Identifying and Structuring the Objectives of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) and its Followers

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“If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles “ Sun Tzu, Chinese philosopher and military strategist, around 500 BC.

“What precisely are we contesting, and what fuels the enemy's power?” Major General Nagata, Commander, Special Operations Strategic Command Central, 2014.

Abstract

This study addressed three questions:

1. What are the objectives of the leaders of ISIL?
2. What are the objectives of the followers of ISIL?
3. How are the two sets of objectives related?

To answer these questions we analyzed the transcripts of interviews and presentations of 59 subject matter experts (SMEs) and conducted a separate analysis of speeches of ISIL leaders and selected Internet sources. In both efforts we identified and structured the strategic, fundamental, and means objectives of ISIL and its followers. The results indicate that ISIL's leaders pursue four strategic objectives: Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant, Control and Govern the Caliphate, Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide, and Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam. The followers' objectives can be partitioned into three strategic objectives: Humanitarian Fulfillment, Religious Fulfillment and Personal Fulfillment. The objectives identified from the SME interviews were similar to those identified from ISIL leaders' statements and the Internet. However, the Internet search revealed many more personal objectives of ISIL followers. The results further indicate that ISIL's leadership objectives are closely aligned with those of its followers. There also is a sharp contrast between the objectives of ISIL and those of Al Qaeda, particularly ISIL’s emphasis on occupying and controlling territories in Iraq and Syria vs. Al Qaeda's focus on worldwide jihad.
1. Introduction

The “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) began in 2004 as an insurgency in Syria and Iraq. Initially affiliated with Al Qaeda, it developed a more brutal form of terrorism, and a different strategy, which focused on the establishment of a regional caliphate instead of worldwide attacks on Western assets and people. After its former leader, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, was killed in a US bomb attack in 2006, Abu Bakr al Bagdadi took over as ISIL’s spiritual and military leader. ISIL has a well-known organization chart, with a “cabinet”, a spokesperson (Abu Mohamed al Adnani), a military commander (Omar al Shishani) and regional governors.

ISIL’s followers come mostly from disenfranchised Sunni youths in Iraq and Syria. ISIL has also attracted a large number of foreign fighters from Arab and Western countries, including religious converts, criminals, and adventurers. After the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, ISIL became a military force to be reckoned with, growing to an army of about 30,000 (Cockburn 2014), including about 5,000-10,000 foreign fighters (Altman 2014, Ackermann 2014, Lund 2013). At the end of 2014, ISIL occupied large swaths of northern Syria and Iraq, including Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city. It draws revenue from taxation, selling oil and smuggling operations, exceeding at times $1 million/day (Ackermann 2014). Using these funds to support its military operations, ISIL also has developed a semblance of governance in the occupied territories.

Because of the growing threat that ISIL poses to Iraq, Syria, its neighbors and the West, the US Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT), under the leadership of General Major Michael Nagata, requested studies of ISIL to answer the questions: What does ISIL want and why is it so attractive to its followers? To respond to these questions an intensive five-month effort was organized by the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Office of the US Department of Defense involving multiple study groups and over 100 researchers and subject matter experts. One of these study groups was formed at the Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events.
(CREATE) and its primary goal was to identify the objectives of ISIL's leaders and its followers. This study and its results are reported in this article.


The strategic model posits that terrorists are rational actors who attack for political ends. As in other organizations, individual members may have somewhat different objectives or assign different importance to a common set of objectives. When identifying and structuring objectives, decision analysts therefore emphasize the need to create, first and foremost, a complete set of objectives that reflect the collective sets of values of the organization. When structuring objectives for ISIL’s leaders, we believe that their collective objectives are internally consistent, although individual military or religious leaders might have slightly different priorities. With respect to ISIL’s followers, we identified a broad range of objectives, collectively describing what different followers might want to achieve. Each individual will likely emphasize a subset of these objectives and ignore others.

Waugh (1983) pointed out that "assessing the goals and value priorities, as well as the capabilities and strengths of commitment, of challenging terrorist organizations, is clearly necessary for the determination of government bargaining strategies." Furthermore, Waugh argued, not "all terrorist organizations do [...] have the same objectives." Therefore, it is of utmost importance to identify objectives of every terrorist group the world has to deal with. The specific challenge is that it is not possible to interact directly with terrorists. It would be highly difficult and
maybe even life threatening to get access to terrorist groups. Keeney and von Winterfeldt (2010) therefore developed a methodology for deriving objectives from open sources available on the Internet. We extend this methodology to identify the objectives of ISIL, the terrorist group that is deemed to be the most dangerous for the world in 2014, and its followers.

Characterizing the values of ISIL’s leaders and followers is critical to understanding their future actions and ISIL’s eventual success or failure. ISIL is an adaptive adversary and any strategic decision support model should include some representation of ISIL’s values and objectives. The description of ISIL’s objectives is a necessary step to a prescriptive analysis of counterterrorism and military strategies. For example, if the conclusion is that ISIL leaders want to establish a regional caliphate as opposed to worldwide jihad, this suggests that military interventions to reduce regional territory losses are important. This distinction between descriptive adversary analyses vs. prescriptive defender analysis is rooted in basic concepts of decision and negotiation analysis (see Raiffa, 1968; Raiffa et al., 2003).

We characterize values in terms of strategic objectives, fundamental (ends) objectives, and means objectives. Strategic objectives tend to be long term and relatively stable over time. Fundamental objectives are the ends to be achieved in a specific decision context in a medium term time frame. Means objectives are the actions that help achieve ends and strategic objectives and they may evolve to fit the resources and terrain of the moment. Any characterization of these objectives are snapshots in time and should be updated, especially after major events and leadership changes. The fact that adversary values may change over time is, however, not a justification for not characterizing and structuring adversary objectives. Decisions for defending against terrorist groups have to be made in real time, based on the information available, and the current understanding of the enemy’s values and objectives.

Specifically, we address the following three questions:
(1) What are the objectives of the leaders of ISIL (i.e., what do ISIL’s leaders want to achieve)?

(2) What are the objectives of followers of ISIL (i.e., why is ISIL attractive to followers)?

(3) How are the two sets of objectives related (i.e., do they reinforce each other or are they partially in conflict)?

To answer these questions, we used a decision analytic methodology for identifying and structuring strategic and fundamental objectives and related them to means and actions to achieve these objectives. In particular, we conducted two separate efforts, one based on transcripts of interviews with 59 subject matter experts (SMEs) and a separate one based on open source statements by ISIL leaders and other open sources on the Internet. Findings from both sources should be useful for developing plans and strategies for countering ISIL’s efforts to establish and expand a stronghold in the Middle East.

The methodology is similar to the one used in Keeney and von Winterfeldt (2010), who identified and structured the objectives of Al Qaeda using only statements by Al Qaeda leaders and related Internet sources. It extends this methodology in three ways:

1. It utilizes two completely separate data sources to identify and structure the objectives of ISIL’s leaders and its followers: one, based on the transcripts of interviews with 59 subject matter experts and one based on the speeches of ISIL leaders and selected Internet sources.
2. Each effort was led by a different decision analyst to avoid cross contamination of the sources and findings.
3. It analyzed the relationships between ISIL objectives and those of its followers to determine if and how they reinforce each other.

In the following sections, we first describe the data sources and methodology used in this study, followed by a description of the strategic, fundamental and means objectives of ISIL’s leaders and its followers. We compare the results of the two separate efforts, concluding that they are
similar, though some details in the followers’ objectives derived from the two sources differ. The final sections provide some interpretation of the results and suggest how the objectives can be used to counter ISIL more effectively. The appendix contains a detailed description of the statements used to derive the objectives.

