting ‘racial purity’ and underlining the perceived disadvantages of ‘racial mixing,’ ‘inferior’ races, and ‘hereditary diseases.’ As Lisa Pine argues, “biology was to impart other aspects of Nazi ideology, such as love for the homeland and the ‘national community,’ which were linked to the subject. As such, biology as a subject gained considerably in importance and prestige under National Socialism.”19 Intertwining scientific subjects such as biology with ideology and propaganda created a new ‘system of meaning’ that was seemingly ‘competitive’ with other systems at the time that emphasized science and knowledge.

Through its educational system, ISIS seeks to provide a moral, spiritual, political, social, and economic justification for its worldview and a training manual guiding its subscribers toward a particular understanding of the world. Each individual component is presented in a way that is easy to digest and plausible—and seemingly not dangerous on its own. However, as the various pieces of the puzzle that ISIS presents through its textbooks are put together, ISIS’s dangerous worldview is revealed. Expressed differently, ISIS’s curriculum “is the systematic formation of a world picture in which children are given a moral basis for believing the Islamic State’s narrative and worldview are true, and everything else is false.”20
As this analysis will show, ISIS leverages a mix of visual, textual, and practical propaganda through its schooling system. Constant exposure of children to this ‘system of meaning’ provides a path towards the normalization of these ideas as part of their identity. This research, therefore, seeks to dissect and dismantle the ‘system of meaning’ in ISIS’s textbooks and educational structure.

**Overall Research Methodology**

The main research questions in this analysis are:

- What are the main narratives, values, and themes existing in ISIS’s textbooks that were aimed at children?
- What are the mechanisms utilized by ISIS to educate and indoctrinate children?

The textbooks underwent, as much as possible, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to understand the values and meanings intended by the writers of the text. The aim of a CDA is to uncover the ideological assumptions of the written words of text, explore relationships between texts and wider social and cultural structures, and explore how these relationships relate to power imbalances and social practices. CDA is a common methodology utilized by linguists, educators, and political scientists (among others) to understand how social activities, human affiliations, and social institutions are constructed. It is frequently utilized by the education sector to assess textbooks, as well as in the social sciences to assess language, and therefore is a useful methodology to analyze the educational documents of the ISIS Files.

In this report, the CDA comprises of: 1) an evaluation of the social and historical context of the texts, 2) a systematic coding of the data by keyword, 3) an analysis of certain statements utilized by the text or visual patterns of the images, 4) the identification of cultural references and themes, 5) the identification of linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms, and 6) an analysis of the results as a holistic picture.

The analysis started with a keyword assessment to identify common themes and leveraging the technology of Qualitative Data Analysis
software (QDA). The keywords led to a set of thematic codes that were assigned to sentences and images within the text. Two researchers used the keyword identification to produce a hand-coded version of the documents. The keyword and thematic coding were conducted in the original language of each of the texts to ensure that the analysis constructed the meaning of the text through specific linguistic examples in the language of intent. Precisely, 65 of the documents (27 textbooks and 38 background documents) were in Arabic, and four documents (two textbooks and two background documents) were in English.

Once the documents were coded, the research team then analyzed examples of those themes in the texts, comparing what was found in the educational textbooks with what is already known about the intentions and narratives of ISIS. In the analysis to follow, a description of each theme is first contextualized, and then specific examples from the education textbooks are given to support the analysis of each theme to extract patterns, cultural references, and propaganda mechanisms utilized by ISIS. This analysis presents an overall picture of the narratives that ISIS aims to communicate through its educational curricula and system.

It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations in the sample of ISIS Files that are included in this collection. The ISIS Files were collected from a specific place (Mosul, Iraq and the surrounding area) during a specific time (2015-2017) and through a non-systematic methodology. In other words, the documents were collected due to opportunity rather than as a deliberate strategy to gain a representative sample of the bureaucracy of ISIS. Therefore, the documents present “a cross-sectional snapshot of the movement indicative of a certain time and location,” which means a description of the social and historical context of the documents is all the more critical to accurately and ethically researching the contents of the ISIS Files.

**Social and Historical Context of ISIS Files Education Documents**

The first part of a CDA requires establishing the contextual background in which the texts were written. In order to contextualize the ISIS Files
documents, Iraq’s pre-ISIS educational policies are first summarized. Then, a brief summary of relevant examples of life under ISIS in Iraq (particularly Mosul) is included. Finally, a rendition of what is already known about the ISIS education system is described. Integrated into this analysis is also a comparative assessment of the background documents that were found as part of the ISIS Files, either confirming or contradicting what was already known. These elements help to set the stage of the thematic analysis of the coded texts that follows.

Iraq’s Pre-ISIS System and Educational Policies

Prior to ISIS gaining strongholds in Nineveh, the education policies in Iraq aimed to provide inclusive education, free of charge, for all its citizens. First established in 1921, the education system in Iraq is controlled by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHSR). Notably, the MOE is divided between the Ministry of Education of Federated Iraq (MoE Federal) and the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (MoEKRI).23 Article 34 of the Iraqi Constitution states that all Iraqi citizens are guaranteed “the right to education and defines it as a fundamental factor in the progress of society.”24 Additionally, the constitution guarantees an individual’s right to be educated in one’s mother tongue.25 This is particularly important in the context of Iraqi Kurdistan, meaning that Kurdish is an accepted language for the education systems in Iraq. It should also be noted that primary education became compulsory as of MOE Law No. (118) of 1976 and remained so in all subsequent laws.26

As far as can be assessed based on open-source information, the current curriculum—created in the post-Saddam era—was instated in May 2003, with the support of UNESCO and other UN bodies. The textbooks were printed in October 2003 and distributed through primary and secondary schools as of February 2004, amounting to almost 9 million textbooks (mainly mathematics and sciences) in the Arabic language as well as in Turkish, Syrian Aramaic, and the two Kurdish dialects (Sorani and Bahdinami).27 In 2012 the government of Iraq launched a strategy to improve access to quality education of Iraqi citizens, especially those from marginalized communities in Iraq. This strategy aimed at enhancing
“social reintegration and cohesion as well as prevent social exclusion within Iraqi society.”

Iraq has also ratified a number of international instruments highlighting the importance of the right to education, including conventions preventing discrimination in education due to race (1970), women (1986), and disabilities (2013).

Prior to ISIS taking control of certain territories in Iraq, public state education was provided free of charge, starting from primary education and including post-doctoral studies. Private education did also exist, and while expensive, it gave students more freedom from government control and allowing individuals to make their own choices on studies. Iraq’s schools operate from September to June, six days a week, with Friday being a holiday. At the age of four to five, children attended pre-primary education. Students typically commence primary education at the age of six. After the sixth year of mandatory primary education, students transition into intermediate education, which lasts for three years. During secondary school, students had 34 classes per week, including the following subjects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary School Subjects: Iraq before ISIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine art education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since gender segregation is introduced in secondary school (year 7), female students have some additional lessons on “household education.” Other elective courses for all Iraqi students may include the Kurdish language, sociology, economics, and patriotism. The last three years dedicated to secondary education allow students to choose one of the two strands of education: general and vocational. General education allows students to obtain an education in the “literary/humanitarian track and scientific track.” For vocational education, students have the choice of picking either agricultural or industrial and commercial education. Agricultural schools prepare students for a job in farming, industrial schools prepare students for a job in auto-machinery or metalwork, and commercial schools prepare students for a job in business administration.
or accounting. All students go through a baccalaureate examination between all the stages of educations (primary, intermediate, and secondary), with a final baccalaureate exam at the end of the secondary education deciding whether they can attend higher education (universities/colleges).

As of 2012 (the last year of official data), 53% of boys and 45% of girls in Iraq finished secondary school. A 2014 UNICEF survey (that is not officially accepted by the Iraqi government) of school children between the ages of 12 and 14 concluded that there were more than 650,000 out of school children—more than a quarter of Iraq’s population at this age.

Notably, by 2014 the education system in Iraq was fragile with a lack of teachers and a damaged infrastructure. At the first peak of violence in Iraq between 2003 and 2008, the Iraqi Ministry of Education reported more than 31,500 violent attacks against educational institutions. This began a steady decline in the quality and level of access to education, and therefore ISIS inherited an education system that was already fragmented before they took control of territory in Iraq. Between 2013 and 2017, the majority of targeted attacks, killings, and kidnappings against teachers and students occurred in areas under ISIS control, including Mosul. Additionally, when ISIS first took over Mosul in 2014 it proceeded to close many of these schools, converting them into barracks or places for military assemblies. By the time ISIS seized control over Mosul city in August 2014, only 20 schools remained open.

Families Living under ISIS Control
Since most of the documents in this dataset were taken from areas in and around Mosul, it is important to get a sense of how life was affected by ISIS taking control. Individuals and families living in Mosul saw a visible shift in their daily routine after falling under ISIS control in 2014; the cost of living and unemployment were both high. For example, a canister of gas, which was around USD 7 before ISIS control, cost more than USD 50 under ISIS, making it impossible for families with no income to afford it. According to reports, Mosul households switched to wood as their main source of energy for heat and cooking. In a 40-household survey in Mosul in 2017 that included families that remained in the city throughout
the duration of ISIS control and military action, 29.4% of the respondents had no employment, while 36.8% had some sort of employment. Mosulites were also partially deprived of clean and safe drinking water. In addition, frequent airstrikes by the coalition forces and military advances by ISIS left many parts of the city and infrastructure destroyed.

Various members of societies were affected differently; however, the system of rules for women was one of the most prominent changes seen for those living under areas of ISIS control. Women had to abide by strict controls over their attire and behavior in public. These regulations were enforced by Al Hisba or the morality police, which was solely created for the purpose of enforcing rules on females. There were also reports of girls as young as nine years old forced to marry ISIS militants, with other reports suggesting that ISIS decrees stated that girls should be married by the age of 16 or 17. However, it is unclear how much these decrees were truly enforced. According to the study conducted in Mosul, 12.9% of girls under the age of 15 were married, and 49.7% of those under the age of 18. The same study found that family households often arranged their daughter’s marriage to male relatives in order to prevent their marriage to ISIS fighters. Moreover, girls and women were often used as sex slaves and passed between ISIS fighters.

**Recruiting Children under ISIS**

According to a report by Phil Langer and Aisha-Nusrat Ahmad, ISIS mainly used two ways of recruitment: coercion and co-option. In terms of coercion, ISIS often abducted male children from schools and took them to military training camps, claiming this was a compulsory requirement for all males. In 2015, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) estimated that ISIS had abducted between 800 and 900 children ages 9-15 in and around Mosul. Reports suggest that children taken by force were divided into two groups: boys between the ages of five to 10 were taken to religious education camps, while those aged 10-15 were placed in military training camps. ISIS had a slightly different approach toward children of Yazidi background. Yazidi boys aged between 8 and 14 were often separated from their families, at times taken to different parts of ISIS-held territories, given military training,
and exposed to “religious indoctrination and martial arts to achieve dehumanized indifference” to violence and pain.58

The most common reasons identified for co-option were circumstance, ideology, and socialization.59 In the first instance, families who were facing economic difficulties were incentivized through ‘salaries’ their children would receive if they were to join ISIS fighters. At the same time, children yearning to establish their identity and seeking social belonging and meaning sometimes found refuge in ISIS.60 ISIS also leveraged socialization in public spaces such as mosques and playgrounds to engage with children and offer them various gifts, including weapons.61

Other reports suggest that ISIS often recruited orphaned children. ISIS provided these children with shelter and basic necessities, while also exposing them to “intensive indoctrination” to ISIS ideology.62 Orphans were moved to military camps, taught how to shoot rifles and drive suicide trucks. It is likely that orphaned children had developed close nurturing ties with ISIS fighters, possibly more than those taken by force from their parents.

ISIS used different approaches when dealing with local and foreign children. The latter were told that “they were raised ‘on the methodology of atheism’ and are required to attend special schools.”63 Unlike local children or those who had prior knowledge of the language, foreign children had to first learn the Arabic language, Quran, and Hadith, before they could start their military and other physical training.64

As Noman Benotman and Nikita Malik argue, ISIS “is not just a rebel group, but an aspiring state, and it needs societies, not just soldiers.”65 Hence, ISIS aspired to recruit whole families, rather than individuals. For example, leveraging the mother-child relationship, ISIS distributed books clearly instructing mothers on ways to bring up their children, encouraging them to recite bedtime stories on topics such as martyrdom and other stories that underlined and highlighted ISIS values. Mothers were also advised to expose “children to graphic content through jihadi websites, and encouraging them to play sports and games which improve their fitness and hand-eye coordination.”66
Furthermore, ISIS crystallized children’s loyalty to the ‘caliphate’ by exposing them to tough living conditions where they were separated from families and sleeping on flea-infested mattresses. Through a shared hardship, these children formed family ties with the rest of the children and their recruiters. Children who had completed their training were given a graduation ceremony and “paraded in public, wearing full uniform and carrying weapons.”67 Many of these children were reluctant to return to their families having completed their training. According to reports, male children were used as “soldiers, human shields, messengers, […] and guards, with the increasing use of ‘small arms’ facilitating their active participation in the war effort.”68 Such roles strengthened their ties to ISIS, engraving the ideology in their mindset. Children, both male, and female were also used as spies, often gathering information and spying on their families as well as educational facilities.

Notably, the conditions often promised by ISIS recruiters and the portrayal of life under ISIS were indeed very different from the reality on the ground.69 This discrepancy between the promised and actual life was significant, often failing to meet the expectations of those traveling to these areas from abroad.

The Diwan al-Talim (Ministry of Education) under ISIS

Noting the context of life under ISIS, particularly life for children, the next section will summarize what is known about the educational system under ISIS control. This information will be cross-referenced with the dataset of background documents included in the ISIS Files.

Education-related documents, including textbooks, have been made available throughout ISIS’s time in control of Mosul in 2015-2016. Textbooks were first released by ISIS in October 2015, focusing on grades 1-5.70 Several scholars have analyzed this body of textbooks. For example, a short review of the ‘Islamic’ nature of the textbooks was conducted by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change in late 2015;71 a review of the textbooks was conducted by Jacob Olidort in 2016;72 and a more recent analysis in 2020 was conducted on the religious elements of textbooks collected both online and in Kirkuk, Iraq.73
To add to the research conducted so far, the ISIS Files collected in 2017 by the *New York Times* presents a unique opportunity to cross-check and verify what had previously been known about the ISIS education system in Iraq at the time. That is—while documents released online represent what ISIS wanted to portray in the media, the ISIS Files provide an opportunity to glimpse how that system of education was actually carried out in schools, orphanages, and homes in the city of Mosul. Moreover, the ISIS Files also provide an opportunity to ‘connect the dots’ between the testimonies and stories of Mosul residents with concrete data in the form of textbooks, school records, written policy, and internal memos.

*Structure of ISIS Education System*

When Mosul fell to ISIS control in 2014, about 1 million students and pupils (of all ages) were part of the education system, and there were about 2,700 schools and higher education systems in place that were cut off from the central ministry of education in Iraq. Based on evidence from the Syrian context, it is clear that ISIS already thought the state-led education systems were not suitable for their followers, stating in a treatise by the Research and Fatwa Issuing Committee in November/December 2014 that the “programs in our schools and institutes are of the blatant tinge of *Jahiliya*, put in place for us by our enemies in order to turn us away from our Islam, and using the education programs as an undertaking is among the greatest of its tools and the most dangerous of them...” That is, ISIS sought to replace the education systems in Iraq and Syria because they thought of them as tools of the enemy. This was reinforced in the ISIS Files document where an administrative circular in 2015 directed schools to remove the old books that were created under the “Infidel Government.”

The educational structure of ISIS in Iraq was organized under the *Diwan al-Talim* (Ministry of Education), which was centralized (as much as possible) throughout ISIS territory. Despite objections to the Iraqi state-backed educational system, the existing Iraqi curriculum was retained until fall 2015, at which time the new curriculum was made obligatory. The *Diwan al-Talim* mandated that all children went to school, but evidence has also shown that they had a difficult time enforcing
mandatory schooling, and many classrooms were empty. According to the newspaper *Niqash*, the *Diwan al-Talim* required all students to pay fees (primary school, $12; secondary school, $18; and university students, $50) in order to pay the salaries of the teachers. These fees were relatively high, and could partially explain why classrooms were empty—parents could not afford the new education system for their children. However, there is little evidence that the fees were actually being paid by families in Mosul, and the ISIS Files provide no additional evidence that these fees existed or were collected.

**The Minister’s Vision**

According to one report by *Niqash*, the head of the Ministry of Education was nicknamed Dhul-Qarnayn, or the “man with two horns,” after a ruler that fought injustice and protected his people against outsiders. Dhul-Qarnayn was known for focusing his efforts on military efforts—including diverting the educational budget towards purchasing weapons. Still, Dhul-Qarnayn knew the importance of education in Mosul in particular—summoning the professors of Mosul University shortly after ISIS gained control of the city, and demanding a plan for a new education system to produce “useful and modern Muslims to serve the Islamic State.” Dhul-Qarnayn outlined his education policy, emphasizing that one of the criteria was to “lighten the curriculum in general and reduce the amount of time spent teaching, in view of students’ ability to absorb learning.”

The new school cycle that ISIS adapted, cut three years of education by shortening the primary education cycle to five years instead of six, and each of intermediate and secondary education to two years instead of three. The second principle was to ‘Islamicize’ education. Olivier Arvisais and Mathieu Guidere describe Dhul-Qarnayn’s approach, quoting his vision for the education policy:

The framework letter from the ‘ministry’ set specific objectives for each level of study. “In primary school, each student must learn to become a keeper of morals at home, learning to criticize acts considered heretical... Intermediary school will become a very important time. We require more religious encounters and Islamic competitions in schools instead of in public places. In this phase, we must also intensify jihadist teachings so that students learn individual weapons handling and war tactics... As for higher
According to some accounts, the curriculum committee of Mosul University professors spent nearly a year of writing and revisions until the new curricula was launched in a public relations buzz in July 2015, when the textbook covers were circulated on social media.  

Mandates by the *Diwan al-Talim* and the figure of Dhul-Qarnayn indeed do appear in the ISIS Files in this dataset (7 times). For example, a number of different decision documents were issued on behalf of the Department of Education, including declarations on topics such as school attendance, school subjects, or test regulations and schedules. Notably, according to the ISIS Files, the *Diwan al-Talim* may have also been divided into several sub-sections, as one circular regarding exams requests that the circular be sent to the following sub-sections: “Educational Supervision Directorate,” the “Directorate for General Education,” the “Directorate for Vocational Education,” the “Directorate of Technical Affairs-Preparation and Training Department,” the “Examinations Directorate,” and the “Department of Education-Mosul Office.” In terms of individual authority, sometimes the documents were issued on behalf of the Emir (of the Department of Education, or for Wiliyat Nineveh), and in several instances, on behalf of Dhul-Qarnayn.  