2. Methodology

Objectives are usually identified in personal interviews with decision makers and stakeholders (Keeney, 1992; Keeney and Raiffa, 1976; von Winterfeldt and Edwards, 1986). However, direct personal interviews with ISIL’s leaders and their followers were not available to us. Instead, we used an indirect methodology of reviewing existing source materials, similar to studies that previously identified and structured the objectives of Al Qaeda (Keeney and von Winterfeldt, 2010) and Hezbollah (Rosoff and von Winterfeldt, 2015).

We distinguish between strategic objectives, fundamental objectives, and means objectives. As suggested by Keeney and von Winterfeldt (2010), “Strategic objectives provide guidance for all decisions. They serve as the mechanism by which leaders can guide decisions made by different individuals and groups within an organization.” In contrast, “fundamental objectives concern the ends that decision makers value in a specific decision context” (Keeney 1994). Means objectives provide tactical guidance to specific actions. Strategic, fundamental ends and means objectives come in a hierarchy: Means objectives guide actions to achieve fundamental objectives, which, in turn, contribute to achieving strategic objectives. Decision analysts structure this relationship in the form of an objectives hierarchy (Keeney and Raiffa, 1976) or value tree (von Winterfeldt and Edwards, 1986).

We used two completely separate approaches to identify and structure the objectives of ISIL’s leaders and its followers. The first approach used transcripts of interviews with 59 subject matter
experts (SMEs), who were asked, among other things: What are ISIL’s strategic objectives and why is ISIL so attractive to its followers? Based solely on these transcripts, one of the authors (von Winterfeldt) used standard decision analysis concepts and techniques to highlight value statements and subsequently structure them into an objectives hierarchy, distinguishing between strategic, fundamental and means objectives. The second approach was based on open sources, primarily speeches of the leaders of ISIL and selected Internet sources of ISIL advocates and commentators. This effort was conducted by another author (Siebert), using the same decision analysis concepts and techniques. Both efforts were conducted independently and separately with no sharing of information between the two analysts. Both analysts spent about the same amount of time (approximately 160 hours or 20 work-days) on this effort during a two-month period between September and October, 2014.

It is worth pointing out that both approaches relied on standard decision analysis techniques for identifying and structuring objectives. These techniques are different from many other text coding and analysis processes. First, it takes experience and substantial training to identify value relevant statements (as opposed to statements of facts or opinions). Second, and more importantly, structuring value statements into an objectives hierarchy and separating strategic, fundamental, and means objectives requires a significant amount of decision analysis training. Thus the main manipulation in this study was that the two efforts were completed independently with two separate sources of data analyzed by two experienced analysts, consistent with the manner analysts usually identify and structure objectives. Of course, conducting this type of analysis with independent coders and multiple analysts would be preferable, but the experience required for coding and the intensive effort required by experienced decision analysts make this difficult.

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1 To be precise, there were two rounds of the SME-based effort. The first round was completely independent of the open source effort. After completing the first round, we received additional SME interview transcripts. Rather than ignoring these, we decided to add them to the SME effort, but we only made additions based on specific statements in the new interviews. This resulted in some minor additions to the objectives using the SME approach, but no changes in the combined set of objectives.
The 59 subject matter experts participated in an effort conducted by the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office (SMA) to support SOCCENT’s understanding of ISIL and its followers. A summary report of these interviews (Canna and Rieger, 2015) lists 49 of these experts by name and affiliation. Ten additional experts participated anonymously. Most SMEs were affiliated with US and international universities, think tanks, national security services, and intelligence analysis agencies. Their background varied, including specialties in

- Islamic terror and jihadists movements
- Middle East politics and international affairs
- History, anthropology, sociology, and psychology of terrorism
- Intelligence analysis of Islamic terrorism

It is also noteworthy that seven SMEs had significant counterterrorism experience in military and intelligence agencies and five others had on-the-ground experience in Iraq and other Middle East countries, including a former Iraqi military officer.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed by the staff of the National Security Institute (NSI), resulting in a 554 page document. The main questions related to the objectives of the leaders and followers of ISIL were: What are ISIL’s strategic objectives; why is ISIL so inspiring to its followers; and what motivates ISIL followers? The interviews were, however, wide ranging, and covered, in many cases, a broad range of historical and political issues related to ISIL. SOCCENT staff, in consultation with a broader research team, identified and selected the SMEs. Most interviews were with single subject matter experts; some were with small groups. In some cases, presentations were intermingled with formal interviews. The meetings lasted between 30 minutes to over 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed with no modifications of the wording and with only minimal editing of misspellings and grammatical errors. In some cases, summaries by the NSI staff were also provided. The individual interview transcriptions or presentations were between 5 and 23 pages long.
One analyst (von Winterfeldt) reviewed the SME interview transcripts and highlighted 353 value-relevant statements separately for ISIL and its followers. Subsequently, he separated the statements into strategic, fundamental, and means objectives and created an objectives hierarchy, containing 24 ISIL organizational objectives and 26 follower objectives. The wording of these objectives was taken mostly verbatim from the SME interviews to avoid any conscious attempt to exaggerate or minimize the SME’s intent.

Another analyst (Siebert) identified objectives from three different kinds of open sources available from the Internet: 1) Transcripts of 12 speeches by the two most prominent ISIL leaders (Al Baghdadi and Al Adnani) in English translation. 2) Interviews with experts and Internet articles dealing with ISIL in US-media (e.g., Nytimes.com, Vox.com, Ibitimes.com, Bustle.com, and Breitbart.com). 3) Interviews with experts and Internet articles dealing with ISIL in German media (e.g., Deutschlandfunk.de, Faz.net). The selection of sources was guided by practicability. All 12 speeches of Al Baghdadi and Al Adnani that were available in English translation were analyzed. As a starting point for the open source media search, we reviewed the leading media in the US and Germany (current TV news, newspaper articles, and expert interviews) during the first week of September, 2014 to identify the status of information on ISIL at this time. In the next step, older material was analyzed using key words and following references in current sources. Furthermore, key media were observed for new developments. Overall, most of our sources were published between June and October 2014. To ensure unbiased data, only sources were considered in which the analyst felt that the medium and/or the author did not pursue a specific political agenda. For the same reason American as well as German media were used. The academic literature was not included because we did not find any relevant current materials related to ISIL. Furthermore, we avoided drawing on materials by other terrorist groups, although other groups may have similar objectives. As in the SME analysis, an attempt was made to stay close to the original wording of the source material, including verbatim statements by al Bagdadi and al Adnani, to avoid altering the
meaning or providing evaluations of ISIL’s own statements as found in their English or German translations.

The decision analyst was aware that the open sources could be biased by propaganda during the identification of objectives and crosschecked several sources in questionable cases. In some cases, it was not easy to distinguish propaganda from true objectives. For example, humanitarian causes are used by ISIL to attract potential followers. It is true, however, that some followers pursue these humanitarian objectives and therefore they should to be included in the objectives hierarchy of the followers.

Having completed the separate efforts, the two analysts compared results and created a combined objectives hierarchy. As in other instances of combining objectives hierarchies from different stakeholders (see, e.g., von Winterfeldt 1987; Keeney, Renn, and von Winterfeldt, 1987; Keeney, McDaniels, and Swoveland 1995), this was just a matter of combining unique objectives from both hierarchies into a single objectives hierarchy. In some cases, there was a discussion about naming objectives and separating strategic from fundamental objectives, but this also turned out to be a straight-forward task.