The ISIS Files dataset corroborates the vision of Dhul-Qarnayn at the time, particularly the attempts to increase “religious encounters and Islamic competitions” and “intensify jihadist teachings so that students learn individual weapons handling and war tactics,” and a significant portion of this report will provide evidence of these components of Dhul-Qarnayn’s vision in detail. It is also important to look at how ISIS viewed their own role in developing the educational curriculum. From the introduction to various subjects of ISIS textbooks and other documents, whether religious textbooks or non-religious textbooks, ISIS referred to themselves as self-appointed ‘guardians of Islam’ who were on a ‘holy mission’ to uphold God’s word and preserve the message of Prophet Muhammad. This is evident, for example, in the introduction to an Arabic grammar book for the fifth grade: “Today, the Islamic State proceeds on
this step with its new curriculum, sparing no effort to follow the righteous predecessors’ steps in preparing this curriculum.” The “righteous predecessors” in this sentence refers to the first three generations of Sunni Muslims, including Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the leaders of the Islamic World after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. Another example can be found later in the same introduction, “Writing these curricula has been a step forward and one of the bricks in the edifice of the caliphate.” ISIS viewed themselves on a mission from God to create the appropriate curriculum to support the foundations (edifice) of the ‘caliphate.’ Through this vision for its education system, ISIS was attempting to ‘plant the seeds of the poisonous tree’ for generations to come.

**Teachers and Staffing**

It is unclear if the authority of the *Diwan al-Talim* gained significant traction in Mosul amongst teachers and administrators, and much evidence actually suggests that the *Diwan al-Talim* did not play a strong role in the communities in Mosul in particular. Despite the call for jobs to be taken by more dedicated followers and reports of forced ‘repentance’ by ISIS propaganda videos, education employees were not necessarily systematically replaced by hardline ideologues. In addition, it was reported that ISIS did not pay teachers’ salaries independently of the Baghdad central government until 2015, and the Iraqi Ministry of Education continued to pay around 53,000 employees, all of which were on compulsory leave until the end of 2014. It should be noted that the central Baghdad Ministry of Education also threatened to terminate anyone who continued to teach for ISIS—meaning that teachers had incentives to resist the administrative structure of ISIS’s *Diwan al-Talim*.

At the same time, teachers sometimes faced threats or punishments for not complying with the ISIS curriculum in Mosul. For example, Riyad al-Joboury, a teacher in Hamam al-Alil in northern Iraq, recounted his experience with ISIS: “They forced us to go back [to school]. They said they would hang us on the bridge if you do not go to school... [they] changed all the lessons — it became about death.” In Mosul City, ISIS killed a male teacher from the Palestine School in January 2015,
reportedly because he was refusing to teach the ISIS curriculum in his schools.\(^96\)

The ISIS Files reveal that at least some teachers were cooperating with the ISIS education system. For example, one document from the al-Sahil Office summarizes a request by an educational supervisor to be transferred to supervising a girls’ school that was lacking a female educational supervisor. In the request, the supervisor says that he is “qualified, scientifically competent and creative in supervision,”\(^97\) perhaps implying that he is able to find ways to supervise the girls’ schools without breaking any rules related to gender segregation. Other documents are issued on behalf of school principals or groups of educators, implying that at least some of the schools were finding ways to function (despite the challenges).

While there are examples of teachers that would comply with ISIS due to threats against them or their families, there are also examples of teachers that would find excuses to not aid in developing or teaching the new curriculum. One high school teacher stated, “They tried to pressure us into making changes, but we tried to respond in a clever way... we blamed it on the science and said that it was not in our hands. And IS accepted this, they had no other choice, because the IS people... did not really understand anything of science.”\(^98\) All in all, it is of course impossible to determine the intentions of the administrators, principals and teachers that participated in the ISIS education system from the ISIS Files as such. On one hand, some teachers may have felt forced to participate and did the best they could to continue to educate students without over-emphasizing the ISIS ideology. On the other hand, some teachers may have been convinced by the ISIS ideology and committed to the education system provided by ISIS.

*Content and curriculum*

In terms of the content of the ISIS curriculum in northern Iraq from 2015-2017, the subjects taught included religious subjects such as the Quran, Creed of the Muslim, Jurisprudence of Sharia, the Biography of the Prophet, and Prophetic Hadith. General knowledge classes included mathematics, grammar, science, Arabic, English, computer science, and
physical education. Subjects such as art, music, philosophy, social studies, religion (other than Islam), and literature were banned. An ISIS Files document confirms this detail that the listed canceled subjects were: “arts, music and civic national education; philosophy, sociology and psychology programs; history, geography and literature; and Christian religious education.” As this analysis will show, ISIS put their own ‘spin’ on the curriculum presented to children during the time it held Mosul and territory in northern Iraq, in alignment with Dhul-Qarnayn’s vision for the education system. As Olidort argues, “the group ‘ISizes’ the subjects, framing the subject in ways that support its quartet of objectives above and training students to contribute to the Islamic State through their knowledge of the material.” That is, even for basic classes like math, geography, and science, the curriculum helps to support their ideology and build their narratives.

In terms of the teaching methods, the ISIS Files reveal some information on how ISIS wanted their subjects to be taught. Most of the lessons contain clearly stated goals and objectives that outline its indoctrination method through listing the key points that children should learn. In addition, the textbooks also contain teaching notes, with suggestions on how the teacher should interact with the student. Textbooks for subjects such as Muslim Creed, Religious Morals and Ethics, and Prophetic Hadith all had a dedicated section for teaching instructions, providing teachers with guidelines on how to present the lesson and what to highlight. The instructions amplified ISIS’s core values and way of thinking. For example, the guidelines for teachers for the Creed of the Muslim Textbook for 4th primary grade suggested that “This creed should be firmly entrenched in the student’s soul; The student should be proud of this creed; The student should be able to defend this creed; The student should be able to call for this creed, bearing the obstacles in its way”. Similarly, in ISIS’s version of its history book, ISIS described the objectives of the textbook as:

Purification of history from the falsehoods inserted in it; Introducing the student to the biography of the best of creatures [Prophet Muhammad] and urging the student to follow his steps; Implanting Jihadi values in the souls of the children of the Ummah; Enlightening
the student about the position of *Al-wala' wa-l-barâ’* that occurred in the Prophet’s biography and the Rightly Guided caliphate.\(^{103}\)

In the above example, modern history is certainly not a priority for this textbook; instead the textbook is a carefully crafted account of certain aspects of the life of the Prophet that contribute to ISIS’s overall vision and values for their future generations.

**Publishing and Distribution**

In September 2015, ISIS began distributing textbooks on CD-ROMs to local print shops, where students had to print them at their own cost.\(^{104}\) Also distributed on CD-ROMs were the Teacher’s Guides. These included “instructions on how to introduce the course, what content should be emphasized, relevant classroom activities, and additional reading to do to prepare the course in advance.”\(^{105}\) ISIS also released *Huroof* (letters), an Android app for children that leveraged Islamic *nasheed* (songs that are normally without musical instruments), bright colors and images of guns, swords, rockets and tanks that correspond with letters of the Arabic alphabet.\(^{106}\) The app was released by *Maktabat al-Himma* (Zeal Press),\(^{107}\) an ISIS online library that had a busy presence on multiple websites active at least until the publication of this report. Its publications range from full length books to two-page leaflets and manifestos. *Maktabat al-Himma’s* publications are issued by *Maktab al-Buhoott wal Dirasat* (the Bureau of Research and Studies). It is responsible for issuing publications about religious ideology and doctrinal studies.

**Effects of Education System on Children**

For parents that were forced to send their children to ISIS-run schools, the long-term effects on schooling have been grave. According to Iraq-based news outlet *Niqash*, school children in Mosul lost several terms of their schooling, as the Iraqi Ministry of Education would not accept any form of schooling that was certified by ISIS.\(^{108}\) In addition, fearing their children would become radicalized and internalize the ideologies of ISIS, many parents opted to keep their children home. According to a 2018 study, 2.2% of children attended ISIS schools in one area, compared to 80.3% prior to 2014.\(^{109}\) While it is hard to determine what percentage of
these children’s parents willingly sent their children to ISIS schools and what percentage were forced to do it, it is clear that all children under ISIS-control ended up facing dire consequences, with children two years behind their peers in official schooling. Following the liberation of cities from ISIS, children that remained in Iraq and Syria currently face the issue of scarcity of schools in the liberated areas and ISP camps, with existing schools overcrowded and understaffed. Countries working to return their citizens have also been paying attention to not only the rehabilitation of children, but also their reintegration into normal life, including education (both, formal and social). It is clear that the effects of lack of education or ‘miseducation’ of these children is visible, and may create further issues if not addressed on time.

**Analysis**

**Overview of the ISIS Files Themes**

Given the context of life under ISIS, including the impacts of ISIS control on the daily lives of families and children, it is important to extract the main themes and values contained in the textbooks and curriculum aimed at students. To get a sense of the composition of the ISIS files texts, this research used keyword analysis to identify and code main themes found within the texts. As part of this process, the research team utilized a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software (Atlas.ti) to determine the frequency of words in the text. Keywords were then clustered together into main themes, paying particular attention to expected themes utilized in existing and public ISIS propaganda.

Using the software, sentences that contained these keywords were coded into these themes automatically. Then, a manual audit of the automatic coding was conducted to ensure that the word references were contextually representative of the theme itself and that all thematic codes were captured. For example, in a search for the word ‘Muhammad’ in Arabic, a passage referencing the Prophet would receive the tag of “Emphasis on Islam.” However, there were times when the name ‘Muhammad’ was used as an example of a student in a dialogue, and the code was not applied. A full list of keywords affiliated with each code can be found in Appendix A.
The main themes of the ISIS narratives contained in the dataset of the ISIS Files are described below:

**Emphasis on Islam:** This theme helps to reinforce the ‘in-group’ or ‘us’ component of the ‘us versus them’ narrative. ISIS crafts a narrative where religious symbols and references are central forming a common sense of identity. This theme includes references to the basic pillars of Islam, religious rituals and religious symbols. In terms of keywords, this theme includes words such as ‘God/Allah,’ ‘the Prophet,’ ‘prayer,’ ‘mosque,’ and references to the Quran or Hadith.

**Governing the Islamic ‘State’:** Also reflective of the ‘in-group’ narrative, this theme refers to words and phrases such as ‘state,’ ‘caliphate,’ ‘sharia,’ and ‘umma.’ This category also codes passages that talk about defining or defending the ‘Islamic World’ and references to key leaders. It also includes mentions or images of a flag or maps of the ‘Islamic World.’

**Doctrine and Creed:** The last component of the ‘in-group’ narrative, this theme includes passages that emphasize Islamic creed or monotheism, and includes terms such as ‘tawhid/monotheism,’ ‘da’wa,’ and ‘believers.’ The theme was separated from the first theme of ‘emphasis on Islam’ because it connotes a certain interpretation of tawhid and an ideology that is exclusivist. That is, ISIS considers all those that believe in the same interpretations as ISIS as part of their ‘in-group’, whereas all others are considered their enemies.

**Enemies of ISIS:** This theme helps to establish the ‘out-group’ or the ‘them’ component of the ‘us versus them’ narrative. It tags words such as ‘kafir,’ ‘shirk/polytheism,’ ‘murtad/apostate’ and all references to other religious groups such as Christians, Jews, crusaders, and Shia Muslims.

**Fighting Enemies with Violence:** Reinforcing the actions one should take towards the ‘out-group,’ this theme includes references to violence, war or weapons. Keywords affiliated with this theme include ‘jihad,’ ‘fighter,’ ‘martyr,’ ‘war,’ and any mention of a weapon or military
equipment (such as armored vehicles). This theme also includes images that are violent, such as pictures of guns.

A comparison of the frequency of the codes in the documents and their proportions can demonstrate the overall composition of ISIS’s main narratives. The frequency of the codes as a percentage of the overall number of codes is presented in Figure 1 below. Notably, the percentages listed are not of the entire text, but rather the percentage of the total number of codes. Since the coded text represents different components of the ISIS narrative, the analysis reveals a picture of how significant different elements of its narrative—and identity—are, as presented in the educational curriculum.

**Figure 1: ISIS Narratives by Theme.** The percentages represent the number of codes per theme as compared to the overall number of codes in the documents.

Based on the percentages above, it is clear that a strong part of the ISIS identity focuses on Islamic values, culture, and religion as indicated by the “Emphasis on Islam” theme. In comparison to previous studies looking at ISIS propaganda, it can be argued that ISIS seems to use symbols, stories, and references to Islam in their educational curriculum much more frequently than their online propaganda. For instance, a 2016 study from Al Mesbar Institute found that 78.3% of ISIS Twitter propaganda in Arabic used non-religious arguments. In a more comprehensive overview of ISIS’s online propaganda, Charlie Winter described six main components of the ISIS narrative: Brutality (2.13%),
Mercy (0.45%), Victimhood (6.84%), War (37.12%), Belonging (0.89%), and Utopianism (52.54%). Included in Winter’s assessment of the Utopian narrative were references to religious life, similar to the theme of “Emphasis on Islam” in this report. The sub-narratives for religious life under the theme of Utopianism comprised 25% of the Utopian narrative. This would equate to roughly 12-15% of the overall narrative of ISIS’s online propaganda—significantly less in contrast to what is revealed through the analysis of the ISIS Files in this report.

Also notable is the number of references to violence in educational textbooks. While there is not a point of comparison to other textbooks for this point, the fact that 14% of the codes related to ISIS narratives are of a violent nature is alarming. Of course, it seems that ISIS emphasizes violence and war far less in their educational curriculum than the “War” theme in Winter’s assessment mentioned above, but perhaps this is because the target audience of the education system (children in ISIS) is of course different than those that might be digesting propaganda online.

Looking at the themes holistically, the first three themes (Emphasis on Islam, Governing the Islamic ‘state,’ and Doctrine and Creed) can be seen as representative of the ‘in-group’ component of the ‘competitive system of meaning.’ In contrast, the last two themes (Enemies of ISIS and Fighting Enemies with Violence) can be seen as the ‘out-group’ component. Here, it is important to note that ISIS seems to dedicate more of their narrative to the ‘in-group’ (77%) as opposed to the ‘out-group’ identity formation (23%).

It is worth mentioning the textbooks in which these codes appear the most. What can be extrapolated from this information is that these are the textbooks that contain the most significant proportion of the ISIS narrative. The top 10 textbooks containing the ISIS narrative are found in Figure 2:
Top 10 Textbooks Containing ISIS Narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook</th>
<th>Number of Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History (4th Primary Grade)</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Programming Using Scratch</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Provision of the Muslim (4th Primary Grade)</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creed of the Muslim (4th Primary Grade)</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharia Jurisprudence (and Intermediate/8th grade males)</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nobel Quran (4th Primary Grade)</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar (First Intermediate/7th Grade)</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography of the Prophet (3rd Primary Grade)</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English for the Islamic State (Book 4)</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Comprehension (4th Primary Grade)</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Top textbooks containing the ISIS Narrative.

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the books which contain the most significant number of sentences coded with ISIS’s propaganda are not entirely religious textbooks, and in fact, 50% of this list are religious subjects and 50% are non-religious subjects. It is interesting to point out here that the Introduction to Programming Using Scratch contains 447 coded items, many of which are violent images or references to enemies of ISIS. One of the English textbooks also appears in this top 10 list with 193 coded items that are a balanced blend of all of the themes. From this list, it can be extrapolated that these school subjects are seen as the most useful tools to transmit the values, norms and culture of ISIS’s narrative to its students. While the subjects of mathematics and science do not appear on this list (but are included in the broader textbooks of the ISIS Files related to education), subjects such as history and grammar are indeed utilized by ISIS to convey its narrative. This would be the equivalent of a modern schooling system using history, literature, language and social studies to teach the morals, values and ethics critical to its national identity and political system.

In addition to the five main themes of the ISIS narrative listed above, this report also describes several other observations related to ISIS’s narrative that did not fall under these categories. These observations could be expanded into further research projects at a later stage and would require a more nuanced analysis that targets specific research questions outside
the scope of this report. Still, it was important to include observations about how ISIS crafts a narrative around topics such as gender and brotherhood, as well as some commentary about the images. A section is included at the end of this report that catalogs these observations in the hopes that it inspires further study of these ISIS Files texts.

In the way they are described in the sections to follow, each of the main themes is a critical building block to the ‘competitive system of meaning’ that ISIS seeks to establish. It is important to note that each theme in and of itself is not necessarily critically dangerous in terms of radicalization. In fact, some of the values presented through their textbooks may be similar to religious education in many countries. Indeed, religious values, morals, and ethics such as being kind to your neighbor are not inherently problematic. However, when the entire picture is laid out, ISIS presents a complex and intricate ideology through their education system. It is an ideology that emphasizes an identity grounded in Islam and creates a safe and physical Islamic ‘State’ for its followers; it is an ideology that describes explicitly the ‘in-group’ of whom they consider appropriate believers; it is an ideology that excludes all those that do not believe the same things they do; it is an ideology that dehumanizes the ‘enemy’ or the ‘other;’ it is an ideology that necessitates action against that ‘enemy;’ and it is an ideology that explicitly justifies indiscriminate violence against the enemy at all costs. It is here that ISIS aims to plant the seeds of violent extremism in their children at an early age, and cultivates and grows those seeds through consistent reinforcement of their ideology throughout their entire education system.

**Emphasis on Islam**

Given that the word ‘Islamic’ is inherently part of their self-established name of an ‘Islamic State’, it is quite obvious that ISIS considers Islam to be the main focal point for the formation of its collective identity, and the main lens through which the world is viewed. As the theme with the largest percentage of the ISIS narrative in the educational texts (53%), this section analyses the different approaches to teaching Islam and its practice that may appeal to student’s hearts and minds through references to Islam’s major sources (Quran and Hadith). Through this approach, ISIS seeks to cultivate an Islamic identity as a critical component of what
it means to be a member of the ‘Islamic State.’ At a basic level, the reference to Islam throughout their narratives, including in the ISIS Files documents, can be described as the propaganda tactic of ‘transfer.’ In this way, ISIS associates the feelings that Muslims have towards their religion—feelings of authority and reverence—to their entire worldview and justifications of violence.

ISIS has adopted what can be described as religious overtones to their messaging through making the practice of Islam as central in the lives of the people living under the ‘caliphate.’ This helps to establish credibility with their followers, while challenging core political assumptions associated with the representation of Islam, particularly in the West. These overtones are emphasized in many claims propagated by ISIS. For example, by choosing the title Dabiq for its English-language magazine to establish a link to events of ‘time of war’ or the Battle al-Malhamah. In the first issue of Dabiq, ISIS claims splitting the world into two camps, and according to ISIS, Muslims have only two choices: either to join the camp of defenders [of Islam] or to live their lives in falsehood. All who are part of the second camp or affiliated with the enemy are made into examples (usually through violence). Here, the defense of what they consider to be ‘pure Islam’ is critical to establishing their identity.

In the textbooks and education-related documents of the ISIS files, Islamic teachings and practices are incorporated into various subjects, including non-Islamic subjects such as math or geography. With such a heavy focus on Islamic symbols and culture, it is clear that Islam is a critical component of what ISIS considers the ‘in-group’ in their ‘competitive system of meaning.’ These references aim to reinforce ISIS’s vision as self-proclaimed ‘guardians of Islam’ that believe they are upholding God’s words and preserving the message of Prophet Muhammad. Such an approach has the potential to resonate with vulnerable adult Muslims, but also even more with vulnerable students, because the ISIS narrative includes ideas that are familiar to them: religious figures such as the Prophet Muhammad and rituals such as praying or fasting. The ideology of ISIS, in this sense, could be more attractive because it claims some religious and spiritual credibility. This does not mean that all Muslims are necessarily vulnerable to the ISIS
narrative. Rather, for individuals that are in an identity crisis, the ISIS narrative may strongly resonate because they are looking for spiritual and religious guidance. Associating their ideas with Islam is a strategic way that ISIS creates a ‘system of meaning’ that is indeed ‘competitive’ with other worldviews where people can find a sense of belonging. Through these references to Islamic teachings and practices, ISIS plants the seed for more dangerous ideological approaches. For example, ISIS categorizes jihad as a form of worship, meaning that ISIS presents jihad in the same light as the five pillars of Islam. This could help ISIS justify violent jihad as a religious obligation at a later stage.

In every textbook analyzed in this dataset, ISIS stated its vision that the textbooks were developed “according to a clear vision not an eastern or western one, but Quranic and Prophetic vision…” The Quran and Hadith are critical to the development of the curriculum, and most of what follows in the textbooks is centered on this approach. Moreover, it is clear that for ISIS, only God is worthy of worship. This was highly reflected in ISIS educational curricula and textbooks. The word ‘God’ was mentioned frequently, even in non-Islamic subjects, and in fact, was the most frequently mentioned keyword in all of the ISIS textbooks and background documents in this dataset.

Religious Themes in Non-Islamic Subjects

Of course, it would be expected for religious themes and references to show up in Islamic subjects such as Quran or Muslim Creed, but an emphasis on Islam is also common in the ISIS Files amongst non-Islamic subjects. For example, in a Science textbook for the 4th primary grade, a lesson on ‘reclaiming the desert’ (reversing desertification) refers to the Quran to support this process. It states, “And you see the Earth still, but when We send down water on it, it vibrates and swells, and grows all kinds of lovely pairs,” from Sura al-Hajj, verse number 5.

A similar approach was taken with a Geography textbook for 4th primary grade, where natural phenomena such as mountains, rivers, valleys, and grass are described. When referencing mountains, the textbook refers to Sura An-Naml: 88, mentioning, “And you see the mountains, and imagine them fixed, yet they pass, as the passing of the clouds—the making of God,
who has perfected everything. He is fully informed of what you do.” Or, when discussing climate concepts such as clouds, temperature, atmospheric pressure, rain, wind, water and mineral resources, the textbook referred to verses from the Quran such as “It is He who shows you the lightning, causing fear and hope. And He produces the heavy clouds (Sura Ar-Ra’d:12). Even the term ‘natural’ is interpreted in a way that relates to religion. ISIS states that, “Whenever the word (natural) is mentioned, this means that the phenomenon is of the Creation of God (Almighty and Exalted is He) without human intervention in them. This is contrary to the theories of the atheists from communists and others besides them.”

**Pillars of Islam**

In addition to references to the Quran and Hadith, ISIS emphasizes the five pillars of Islam as central to everyday life in its society under its ‘caliphate.’ Again, this is not divergent from how these five pillars are emphasized in the cultural lives of many Muslims around the world. The practice of Islam as such is therefore used by ISIS as one part of crafting its narrative and shaping identity. For example, in “The Muslim Creed” textbook for 3rd primary grade, one lesson outlines the five pillars, referencing a Hadith: “Islam has been built on five pillars: testifying that there is no deity worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, establishing the salah (prayer), paying the zakat (obligatory charity), making the hajj (pilgrimage) to the House, and fasting in Ramadhan. (Agreed upon).”

However, as with references to Hadith, the pillars of Islam show up in non-Islamic subjects. For example, in “Introduction to Programming Using Scratch” for first and second intermediate grades (grade 7 and 8), one of the exercises for teaching the ‘Scratch’ programming language was to program a ‘sprite’ (a computer-based character) how to properly pray. Photo 1 shows the proper way of standing at the beginning of prayer, followed by instructions for the opening takbir.
In an Arabic Grammar textbook for 4th grade, several examples refer to the prayer. In one exercise, students are asked to put one line under each noun and two lines under each verb for a given sentence. The example is as follows (underlines omitted): “In their prayers, Muslims used to face towards Jerusalem until God’s command come down to convert the Qiblah. They then began to face towards the esteemed Kaaba in each prayer.” Similarly, a Science textbook for the 2nd grade refers to wudu’ (ablution, a condition to performing prayer) under the benefits of water as illustrated in Photo 2.

As seen in Photo 3, an English textbook uses a fictional character of Ali to model the behavior of being a ‘good Muslim’ through what he does on a Friday. Notice here the mention of Friday sermon, prayer and
recitation of the Quran. This illustrates that the narratives of the five pillars of Islam are woven throughout the textbooks, and these pillars reveal that Islamic values are critical to the ISIS way of life.

Photo 3: What did Ali do on Friday?

*Hadith in the Textbooks*

In addition to the Quran and the five pillars, ISIS also references Hadith in its textbooks, particularly to craft a particular narrative through its religious subjects. Hadith can be defined as “a collection of traditions containing sayings/actions of the Prophet Muhammad that, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran.” According to the classical theory of Sunni jurisprudence, Hadith are recognized as one of the sources of law. Since the interpretation and acceptance of all Hadith are not universal (and rather dependent on the sect or school of jurisprudence), the use of Hadith can be a powerful way for ISIS to shape its narrative throughout the textbooks because ISIS can refer to rare or controversial interpretations as ways to justify their actions. Prophetic Hadith was a dedicated subject of one ISIS textbook, but Hadith were also used in other subjects. For example, in a description found in a History textbook, ISIS uses a Hadith to explain:
The predecessors were keen to study the Prophet’s biography and teach it to their children... Knowing such biographies is what helps to emulate and follow [the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs]. God’s Messenger (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) said: (so you must keep to my Sunna and to the Sunna of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, those who guide to the right way. Cling to it stubbornly."

In this case, the Hadith justifies the choice of school subject (History) and highlights the importance of why ISIS wanted this to be taught to children (so that the Prophet’s actions can be emulated). This is important for another theme discussed later in this report: violence. In this History textbook, ISIS justifies acts of violence by focusing only on the violent battles of the Prophet during the Medinan Period (disregarding the rest of the Prophet’s life), and infers that these acts of violence should be emulated by ISIS followers.

Overall, the emphasis on Islam is a heavily referenced theme that shows up in the ISIS Files, particularly in the textbooks, and it is clear that Islam is central to ISIS’s identity narrative. That is, the textbooks are colored with religious language, symbols and references that attempt to build credibility and trust with the student. By incorporating Islamic language and religious symbolism into the textbooks, ISIS ‘transfers’ the positive credibility and identity affiliated with the Islamic faith to the lessons associated with its curriculum and the narrative it is trying to create. By itself, this technique is not dangerous, and indeed is the approach taken by many religious education systems. However, when this transfer includes references to dehumanizing ‘others’ and utilizing violence, a dangerous ISIS ideology starts to emerge.

**Governing the Islamic ‘State’**

The next largest main theme (17%) found in the dataset of ISIS Files textbooks contributes to the ‘competitive system of meaning’ by ascribing not only an Islamic identity (an individual identity around Islamic values) but also a collective identity. One of ISIS’s main claims, and part of its central branding strategy, is a political one: that ISIS is the sole legitimate source of Islamic governance and law (sharia) through a transnational and physical Islamic ‘state’ or ‘caliphate’ that holds power and authority over all Muslims. According to ISIS, the ‘caliphate’ is home to ISIS’s
romanticized and exclusivist interpretation of the Muslim community, or the *umma*. In a general sense, the *umma* can be defined as a “cluster of believers bounded by their faith and religious and moral responsibilities, in a single borderless community.”131 There are debates by different Islamic scholars over whether or not the general Islamic *umma* should be considered inclusive or exclusive (of others that may not follow the same religious interpretations), whom should lead the *umma*, how the *umma* should be manifested (religious or institutional), and how the *umma* should be proposed politically (as an identity or as a political structure).132

However, ISIS’s interpretation of the *umma* is clear: it is exclusive only to those that they consider true believers, led by the ‘caliph’ (Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi), manifested institutionally through *sharia*, and governed by a political structure, the ‘caliphate.’ This political claim as a ‘caliphate’ is accompanied by a significant campaign in its propaganda to not only legitimize its religious and governmental authority, but also by a campaign to physically control territory, build infrastructure, and create a cohesive society within their vision of a perfect refuge for Muslims. ISIS sought not only to convince Muslims to buy into their concept of a ‘caliphate’ for a sense of belonging or identity, but also as a real, physical place where Muslims could reside.

Importantly, children are perceived as critical to the ‘caliphate,’ not only as fighters, but also as citizens of the society that ISIS was trying to build. As Daleen Al-Ibrahim put it, “ISIS targets these children as an empty blank page that can be affected precisely according to the ISIS vision and objectives.”133 Therefore, it is no surprise that the textbooks reveal ISIS’s plans for building a so-called ‘caliphate,’ include references to governance and structure, and provide foundational insights into what ISIS envisions for the future of its ‘state.’ Here, the contents of the ISIS Files have implications for assessing the future transnational actions of ISIS and attempts to re-establish physical territories in regions such as North Africa and Southeast Asia. Moreover, the ISIS Files also reveal the intention to educate children to become custodians of the ‘state’ and its values and to motivate them to protect their ‘state’ at all costs.
A Spiritual and Physical ‘caliphate’

ISIS’s notion of a ‘caliphate’ takes a nostalgic view of the time of Prophet Muhammad, where the Prophet’s actions (as well as the example of His Companions that continued to guide the Muslim community after his death) are highly revered and admired. Following the Prophet’s example, ISIS aims to provide both a physical and spiritual refuge for Muslims—a ‘utopian’ society where all Muslims can worship according to ISIS’s interpretation of God’s commands. As a starting point, this includes a physical territory where their community can be safe from physical and spiritual threats, and where Islamic law (sharia) is the only law of the land.

At its peak in 2014, ISIS controlled approximately 100,000 square kilometers of territory, with its central base in Iraq and Syria and formally claimed to establish provinces (wiliyat) in countries such as Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, the Caucasus, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Philippines, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. In the beginning, the central base was in Iraq and Syria, with calls to perform hijra (migration) to the caliphate in the physically-controlled territory there. In addition, the wiliyat were established when affiliated groups formally pledged bay’a (allegiance) to al-Baghdadi, and al-Baghdadi officially accepted their request to be part of ISIS. As ISIS lost territory in Iraq and Syria, its wiliyat became more significant in their strategy to maintain relevance and authority.

Physical territorial claims are therefore important to crafting its narrative through its textbooks. In a second intermediary grade textbook on Geography of the Islamic World (8th grade), the physical construction of ISIS’s claims to land are detailed. The position is described as follows:

The Islamic World is located between two latitudes (11.50) degrees to the south of the equator. It reaches its maximum extension to the south with the borders of (Tanzania) in Africa. It is also located between the latitude (51.45) degrees to the degrees north of the equator, with the northern borders of Kazakhstan in Central Asia. As for its location of longitude, it extends between longitudes 16.4 degrees to the west of Greenwich with the extension of the western
coast of Africa at Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal and the longitude (140) degrees to the east of (Greenwich) with the borders of Indonesia.135

This passage essentially defines the parts of the world that ISIS sees as viable governorates (wiliyat) of its ‘caliphate.’136 The textbook also highlights graphically the areas where Islam is commonly practiced—and ostensibly suitable for inclusion as part of its ‘caliphate.’ Notably, while countries are mentioned in the descriptions, the main entity described throughout the textbook is described as the “Islamic World.” The concept of nations and national boundaries is not a subject of discussion, and the boundaries of the territory of the Islamic World are separated mostly by geographic landmarks such as oceans, mountains, and seas. As the map from a Geography book in Photo 4 shows, ISIS holds a dichotomous view of the world—drawing the edges of its borders on the map to justify its position.137 The map itself is a representation of what ISIS considers the ‘in-group’ and the ‘out-group’: Muslims or the “unbelievers.”

Photo 4: The Map of the Islamic World. The captions on the bottom indicate “countries where Muslims are numerous” (white color) and “countries where unbelievers (kafaruun) are numerous” (black color).

Justice and Law

For ISIS, its lands are a place where sharia (Islamic law) is practiced freely and is the only law applicable. Under the physical lands controlled by ISIS, a structured system of control and justice was created, the rules, laws, and punishments centered on their idea of adhering to strict sharia. Drawing on work by the al-Qaida scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, for
ISIS, man-made laws are “analogous to polytheistic idols and therefore violate tawhid,” meaning that all laws that are not divinely proscribed are rejected. Notably, ISIS also accepts Sharia siyasa, taking on the model of Ibn Taymiyyah, which applies Islamic legal principles to matters that are not explicitly addressed in the Quran such as traffic laws and city ordinances. Therefore, ISIS’s legal structure included governance on everything from economic transactions, property rights, marriage, education, taxation, conscription, and moral laws to govern societal interactions.

This approach is also found in the ISIS Files textbooks. For example, in one of its textbooks on “Sharia Jurisprudence,” ISIS explains that, “[t]he references of acts of worship are the Quran and Sunna, from which the rulings of Sharia are taken. Muslims have to learn the rulings of their religion in order to adhere to them and perform them as Almighty God commanded... The jurisprudence of religion and knowledge of what is lawful and what is prohibited are of the most noble and honorable sciences.” Sharia, therefore, was seen as both a religious and legal obligation for its citizens, and ISIS thought it important enough to include as a subject, at least for its 8th-grade boys’ classes. The same textbook also explains:

God has blessed the Islamic Ummah with the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate that rules by the law of God and establishes life based on the religion of God and His desire. It is keen to teach Muslims their religion and return them back to the pure water spring and teach them to adhere to the Quran and Sunna in light of the understanding of the Ummah’s Predecessors.

For ISIS, the existence of their ‘caliphate’ is attributed to the teachings of the Quran and Sunna, and claims to govern with authority that comes from the ‘law of God.’

Hijra (Emigration) to the ‘caliphate’

The second component of ISIS’s narrative around state-building is their calls to come to their physical territory through hijra. Hijra (emigration) in the Islamic tradition generally refers to the migration of Prophet
Muhammad in 622 C.E. from Mecca, where he faced religious persecution, to Medina, where Muslims were able to practice Islam freely. In this spirit, if Muslims are facing persecution, or unable to practice Islam, it is recommended that Muslims migrate from their lands of *Dar al-Harb* (House of War) to the lands of *Dar al-Islam* (House of Islam), where Muslims are free to worship as they please.

However, ISIS has exploited the concept of *hijra* as a device for establishing itself as a state and attracting foreign fighters.\footnote{For example, in Issue 2 of *Dabiq*, ISIS’s English-language virtual magazine, ISIS explains, “the first priority is to perform Hijrah from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from darul-kufr to darul-Islam. Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses and children.”
Importantly, ISIS delegitimizes many of the Middle Eastern countries that practice Islam, justifying that the only true *Dar al-Islam* exists in the Islamic State, where Muslim laws are fully implemented. Notably, ISIS’s *wiliyats* are included in its definition of *Dar al-Islam*—and in fact, Libya is justified as a potential destination for hijra in Issue 8 of *Dabiq*.
Accoding to ISIS, hijra “is not restricted by time [period], so every Muslim residing in the abode of disbelief at any time, must migrate to the abode of Islam, wherever it is.” In other words, for ISIS, *hijra* is both obligatory (it is required) and urgent (even though they are not in the time period of the Prophet, they should still migrate).

ISIS’s objectives of *hijra* can be found in a primary school History textbook (4th grade):

*Hijra (Migration)*, in its religious meaning, fulfills a number of objectives, including:

1. Establishing an Islamic state that protects religion, establishes borders, strives for the cause of God, and is the refuge that all Muslims on Earth seek.
2. Establishing an Islamic society in which the bond between its members is based on the creed without any other bond or connection.
3. Providing protection for Muslims from persecution and harassment and enabling them to establish God’s Sharia on earth without any fear.
4. Establishing an Islamic base to gather the mujahideen and prepare armies to spread Islam on earth.¹⁴⁷

According to this ISIS textbook, the purpose of the *hijra* fulfills the Islamic State’s objectives to build a nation that protects its followers from physical, emotional, and spiritual threats and establishes a base where its armies can launch future missions to spread Islam. In this case, ISIS uses religious symbolism in order to instill a sense of identity: belonging to the Islamic State, a refuge for all Muslims.

Importantly, the last objective in the lesson above also alludes to two other key components of ISIS’s message: *da’wa* and *jihad*. The *hijra* provides a way for ISIS to ‘spread Islam on Earth’ *da’wa*. In addition, the language of gathering *mujahideen* (fighters) and preparing armies suggests that this is to be done violently, and through *jihad* (struggle). Both of these concepts, and how they are manifested in ISIS’s textbooks, will be explored further under later themes.