The study design allows us to compare and analyze the sets of objectives with respect to two dimensions: (1) ISIL leaders vs. its followers and (2) SME interview transcripts vs. open sources. Our findings can be used to understand more deeply why joining ISIL is so attractive (see research question 3). Furthermore, this design allows us to analyze potential biases of different sources of information. For example, we can investigate potential biases in both the SME-approach and the open source approach.
3. Results

3.1 Objectives of ISIL’s Leaders

Table 1 shows an excerpt of the 353 SME statements we identified related to goals, values, grievances, and objectives of ISIL. The shading was added, after the initial compilation of these statements, suggesting strategic objectives in dark grey, fundamental objectives in light grey, and means objectives or other value-related statements in white.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>SME 1</th>
<th>SME 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
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<td>SME 1</td>
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<td>SME 2</td>
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<td><strong>ISIS Objectives</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of employment</td>
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<td>Careful about interfering with tribes</td>
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<td>Restoring a semblance of government</td>
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<td>Unemployment youth bulge</td>
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<td>Revolutionary fervor</td>
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<td>Pre-existing grievances</td>
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<td>Alienated by sectarian regime</td>
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<td>Combating Shiite powers</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than Syria and Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>Representing all Sunnis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deviation from the “right path”</td>
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<td>Kill dissidents</td>
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<td>Purify Society</td>
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<td>Totalitarian regime</td>
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<td>Decadence of the West</td>
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<td>Corruption of religion by minorities</td>
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<td>Leader should be from the House of Prophets</td>
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<td>Eliminating corrupters of their religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunni Arabs effectively isolated</td>
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<td>Pushed on the sideline</td>
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<td>Control of large parts of the territory</td>
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<td>Represent the entire Sunni population</td>
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<td>Decline of secularism</td>
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<td>Establish past Islamic glory</td>
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<td>Purification of society</td>
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<td>Totalitarian Islamic rule</td>
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<td>Society declined</td>
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<td>Deviated from the right path</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decadency of agents of the West</td>
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<td>Corruption of religion</td>
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<td>Alleviate Sunni grievances</td>
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<td>Arab leadership of the Muslim community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliminate the agents of foreigners that corrupted religion</td>
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<td>Absence of political authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Islam is the way to go</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunni Arabs alienated by the sectarian regime</td>
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</table>
**Table 1: Excerpt of SME Statements about ISIL Objectives.**

Using this source list of 353 statements, 24 objectives were identified, including three strategic, five fundamental, and 16 means objectives. The resulting objectives hierarchy is shown in Figure 1. The first strategic objective *Establish Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant* can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objective *Eliminate Current Rulers in Iraq and Levant* and for the regions ISIL already occupies by the fundamental objective *Function as a State and Provide Services*. The second strategic objective *Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide* can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objective *Purge the World of Anti-Islamic Forces*. The third strategic objective *Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam* can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objectives, *Give Meaning to the Lives of Sunnis* and *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam*.

![Figure 1: ISIL Leaders’ Objectives Derived from Expert Interviews.](image-url)
From the open source speeches and media accounts we identified 175 statements related to goals, values, grievances, and objectives of ISIL. These statements were between a couple of words and a couple of sentences long. Furthermore, we listed the context of these statements to prevent wrong interpretations. Each statement was translated into at least one objective. Overall, 113 statements were related to the objectives of ISIL’s leaders. However, at this stage there were many redundancies in the objectives.

In the first step, strategic objectives were identified top-down, and in the second step, the top-down and bottom-up approach were applied iteratively to identify fundamental and means objectives, as well as their relations. Overall, 30 distinctive objectives were identified, including four strategic, five fundamental, and 21 means objectives. The resulting objectives hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 2. The first strategic objective Expand Caliphate (the Whole World!), can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objective Conquer New Territory. The second strategic objective Control the Islamic State, can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objective Consolidate and Defend Territory. The third strategic objective Establish a Caliphate across Middle East, can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objectives Kill and Convert Infidels and Establish ISIL as a Radical and Rigorous Brand. The fourth strategic objective Disseminate Monotheism, can be achieved by pursuing the fundamental objective Implement Sharia Law in Occupied Territories.
Figure 2: ISIL Leaders’ Objectives Derived from Open Sources.

The strategic objectives and most fundamental objectives derived independently from the two sources are similar. Differences between the two sets of objectives show up mostly at the level of means objectives. Both approaches identified the strategic objective *Establish Caliphate*. However, the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources emphasizes that ISIL not only wants to *Establish a Caliphate*, but also wants to be the organization to *Control the Islamic State*. Something similar can be observed for the objectives *Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide* and *Expand Caliphate (the Whole World!)*. The second objective derived from open sources also includes the inherent claim for ISIL being in power.

ISIL’s claim for power is one of the most important distinctions in comparison to Al Qaeda (Siebert et al., 2015). ISIL does not focus on *Expel Westerners, Destroy Israel, or Establish a Caliphate (in hundreds of years)*. (Keeney and von Winterfeldt 2010). ISIL wants to *Establish a Caliphate*...
(immediately) and their leaders want to be in power. Our design using two different sources reveals this important distinction.

The objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews emphasizes ISIL’s focus on Sunnis in the strategic objective *Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam* and the fundamental objective *Give Meaning to Lives of Sunnis*. In contrast, in the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources, Sunni-related objectives are only explicitly stated in the means objectives *Prevent Being Suppressed by Shia Government*, *Guard and Treat Sunnis with Respect*, and *Sunnis Govern Iraq*.

The analysis of the underlying value statements show similarities between *Conquer New Territory* and *Eliminate Current Rulers in Iraq and the Levant*, *Consolidate and Defend Territory and Function as a State and Provide Services* as well as *Implement Sharia Law in Occupied Territories* and *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam*. However, the objectives, *Kill and Convert Infidels* and *Establish ISIL as a Radical and Rigorous Brand*, derived from open sources, are means objectives in the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews. It is noteworthy that the fundamental objectives derived from expert interviews were formulated more broadly than were those derived from open sources.

The objectives hierarchy derived from open sources is more comprehensive and contains objectives related to military tactics such as *Shape Battle Field to Gain Advantages* and *Spook their Military Adversaries by Suicidal Attacks* and objectives related to military strategies such as *Attack Foreign Countries from Inside* and *Demonstrate Military Strength and Terroristic Capabilities*. Furthermore, the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources explicitly states the objectives *Radicalize and Align Followers* and *Take over other Islamic Movements*. In contrast, only the objective *Provide Military Leadership and Resources* was not explicitly or implicitly included in the objectives’ hierarchy derived from open sources.
After identifying similarities and differences between the two independently developed objectives hierarchies, the two analysts created a joint objectives hierarchy. The purposes of combining the two hierarchies were twofold: (1) Provide a complete set of objectives and (2) Avoid redundancies. The two analysts first created a complete set of strategic objectives and agreed on appropriate names for strategic objectives that were worded similarly in both sets. They did the same with fundamental and means objectives, and occasionally moved a fundamental objectives to the means objectives (or vice versa) after discussing whether an objectives was truly a fundamental one. Finally, they checked the resulting combined objectives hierarchy for completeness and redundancy (see Figure 3).

The three strategic objectives *Establish Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant, Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide, Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam* from expert interviews are complemented by the strategic objective *Control and Govern Islamic State* indicating ISIL claim for power. The strategic objectives are related to military power and religion. The arrows above the strategic objectives indicate the extent to which they are related to military power and religion.

The two objectives *Convert or Kill Infidels* and *Establish ISIL as a Radical and Rigorous Brand* that were identified as fundamental in the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources are considered as means objectives as suggested in the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews. Since the fundamental objectives derived from expert interviews were broader, we used them in the joint objectives hierarchy. Pursuing an additive approach, all means objectives from both approaches were explicitly (*i.e.* in original wording) or implicitly (*i.e.* implied by another, broader objective) considered with three exceptions.

The objective *Shape Battle Field to Gain Advantages* was based on military tactics destroying dams and bridges and cleansing areas by frightening and killing infidels. The objective *Spook their Military Adversaries by Suicidal Attacks* is also a special reason for killing people. In the objectives
hierarchy derived from open sources, *Convert or Kill Infidels* is recognized as a fundamental objective. Furthermore, *Convert or Kill Infidels* contributes to almost all top-level objectives. Emphasizing its relevance, this crosscutting means objective is assigned to all five fundamental and thereby to all four strategic objectives. Therefore, we did not explicitly consider the military tactics *Shape Battle Field to Gain Advantages* and *Spook their Military Adversaries by Suicidal Attacks* in the joint objectives hierarchy. We considered the objective *Teach the Children the True Islam* to be part of the means objectives *Radicalize and Align Followers* and *Increase the Number of Fighters and Followers*.

The objective *Generate Revenue* is also crucial for achieving most of the top-level objectives. Without financial resources, it is not possible to maintain a strong army, to ensure supplies, to stabilize the economy and offer jobs, to recruit followers, etc. The objective *Generate Revenue* was identified as a crosscutting means objective. The objectives *Attack Foreign Countries from Inside* and *Demonstrate Military Strength and Terroristic Capabilities* both contribute to the objective *Prevent Foreign Countries to Interfere in Iraq and the Levant*. We included the mentioned objective to emphasize this. Emphasizing ISIL claim for power, we included the objective *Be Recognized as Leader of the Islamic State*. 
### 3.2 Objectives of ISIL’s Followers

Using the SME interview transcripts, 176 statements characterizing the objectives of ISIL followers were identified and grouped into 26 categories. The resulting objectives hierarchy is shown in Figure 4. Three strategic objectives were identified: Support Sunni Causes, Recreate the Glory of Islam, and Give Meaning to Own Life. The SMEs mentioned few objectives that could be qualified as fundamental objectives, so the 23 means objectives were assigned directly to the strategic objectives to which they contribute most. For example, Pursue and Defend Sharia Law and Pursue Pure and Strict Islam, were assigned to the strategic objective Recreate the Glory of Islam,
and *Fight Oppression and Discrimination by Shia and West, Have a Better, More Authentic Life, or Feeling Empowerment* were assigned to the strategic objective *Give Meaning to Own Life.*

**Figure 4: ISIL Followers’ Objectives Derived from Expert Interviews.**

Approximately 90 value relevant statements related to followers were identified from open sources and grouped into 49 objectives. The resulting objectives hierarchy is shown in Figure 5. Following the top-down approach, objectives were grouped into *Altruistic Objectives, Religious Objectives,* and *Personal Objectives.* This scheme cannot be applied unambiguously for every objective. However, it does enhance understanding the structure of the identified objectives. In an iterative procedure following an alternately top-down and bottom-up approach, a total of nine fundamental objectives were identified. *Do Something Good* and *Help Sunnis* are altruistic objectives. *Have Spiritual Fulfillment* and *Fight for God* are religious objectives. *Improve Material*
Situation, Improve Self-esteem, Enjoy Brotherhood, Attack Westerners and Jews, and Be Violent are personal objectives. The 49 objectives were assigned to one of the nine fundamental objectives to which they have the closest relation. The objectives assigned to the same fundamental objective have more in common than those assigned to different fundamental objectives. For example, Support the Religion of God Through Jihad and Kill Infidels in Name of God assigned to the fundamental objective Fight for God have more in common than Help in the Humanitarian Crisis, Have an Adventure, or Trample the Idol of Nationalism. The intention was to create a comprehensive set of objectives for covering the broadest range of followers. Therefore, some of the objectives would not be relevant simultaneously for every follower. For example, there might be only a few followers for whom Do Something Good and Be Violent are both relevant. The structure with nine fundamental objectives organized in three groups provides the opportunity to present and clearly arrange a large number of objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Altruistic Objectives</th>
<th>Religious Objectives</th>
<th>Personal Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do Something Good</td>
<td>Help Summits</td>
<td>Have Spiritual Fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End the War in Syria</td>
<td>Prevent Being Suppressed by Shia Iraqi Government</td>
<td>Be God’s Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help in the Humanitarian Crisis</td>
<td>Iraq Governed by Sunnis</td>
<td>Fulfill the Promise of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build, Reform, Remove Oppression</td>
<td>Guard and Treat Sunnis with Respect</td>
<td>Be Blessed by God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spread Justice, and Bring about Safety and Tranquility</td>
<td>Fight for the Sunnis</td>
<td>Be with the Superior Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refuge Humiliation, Subjugation, and Subordination</td>
<td>Free Sunni Cities</td>
<td>Sacrifice Life and Wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stop Slain Violence and Discrimination</td>
<td>Have an Everlasting Hereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevent Sunni Genocide</td>
<td>Be on the Winners side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: ISIL Followers’ Objectives Derived from Open Sources.
On the top-level, the two objectives hierarchies are similar. *Give Meaning to Own Life* corresponds to the group of personal objectives, *Recreate the Glory of Islam* corresponds to the group of religious objectives, and *Support Sunni Causes* corresponds to altruistic objectives. For the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews the relation is 6:5:12 and for the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources, the relation is 2:2:5 for the fundamental and 12:13:24 for the means objectives. Overall, 21 out of 23 means objectives derived from expert interviews are explicitly or implicitly included in the objectives hierarchy derived from the open sources. The exceptions are *Rebellion against Complacent Fathers* and the *Likelihood of Success when Trying to Access and Join ISIL*. Overall, 7 out of 9 fundamental objectives derived from the open sources are explicitly or implicitly included in the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews. The exceptions are *Do Something Good* and *Attack Westerners and Jews*. The objectives hierarchy derived from open sources includes many detailed objectives. In contrast, the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews is characterized by fewer, more aggregated objectives.

The open source search produced many more followers’ objectives than the SME search. The SMEs made very few references to the followers’ objectives related to humanitarian causes (left side of Figure 6) and to personal objectives (right side of Figure 6). Examples of humanitarian objectives obtained from open sources are *End the War in Syria* and *Help in the Humanitarian Crisis*. Examples of personal objectives are to *improve their self-esteem* and *material situation*.

After identifying similarities and differences, the two analysts discussed the objectives of the different levels, selected wording for identical objectives, and finally checked for completeness and redundancy. Three different layers characterize the joint objectives hierarchy illustrated in Figure 6. In the top layer are the strategic objectives *Humanitarian Fulfillment*, *Religious Fulfillment*, and *Personal Fulfillment*. In contrast to the objectives hierarchy derived from open sources, which only
groups the objectives on the highest level, strategic objectives are used as in the objectives hierarchy derived from expert interviews.