The understanding of ISIS’s concept of *hijra*, as outlined in its textbooks and other propaganda, is critical for preventing the spread of such ideology in the future. For children that may have been exposed to ISIS material (either through education or in their daily lives), the urgent and obligatory concept of *hijra* and the need to establish a physical territory to launch armies can have far-reaching consequences. States that are seeking to rehabilitate and reintegrate these children need to be aware that the seeds may have already been planted, and may lie dormant for years, until triggers may re-awaken familiar narratives in the minds of these individuals if those ideas are not countered. This re-awakening could lead to attacks in the children’s home countries, under the justification of establishing a physical territory for the Islamic ‘state.’
Control of Resources

Another way that ISIS reaffirms its claims to legitimate political authority is through its ability to control and manage resources that would aide in the prosperity of its ‘state’ and people. Situated in the Middle East, naturally one of those key resources is the management and control of oil fields. Interestingly, the subjects covered in the science textbooks—such as chemistry and physics—include lessons related to establishing the oil trade and building infrastructure. For example, in a Physics textbook (Grade 7), one lesson is on the volumetric flow rate, which is critical to understanding how to construct pipes for plumbing and how to extract and transport oil through rigs and pipelines. Similarly, a Chemistry textbook (Grade 8) includes sub-units describing practical uses of chemicals in different groups on the Periodic Table. In a unit on aluminum and its alloys, some of the practical uses listed include: manufacture of aircraft and housing, electrical wiring, manufacture of cookware, preservation of food, and manufacture of soft drink cans. While of course these sort of examples would be expected in any textbook, it reinforced Dhul-Qarnayn’s vision for what subjects to teach—to prioritize the knowledge that students would need to navigate and understand their surroundings, and ultimately contribute economically to the ‘caliphate.’

ISIS also subtly emphasizes the legitimacy of its claims over critical geographic areas—and their resources—as part of the ‘Islamic World.’ For example, in a textbook about the Geography of the Islamic World for the second intermediate grade (8th grade), ISIS justifies the control of these areas from an Islamic perspective:

The Red Sea: The Islamic World surrounds it from every side, so its waters are considered Islamic waters. Its importance increased after its connection to the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal, as we mentioned above. Thus, it has become one of the most important pathways for global trade between the East and the West, especially the (oil) trade.

Several other waterways are mentioned as “controlled by the Islamic World,” including the Strait of Gibraltar, the Dardanelles and the
Bosphorus, the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Malacca, and the Strait of Singapore. Listing these waterways as part of the Islamic World is a subtle way of justifying their attempts to control the flow of resources, including key ports for both goods and oil. This is significant because it provides insight into ISIS’s broader vision — which includes controlling trade from the Middle East and the Far East to Europe and the Americas through the Suez Canal, the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, and the Strait of Gibraltar. Although ISIS never successfully controlled any of these waterways, this passage should be alarming in terms of the seriousness of their plans to expand their territory through military efforts.

Finally, ISIS plainly outlines how physical territory relates to power and economic resources in its description of the area of the Islamic World:

The area of the Islamic World is about (31,715,393) km², representing 23-24% of the total land area of up to (135,708,000) km², which means that our world occupies a quarter of the land area in the world. Thus, it constitutes a great weight that enables it to own a powerful force that can be put to use to support the causes of the Muslims.

The importance of the wide area is not limited to the strategic aspects in the circumstances of war but rather goes beyond the circumstances of peace especially in economic terms (the formation of natural resources), as the extent of the area of the Islamic World area includes diversity in its geological structure. This is reflected in the diversity in the types of soils and minerals.

Strategic Minerals: These are the minerals that are essential to the State because of their significant importance in times of war and peace. Crude oil ranks first among those minerals. Our Islamic World occupies the center stage in terms of the amount of oil reserves and its production.

In addition to oil, there are many other minerals of relative importance such as manganese and mercury. There are necessary minerals such as iron, lead, copper and phosphates) in addition to the presence of ores for these minerals. However, the exploitation of those discovered minerals is still limited.
Here, it is essential to point out that most of these resources are exported in the form of raw material, which leads to the deprivation of Muslims of large financial returns. 152

There are two reasons why this final passage is important. First, the passage recognizes that land and its affiliated resources are a source of significant power, claiming that land is rightfully ‘owned’ by Muslims. Second, the passage also plainly mentions that the exportation of resources from the Islamic World is an act that is depriving Muslims of financial gains. This is in alignment with many other ISIS narratives and grievances that claim that Muslims in the ‘Islamic World’ are being exploited by the West (for example, for oil), and it is up to ISIS to defend the umma against the financial attacks on what they consider rightfully theirs.

Leadership

References to the leadership of the Islamic State is another way through which the textbooks subtly emphasize the authority of its governance and claim its legitimacy. Besides the Prophet Muhammad, ISIS makes several references to the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the leaders of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet. According to Oxford Islamic Studies, the duties of a ‘caliph’ are the “enforcement of law, defense and expansion of the realm of Islam, distribution of funds (booty and alms), and general supervision of government.”153 Of course, one of the critical leaders for ISIS was Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was declared a ‘caliph’ in the eyes of his followers. That is, for ISIS, the declaration of al-Baghdadi as the ‘caliph’ justified for ISIS followers the idea that ISIS had religious and political jurisdiction on how Muslims should be ruled and protected.154

Haroro Ingram, Craig Whiteside, and Charlie Winter argued that the image of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was “a metaphor for the ‘caliphate’ itself.”155 References to his leadership in the textbooks conjure the images of his first video appearance at the Friday prayer in the Grand Masjid of Mosul in July 2014, where he appeared as a strong and pious ‘caliph’ of the newly-declared ‘caliphate’ called the Islamic State. Similarly, Fernandez suggests that “Baghdadi mostly plays the role of an Islamist
Stalin, prioritizing the doctrine of ‘jihadism in one country,’ albeit a new and multi-ethnic one, over the calls for the global jihad that al-Qaida has preached.”

A reference to the leadership of the Islamic State in a textbook is an intentionally-placed symbol of the ‘caliphate’ and al-Baghdadi’s place as its spiritual leader.

Interestingly, there are no clear references to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi specifically in the textbooks as one might expect. However, in one of the background documents that appears to be a school assignment, al-Baghdadi is explicitly mentioned: “O Allah, provide Jihads/ mujahideen with conquests. O Allah, keep our Sheik, Emir, Muslim leaders like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi safe. O Allah, keep them safe against attacks, spies and agents and against temptations.” The sentiment is made in the context of a broader discussion of the enemies of ISIS, and suggests that the student had internalized and accepted the ISIS narrative that al-Baghdadi was the ‘caliph’ of the Islamic ‘state.’

In the textbooks themselves, ISIS does make reference to other leaders that contributed to the evolution of its ideology and identity. In a textbook on Arabic Literature for the second intermediate grade (Grade 8), the following passage mentions several leaders:

Today, we are in dire need of the enthusiastic and jihad poetry to inspire and galvanize the spirit of male fighters in the ranks of the State of the Caliphate and promote the concept of jihad, because it is an obligation on the Ummah like as prayer, fasting and other obligations, and in order to frighten and terrify the enemy with all the power and determination the state has been given. The poems and speeches of the leaders from the emirs of the Islamic State had the greatest impact in promoting the spirit of jihad in the hearts of fighters such as Sheikh (Osama bin Laden), Sheikh (Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi) and Sheikh (Abu Omar al-Baghdadi) – may God have mercy on them—and others.

This second passage is meaningful for several reasons. First, the textbook emphasizes the importance of poems and speeches in spreading ISIS propaganda. Here, ISIS gives a subtle justification and reasoning behind why (their version of) Arabic literature is chosen as an important topic to remain in the ISIS curriculum (remembering that subjects such as art,
music, philosophy, and other types of literature were banned). It is recognized as important because of its impact in spreading the “spirit of jihad” in all its fighters. Second, the textbook refers to a series of revered leaders that were foundational to the emergence of the Islamic State: the first being the leader of al-Qaida (Osama bin Laden) the second being the leader of al-Qaida in Iraq (Sheikh Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi), and the third being the leader of the Mujahideen Shura Council that later became the Islamic State in Iraq (Abu Omar al-Baghdadi). This reference to the three leaders is an attempt to reemphasize the legitimacy of ISIS by justifying its connections to the ‘fighters’ of the past.

Citizens of the ‘caliphate’

Another mechanism related to the theme that is utilized by ISIS is to firmly establish the values of what it means to be a citizen of their ‘caliphate.’ In an analysis of ISIS’s early virtual propaganda, the theme of a utopian society was one of the most prominent and frequently cited by Charlie Winter. The utopian theme in ISIS propaganda includes depictions of religious life such as praying and fasting, economic activities such as a vegetable market, social life such as children playing together, justice such as punishments for crimes, governance such as fixing infrastructure, expansion of the ‘caliphate’ into other regions, and the natural landscapes such as the desert or a lightning storm. In particular, depictions of religious, economic, and social activities in their propaganda emphasized the type of citizens that ISIS desired: pious, happy, caring towards each other, and dedicated to protecting the ‘caliphate’. Notably, since early 2017 (after the publishing of the textbooks in the present study), ISIS’s propaganda has shifted—away from depicting a civilian utopia and focused more on war and fighting.

ISIS gives us a glimpse of the types of values important to them even through some of the most basic exercises in its textbooks. For example, in an Arabic Grammar textbook for 4th-grade primary, we see the following as examples of the sound masculine plural:

1. Honest people obtain profits from their trade.
2. God is pleased with the believers.
3. Shooters are skillful.
4. The mujahideen seek paradise.
5. God rewards fasting people.
6. The Muslims help the devoted one.

The choice of sentences here provides examples of how ISIS might perceive a good citizen: honest, profitable, a believer that is in good favor by God, a skilled shooter, a fighter (mujahid), a pious faster, and a loyal and caring Muslim.

In a second example, a Religious Morals and Ethics book describes how ISIS citizens should treat their neighbors:

The neighbor has a great position. He has rights upon us so we should respect him, be good to him and help him if he needs assistance.

Being good to the neighbor is one of the moral virtues that God loves and becomes pleased with the one who has such morals. It is evidence for faith and a way that guides those who have such moral virtue to Paradise.

It is not permissible to harm our neighbors. We should not raise our voices when they are sleeping. We should not throw stones at their houses. We should not hit their children because God Almighty does not like those who harm their neighbors and does not admit them to Paradise on the Last Day.

Here, the idea that the ‘caliphate’ is a welcoming place, where all Muslims can live together and prosper.

Lessons in a Reading and Comprehension textbook offer advice for the future of the Islamic State; for example, students learn about the “consequences of envy.” Moreover, ISIS states that “...children learn their heritage from their parents so that they can benefit from the good morals, sound ideals, and precious advice.” The lesson goes on to give an example of a poem, stating that “if you keep with a despicable person, you are as the company you keep...” and “the modest live well.” Through these examples chosen, ISIS reveals values that it wants to instill in its
children. Some of these values, of course, are intended to support the ‘caliphate’ in the sense that they want all citizens of their ‘state’ to benefit each other and live together in harmony. This helps to paint the idyllic picture of the ‘caliphate’ that ISIS wants to show to the world.

Loyalty and Identity

The final component to ISIS’s governance narrative in its textbooks is constructing an identity around what it means to be part of the Islamic State, both in deeds and in symbols. Flags, anthems (in this case, *nasheed*), national attire, and social/cultural traditions are all examples of forming a ‘national’ identity, and instilling a bond between the individual and the State or their ‘homeland.’ These are the same symbols that are used by any other state in developing a sense of pride or nationalism for their citizens. In the same vein, ISIS often leverages images and symbols to reinforce their ‘system of meaning.’ For instance, the cover of a Geography textbook features an image of a forest with a man standing with his back, dressed in ‘ISIS-appropriate attire,’ and a gun hanging from his shoulder (See Photo 5). These symbols are intended to conjure feelings of attachment and identity to ISIS, as well as a sense of pride.

![Photo 5: Cover of a Geography Textbook](image-url)
One of the critical symbols of the ISIS identity—and therefore loyalty to ISIS—is the flag. There are a number of places where references to the flag can be found in the ISIS textbooks. For example, the cover of the English textbook shows the ISIS flag on top of a high tower (See Photo 6), and a boy gesturing with the sign of monotheism or *tawhid*, pointing of the index finger up to the sky (See Photo 7). Similarly, in the same textbook, at the beginning of each unit, there are small cartoons that help the student learn new English words. In one of these cartoons, the flag appears on the wall of the classroom, and it is also discussed in the cartoon by the teacher. While some of these symbols themselves are not unique to or originating from ISIS, it is clear that the group uses these images and symbols to internalize core ideas and values of the State, indoctrinate children, and shape their identity around these constructed norms.

**Photo 6: English Lesson.** The ISIS flag can be seen hanging on the background on the wall.

**Photo 7: English for ISIS.** The cover reveals the symbol of *tawhid* (monotheism) and the ISIS Flag.
As seen in the analysis above, this theme is significant in that ISIS shapes a vision of an ‘ideal’ Islamic ‘caliphate’ that is a physical refuge for all Muslims. ISIS’s vision for its ‘state’ is one that is built on sharia, and manifests—according to ISIS—all the moral and legal requirements for an ‘ideal’ Islamic society. ISIS mandates that all of its followers immediately should migrate to its physical location (hijra), and lays the groundwork for justifying—sometimes violently—the defense of their ‘caliphate’ at all costs.

**Doctrine and Creed**

The way ISIS interprets and teaches Islamic doctrine and creed is a critical component in its ‘competitive system of meaning.’ This section will demonstrate how the ISIS curriculum leverages narratives around some of the basic principles of the Islamic doctrine, particularly on its interpretation of tawhid (monotheism), to construct its own identity in relationship to the ‘other’ and to distinguish itself, in its eyes, as the only true manifestation of Islam. Comprising approximately 7% of the overall ISIS narrative in the texts in this dataset, ISIS repeatedly and consistently applies certain religious narratives throughout its curriculum to imprint this idea into the minds of its students.

The importance of this subject is highlighted in the Muslim Creed textbook where it states that:

> The one who follows the reality in which the Muslim generations are brought up sees that there is an urgent and immediate need for teaching the subject of “Islamic Creed.” In addition, there is a need for including the subject of “Islamic Monotheism” to meet this need of Muslims for this type of religious sciences. Indeed this is of its most important aspect, especially at a time when our Ummah is waging an ideological conflict through which our enemies aim to obliterate our identity, empty us our fundamentals, and separate us from the sources of our strength. The most dangerous of these conflicts targets the creed; as we are the Ummah of monotheism. **Monotheism is the core of our identity and the tint of God in us** (emphasis added).168
In this passage, ISIS polarizes the discourse by identifying a conflict between themselves (monotheists) and all others through the ‘us versus them’ narrative. Social psychologists explain the ‘us versus them’ mentality through the theory of social identity. The premise of the theory states that humans have a tendency to identify with a social group. Following the process of categorization, identification, and comparison, an individual starts to form a sense of belonging to a certain group. Consequently, this identification and belonging create an ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ thinking, often leading the individual to practice favoritism towards the former and denigration for the latter. The construction of the in-group and out-group is a relational occurrence. As Haroro argues, “one comes to know what one is because of what is not (and vice versa).”

Scholars differ in opinion on where to place Islamic doctrine in ISIS’s process of constructing its identity. Some have suggested that grievances and claims of injustice are the main factors where religion is the glue that bonds and justifies narratives of grievances. Others suggested that ISIS’s members are motivated first and foremost by a deep religious impulse. Those of the first opinion argue that ISIS reinforces the divide between the two groups by creating a sense of crisis and insecurity, and it blames on the out-group or ‘others’ for their demise. In other words, ISIS “exploits a pervasive sense of insecurity by portraying troubling events in a particular light as a way to appeal to those who may already share some of its views and by promoting the group’s ability to deal with those concerns, thus underlining the group’s strength and value.” This arguably self-imposed perpetual state of crisis and insecurity for the ISIS in-group creates a ground to further dehumanize and demonize the out-group ‘other’ and justifies the use of violence against them.

The second opinion is that religion is the overall framework by which ISIS and similar groups interpret and justify their actions. This process is referred to as ‘religiosity.’ Religiosity is defined as a “strong religious impulse (which should not be confused with religious knowledge) among ISIS’s fighters and commanders.” This is demonstrated in the research of two sociologists, Lorne L. Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam, who conducted interviews with twenty foreign fighters who joined ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaida's Syrian branch) and other similar militant groups in
Syria. Based on the interviews, the researchers concluded that “these individuals were so heavily mediated by religious discourse it seems implausible to suggest that religiosity (i.e., a sincere religious commitment, no matter how ill-informed or unorthodox) is not a primary motivator for their actions.”\(^{174}\) Either way, it is clear that the doctrine, creed, and religious discourse is a central and effective part of how ISIS markets itself and promotes its agendas.

ISIS, al-Qaida and other similar groups follow the belief that Sunni Islam was at its height during the time of the first generations of Muslims, that they seek to restore their own interpretation of these early Islamic modules, and that the only way to do so is by waging war against those who oppose it. At the center of this is their strict interpretation of the principle of \textit{tawhid}, monotheism (or the oneness of God), against \textit{shirk} (polytheism or the belief in multiple gods) and a loose interpretation \textit{kufur} (disbelief or infidelity to the one God) and their expressed aggression against those they consider either affiliated with \textit{shirk} or \textit{kufur}.

ISIS applies the principle of monotheism to construct a social movement, or a set of opinions and beliefs that promote change, and promote a romanticized identity it has created for itself as: a) the sole defender of Islam; b) struggling against the mainstream of the misguided and the evil; and c) the only entity with the tools and the know-how to rescue the Islamic nation or \textit{umma}. ISIS’s success in achieving this depends on its “ability to promote a specific version of reality and to make this version resonate with the worldview of potential recruits.”\(^{175}\)

Not surprisingly, this strategy can also be found in the works of Abu Bakr Naji, an alleged al-Qaida strategist who released in 2004 a manuscript titled “The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stages through which the Umma Will Pass.” In this manuscript, Naji dedicates a whole chapter to the most effective way to educate the next generation of mujahidin. He suggests students should be “learning from momentous events of ‘trials, and \textit{fitnas} (agitations) which the companions of the Prophet faced since the first day they entered Islam,’ and learning from the exemplars who stood in the face of ‘horrors that produced this unique generation for us.’”\(^{176}\)
Leveraging this logic, Naji cites stories of warriors from the time of Prophet Muhammad as the ultimate role models in selflessness and sacrifice (exemplar). He uses them as a comparison to condemn contemporary Islamic movements and scholars who disagree with the violent Salafist agenda, and for not carrying on with what Naji perceives as *jihad* (momentous events) to defend the perceived ‘Islamic nation’ or *umma*. Through the use of such examples, students may start to develop the in-group and out-group understanding, identifying that ‘us’ entails in comparison to ‘them’ or ‘others.’ ISIS applies this logic to its propaganda, and in turn, its curricula—repeatedly framing themselves as the protectors of Islam, and the other as the enemy worthy of destruction.

*Framing the ‘caliphate’ under Tawhid*

Building upon this narrative, monotheism is a pivotal framing point for ISIS. It is the belief in the existence of one God. This one God is the ultimate reality and the creator of all things. In this regard, Islam shares the same belief with other monotheistic religions. Virtually all Muslims agree on the principle of *tawhid*. But, ISIS, and similar groups, adapt extreme interpretations to *tawhid* and leverage those interpretations in their propaganda to justify and encourage political violence including *jihad*.177

The 19th-century Salafist scholars divided the concept of *tawhid* into a number of applications. The most agreed upon are the following: 1) *Tawhid al-Rububiyah*, 2) *Tawhid al-Uluhiyah*, 3) *Tawhid al-Asma wa’l-Sifaat*. Senior Saudi scholars Bin Baz and Saleh Al-Fawzan explain these categories: The first *Tawhid al-Rububiyah* is to believe that only one God exists, and He is alone is responsible for prosperity and hardships, birth and death, and other aspects of life. Both scholars agree that some polytheists can also believe in the existence of one God. This applies to religions and sects that believe in one God but also perform worship sermons to idols and religious figures. The second, *Tawhid al-Uluhiyah* is to direct worship only to Allah and not to pray to idols or other creations, including prophets and imams, as a means of connecting to God. Saleh Al-Fawzan explains that though polytheists during the time of Prophet Muhammad acknowledge *Tawhid al-Rububiyah*, “they are
required to exclusively pray to Allah, because by acknowledging that He is the single one God, they are required to unify their worship [to pray to one god]... The belief in one God is instinctive by birth but it is not enough.” 179 The third demonstration of tawhid, to believe in God’s names and attributes as mentioned in the Quran [including the ar-rahman the Beneficent, ar-rahim the Merciful] and so on. Notably, ISIS also explains tawhid and its categories in this same way throughout the “Creed of the Muslim” textbook for the 4th grade.180

There is a fourth controversial application to tawhid which ISIS and al-Qaida before them apply to justify their attacks on what it defines as the ‘near enemy’ including Muslim governments. This is called Tawhid al-Hakimiyah, or oneness of Allah’s judgment and legislation. The term is derived from the Arabic word hukm (legislation or law), and in this context refers to the obligation to rule only by what Allah has revealed, and associating no other forms of legislation with it. The debate over the validity of Tawhid al-Hakimiyah has taken the form of fatwas found on the internet between mostly leading Saudi scholars on the one side who refute this as bid’a (heresy or innovation) and the preachers of extremist groups like ISIS and al-Qaida who support it.181 Tawhid al-Hakimiyah expands on the principle of tawhid, (that only one God exists to be worshipped, followed, and obeyed), and applies it to governance. It argues that God is the only legislator according to the Quran and the Sunna and that any other source of governance or legislation is a major form of polytheism, one that leads to excommunicating and waging war against said polytheists.182

One problem with Tawhid al-Hakimiyah, other than it is promoting hostility against those seen as not committed to tawhid, lies in how ISIS interprets tawhid in the first place. ISIS’s interpretation of monotheism or tawhid is a reaction to concepts and groups it opposes, and the defense of tawhid is linked to the survival of ISIS. This reactionary approach means that ISIS takes on an extreme interpretation of monotheism where war is not only warranted, but required against those who oppose the organization and its ideals.
In other ISIS Files collected (but not in this present dataset), Cole Bunzel explains how evidence of this can be seen in ‘Muqarrar fi al-Tawhid’ (Course in Monotheism), a training manual for new recruits. The document leverages Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the 18th century, and Ibn Taymiyyah in the 14th century, to elaborate on the concept of tawhid as the opposite of shirk, and its centrality to the doctrine of Islam. In this document, tawhid is defined in such a way that it “requires Muslims to excommunicate so-called polytheists, to show them enmity and hatred, and to fight them in jihad.” According to Bunzel, this document claims that “Whoever does not excommunicate the polytheists, or is doubtful about their unbelief, or affirms the validity of their doctrine—he is an unbeliever by consensus.’ The word translated here as excommunication, takfir, means to declare someone an unbeliever (kafir).” For ISIS, not declaring someone a kafir is a crime punishable by death, and tawhid here is interpreted in a way that requires the eradication of all manifestations of shirk (polytheism) and the bara (dissociation) from, and takfir (excommunication) of so-called polytheists.

However, disassociating itself from polytheists and infidels is not enough for ISIS. The act of disassociating must simultaneously be coupled by an expression of loyalty to the ‘caliphate.’ This is called al-wala’ wa-l-barā’ (loyalty to God and dissociation from polytheists). Al-wala’ wa-l-barā’ in its most basic form means “loyalty and disavowal” for the sake of God. According to Shiraz Maher, al-wala’ wa-l-barā’ has mainly concerned its self with the individual conduct of Muslims, guiding them to distinguish their manners and behavior (greetings, clothing, festivals and appearance) from non-Muslims. Maher notes that the concept “operates similarly to takfir, as a tool of ‘in-group’ control which draws a line against those deemed to be outsiders. It forms a distinct delineation between the Salafi-Jihadi constructions of Islam and everything else, forming a protective carapace around the faith which guards against impurity and inauthenticity.” Understood from this perspective, the concept is essential to the protection and defense of Islam, similar to takfir. Al-barā or disavowal is second in importance after tawhid to ISIS. It focuses on enhancing the solidarity among the ISIS members, while at the same time setting a clear distinction between them and their enemies. The principle originated from the meaning that to believe in one
God, be monotheist, a Muslim must embrace and adhere to the teachings of Islam (wala) and reject all others (bara).

The principles of applying *al-wala’ wa-l bara’* is a source of tension between ISIS and al-Qaida. Al-Qaida agrees on the principle but argues that ISIS has gone too far in how it interprets loyalty and executes disavowal. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi used it to justify targeting Shia in Iraq, citing Ibn Taymiyyah to portray Shia as un-Islamic. ISIS followed by example, only they condemned a larger sect than its predecessor al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI). Al-Qaida’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and one of its lead preachers Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi publicly disagreed with al-Zarqawi for targeting Shia (and notably also disagreed with ISIS doctrine). Differing interpretations of *Al-wala’ wa-l bara’*, and therefore the justifications of which religious groups are considered rejected, is one of the more prominent sources of disagreement between al-Qaida and ISIS. This interpretation is critical to the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ formation of the ISIS narrative.

ISIS uses the expression to mandate that all ‘true’ Muslims must direct this adherence to its ‘caliphate’ as the only true manifestation of Islam, and express animosity and halted to its enemies. ISIS largely quotes Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in its propaganda to justify this. For Abd al-Wahhab:

> The principle and basis of Islam lie on two: the first is to command the worship of Allah alone with no partner, and to promote and support that, and to disavow [takfir] those who abandon it [Islam]. The second is to warn again sharing another [god] with Allah in worship, and to stress this warning and to express animosity [make the enemy] against those who do.

The ISIS Files justify this same position regarding the importance of tawhid to their identity, explaining in a textbook dedicated to the Creed of the Muslim:

> The “Creed” is the cornerstone of the character of the Muslim in his ideas, values, and principles and from there his conduct and work for all the teachings and rulings of Islam are built on the Islamic Creed.
If creed collapses, all Islam’s teachings collapse with it. This is the reason behind why Islam has placed a particular emphasis on the Creed.192

In this way, we see that ISIS has constructed its central identity around tawhid, and this construction is manifested significantly in the textbooks of the ISIS Files. Although a relatively minor theme in terms of the frequency of its appearance when compared to other themes, the weight of the inclusion of this principle in the educational curriculum should not be underestimated, as it is critical to establishing the construct of ‘us’ in the ‘us versus them’ narrative. Those who believe in the same ideology as ISIS are welcome to take part in the ‘caliphate’ project, whereas those who do not believe in this interpretation are excluded.

**Enemies of ISIS**

The three previous sections have described what can be considered the ‘us’ component of the ‘us vs. them’ narratives of ISIS contained in the ISIS Files text. The following section will now shift the focus to the ‘them’ component of the ISIS narrative—describing the enemies and, according to ISIS, the urgent crisis calling for Islam’s defense against its enemies. The framing of certain groups of people as enemies in this way could be described in terms of common propaganda techniques as ‘name-calling.’193 That is, by assigning unattractive labels to the ‘other,’ ISIS conjures ideas of hate or fear and reinforces the idea that Islam, and the Islamic ‘state,’ is under attack by these enemies.

This theme, describing the enemies of ISIS, comprises 9% of the narratives in the ISIS Files documents related to education. ISIS has two types of enemies: 1) those it opposes on the basis of monotheism for believing in multiple gods or no god, namely the mushrikuun, (polytheists) and the kufur (infidels); and 2) those it opposes using other moral or political arguments under the framework of Islamic history and theology. The lines between these two categories of enemies are blurred, as ISIS often uses these terms interchangeably, or gives a wide definition of what it means to be an ‘infidel,’ or a ‘polytheist.’ The following sections describe the justifications that ISIS has used with respect to these terms, and then
also highlights how they are used in the text to build upon their ‘competitive system of meaning.’

_Polytheism (Shirk, mushrik, mushrikuun or mushrikeen)_

The concept of _shirk_ usually applies to polytheistic faiths, and it is more a specific accusation than _kufur_. Words affiliated with shirk (polytheism) were mentioned 220 times, and at least 60 times alone in ISIS’s history textbook, for the 4th primary grade. In particular, ISIS often referred specifically to the pre-Islamic tribes in Mecca who fought Prophet Muhammad and worshiped their many deities. For example, the History textbook for the 4th primary grade tells the story of the polytheists of Quraysh (the largest and most powerful Meccan tribe at the time) when they tried to assassinate Prophet Muhammad in the early stages before he left Mecca:

The polytheists feared that God’s Messenger (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) would migrate and gain too much strength for them to control, so they gathered in Dar al-Nadwa and agreed to nominate, from every Qurayshi clan, a strong young man, then arm each with swords and strike God’s Messenger (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) in one blow. By assassinating the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) in this manner, all of the clans would have a share of his blood. However, Gabriel (A.S.) came to the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) and warned him of the plot to assassinate him.194

The Qurayshi reacted to this violently in the Battle of Uhud. “One of the reasons for this battle was the polytheists' desire to avenge their defeat.”195 This story helps to emphasize the ISIS narrative that they are under attack by their enemies, and that their enemies (in this case the polytheists) will resort to violence to carry out their aims. In the Battle of Uhud, “The Polytheists reached the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him), wounded him, broke his lateral incisors, and killed the Muslim flag carrier, Musab bin Omair, in front of him.”196 By highlighting the Battle of Uhud and the actions of the polytheists this way, it reinforces ISIS’s worldview that their ‘state’ is under attack, using the symbol of the flag carrier in the historical story to represent their ‘caliphate.’
However, as elaborated previously, ISIS considers other monotheistic faiths, including other sects of Islam, to be polytheist. This is because they practiced what ISIS saw as either a tainted version of Islam loaded with pagan rituals or because those Muslims share God’s authority with what is viewed as unlawful scripture for not originating from the Quran and the Sunna, like contemporary laws and forms of government. ISIS defines this group as *mushrikuun* or *mushrikeen* or polytheists as opposed to its members whom it considers as *muwahhidun/muwahideen* or those who believe in the oneness of God or *tawhid*.

**Infidelity (kufur, kufar, kafir)**

The second and most common construct of an ‘enemy’ of ISIS are the *kufar* or infidels. The term means those who do not believe in God in the Abrahamic sense, and it also translates as ‘heresy.’ However, ISIS have applied a much wider interpretation of the term. In Abu Abdullah al-Muhajjer’s “Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Jihad,” one of the main manifestos ISIS relies on for its ideological justification, there is a dedicated chapter to define the *kufar* as the opposite of Muslims and *mu’mi’non/mo’min’en* (believers). Al-Muhajjer argues:

...and so the Sunna [teachings] of Allah, as with all past proselytization, divided creation into two groups: those who respond and those who object, meaning, the mo’min’en and the kufar to test each against the other. Humanity was divided over his message (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). One group believed and they are the Muslims, the other group committed kufur [rejected Muhammad]. They are the kufar descending from races, colors and countries.

Al-Muhajjer also divides the world geographically into *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (house of war.) *Dar al-Islam* is where ‘true’ Muslims live, according to al-Muhajer. As such all Muslims are religiously obligated to migrate to *dar al-Islam*. Infidels and Muslims who decide to associate with them, by not migrating to *dar al-Islam*, live in *dar al-harb* or house of war. Al-Muhajir explains that it is called ‘house of war’ because: “It is an obligation to fight and subdue those [living outside dar al-Islam] to the rulings of Islam because all of earth belongs to Allah
alone and not to the kufar ... and Islam is His religion to which He accept no other.” 199

ISIS applies this same logic in its curricula. For ISIS, all non-Muslims are the enemy, as illustrated in “The Muslim Creed” textbook for the 3rd grade:

Islam is the religion approved by God and with which God is satisfied. He shall not accept any religion other than it.

God exalted said: [and have approved you Islam as religion] (Al-Maaida: 3)

All religions other than Islam are false religions. The people who follow these religions are disbelievers (kufar/kafir). 200

Here we can also return our attention to Photo 4 in a previous section, “The Map of the Islamic World,” where ISIS distinguishes between the “countries where Muslims are numerous” and “countries where unbelievers/kafaruun are numerous.” 201 ISIS illustrates a physical and geographic divide between dar al-Islam and dar al-harb—drawing the lines between war and peace. To summarize, ISIS goes beyond the literal definition of the term kufur. ISIS’s interpretation of who it considers as kafir applies to all of its enemies, including non-Muslims, Muslims who do not endorse ISIS (including fellow extremists), and all those who chose not to migrate to its ‘caliphate.’

Hypocrisy to Islam (nifaq, munafiq, munafiquun or munafiqen)

ISIS also has several other categories that fall under its definition of kufar. First, the munafiquun (hypocrites) are defined as those who pretend to be Muslim while they secretly oppose and fight Islam. ISIS labels them as worse than infidels or kufar. In the following statement, ISIS official spokesperson Abu Hasan al-Muhajir refers to Muslims who practice three of the main pillars of Islam, to pray, fast, and give zakat (alms giving), as munafiquun. He accuses them of being hypocrites for not agreeing – or as per the quote below – not understanding, ISIS’s definition of tawhid or monotheism.
When the Imam of the dawa al-Najdia [another name for Wahabism] may God accept him, was asked what is the meaning of there is no God but Allah [expression of monotheism], he replied ... they are the dividing words between kufur and Islam ... they are not meant to be uttered by tongue while one is ignorant of their meaning. The munafiquun [hypocrites] who say it are dwelling at the lowest level of hellfire, lower than the kufar, despite their [the hypocrites’] praying, fasting and alms giving.\textsuperscript{202}

In the ISIS Files, ISIS provides simplified a definition of \textit{munafiqun} to its students. It explains their origin but again implies that they are one of the most dangerous enemies to Islam:

\textbf{Emergence of the munafiqun [hypocrites]:} the hypocrites are outward Muslims who were inwardly concealing \textit{kufur} [disbelief]. The hypocrites have emerged and appeared in the Medinan Period, when Islam became a state and authority. The hypocrites have sought to fight Islam in secret and covertly, and their danger to Islam was grave. The Medinan Quran mentioned many of their characteristics that expose them.\textsuperscript{203}

\textbf{Rejectionists (rafidi, rawafid, rafida)}

Another term that ISIS uses to describe what they consider to be kufar is related to inter-religious tension between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims: \textit{rafida}. \textit{Rafida} is a derogative term against Shia Muslims believed to be first used by Ibn Taymiyyah to describe the Muslims who rejected the rule of the first three successors (Caliphs) after the death of Prophet Muhammad on the basis that the fourth and last of the Caliph, Ali, was more eligible by blood as the Prophet’s cousin. ISIS uses the terms \textit{rafida} and \textit{rawafid} to refer to Shia Muslims in Iraq and the Iranian government and people. Ibn Taymiyyah described the Shia faith as being polluted by \textit{bid’a} (heresy or innovation) in religious matters that tarnish Islam’s purity.\textsuperscript{204}

\textit{Rafida} is one of the most frequently used terms by ISIS in its propaganda when issuing threats and warnings in Iraq. For example, Abu Hasan al-Muhajir’s October 2020 statement warned Sunni Iraqis to stay away from election polls to avoid being associated with the \textit{rawafid}: “We warn that the government of the \textit{rafida} Hashd (Hashad al-Sha’bi or popular
mobilization army)\textsuperscript{205} is approaching what it calls elections. Anyone who supports it, then belongs to it and its people and will be judged (persecuted) as such.”\textsuperscript{206}

This theme also appears in ISIS textbooks, although less-frequently than one might expect. For example, in a Reading and Comprehension textbook (Grade 4), ISIS glorifies two of its fighters who fought and were ‘martyred’ at the hands of Iraqi armed forces (dubbed here as \textit{Rafida’}). The first is the story of Abu Abdul Rahman al-Bilawi, a former aide to Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi. The passage states, “He was killed - may God accept him - two days before the start of the battle of the conquest of Mosul, when a flock of Rafidites attacked his house in Mosul. He had no choice but to carry his weapon and engage with them. He killed some and loaded others with injuries before he breathed his last and his spirit returned to its creator.”\textsuperscript{207} Another example from the same textbook is the story of an Australian recruit who converted to Islam and went by the name of Abu Abdallah. Abu Abdallah was striving to become a suicide bomber until ISIS finally allowed him to do so. He is described as follows, “This knight mounted his horse with joy to meet his Lord. He detonated his car in the masses of the Rafidites, killing and dispersing them.”\textsuperscript{208}