In the second layer, there are eleven fundamental objectives. Starting with the more complete set of the nine fundamental objectives derived from open sources we combined the objectives of the two sources. Within the objective contributing to *Humanitarian Fulfillment* we substituted the objective *Do Something Good* with *Support Humanitarian Causes*. Within the objectives contributing to *Religious Fulfillment* the third fundamental objective *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam* was introduced. In contrast to *Have Spiritual Fulfillment* and *Fight for God*, this objective describes what the followers want to achieve substantively. *Have Power* was considered to be a fundamental objective contributing to *Personal Fulfillment*. In the objectives derived from expert interviews, *Power* was part of *Pursuing Masculine Themes*. The objective *Enjoy Brotherhood* was transformed to *Belong to a Brotherhood of Fighters* to emphasize social aspects. The objective *Be Violent* was specified in *Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality*.

**Figure 6: ISIL Followers’ Objectives Based on All Sources.**
3.2 Relationship Between the Objectives of ISIL’s Leaders and its Followers

We analyzed the relationships between the fundamental objectives of ISIL leaders and its followers; separately, we analyzed the relationship between their means objectives. The purpose was to determine which objectives reinforce each other, and perhaps more importantly, which objectives separate the leaders from the followers.

The relations between ISIL leader’s and followers’ fundamental objectives are illustrated in Figure 7. ISIL leaders’ objectives are located on the top and ISIL followers’ objectives at the bottom. The single headed arrow indicates that one objective reinforces the other and a dual headed arrow indicates that both objectives reinforce each other. All ISIL organizational fundamental objectives correspond to at least one fundamental follower objective. In other words, followers pursuing their objectives help ISIL to achieve organizational fundamental objectives. For example, *Fight for God* contributes to *Eliminate Current Rulers in Iraq and Levant* and *Purge the World of Anti-Islamic Forces*. *Support Humanitarian Causes* contributes to *Functions as a State and Provide Services*.

Interestingly, four personal objectives of ISIL’s followers do not directly reinforce the objectives of ISIL’s leaders: *Have Power, Improve Material Situation, Improve Self-esteem, and Belong to a Brotherhood of Fighters*. These objectives are related to personal motivations of followers and ISIL’s Internet campaigns address these follower objectives by showing martial action videos combined with softer, humanitarian images to gain recruits.
To analyze the relationships between the means objectives of ISIL leaders and the fundamental objectives of their followers in more detail it is useful to distinguish three types of follower objectives (See Figure 8). The follower objectives Support Humanitarian Causes, Support Sunni Causes, Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam indicate what followers want to achieve. These objectives are highlighted in orange in Figure 8. The followers’ objectives Fight for God, Attack Westerners and Jews, and Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality indicate what followers want to do (colored in green). The objectives of these two types contribute to ISIL leaders’ objectives. In contrast, the objectives Have Spiritual Fulfillment, Have Power, Improve Material Situation, Improve Self-esteem, and Belong to a Brotherhood of Fighters describe what followers want to get (colored in blue). Instead of contributing to ISIL leaders’ objectives, these help the followers to achieve their personal objectives.
Figure 8: Relationships between the ISIL Leaders’ Means Objectives and Followers’ Fundamental Objectives.

Overall, 20 out of 24 ISIL means objectives can be linked to fundamental follower objectives. The remaining four objectives (colored in light grey) relate directly to the followers (Increase Number of Fighters and Followers, Radicalize and Align Followers, and Take over other Islamic Movements) or military tactics (Secure Supply Lines and Resources).

On the one hand, there are fundamental follower objectives contributing to ISIL organizational means objectives. For example, Attack Westerners and Jews contribute to Attack Foreign Countries from Inside and Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality contributes to Implement the Sharia with the Sword. On the other hand, there are ISIL organizational means objectives contributing to fundamental follower objectives. For example, Generate Revenue contributes to Improve Material
Situation and Be Recognized as the Leader of Jihad or Be recognized as the Leader of the Islamic State contributes to Have Power. While all other fundamental follower objectives are in relation to at least one ISIL organizational means objectives, Belong to a Brotherhood of Fighters is not related to any objective.

This analysis shows that the objectives of ISIL’s leaders and followers are closely connected. All ISIL leaders’ fundamental objectives are reinforced by at least one fundamental follower objective. Furthermore, most means objectives of ISIL leaders are related to fundamental follower objectives. When followers pursue their objectives they help ISIL to achieve its objectives.

Furthermore, this analysis reveals why ISIL is so attractive for very different individuals. In comparison to Al Qaeda whose followers were recruited mostly because they want to Expel Westerners or Destroy Israel ISIL offers a more broad range of causes to join. Independently, which objectives a follower pursues, e.g. Humanitarian Causes, Fight for God, or Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality, he or she have the impression to contribute to ISIL objectives.

5. Summary and Conclusions

In this section we comment first on some substantive lessons learned and second on lessons learned regarding the methodology.

5.1 Objectives of ISIL’s Leaders and Its Followers

ISIL pursues two kinds of strategic objectives. The first kind consists of three objectives specific to ISIL: Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant, Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide, and Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam. A fourth strategic objective of ISIL might be considered generic for such organizations; ISIL has a clear claim to power that is expressed in their fourth strategic objective Control and Govern the Islamic State. This claim to power can also be seen
in three means objectives. ISIL wants to *Derive Legitimacy as Heirs/Descendants of Mohammed* and wants to *Be Recognized as the Leader of the Jihad*. Furthermore, ISIL wants to *Be Recognized as the Leader of the Islamic State*. Therefore, ISIL pursues not only the three strategic objectives of the first kind, but they also want to consolidate or and cement their power. In other words, they want to be the movement “in charge” of achieving these three strategic objectives. Furthermore, they have clear ideas about how they want to achieve their strategic objectives and how their Islamic State should be governed. ISIL wants to *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam* even though most of the moderate Sunnis do not agree with this Version of Islam and the population is not really in favor of such a version of Islam. Therefore, ISIL deprecates collaboration with other less radical Islamic groups and prefer to *Radicalize and Align Followers* and *Take over other Islamic Movements*.

It is an open question whether ISIL is a *religious group* using military power to achieve their objectives or a *military organization* using religion for justification. An answer to that question cannot be derived from our analysis. However, religion and military power are preeminent in the organizational objectives hierarchy of ISIL.

ISIL’s two crosscutting means objectives are (1) *Generate Revenue* and (2) *Convert or Kill Infidels*. Pursuing these objectives promotes achievement of all other ISIL’s strategic, fundamental, and means objectives. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to reduce ISIL’s revenues and capital, *(e.g., destroying oil refineries)*, and to prevent ISIL from committing genocide, *(e.g., empowering minorities with equipment, training, and military support)*. In contrast to other Islamic groups like Hezbollah and Al Qaeda the objective *Attacking Israel* plays only a minor role.

The followers and recruits of ISIL have a complex set of objectives that can be partitioned into three strategic objectives: *Humanitarian Fulfillment, Religious Fulfillment* and *Personal Fulfillment*. This is consistent with many observers’ opinions that potential followers and recruits are “damaged”, “empty”, or “unfulfilled” in a very personal way. Observers, who mainly focus on the
abnormal and vicious aspects of ISIL, often overlook the humanitarian objectives. This may be due to a selection bias and the unwillingness to attribute any “good will” to people who are essentially perceived as evil.