\textit{Murtad/ Murtaduun/ Murtadeen}

Murtaduun, plural for Murtad, refers to apostates or Muslims who renounce their faith.\textsuperscript{209} This category shares common grounds with the ‘Munafiquun,’ or hypocrites, however, the act of renouncing one’s faith carries harsher consequences than being seen as a hypocrite Muslim. Hassan Hassan elaborated on the roots of the concept and how ISIS applied it, in an article published by the Carnegie Endowment. Hassan cites the early application of the term by al-Qaida clerics including al-Fahd, al-Alwan, al-Khudayr, al-Shuaibi and al-Maqdisi who preached extensively against the government of Saudi Arabia in the early 2000s for its role in the first Gulf War. These clerics went on to apply the label of apostate to any Muslim who joined a parliament, voted or ran for elections, worked at or indorsed modern banking systems and legislations all of which these clerics considered ‘un-Islamic. Al-Khudayr deemed any Muslim “who swears loyalty to a constitution, even if compelled to do so,” an apostate.\textsuperscript{210}
ISIS applied an even looser interpretation of apostasy to include Shia Muslims, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and ISIS’s rival group al-Nusra. ISIS spokesperson Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, released a statement in February 2020 where he threatened enemies of the state. He referred to Sunni Arab, Kurdish and Shia factions that fought against ISIS as apostates. Al-Muhajir urged his followers to fight against the “the Murtadeen [apostates] who falsely affiliate with ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama‘a [the people of the Sunna and community – a name ISIS uses to refer to itself]” and the “apostate” government in Iraq which “continues to spread corruption on earth with its army and police where religion is not to Allah, and people continue to be governed no by the laws of Allah.” 211

ISIS apply the same narrative in its curriculum. In the below example from its History book for the 4th Primary Grade, ISIS use this term murtad or apostate to refer to Muslims who are seen as renouncing their faith for lack of conviction and for being opportunists who side with the enemy for worldly gains. Referring to the Isra’ Event,212 ISIS explains this as, “a trial for those who had weak faith as they did not stay steadfast, and many of those who had embraced Islam apostatized.”213 Other textbooks already associate apostates with violence. An Arabic Grammar book refers to ‘apostates’ in several exercises such as, “The martyrdom operative ______________ himself among the apostates [the student should fill in the blank],”214 “The (mujahid) fought the apostates,”215 or “The mujahideen behead the apostates.”216

Other enemies: The West, Jews, and Crusaders

Occasionally ISIS will name its ‘Western’ enemies more specifically, rather than lump them all under the label of kufar. This applies when it is trying to relate itself to post-colonial narratives similar to the Ba’athism of Iraq and Syria and the Nasserism of Egypt. Where these movements called for socialism and Arab nationalism (ISIS rejects both), ISIS uses the same logic to promote an Islamic ‘caliphate.’ It too claims to own the socio-economic frameworks to rescue Arab Muslim nations from Western exploitation.217 Or in the words of al-Baghdadi, only the ‘caliphate’ will bring back Muslims’ “glory, honor, rights and leadership.”218
A further elaboration on this idea can be found in ISIS’s school curricula as in the example below from its Geography textbook for the 8th grade:

Based on the above, the Islamic World has been distinguished by many features of great importance, and they have made it a place for the Crusader, Jewish and Rafidite competition to eradicate Islam and to simultaneously control the wealth of Muslims, especially oil and the rest of the other natural resources. This, in turn, leads to control over the whole world, except that the will of God has been the dominant one. That is because God has blessed the Muslims with a glimmer of hope, for the Islamic State (the Caliphate on the Prophetic Methodology) has arisen. It has stood against the sect of disbelief, which has constantly tried to dominate the Islamic World with its various advantages... 219

ISIS uses regional identities or cultures of conflict (post-colonial history) and domestic ones (Iraq-Iran, Shia-Sunni tension) to define its enemies as well as reinforce its own identity as a solution. In the logic of ISIS, a ‘pure’ pre-colonial version of Islam is the solution to the conflicts of the modern era, and the utopia of a ‘caliphate’ is the aspiration.

So far the discussion in this report has been directed toward how ISIS has crafted its identity through its educational documents: an Islamic identity, built on loyalty and migration to the ‘caliphate,’ and manifested through its own interpretation of tawhid. The educational documents also begin to characterize ISIS’s enemies—enemies that are threatening the existence of the ‘caliphate’ and ISIS’s way of life. These enemies include polytheists, hypocrites, non-Muslims, Jews, Christians, and finally sects of Islam that do not follow their strict interpretation of tawhid. The layers of ISIS’s ‘competitive system of meaning’ are unfolding, and each layer is building upon the last until we reach the final layer: the defense of the ISIS way of life through any means necessary, including violence.

Fighting Enemies with Violence

After reviewing how ISIS characterizes itself and its enemies, the culmination of the ISIS ‘competitive system of meaning’ ultimately lies within their various methods of justifying violence. Each component covered in previous sections sets the stage for their justifications of
violent acts against governments and civilians. Their approach has, until this point, constructed an identity around Islam and establishing a ‘utopian caliphate.’ They have divided the world into those that follow their ways (us) against those that reject their ways (them). Under this theme, the final component at the core of ISIS’s narrative is how it conceptualizes and manifests jihad, particularly in how it envisions a violent jihad against its enemies. 14% of the ISIS narratives in the present dataset make reference to violence as an appropriate and justified action.

Fawaz Gerges highlights three components of what ISIS considers jihad. First, the fighters (mujahedeen) need to wage a full-on ‘offensive jihad’ as opposed to a ‘defensive jihad,’ in order to wear their enemies out with chaos and fear. Second, wars should target the ‘far enemy’ (mainly the U.S. and its European allies), and the ‘near enemy’ (Arab/Muslim rulers). Third, the mujahedeen have a license to kill with impunity no matter what the target, military or civilian. In an examination of the ISIS school curricula through this framework, all three of these components can be demonstrated.

ISIS’s definition of jihad represents a highly contentious argument amongst Islamic scholars on the term. In an ISIS-published book to explain the basics, jihad is described as:

...derived from the source ‘ja’had ji’hadan and muja’hada’ (engage in jihad and the engagement in jihad). It is to fight the enemy and engage in jihad for the cause of Allah. It is from (the word) ju’hid meaning hardship and energy.

According to Lisan al-Arab (an Arab lexicon by Ibn Mandhur written in the late 13th century): {jihad: is the exaggeration and exertion of one’s efforts to the limit in combat or in words or to the end of one’s ability.

Terminology wise: it means to make effort and exhort one’s limit in fighting against the people of kufur and stubbornness so that the word of Allah be elevated and word of those who committed kufur be lowered.
Waging an ‘offensive jihad’ to spread chaos and fear

In ISIS’s explanation, it draws on 13th-century scholars Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim who departed from the mainstream belief of Sunni scholars that *jihad* should only be waged in self-defense. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, waging wars against all polytheists, even unprovoked, is a religious duty for Muslims. This explanation can be found in a History textbook under “Lesson: Permission to Fight.” Here, ISIS describes the third stage of fighting as “the stage of imposing fight against all Polytheists until God alone is worshiped and has no partner. God exalted says: ‘Fight those who do not believe in God or in the Last Day.’”223 ISIS further explains that according to Ibn al-Qayyim, *jihad* was first, “forbidden, then it was permitted, then it was commended for those who are attacked, then it was commanded against all of the polytheists — either as Fard 'Ain or Fard Kifayah, according to what is generally accepted.”224

In this construct mentioned in the ISIS Files textbooks, Fard ‘Ain is defined as an obligation for each Muslim, such as praying and fasting, and Fard Kifayah is an obligation for the Muslim community (*umma*) as a whole, such as in a military struggle. Notably, it could no longer become mandatory if enough Muslims respond to the Fard Kifayah and the remaining Muslims are discharged. 225

In an ISIS History textbook, with a lesson discussing the Battle of Badr, one of the objectives states that “the student should be able to realize that *jihad* for the sake of God is not limited to resisting aggression. Rather, *jihad* was legislated in order to implement the judgment of God and invade the infidels, in addition to making them worship God alone and not worship people.226 This example also supports ISIS’s idea of *jihad* as aggression and an act of intimidation, not defense. Drawing on the ‘us vs. them’ rhetoric covered in the previous section, for ISIS, a violent and offensive *jihad* is justified against all people that do not worship God.

Targeting the ‘far enemy’ and the ‘near enemy’
The previous section on the enemies and urgent crisis discussed in significant detail how ISIS has labeled both the ‘far enemy’ (the West) and the ‘near enemy’ (Middle Eastern states) as polytheists or infidels. This
begins the justification process for using violence against them. For example, in a History textbook under a “Lesson: Characteristics of the Medinan Period,” ISIS explains the emergence of the hypocrites in a way that stresses the fact they are a danger to Islam: “The hypocrites have sought to fight Islam in secret and covertly, and their danger to Islam was grave. The Medinan Qur’an mentioned many of their characteristics that expose them.”227 This polarized view puts the ‘hypocrites’ directly at war with Islam, and it can be logically concluded by this presentation, that they are a threat to ISIS’s ‘caliphate.’

Similarly, the ‘Introduction to Programming using Scratch’ textbook illustrates this point vividly through the “Helicopter Shoot Down Challenge.” The ISIS textbook goes on to explain that,

Dozens of modern tyrannical countries are allied with each other; but they have not adhered to what they declared upon themselves from covenants and conventions, attacking and killing all Muslims and thus trying to erase the Islamic Caliphate, which has come back against their will. They are trying to destroy our Islamic State that our God blessed us with and He has made it by the power and force of God remaining and expanding.228

In the textbook instructions, the challenge for students features a ‘crusader’ alliance flying in ISIS airspace, and the aim of the game is to shoot down the helicopters (See Photo 8).

Photo 8: Helicopter Shoot Down Challenge.229
**License to kill with impunity**

Giving ISIS supporters the license to ‘kill with impunity’ also is a theme that is contained in the ISIS textbooks. For example, a History textbook explains that “The student should be able to understand that one of the duties of the Islamic Army is to terrorize and intimidate the infidels,” and that “The student should be able to realize that killing prisoners is a necessity when it is needed and in the interest.”

This construct can also be seen in the subject of the lessons that are included in the textbooks. For example, in an Islamic Literature textbook for the 8th grade, ISIS chooses poems and stories that allude to war and violence. Given the history of the Arabic language, particularly its well-celebrated culture of romanticism and poetry about love, there is no doubt that the choice of violent allusions is deliberate. In this particular example, a poem glorifies a war hero and leader, stating that:

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He makes his swords clad in
The blood of those who betrayed

And put their amputated heads
As crowns on his spear's head

When he heads towards war,
Death acts upon the orders of his raised spears
His raised-high spears defy
Like death defies people and ends their life years

He made raptors
Used to the flesh of his foes
So they always
Follow him wherever he goes.
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There seems to be no mercy displayed by this particular leader; he places his enemies’ heads on his spears and makes scepters out of the flesh of his foes.

In another example from a History textbook for the 4th grade, one of the lessons is about the story of Ibn al-Ashraf’s killing. The passage below explains how violence may be used indiscriminately in certain circumstances:
1. Whoever insults the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) should be killed in any case, if the insulter was a dhimmi or concluded a Muwada’ah (‘peace treaty’) with the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him), such dhimma or Muwada’ah with the insulter shall become null and void.

2. It is permissible to use deceit and trickery in destroying God’s enemies. The Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) said: “War is Deceit.”

Notably, the final Hadith is often mentioned by al-Qaida and ISIS affiliates to justify using trickery and deception to overcome the enemy in the case of war.

This is one of the most alarming aspects of ISIS’s school curricula in how it glorifies acts of extreme violence like beheadings and torture by leveraging familiar poetry, stories from Islamic history, and most dangerous of all, references to the Quran, Hadith and other sources of the Islamic faith as the jurisdiction by which these atrocities are carried out. This is a deliberate strategy of ISIS to establish its ‘competitive system of meaning’ to radicalize and recruit new followers. Certain components of their narratives may resonate and appeal to a wider audience, and once those potential new followers are drawn into the narrative, ISIS can find entry points to try to justify their violent actions in the minds of the vulnerable.

The license to kill with impunity can also be illustrated through the casual and passive way in which jihad and martyrdom are referred to throughout the curriculum. For example, in a 4th grade primary Arabic Grammar textbook, the following exercise is presented:

Answer the following questions using useful sentences that contain a verb and a subject.

1. Who has striven [in the cause of God]?
2. Who won the martyrdom?

Similarly, in the “Introduction to Programming using Scratch” book, there are a number of lessons that feature violence. For example, in the
“Kalashnikov Challenge,” the student learns how to simulate the shape and sound of the bullet exiting the Kalashnikov rifle through the programming system. ISIS uses this challenge because,

Our Lord the Exalted and Almighty ordered us to prepare all types of power especially the military power to fight the enemy of God and our enemies. One of the most widespread weapons used by the Islamic State soldiers is the Kalashnikov Rifles. In this challenge, we will learn about that weapon and learn how the student shall program Scratch to simulate firing using the Kalashnikov Rifles, trying to simulate the reaction of the going out of the bullet and its shape and sound.234

In the same textbook, in the “Apostate Hunting Challenge,” the aim of this lesson is described as: “According to God’s command, sniper detachments of the Islamic State track and hunt dozens of apostates and disbelievers daily at all the fronts of the jihad. Therefore, our challenge here is to create a simple imaginative environment which is similar to the process of hunting the apostates from the tyrants’ soldiers...”235 The lesson that follows teaches the student to program the sniper to shoot its gun and programs the ‘apostates’ to either run or be killed.

Importantly, the Scratch computer programming language is not taught to children in such a violent manner through standardized textbooks and lessons throughout the world. Most resources that teach Scratch feature fun games where children learn how to code, and the mascot for the free programming language is the ‘Scratch cat.’ The user of Scratch learns how to program by navigating this Scratch cat through a series of exercises. However, we see that ISIS replaced the cat with other types of ‘sprites’ (figures that can move in the Scratch program) such as ISIS fighters and ‘apostates,’ and therefore one critical question is outstanding when it comes to our understanding of the ISIS files textbooks: What happened to the Scratch cat?

The passive way that ISIS legitimizes violence and refers to violent images and symbols in the texts has the potential effect of normalizing violence for the children studying under them. The concepts that Islam and the Islamic ‘state’ are perpetually under attack, and that both should be
defended, are subtly interwoven throughout the narrative of the ISIS textbooks. Coupled with the violence and traumatic events occurring outside the classroom setting that fit this same narrative (that the Islamic ‘state’ is under attack), there is a high risk that these concepts could have been digested and internalized by students if an alternative construct of reality (that does not normalize violence) is not provided.

**Connection of jihad with hijra and da’wa**

It is important to revisit how ISIS connects *jihad* to other Islamic concepts such as *hijra* (migration) and *da’wa* (proselytization). Concerning *hijra* (migration), one of the key concepts that can be drawn from ISIS textbooks, especially “History” and “The Biography of the Prophet” is that *jihad* cannot be completed without *hijra*. This means Muslims have to migrate to the territory of the caliphate in exchange for salvation by *jihad* on their day of death. This idea was presented to students by linking the history of the Prophet and his Companions who migrated from Mecca to Medina to the “The Great Battle of Badr” and the beginning of all battles to follow. For example, in the History textbook for 4th grade, the support of this statement is carefully built up through associating *hijra*, with the Medinan Period, that was marked by the permission to fight “jihad legislation enactment” in only one way—through violent battles.236

In ISIS narratives, *jihad*, war and violence are also linked with *da’wa*, the concept that describes the spread of Islam. According to ISIS, *da’wa* (proselytization/spread of Islam) signifies fighting (spiritually and physically) to exterminate all religions outside Islam. Thus, *da’wa* means supporting the war against the infidel enemies; in other words, ISIS is waging a war (violent *jihad*) alongside a *da’wa* campaign. This concept was built on throughout the History Book for the 4th grade by portraying the evolving stages of *da’wa* from the no-*jihad* Meccan Period through the Median period that marked the beginning of violent battles. ISIS portrays the Meccan period as, “a period of da’wa and building the Creed. The Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) stayed in Mecca preaching the way of God on the basis of knowledge for thirteen years. But the people of Mecca were standing as an obstacle in the path of the Da’wa. Only a few people embraced Islam throughout this period.”237
In contrast, the Medinan Period referred to as the ‘emergence of a universal Islamic da’wa,’ is explained as follows:

The universality of the Islamic Da’wa began to emerge from the borders of Mecca and makes its way to the nations and peoples of the world during the Medinan Period. Therefore, the Prophet (God’s peace and blessings be upon him) sent books to kings, princes and presidents calling them to embrace Islam. Thus, the universality of Islam was among the divine wisdoms in the enactment of legislation on jihad.238

In a textbook, “The Biography of the Prophet,” one objective is listed as “Learning perseverance for da’wa from God’s Messenger (May God’s peace and blessings be upon him) and his companions...”239 Another objective is “Learning the methods of da’wa and adopting the same methods [as the Prophet] when calling to Islam.”240 The textbook then goes on to explain the battles in which the Prophet used to spread Islam, including the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud. The Battle of Badr, for example, is framed as a “great battle in which God distinguished between truth and falsehood and refuted the disbelief and its people.”241 That is, the methods of the Prophet for implementing da’wa, in this case, are directly linked to violence and war.

The choice and sequence of the stories included in this textbook are important here with respect to both da’wa and jihad. In the same textbook, there could have been a description of the Prophet’s birth, life, customs, good deeds, marriage or core behaviors. However, the Prophet’s biography is framed and taught only through the lens of his successes in wars. In reading this framing of the life of the Prophet, one would get the sense that the Prophet was only a warrior, but miss out on the humanistic qualities and numerous other social roles that were not in any way related to violence, and which surrounded his birth and life. The textbook also does not cover the personal and ethical lessons that might be learned from the time in which the Prophet lived amongst fellow Muslims. This framing is important to reinforce the ‘us vs. them’ narrative as discussed in the previous sections and to justify using acts of violence (war/battle) as part of the critical responsibilities of all Muslims to proselytize their beliefs.
religion and fight against their enemies. In colloquial terms, this could be seen as ISIS ‘cherry-picking’ or ‘card stacking’ the stories that best fit their narratives and justifications of violence from the entire spectrum of the Prophet’s biography.

*Tactics of Violence and War*

Although this is not a major theme in the ISIS curriculum, there are several places where ISIS also provides some insight into how it tactically perceives violence and warfare. One history lesson explains,

> Despite the defeat of the polytheists at the beginning of the battle, they were able to benefit from the error of the archers when they used the element of surprise in war. Surprise is one of the most important principles of warfare, which means striking the enemy in a place or at a time or in a manner not expected so that the enemy’s physical and moral forces could be destroyed. Khalid bin al-Walid besieging the Muslim forces from behind, at a time when the polytheists were completely defeated, surprised the Muslims. Their platoons went into so much chaos that they could not distinguish between their enemy and their own. Also, the morale of the Muslim soldiers became so low, they did not know what to do.

While in this particular example, it is the tactics of the enemy that are summarized, it is important to point out that ISIS sees ‘surprise’ as both a physical and psychological tactic that can be useful to defeat its enemies. Although there is not an explicit mention of tactics such as suicide bombing in this example, this story can provide the foundation for justifying unconventional warfare for tactical purposes.