The open-source search produced a much richer picture of the followers’ objectives than the SME transcripts. In particular, the open-source search found many personal fulfillment objectives not explicitly mentioned by the SMEs. Personal fulfillment objectives like Have Power, Improve Self Esteem, and Belong to a Brotherhood are characteristics of people who are disenfranchised and feel discriminated against, and are often marginalized in their own environment. The personal objectives Improve Material Situation and Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality suggest that followers are poor and often have criminal backgrounds. The religious and humanitarian fulfillment objectives provide a romantic rationale for these personal objectives.

One specific means objective is High Likelihood of Success When Trying to Access and Join ISIL. It suggests that joining ISIL is more attractive to followers than, say, joining Al Qaeda or Hezbollah. It is true that followers have relatively easy movement through Turkey, resulting in a simple process for gaining access to and being accepted by ISIL.

The objectives of ISIL and its followers are closely related. All fundamental objectives of the ISIL organization are promoted by at least one fundamental follower objective. Furthermore, most means objectives of the ISIL organization are related to fundamental follower objectives. Followers pursuit of their objectives promotes achievement of objectives important to the ISIL organization. ISIL’s pursuit of their means objectives also promotes achievement of objectives important to ISIL followers. ISIL is more successful in recruiting because they offer for a broad range of causes to join the organization, e.g. Humanitarian Causes, Fight for God, or Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality. Independently of their individual objectives, all followers can support ISIL by pursuing their own objectives. ISIL’s leaders clearly understand and use the objectives of potential recruits in
their videos and Internet campaigns, which are a mix of martial action movies and showcases of law and order and humanitarian efforts under ISIL’s rule. In the analysis of the relationships between the objectives of ISIL’s leaders and followers we identified several disconnects, suggesting that the ISIL organization’s media campaigns cater to followers’ values to attract recruits and are thus nothing more than propaganda, not reflecting any actual objectives of the ISIL organization.

5.2 Methodology

In this study, we used two different sources of data. In the open-source analysis, we used as primary sources the speeches of leaders of ISIL and observations of ISIL’s actions. In the SME analysis, we used secondary sources consisting of the transcripts of interviews with 59 subject-matter experts. At a high-level, these sources led to similar results, but we also identified some differences. For example, in the speeches of ISIL leaders we identified many values that could be translated to strategic objectives. In contrast, these leaders addressed only a subset of the means objectives. In particular, military or follower related objectives were more intensively discussed in the media and in the secondary sources. We conclude that it is important for completeness to use both primary and secondary sources. Since the differences between sources appear primarily in means objectives, it is also important to use observations of and comments on actions and tactics as sources for objectives.

Both the SME analysis and the analysis of open-sources led to relatively complete objectives hierarchies, at least at the top level. An important exception is ISIL’s claim for power, which was identified only in the open source effort. ISIL does not only want to Establish a Caliphate; their leaders want to be in charge. This is an important finding for creating strategies to counter ISIL. At this stage, we can only speculate why the SME’s did not identify ISIL’s claim for power. One explanation could be that the SME may have been caught up in old thought pattern since no previous Islamic terrorist groups have ever articulated a claim for power.
In the process of fusing the two hierarchies we found that the open source analysis identified many more follower objectives than the SME approach. Humanitarian objectives were identified only in the open source analysis. This may have been due to the fact that the SMEs, who clearly had no sympathy for ISIL, considered the humanitarian objectives part of ISIL’s propaganda to attract followers. These differences in the set of follower objectives emphasize the usefulness of identifying objectives using a broad range of sources.

Separating the analysis into two distinct efforts, using different sources and conducting independent analyses proved useful in several respects. The individual identification and structuring of objectives ensures that the decision analysts are responsible for their results and are required to produce a comprehensive list of all relevant objectives. In our study, this context provided motivation to both decision analysts. Furthermore, this procedure mitigates against anchoring effects. The differences between the approaches were meaningful and could be explained and interpreted by the analysts. It was also encouraging to observe that at a high level the two information sources produced convergent results.

Because we used two different sources and analysts to identify and structure objectives, an additional step was required to combine the two objectives hierarchies. Building on this experience, we suggest a four step procedure. In the first step, similarities and differences of objectives and relations among objectives can be identified by enriching one objectives hierarchy with the objectives of the other hierarchy in a purely additive way. This is best done by starting with the strategic objectives, then moving and sorting the fundamental and means objectives. In the second step, the different levels of objectives should be discussed. In this step, strategic objectives seldom change their high-level position. However, occasionally means objectives in one hierarchy are considered fundamental objectives in another one. In this case, the WITI (Why is This Important?) test helps to clarify the appropriate level of the objective. In the third step, the final naming of the
objectives should be developed. For similar objectives with slightly different names, one name is often more meaningful than another. In some cases, a better name can be found that captures the meaning of the objectives from both hierarchies. In the fourth step, analysts should check the combined objectives hierarchy for completeness and non-redundancy.

The two approaches carried out by different analysts using separate data sources reported in this paper yielded quite congruent objectives hierarchies. The process of fusing the two objectives hierarchies revealed not only some missing objectives but also led to greater insight and a final objectives hierarchy that both analysts considered as more complete than the ones developed by the individual analysts and homogeneous information sources. We have demonstrated that it is feasible to identify and structure objectives for a terrorist organization and for its followers. This methodology could easily be applied in other situations in which one is interested in the objectives of an adversary organization, for example a competitor or a negotiation partner.

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Appendix

Illustrating and Describing the Objectives Hierarchy of ISIL’s Leader

Strategic Objectives

Figure 3 shows in the top layer four strategic objectives of ISIL that we derived from expert interviews and open sources. In the following, each strategic objective is discussed in detail and the main sources that helped us identifying and formulating this objective are presented. Two of the strategic objectives are religious and two envision the establishment of political control and military power.

(1) Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam

ISIL pursues the objective to Recreate Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam. Al Adnani emphasized that establishing the Islamic state brings glory to (Sunni) Islam and Muslims. The (Sunni) Islam and Muslims should dominate the world again.

The establishment of an Islamic state [...] brings glory to Islam and Muslims, humiliates unbelief and the unbelievers, and restores the Caliphate so that Islam and Muslims dominate the world once again.

So, the Islamic State has an End of Days ideology as do many jihadist organizations and the caliphate is often seen as sort of a precursor to the [...], this the end of days battle that brings on sort of Armageddon and the ultimate victory for the Muslim world.

I think a lot of Muslims, that’s where the caliphate becomes very important because the caliphate is a symbol of what Muslims once had.

Al Baghdadi wants that a Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honor and is revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved.

Soon, by Allah’s permission, a day will come when the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master, having honor, being revered, with his head raised high and his dignity preserved. Anyone who dares to offend him will be disciplined, and any hand that reaches out to harm him will be cut off.

(2) Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide

ISIL intends to Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide. For example, Al Adnani declared that the jihad is waged under the banner of monotheism. Al Baghdadi wants to humiliate polytheism and polytheists. Thereby, Al Adnani said that they focus on Rome and Al Baghdadi promised their followers that if they precede then they would conquer Rome and own the world.

The banner of monotheism was raised high when jihad was waged. Only a small group of emigrants and supporters of God confronted the most powerful army in history [referring to the US Army], using worn-out munitions with a daring spirit. They were certain that God would grant them victory. They were determined to enact the sharia of God. Their bodies were in Iraq while their souls were in the usurped Mecca [derogatory reference to the reign of the Saudi royal family]. Their hearts were in Jerusalem while their eyes were focused on Rome.
O Allah, dignify Islam and the Muslims and humiliate polytheism and the polytheists, and dignify your mujahideen all over the world. Make their foothold firm and bind their hearts and be a supporter and assistant for them. Make their aim true and their opinion true. Prepare for them good guidance and make Your good assistance to them reinforcement.\textsuperscript{vi}

[Addressing his followers] If you hold to it, you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills.\textsuperscript{vi}

The expansion of (Sunni) Islam is closely related to the expansion of the caliphate. Most subject matter experts have identified ISIL inherent objective to expand their caliphate in order to disseminate monotheism. However, the intended expansion of the caliphate is estimated differently within the subject matter experts ranging from nearby countries like the Lebanon over former Muslim territories to the whole world. The different estimates, especially those regarding a small expansion, might be driven by realistic judgments. However, without any restrictions ISIL would almost certainly want to expand Islam and Sharia law worldwide.

Expansion of those boundaries is also a goal. We are looking at something that has ambitions beyond Iraq and Syria. It is unclear how far they will go. They want to acquire a base from which to operate, and the legitimacy/appeal that results.\textsuperscript{viii}

Establishing an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria is the beginning, not the end, for the group. They are different than AQ, who did not have a political agenda. ISIL is looking to expand. Their slogan is about expanding. It is a core part of the mission. If they could, they would expand globally. They will expand where they can. Lebanon, for example, would form a gateway to the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{x}

They want to recapture the territories of the Muslims. As an academic, I see an identity territory nexus here, in order to fulfill their identities they want to own, or re-own, the territory that in their minds belongs to the Muslims.\textsuperscript{x}

Their objective is to create a caliphate that will include all the Muslim land which is basically anywhere that at any point in history was under Muslim control.\textsuperscript{xi}

So for example, Iraq and Syria it’s just the first step when Al Baghdadi, I think it was at the beginning of Ramadan when he sent out a letter and he said, something to the effect of, he cited all those places in different parts of the world, Pakistan, India, and so on and so forth. If you, the soldiers of IS, are going to be victorious, and you are going to be the true guardian of religion, then we shall conquer Rome and seize the Earth. Not inherit the Earth, seize the Earth.\textsuperscript{xii}

\textbf{(3) Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant}

ISIL does not only pursue their strict version of Islam. They want to Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant as Al Baghdadi stated in August 2014.

In Iraq [sheikhs who preceded us] have completed the journey of highness by declaring the Islamic State of Iraq. As for the Levant, they have created cells that are limited to preparation and supply, waiting for the chance to continue the path of highness that must continue.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Establishing a Caliphate and can be considered as the constitutive element for the group since it is embedded in the name of group. Almost all subject matter experts mentioned this objective. Its relevance for the group is often underlined with qualifiers like for example “main” or “immediate” objective.

Their main objective is an Islamic state. They are engaging in activities that are making that a reality.\textsuperscript{xiv}

I think the immediate goal is to create a caliphate and of course they are taking advantage of the political vacuum that has been created in Iraq and Syria to do so.\textsuperscript{xv}
ISIL followers as well as most Sunnis think that a caliphate is mandatory since a caliphate existed in Iraq over a period of 500 years. Restoring the caliphate is fulfilling a prophecy. Al Adnani went even so far to declare it as sinful for a Muslim not trying to establish a caliphate.

Iraq is known for 500 years the caliph ruled. Many think this is the natural way of things.xvi

They also play on the themes of restoring the caliphate, and fulfilling a prophecy.xvii

Therefore, the shūrā (consultation) council of the Islamic State studied this matter after the Islamic State – by Allah’s grace – gained the essentials necessary for khilāfah, which the Muslims are sinful for if they do not try to establish.xviii

(4) Control and Govern the Islamic State

Achieving the other three strategic objectives Establish a Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant, Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide, and Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam is not enough for the leaders of ISIL. They want to be the movement that achieves these objectives; they want to Control and Govern the Islamic State. For example, Al Adnani stated that ISIL would deter other Islamic groups like Nusayris and Hezbollah.

Iraq and the Levant will remain one arena, one front, one command, and no borders will separate between them! We swear that we will destroy the barrier, we will fill in the ditch, and we will remove the wires and erase the borders from the map and remove them from the hearts! The booby-traps will hit the Rafidahs from Diyala to Beirut. We swear, we will deter the Nusayris and Hezbollah!xix

Furthermore, ISIL leaders personally want to be in charge in the caliphate. Al Baghdadi underpinned his claim to leadership clearly by claiming to be the “caliph”.

ISIL’ desire (and apparent strategy) is to overthrow the existing governments of unstable, heavily Muslim nations and establish their own theocratic state in its place. The leader of this new caliphate would be the leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who claims he’s the “caliph”.xx

The influential leader Al Adnani supported Al Baghdadi’s claim to leadership by demanding that Muslims pledge allegiance to the caliph and support him.

We clarify to the Muslims that with this declaration of khilāfah, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the khilāfah Ibrāhīm and support him.xx

In their own ranks, leaders secure their position by demanding absolute obedience. Al Adnani even went so far that he put disobedience against him on the same level as disobedience against Allah.

Whoever obeys me has obeyed Allah, and whoever disobeys me has disobeyed Allah. Whoever obeys the leader has obeyed me, and whoever disobeys the leader has disobeyed me.xxii

Fundamental Objectives (and means objectives used in their description)

We identified five fundamental objectives of ISIL that are listed in the second layer from the top in Figure 3. The fundamental objectives contribute more or less to all strategic objectives. For arranging the objectives hierarchies more clearly, the fundamental objectives are assigned to the strategic objective they contribute most. Each fundamental objective is discussed in detail and the main sources that helped us identifying and formulating this objective are presented. Furthermore, the means objectives contributing mostly to a fundamental objective are used to provide more insights on the fundamental objectives.

(1) Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam
For achieving the strategic objective *Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam* ISIL needs to pursue the fundamental objective *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam*, in particular. ISIL is the most radical Islamic terrorist group. It proposes a more literalist reading, and more fundamentalist reading and thereby creating an Islam that is pristine in its perception.

These guys are adhering to a more literalist reading, more fundamentalist reading, and they have a much more expansive narrative of grievance and victimhood.\(^{xxiii}\)

So the aim is one of trying to create again a pristine, true Islam as they perceive it to be.\(^{xxiv}\)

ISIL is trying to implement this full, undiluted, harsh, strict vision of Islamic by means of a totalitarian regime in the Islamic State.

Their approach is to kill dissidents and "purify" through a totalitarian regime.\(^{xxv}\)

[They] establish an Islamic state with a full, undiluted, harsh, strict vision of Islamic governance right now.\(^{xxvi}\)

Overall, ISIL pursues five means objectives for achieving the fundamental objective *Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam*. The first deals with the means ISIL intend to use. They want to *Implement the Sharia with the Sword*. Al Adnani said that their objectives cannot "be achieved by means of peaceful calls without fighting or bloodshed".\(^{xxvi}\) God "ordered us to fight His enemies and do jihad in His cause to achieve this and establish the religion."\(^{xxvii}\) Al Baghdadi cited the Koran "So welcome to those who agree with us not to lay down our arms until we implement Allah's Shariah."\(^{xxix}\) ISIL systematically uses cruel actions like mass killings or beheadings to *Radicalize and Align Followers*. Since the other Islamic terrorist groups are not radical enough "they don't want to rely on any other group and they are truly and fully ready to sacrifice themselves to their goal."\(^{xxx}\) ISIL intends to *Takeover other Islamic Movements*. For example, ISIL is suspected to have killed the leaders of a rivalry group in order to take over their weapons and more radical followers.\(^{xxxi}\) Furthermore, there are two objectives concerning how ISIL is perceived. On the one hand, ISIL wants to *Derive Legitimacy as Heirs/Descendants of Mohammed*. "They claim to be better because they derive their superiority over non-Arab Islamic groups form the fact that the Prophet was Arab. The extremists are going back to the idea that the leader should be from the House of Prophets. Unbroken descent by the leader gives more legitimacy. He was a cleric and has a degree in Islamic Studies which adds to his authority."\(^{xxxi}\) On the other hand, ISIL wants to *Be Recognized as the Leader of the Jihad*. SME 3 argued that it is their idea is to try to be recognized by the outside world as the trend setter organization in the Muslim world.\(^{xxxi}\)

(2) *Give Meaning to the Lives of Sunnis*

For achieving the strategic objective *Recreate the Power and Glory of (Sunni) Islam* ISIL needs especially to pursue the fundamental objective *Give Meaning to the Lives of Sunnis*, in particular. In post-invasion Iraq, the Shia majority dominated the government. Whereas, the Sunnis were systematically excluded from power.