Another example comes from a mathematics book, where the student is asked to solve a problem about perpendicular lines. In this exercise, the example describes a town near a road and asks where a military outpost should be placed in relation to both the road and the town. Presumably, the outpost should be placed on the perpendicular line that intersects both the town and the road—to protect the town and its assets. This subtle tactic suggests that ISIS wishes its students to start thinking about military strategy, even when the subject is not necessarily related to combat.
Finally, ISIS provides a glimpse into their mindset in its Chemistry book; a lesson on the chemical properties of aluminum notes that a particular alloy of aluminum “is considered the essential part of vacuum (thermobaric) bombs and missiles,” and that reactions using aluminum are “the main part of making thermal bombs.” While it is indeed expected that a chemistry book would make references to fire or an explosion, the choice to use thermal bombs as an illustrative example is at least noteworthy. Again, while this sub-theme should not be over-emphasized, as tactical violence does not appear a superfluous number of times in the ISIS textbooks, the fact that war tactics are appearing at all in curriculum aimed at children is indeed alarming.

Violent imagery

Another way in which ISIS glorifies this violent conceptualization of jihad is through the images it portrays in its photos and videos. ISIS is known for its gruesome, violent acts that capture the media’s attention, for example, for the violent beheading videos by Westerner Muhammed Emwazi (Jihadi John), or the capture and death of a Royal Jordanian Air Force pilot that was burned alive on camera. Strategically speaking, ISIS has also been known to adapt its media approach to various factors, including tailoring the images to localized contexts using photos of foreign fighters, or adjusting its media efforts based on high death counts from attacks of rival groups.

ISIS has also not shied away from using graphic images with relation to children in its propaganda. For instance, in a video, “The Generation of Epic Battles,” ISIS features young boys from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in a ceremony to burn their passports and become loyal soldiers of the ‘caliphate.’ Another 2015 video titled, “Harvest the Spies,” features a child executioner that pursues the death of a Western spy. It is no surprise, therefore, that ISIS also uses graphic images in its textbooks, although notably less “glossy” and professionally incorporated than some of their other propaganda.

In the ISIS Files textbooks, the appearance of weapons and allusions to violence could be described in marketing terms as ‘product placement.’
That is, images or brands are ‘placed’ in certain contexts so that they are associated with certain emotions (usually positive). This marketing tactic does not describe the benefits of a product, nor draw any specific attention to it—rather it is present and visible to the reader in a subtler way. In the textbooks, violent images such as swords and guns are placed on the same page as a seemingly innocuous lesson. For example, in Part 1 of the English textbook series, each letter of the alphabet gives examples of words that start with or use the letter. These examples vary from colors to animals to pillars of Islam but also include references to weapons or violence. For instance, for letters “A” and “B,” the examples used were “Army,” “Hand,” “Bullet,” and “Arm.”249 On the same page as the exercises for these letters, a sniper or some kind of long gun also appears unnecessarily (See Photo 9).250 Other words appearing in the textbook included “gun,” “pistol,” “sniper,” “martyr,” and “mortar.” Similarly, In the Arabic Grammar textbook for the second intermediate grade (8th grade), there are frequent uses of weapons (guns, rocket launchers, swords) that decorate the pages (See Photo 10).251
In the case of images, exposing children to them in such a context as education desensitizes them to violence. The images used become part of the normalization of violence, and the sight of guns or weapons becomes an accepted part of the culture and values of the group. This has been described as a tactic of recruitment and radicalization of individuals into violent extremist groups, particularly children.\textsuperscript{252} Children under ISIS were often exposed to violence through exposure to beheadings and other forms of public executions and punishments under ISIS.\textsuperscript{253} As already mentioned, with frequent exposure to these elements, children no longer label these items as ‘violent’ or ‘bad’ and are therefore no longer scared of using them or witnessing them in use. Additional elements of violence were present outside of the ISIS education system, as part of the exercises and training young boys received as they joined the ranks of the ‘Cubs of the Caliphate.’\textsuperscript{254} ISIS often categorized male children according to age, placing boys at 15 and younger to learn about religion and creed, while those reaching the age of 16 and above receive military training at designated camps.\textsuperscript{255} While research showed that ISIS was not always consistent in this categorization, it is clear that especially boys were exposed to violence whether through school curriculum, public violence, trainings, and active participation in violence.\textsuperscript{256}

Through discussion of this final theme, we start to see the complete picture of ISIS’s narrative. In its education system, ISIS clearly delineates its constructs of violence and overemphasizes violent concepts through images and words in a way that is unnecessary and inappropriate for children in both primary and secondary school. It makes references to \textit{jihad,} defines \textit{jihad} in a violent way, incorporates photos and images of
Additional Observations

In addition to the coding system by theme, this research uncovered several other observations that the authors felt inclined to include in this analysis. These observations are not complete or robust, and they should be taken as a starting point for further investigation, analysis, and research. However, it was important to include a discussion of how ISIS characterizes concepts such as gender, the overall vision for the educational curriculum, and some observations on the portrayal of human images. The following passages summarize these preliminary findings.

Gender

The way ISIS treats women and men is clear based on recruitment tactics and evidence coming from life under ISIS. ISIS created their own vision on the role of females in their society and internalized it through the ‘competitive system of meaning.’ While the role of women under ISIS control varies, with some women taking up more active roles than others, the gendered roles presented in the education system is more directed at underlying the active role of males and more passive and caring roles of females. Some parallels can be drawn with, for instance, the Nazi education system, where girl’s education “was particularly concerned with the ‘mother instinct’” and “practical studies on the care of babies and young children, care of the sick and first aid, and preparation of girls’ role as future housewives.”

In terms of how women and girls are portrayed, the texts and images suggest stereotypically passive and caring roles, such as teachers and nurses, while men are depicted as doctors, engineers, and students. However, there are a couple of examples where there is an allusion to a more active role for women in the Arabic Grammar textbook for grade 4 students. For example, in an Arabic grammar exercise explaining the feminine plural, an exercise gives the example of “Fighters (feminine/plural) hold the sword in defense of Islam” and “The female mujahids

weapons and war, and floods the minds of children with visions of the Prophet as only a great warrior (and not much else).
fight the invaders” to illustrate the point of the lesson. Still, the rest of the examples used highlight the implied passive role of women, for example, “The female Muslims (feminine/plural) seek forgiveness,” “Mothers are kind,” and “The Islamic State is keen to teach the female Muslims.”

Generally, women and girls are rarely mentioned or shown in images in the texts. When they are pictured, females are in covered clothing from head to toe, with their faces covered as well. In addition, they are only be found in illustrations of the family, depicting them as ‘mother’ and ‘sister,’ but not in other illustrations. Any images encouraging interactions between several students include only boys, and no girls are present in these images. This may be somewhat reflective of the practice of segregation between boys and girls. Photo 11 shows how women are depicted in an English textbook.

Examples of gendered roles and differences between a female and a male have also been normalized through the education curriculum for children. For example, females are mainly depicted as pious, caring, and obedient beings taking care of others, providing healthcare, or teaching. Through the given depiction of either of the genders, ISIS yet again creates and constructs norms for their followers to live by. One area for future research on the ISIS Files textbooks could be to conduct a detailed gendered analysis of the female and male figures appearing in the texts and images, and thus come to more comprehensive conclusions for how ISIS portrays gender through their education system.

Brotherhood

There are also some observations with respect to how ISIS discusses ‘brotherhood’ and social connections between its members. This was
highlighted in a textbook on Arabic literature for the 8th grade, drawing on the brotherhood between Al-Muhajireen (migrants) coming from Mecca and al-Ansar (supporters) in Medina, which was followed by a call-for-action to follow the steps of al-Ansar to make a sacrifice:

They are the *muhajireen* and *ansar* [supporters], those who sacrifice their lives and money for the religion of God. Without them, the flame of this religion would have been extinguished, except for what God has willed. For they are the protectors of religion and honor they are the symbol of heroism and redemption. Let us work together to support the Islamic State, for it is the only hope after God Almighty, to be rid from this humiliation and shame, and to preserve its survival and continuity to protect our religion and our honor, and God is the One whose help is to be sought.\(^{262}\)

In an example from the Arabic grammar textbook for the 7th grade, the lesson used a Quranic verse that placed emphasis on the values of brotherhood among believers, from Sura Al-Hujuraat as follows: “Almighty God says: The believers are but brothers.”\(^ {263}\) In another example from the Arabic grammar textbook for the 5th grade, a grammar question to teach a lesson about declension cases used the following text of Prophetic Hadith: “No one of you can become a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself.”\(^ {264}\) Examples of this also occur in Unit 3 titled “Help” in book four of English for the Islamic State: “How can a Muslim help his brother in Islam?”\(^ {265}\) It is clear through these examples that ISIS is attempting to reinforce values related to helping fellow Muslims—with the subtext that ‘fellow Muslims’ only include those that are part of ISIS (since all others are considered enemies). While the theme of ‘brotherhood’ did not appear frequently enough in the textbooks to be included in one of the main themes, the authors thought it worth mentioning as a further area of research.

*Blurred Faces and Eyes*

The authors observed during the analysis of this report that all the images of living beings in their textbooks are blurred out. It is assumed that ISIS erased the eyes or the face of the images based on the prohibition of using images of religious figures. This is in alignment with a Hadith graded as weak (*da’if*)\(^ {266}\) by Al-Albani ‘Ali, who reported God’s messenger as saying,
“The angels do not enter a house in which there is a picture, a dog, or one
who is defiled. Transmitted by Abu Dawud and Nasa’i.” Expanding on
the idea that images of the Prophet are disrespectful and forbidden, this
Hadith has been interpreted in some cases to mean that images of people
are also forbidden. Notably, this is in contradiction to much of their
propaganda material, where images of people—including children—are
promoted as part of their recruitment techniques. This contradiction may
be of interest for further study—to explain why depictions of people in
ISIS textbooks are blurred, but depictions of people in widely-distributed
propaganda are not.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has dissected and analyzed the content from the education-
related ISIS Files to reveal the comprehensive, systematized and
institutionalized approach ISIS took in shaping the norms and values of
its community through establishing a system of meaning. It is clear in
this dataset of ISIS Files that the narratives of ISIS are both subtly and
overtly constructed. Their identity is constructed using symbols and
references to Islamic concepts; their identity is reinforced through the
establishment of a physical Islamic ‘state’ or ‘caliphate’ that protects
Muslims under the laws of sharia and with the guidance of tawhid; their
enemies are well-defined; their nation is under attack by those enemies;
and they claim that there is no choice but to respond to these enemies
with violence.

The main findings from this analysis of the education-related ISIS Files
can be summarized as follows:

1. Through its curriculum, ISIS presents its vision for the future, and its
‘competitive system of meaning,’ which is leveraged to shape its
audiences’ perceptions of various aspects of their everyday life
through “a combination of narratives and imagery.” ISIS has
attempted to manipulate its future generations through the structure
and content of its education system. Children under ISIS were raised
with the belief that their identity is under threat, and the only way to
protect it from the attack from the enemy or ‘the other’ is to affiliate
themselves with the Islamic State and use violence to protect themselves and their peers.

2. The curriculum emphasizes both an individual and collective ‘Islamic identity’ that transcends language and borders where it’s ‘state’ or ‘caliphate’ is home to the true Muslim community or umma from all across the globe. In this sense the curriculum it created can easily be resurrected in new territory it may occupy, or be adapted through online platforms to its followers. This is particularly of importance for two main geographies: 1) physical territories in regions such as East and North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia where ISIS still maintains some physical strongholds (albeit small), and 2) virtual ‘territories’ that could manifest attacks in the “countries where unbelievers/kafaruun are numerous”—such as Europe and North America.

3. By defining itself as a Muslim nation, or umma, ISIS also claims that its ‘caliphate’ is the sole manifestation of the umma. In pushing this interpretation, ISIS tells its followers that the only true believers are the ones led by the ‘caliph’ (Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi), and adherent to the ‘caliphate’ laws and structures. ISIS uses this argument to attempt to legitimize its religious and governmental authority, its attempts to physically control territory and resources, and it creates a cohesive society within their vision of a perfect refuge for Muslims globally.

4. ISIS divides the world into Dar al-Harb (House of War) where the enemies of the ‘state’ live, and Dar al-Islam (House of Islam), the abode of the true Muslim umma. ISIS has emphasized that a ‘true’ Muslim must migrate from Dar al-Harb (House of War), express animosity towards it, fight it in jihad, and immigrate to Dar al-Islam (House of Islam) under ISIS and its ‘caliph’ al-Baghdadi. Understanding how ISIS defines both worlds in this ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narrative is necessary when trying to rehabilitate impacted communities, especially children, and reintegrate them back into society—either in Iraq and Syria or outside of these countries.

5. ISIS has applied widely accepted regional and local narratives of grievance to support its ideology. These include post-colonial narratives similar to the Ba’athism of Iraq and Syria and the Nasserism of Egypt. But, where these movements called for socialism
and Arab nationalism, ISIS uses the same logic to promote an Islamic ‘caliphate.’ Furthermore, it claims to own the socio-economic frameworks to rescue Arab Muslim nations from Western exploitation. ISIS also leverages local grievances, such as the Sunni-Shia tension in Iraq where ISIS places itself as the defender of Sunni Muslims against Shia and Iranian aggression. In applying these widely accepted grievances in its propaganda, ISIS attempts to boost its legitimacy among target communities and discredit any counter-narratives as being ‘western,’ ‘colonial,’ or ‘anti-Islamic.’

6. Another common feature of the ISIS curriculum lies in how it normalizes and glorifies violence and dehumanizes its enemies. It is an ideology that necessitates action against its enemies and justifies indiscriminate violence against the established enemy at all costs. It is here that ISIS aims to plant the seeds of violence in their children at an early age, cultivate and grow these seeds through consistent reinforcement of their ideology throughout their entire education system. The curriculum is full of alarming examples of poems and games that glorify extreme violence like beheadings and torture. The most dangerous aspect of this is that ISIS makes references to the Quran, Hadiths, and other sources of the Islamic faith to justify these atrocities.

7. While the education system under ISIS ultimately failed to ‘take root’ due to the failure of ISIS to maintain control of its claimed land, the seeds of the ISIS education system were sown, and can potentially grow in ‘fertile ground.’ That is, despite the collapse of the education system under ISIS, the narratives and ideology from that education system have the potential to grow and fester in the minds of vulnerable individuals if the conditions for radicalization are fertile.

8. All in all, ISIS attempted to leverage the education system in the same way as many nations do—as a way to build their collective identity and instill values, norms and culture into its future generations of students. However, where ISIS’s education system deviates from the normal construct of education is in its dehumanization of its enemy, and the justification of the use of violence against that enemy.
By offering a glimpse into the mindset, values, and intentions of ISIS, this analytical report aims to benefit policymakers and practitioners working on de-radicalization, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration who may apply its findings to develop appropriate methods in not only dealing with children coming from these communities but also develop better strategies on how to build resilient communities and prevent the emergence of a similar situation.

**Challenges and Risks after ISIS: Local, National and Transnational**

Since ISIS has lost almost all of its physical strongholds, it is now time for thinking about rebuilding—in cities in Iraq and Syria (such as Mosul), in terms of a national identity and policy towards ISIS-affiliated individuals, and in terms of a transnational approach to the many foreign fighters and their families that are still residing in the Middle East or have been relocated to their home countries. However, there are still a number of challenges with respect to children in and outside of Iraq that need to be addressed in the repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts. The ideology that was analyzed in this report may be able to contribute to overcoming some of those challenges in the way forward.

At the local and national levels, Iraq has received support from international organizations to improve their education sector as well as rebuild schools. However, Iraq will continue to need support to address the basic challenges in access to quality education, and even more, support to handle the children that have been exposed to ISIS ideology. For example, the Ministry of Education has struggled to appropriately distribute textbooks to students effectively. Allegations against the Minister of Education in 2016 noted that lack of resources, illegal printing and distribution of textbooks, and overcrowded classrooms were all contributing factors to the textbook shortage. Students and parents protested the lack of textbooks and demanded accountability in November 2016 in Basra.

Schools in liberated parts of Mosul and IDP camps are also scarce in number and over-crowded. In July 2018, it was reported that 62 schools in Mosul were completely destroyed and 207 damaged as a result of the battles to defeat ISIS. As for IDP camps, teachers interviewed by
UNAMI in two camps in Nineveh described overcrowded classrooms and limited lesson time where schools ran in shifts offering six hours of classes per week for secondary-aged boys, rather than the standard 30 hours per week. These students are unable to go to school outside the camp because of extreme travel restrictions preventing them from leaving camps.275

There is also a social stigma and a skepticism over families that had been previously living under ISIS-controlled territory. Moreover, there are many displaced families that have left their homes and cities. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) reported in June 2020 that there are more than 277,000 people from Mosul city who remain displaced, by choice or by force.276 The Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimated in June 2019 that 250,000 Iraqis were unable to return to their place of origin because they were perceived to be affiliated with ISIS.277 Among this displaced population were approximately 45,000 children living in camps and missing civil documentation, according to an NRC report in April 2019. The same report added that about one in five households living outside of camps reported having children with documentation issues.278

The Iraqi MOE also requires several types of documentation before children can register in school. Those include identification cards of children and parents, or in case of the father’s death, a death certificate. The challenge many face is that are no provisions in place to address the absence of documentation for fathers missing or detained. In addition, families in areas once ruled by ISIS are required to apply for security clearance before they can obtain any form of documentation. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) received accounts of officers either denying a clearance, tearing up applications, destroying expired documents, or occasionally arresting individuals thereby denying their offspring access to education and other essential services.279 All of these factors will need to be considered as Iraq transitions to a post-ISIS state.

Iraqi children are of course not the only concern—children in camps in Syria and Iraq, as well as repatriated children to their home countries also present key challenges. From the beginning, policies across Europe have not been consistent, and EU countries have been generally reluctant to
repatriate ISIS-affiliated individuals, including children. However, several European countries are beginning to repatriate women and children from al Hol camp in Syria. For example, Germany and Finland repatriated women (5) and children (18) from al Hol in December 2020.\textsuperscript{280} Regardless, this challenge is not unique only to Europe, as up to 70 nationalities have been housed in the al Hol camp.\textsuperscript{281} While some countries like Indonesia have not yet decided on voluntary repatriation, other countries are beginning with allowing for women and children to return to their home countries. Countries physically close to the conflict such as Turkey were repatriating women and children early on, with 188 children of ISIS fighters returning to Turkey in May 2019.\textsuperscript{282} Similarly, Uzbekistan has also repatriated 25 women and 73 children in December 2020.\textsuperscript{283}

A Dutch report highlights some of the risks that may be posed by returning families, including children if appropriate policies and programs are not in place to handle them:

Minors are indoctrinated with the idea that... the West as a whole... is the enemy. Indoctrinating minors with ideas about the role of women, homosexuals, and people of other faiths or beliefs is part of the deliberate and systematic shaping of children that starts at an extremely young age. The effectiveness of this is reinforced by the role of the families, not least by taking the children to ISIS-held territory.\textsuperscript{284}

The research findings in this report support this same premise: that children under ISIS were seen as the next generation of the ‘caliphate,’ and there was a deliberate attempt to indoctrinate them with a specific set of ideals, including dehumanizing the West and instilling the idea that violence is the only way to protect their ‘caliphate’ and way of life. These narratives have the potential to reemerge at a later stage in life if they are not dealt with in the children that have been exposed in ISIS-controlled territory.

As this analysis of the education-related ISIS Files documents reinforces, children living under ISIS were taught to count explosives and calculate the number of people who could be killed by a suicide bomb, as an
attempt by ISIS to encourage and normalize radicalization. Of course, the exposure and normalization of atrocities and violence were also instilled in these children through other means such as social and other everyday life activities.

In addition, areas liberated from ISIS suffer from what Save the Children described as “collective trauma,” where an entire community of children and adults are struggling to cope. Interviews with 545 children cited “domestic violence as much as the loss of loved ones as a source of distress” and it was observed that “children themselves became more aggressive in response to a violent environment.”

It is important to fully understand the extent of the effect that ISIS had on all children exposed to their ideology and trauma. Their understanding of the world outside of what they saw as a norm differs greatly, and is hence vital to comprehend these children’s views in order to 1) not traumatize them further by removing their worldview and sense of identity without providing an appropriate alternative; 2) develop a tailored approach how to introduce a different worldview (‘system of meaning’) to these children; 3) work with communities where these children returning from ISIS-held territories will be reintegrated on solutions, and 4) educate these communities to avoid stigma or grievances that may emerge.

Progress towards Rehabilitation and Reintegration of ISIS-affiliated Children

Despite the challenges and risks, there have, however, been some steps in the right direction to reinstate the education system in Iraq and help to prevent violent extremism from re-emerging in the country. For example, in March 2017, the Iraqi Ministry of Education, the Department of Education Nineveh and UNESCO held a pilot program titled “Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education in Government Primary Schools in Mosul.” The program trained teachers on PVE-E activities, to include how to foster socio-emotional and behavioral skills necessary to resist violent extremism and radicalization.
According to Iraq Education Cluster Strategy 2019, jointly coordinated by UNICEF and Save the Children International, the identified needs for Iraq are:

Children in Iraq urgently need 1) improved access to education; 2) Improved teaching quality remains a key concern beyond 2018; 3) Improving learning outcomes is required to ensure that all children have a fair chance to be successful as adults; 4) Improving learning environments is critical to minimize security and safety concerns, the main barrier to access education in areas of return and newly retaken areas; 5) Many children are suffering from the trauma of violence, displacement and loss and are in need of structured psychosocial support; and 6) Lack of access and participation in education increases protection risk for children and youth. 288

The main objectives of the new strategy are to “1) increase access to quality formal and non-formal learning opportunities for children; 2) schools and learning environments are protective and responsive to the needs of conflict affected children; 3) strengthen the capacity of the education system to plan and deliver a timely appropriate and evidence-based education response.”289

In order to address international concerns, international organizations have offered guidance to countries attempting to handle cases of ISIS-affiliated children that can be leveraged as models for policy and programs. For example, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) developed a handbook titled “Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-Based Approach.” According to this handbook,290 states have an obligation to rehabilitate and reintegrate “children affected by violence, including armed conflict.” Citing the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011), states have an obligation to “promote the rehabilitation and social integration” of children affected by violence.291 Furthermore, states are also obligated to “take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, mistreatment or exploitation. This obligation exists not only at the national level but also at the provincial and municipal levels.”292
states are required to take all the necessary steps to promote a child’s recovery on both physical and psychological level and ensure social reintegration into their relevant societies. The convention is applicable to all member states, and hence should be applied accordingly. This means that each state, not only Iraq, has the responsibility to provide necessary support and care for children affected by ISIS. While it may be argued that some of these children have acquired skills and training that may threaten the peace and security in their societies, these children still have the right to be given appropriate care to rehabilitate, recover, and potentially reintegrate to the appropriate countries of origin.

On a more practical level, Hedayah developed a handbook of guiding principles, “Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center: Guiding Principles for Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Their Family Members.” This handbook comprises of international guidance on both the policy and programmatic steps necessary to stand up a dedicated Center for returning foreign fighters and their families. In particular, the research found in this report may be useful for operationalizing this handbook, by providing critical insights into the actual ideology that ISIS intended for children of their ‘caliphate.’

**Recommendations**

ISIS’s ‘competitive system of meaning’ was revealed in this research conducted on the education-related ISIS Files, and several recommendations emerge from this research that can be applicable to policy and practice. This report will not comprehensively cover all of these recommendations, and a separate report will be developed to address more specifically what governments, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the private sector can do with the outcomes of this research. However, several of the key recommendations are summarized below:

1. *Ensure the “Do No Harm” approach is strictly implemented when working with children affected by or previously living under ISIS control.* In order to achieve this, it is essential to involve relevant practitioners, including child psychologists, in the development of necessary assessments and programs for these
children. While it is highly likely that most of these children were exposed to ISIS narratives and/or the curriculum, it is still valuable to determine the extent to which the group’s values and ideas have been internalized by these children. As mentioned throughout the report, ISIS has worked to create a ‘system of meaning’ which is leveraged to mold a sense of belonging to the State, constructing identities through values and ideas, as well as through the creation of an enemy or ‘other,’ who is supposedly threatening the State. This ‘system of meaning’ will need to be carefully assessed before being dismantled, as any wrong steps taken in this direction may result in immediate retaliation from these individuals with complete disregard and distrust toward practitioners. As a long term issue, if the values and ideas key to the identity of these individuals are not dismantled in the most appropriate manner, individuals may develop identity problems. It is therefore important to provide them alternative values that promote peace, helping them organically redefine themselves and their identities. This may be done through activities and interactions involving individuals from other societies, which they once viewed to be their enemies.

2. Education, both formal and social, will also play an important role in working with the affected children. Appropriate practitioners from different spheres (education, psychology, sociology, etc.) will need to work together in the development and implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration programs for ISIS-affected children. Some of these children were brought up with the reality created for them by ISIS. Stripping them off this reality and stating that all they were taught is false may cause future psychological trauma, identity crisis. Education practitioners will need to focus on proactive narratives that naturally build a sense of identity and purpose that is multifaceted (instead of polarized), and discourage any form of violence. These narratives may already exist in many subjects in existing educational systems, so the appropriate solutions should focus on amplifying and expanding appropriate proactive narratives that overcome the violent narratives of ISIS.

3. Provide training and support to practitioners that will directly be handling cases of children exposed to ISIS
ideology. This is to ensure that the best, most effective and most efficient approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration are implemented. Those working with these children need to be fully aware of the mechanisms and methods used by ISIS in radicalization processes as this may help them better understand how to respond to children’s needs. There will need to be a level of cooperation and exchange of information and ideas between those involved not only on the local level but also on the inter-and intra-state to ensure that lessons learned and challenges experienced are shared efficiently and a holistic approach is applied in responding to the need of these children.

4. **For educators, examine the educational curriculum in their home countries from the lens of preventing and countering the narratives of ISIS and other violent extremist ideas.** More broadly, current curriculum should be reviewed from a lens of supporting tolerant identities, and future curriculum will need to be developed to build resilient students that have the knowledge and skills to overcome radicalizing ideologies. Curriculum should avoid rhetoric that polarizes identities, instead emphasizing societies that hold multiple identities as equally important. For example, Iraqi curriculum may reinforce values in their education system that celebrate the cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of its citizens. Increasing the resilience of children to violence and extremism from a young age is a critical step to increasing the resilience of the society as a whole.

5. **For researchers, investigate further the effects of ISIS’s narratives on children influenced by ISIS in some way.** Further research is needed to determine which children have been exposed to the ISIS ideology, and to what extent the ideology has been internalized. For those countries handling the return (voluntary or involuntary) of their citizens from regions previously controlled by ISIS, intake assessment of the children should include how the narratives of ISIS have influenced their way of thinking. This research can help to inform appropriate programs and support for the children and their families so that the ‘seeds of the poisonous tree’ do not take root.
Appendix A: Code Reference Sheet

The following document was used as a reference to code the sentences in the textbooks and background documents included in this dataset. This reference sheet should not be seen as comprehensive. Some sentences were coded to a certain theme or themes that did not contain these specific words if the meaning was implied.

1. Emphasis on Islam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Grouping</th>
<th>English words</th>
<th>Arabic words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>God, Allah, names of God, God Exalted/Almighty God</td>
<td>رب العالمين: الخالق: أسماء الله الحسنى: الله تعالى</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet(s)</td>
<td>Muhammad, The Prophet, Messengers, His messengers, Aisha</td>
<td>محمد (صلى الله عليه وسلم): الرسول: النبي: رسول: عائشة:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>إسلام</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>angels</td>
<td>الملائكة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quran and Hadith</td>
<td>Quran; The Nobel Quran; The Glorious Quran, Sura, Book, His Book, all mentions of verse from Quran or Hadith</td>
<td>القرآن الكريم: الكتاب المبين: سورة: كتاب</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>Mosque/masjid</td>
<td>مسجد</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This theme also covers any mention of Hadith or the Quran (verse), especially those that are not contextually relevant to the subject of study.

2. Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Grouping</th>
<th>English words</th>
<th>Arabic words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Government, protect(ion), base (military), trade, control, power, flag</td>
<td>الحكومة: حماية: أساس: التجارة: سيطرة: قوة: علم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>Sharia jurisprudence; (jurisprudential) opinion; ruling; law/legal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Community, citizen, neighbor; companions;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td>Moral, virtue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijra</td>
<td>Hijra (migration)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Osama Bin Laden; Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, Righteously-guided Caliph(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegiance (Bay’a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil (equipment)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It also refers to passages that suggest the structure or organization of the Islamic State as its own independent jurisdiction. It also includes criteria and values of citizenship within the Islamic State, and references to leaders such as Osama Bin Laden and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Images to be coded include flags, maps with reference to the State/land.

### 3. Doctrine and Creed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Grouping</th>
<th>English words</th>
<th>Arabic words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monotheism</td>
<td>Tawhid/monotheism</td>
<td>توحید</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da’wa</td>
<td>spread Islam, da’wa</td>
<td>نشر الإسلام: الدعوة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>identity</td>
<td>هوية</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believers</td>
<td>Believer;(s)</td>
<td>المؤمن: المؤمنات: المؤمن: المؤمن:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Islam</td>
<td>The House of Islam</td>
<td>دار الإسلام</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Enemies (of ISIS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Grouping</th>
<th>English words</th>
<th>Arabic words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shirk</td>
<td>Shirk (association of God with others), polytheist, polytheism takfir, kafir/infidel, infidelity</td>
<td>شرك: تكفير: كافر: كفر</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This theme also covers mentions of violent acts, references to guns, references to fighting for a cause, and references for dying or martyrdom to the Islamic State. Images of weapons and guns were also coded.


8 Ingram, 4.


13 Ibid.


16 Bass, 130.

18 Pine, 3-4.

19 Pine, 42-43.


25 UNAMI and OHCHR, “The Right to Education in Iraq.”


29 UNAMI and OHCHR, “The Right to Education in Iraq.”


31 Sulaf Al-Shaikhly and Jean Cui, “Education in Iraq,” last modified October 17, 2017, https://wenr.wes.org/2017/10/education-in-iraq#:~:text=Public%20education%20in%20Iraq%20is%20free%20at%20all%20levels.&text=Education%20is%20compulsory%20until%20graduation%20in%20school%20gr ade%209.&text=Graduation%20from%20elementary%20school%20requires%20end%20of%20the%206th%20grade.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.


45 Lafta, Cetorelli, and Burnham.

46 “Mosul Diaries: Poisoned by Water,” BBC.


Lafta, Cetorelli, and Burnham, “Living in Mosul during the Time of ISIS and the Military Liberation.”


Lafta, Cetorelli, and Burnham, “Living in Mosul during the Time of ISIS and the Military Liberation.”


Anita Persin, “Fatal Attraction: Western Muslimas and ISIS,” Perspective on Terrorism 9, no.3 (2015), 70.

72 Olidort.


79 Aarseth, “Resistance in the Caliphate’s Classrooms.”

80 Arvisais and Guidere, “Education in Conflict.”


82 Arvisais and Guidere, “Education in Conflict,” 507.

83 Arvisais and Guidere.

84 “Subject: Decision on School Registration,” The ISIS Files 35_001577, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/qn59q396v.

85 “Subject: Canceled Subjects,” The ISIS Files 35_001576, January 12, 2015, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/5x21t430.

86 “Subject: Circulars on Sixth Grade Reforms,” The ISIS Files 35_001584, April 19, 2015, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/vq27z41g; “Education Policy of the Islamic State,” The ISIS Files 35_001580, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/pr76f340k.


88 “Exam Rules,” The ISIS Files 30_001474.

89 Arvisais and Guidere “Education in Conflict,” 507.

90 “Textbook: Arabic Language Grammar: 5th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001654, 5.

91 Ibid.

92 Aarseth, “Resistance in the Caliphate’s Classrooms.”

93 Aarseth.


97 “Subject: Assignment Request to Supervise Girl’s School,” The ISIS Files 35_001583, November 11, 2015, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/f7623c57r.

98 Aarseth, interview with the assistant manager from a high school in Mosul, conducted in Erbil, November 3, 2016.

99 Olidort, “Inside the Caliphate’s Classroom,” xi.

100 “Subject: Canceled Subjects,” The ISIS Files 35_001576, January 12, 2015, https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/artifact/5x21tf430.

101 Olidort, xi.

102 “Textbook: Creed of the Muslim: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001084, 6.


104 “How to be a good little jihadi,” Niqash.

105 Arvisais and Guidere “Education in Conflict,” 510.


108 Joumah, “Inside Mosul: Thousands of Students, Teachers Trapped between Extremists and Education Ministry.”


111 UNAMI and OHCHR, “The Right to Education in Iraq: The Legacy of ISIL Territorial Control on Access to Education.”


118 This statement is found in the introductory letter in nearly all the textbooks contained in the ISIS Files dataset.


120 “Textbook: Geography: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001086, 8.

121 Ibid, 22.

122 Ibid, 6.

123 “Textbook: The Muslim Creed: 3rd Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001656, 8.


126 “Textbook: Science: 2nd Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001663, 35.

127 “English for the Islamic State: Book Four,” The ISIS Files 37_001658, 6.


130 Sproule, 136.


132 Piscatori and Saikal.

Of note, the borders of the “Islamic World,” as described here, do not include Mozambique, which is located south of Tanzania. This is an interesting assertion in the context of ISIS-affiliated attacks in Mozambique in late 2020 and early 2021.

In the textbook on Sharia Jurisprudence, it was indicated that the lessons were only to be for male students. It is unclear if a similar approach or method was applied to girls’ schools as well.


Ibid.

Olidort, “Inside the Caliphate’s Classroom,” viii.


157 “Invocation of God,” The ISIS Files 27_001373, 1.


163 “Textbook: Reading and Comprehension: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001094, 34.

164 “Textbook: Creed of the Muslim: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001094, 34.

165 “Textbook: Geography: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001086, cover.


167 Ibid, cover.

168 “Textbook: The Muslim Creed: 3rd Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001656, 5.


“Textbook: Creed of the Muslim: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001084, 16-20.

Barclay, “Tawhid al-Hakimiyah.”

Barclay, “Tawhid al-Hakimiyah.”

The ISIS Files collection on Ideology can be found here: https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/catalog?f%5Bmember_of_collection_ids_ssim%5D%5B%5D=v979v304g.


Bunzel, 6.


Bunzel.


Ibid.


“Textbook: Creed of the Muslim: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001084, 5.


195 Ibid, 51.

196 Ibid, 53.


199 al-Muhajjer, 24.

200 “Textbook: The Muslim Creed: 3rd Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001656, 7.


203 “Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 35.


207 “Textbook: Reading and Comprehension: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001094, 11-12.

208 Ibid, 37.


The Isra’ Event was Prophet Muhammad’s night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. The story is mentioned in the Qur’ān (17:1).

“Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 27.


Ibid, 15.

Ibid, 30.


Notably, it is important to make a distinction between what is considered the ‘greater jihad’ and the ‘lesser jihad’ here. In the ISIS textbooks and propaganda, there is little attention given to the ‘greater jihad’—the spiritual struggle to be a better Muslim. Most of the attention instead is focused on the ‘lesser jihad’—a physical struggle. While this section does not give a nuanced description of the different interpretations of jihad, nor is it within the scope of this report, it is important to note that the ISIS interpretation of this term is not reflective of what many Muslims consider to be jihad—a spiritual struggle.


“Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 40.

Ibid, 41.

Ibid, 41.


“Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 42.

Ibid, 35.


Ibid, 56.
“Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 42.


“Textbook: History: 4th Primary Grade,” The ISIS Files 19_001090, 50.


Ibid, 106.


Ibid, 34.

“Textbook: The Biography of the Prophet: 3rd Grade,” The ISIS Files 37_001661, 6.

Ibid.

Ibid, 8.


Ibid, 49.


Al Ibrahim, “Cubs of the Caliphate.”


Ibid.


Al Ibrahim, “Cubs of the Caliphate,” 2.


Horgan et al., “From Cubs to Lions.”

Horgan et al.

Chatterjee, “Gendering ISIS and Mapping the Role of Women.”

Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 44.


“Textbook: English for the Islamic State: Book Four,” The ISIS Files 37_001658, 42.

Hadith that are weak are considered da’if. Hadith that are not acceptable with regard to the criteria concerning their reliability have been regarded as rejected, or mardud. Retrieved from https://islamiccenter.org/unit-four-weak-hadith-and-hadith-fabrication/


Ingram, “Deciphering the Siren Call,” 4.


UNAMI and OHCHR, “The Right to Education in Iraq: The Legacy of ISIL Territorial Control on Access to Education.”


279 UNAMI and OHCHR, “The Right to Education in Iraq.”


285 UNAMI and OHCHR.


289 Iraq Education Cluster.

UNOCT and UNCCT, 66.