Shia government that systematically excluded Sunni Iraqis from power and favored the country's majority Shia population\(^{xxxiv}\)

Maliki's policies convinced a number of Iraqi Sunnis that the Iraqi government would never treat them equally, making ISIL and other Sunni militias seem like a comparatively attractive alternative.\(^{xxv}\)

For many young Sunnis in Iraq and the Levant and in Western countries were discriminated because they are Sunnis. For example, they have difficulties to find a job, but in Iraq and the Levant there is the chance to find meaning in one's life.
If you have an Arabic or a Muslim sounding name and you apply for a job your application is thrown in the garbage right away. They feel there is a serious glass ceiling for them. These people are basically becoming more and more alienated from that system, and therefore, they seek a way out. Now imagine an alternative comes along that can impart new meaning to your life. The right message, the right preacher, the right mosque is there to galvanize this type of opinion. You look at what is going on in Iraq and Syria as a holy cause that you can join and therefore impart some real meaning to what your life is supposed to be.

Young people, who are not necessarily downscale, [...] have trouble finding jobs because they are Muslim.

They have a strong narrative, in that they focus on Sunni pride and restoration. For a lot of idealistic youth, there is a feeling of alienation and disempowerment. This group three years ago took to the street and took down a dictator, and then did it again. Now they cannot participate. Continuing this will further radicalize young men in the region.

You are fighting for the survival of your soul as a Sunni.

Overall, ISIL pursues three means objectives for achieving this fundamental objective. Firstly, ISIL wants to Stop Shia Violence and Discrimination. "In Iraq Shia militias [...] had slaughtered Sunnis during the post-invasion civil war." ISIL fights “against Shia in Syria and Iraq who were persecuting Sunnis.” While fighting Shia Al Baghdadi demanded from their followers to “attend to the Muslims and the tribes of Ahlus-Sunnah (the Sunnis) with goodness.” They should “Stay awake guarding them so they can be safe and at rest.” Secondly, ISIL wants therefore to Guard and Treat Sunnis with Respect. When Saddam was in charge, the Sunni minority ran the government and “they believe they still ought to be the leading power today.” Thirdly, for this objective ISIL wants that Sunnis Govern Iraq again.

(3) Purge the World of Anti-Islamic Forces

For achieving the strategic objective Expand Islam and Sharia Law Worldwide ISIL needs especially to pursue the fundamental objective Purge the World of Anti-Islamic Forces.

They are portraying themselves as purging the world of anti---Islamic forces and instituting a new order that can restore the destiny of the Muslim world.

Overall, ISIL pursues five means objectives for achieving this fundamental objective. ISIL wants to Be a Feared, Authentic, Radical, Brutal, and Rigorous Movement. This objective can be derived from their exhaustive killings. However, ISIL does not only wish to be radical and brutal it wants to be perceived as being so and to Establish ISIL as a Radical and Rigorous Brand. SME 5, 6, and 7 pointed out that ISIL “understood the value of having a brand, something that people could identify with online and on the ground and more so than any other groups.” ISIL sharpens their brand as they try to Demonstrate Military Strength and Terroristic Capabilities. This objective can be derived from observations, for example, propaganda video in the internet in which they show their weapons, hostages, or beheadings. Until this paper was written, ISIL was not able to launch an attack in Western countries. However, based on the efforts of training foreign fighter who will go back to their home countries we can certainly conclude that ISIL want to Attack Foreign Countries from Inside. ISIL uses their ability to attack foreign countries from inside to threaten these countries because ISIL wants to Prevent Foreign Powers to Interfere in Iraq and the Levant.

(4) Function as a State and Provide Services

For achieving the strategic objective Establish a caliphate in Iraq and the Levant ISIL pursues the fundamental objective Function as a State and Provide services, in particular. In contrast to other
Islamic terrorist groups, ISIL already functioned at least in some parts of their controlled territory as a state.

Their videos show [...] their ability to provide services and function as a state.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

The main difference is they are a state. They control territory. There is a governance structure that is delivering some level of services.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

ISIL created a kind of government structure and is actually delivering some forms of services.

Well not ministries but you know what I mean as in there’s a government structure, that is that is actually delivering some form of services.\textsuperscript{xlviii}

ISIL has been more successful than AQ in restoring some semblance of govt.\textsuperscript{li}

Overall, ISIL pursues four means objectives contribute for achieving this objective. Three objectives are dealing with functions of a state. “Both for the Kurds and the Sunnis, Maliki [President of Iraq] provided no services at all.”\textsuperscript{lii} Therefore, ISIL wants to Improve Services in Occupied Territories to “gain popular support.”\textsuperscript{liii} In their video, “they show people getting food, medical treatment, etc.”\textsuperscript{liii} SME 11 noted that ISIL is successful in pursuing this objective. “They have managed to bring a semblance of peace in terms of normal criminality and basic services.”\textsuperscript{lix} For the same reason ISIL is trying to Provide Internal Security, Semblance of Order. SME 10 pointed out that ISIL brings their idea of “justice and order to the territories that they are identified with.”\textsuperscript{liiv} “ISIL has been able to restore some normality to daily life, which allows people to overlook some of the brutality. ISIL is delivering a form of security.”\textsuperscript{liv} Middle East expert Neumann pointed out that in the city of ar-raqqa in eastern Syria ISIL even has established an ISIL-police, an ISIL-consumer protection, and an ISIL-court.\textsuperscript{lv} Furthermore, ISIL intends to Stabilize Economy and Offer Jobs. This is the basis for generating profits. “Controlling the local economy and smuggling, plus taking over oil fields all provide funding.”\textsuperscript{lv} Corruption remained as problem after the invasion in Iraq. ISIL wants to Fight Decadency and Corruption. “Their view is decadence and ‘agents of the west’, along with corruption of religion by minorities is to blame.”\textsuperscript{lxv}

(5) Eliminate the Current Rulers in Iraq and the Levant

The strategic objective Control and Govern the Islamic State ISIL requires to first Eliminate the Current Rulers in Iraq and the Levant.

They don't want to be ruled under anyone, meaning neither of external power nor an ethnic group like occurred in Iraq.\textsuperscript{lx}

Their principal agenda is replace rulers in the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{lxii}

Their strategic objective from where we are standing is to challenge the legitimacy of governments and nation--states in the region.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

And the only way that they could establish past Islamic glory is to overthrow the existing old and establish a new government.\textsuperscript{lxiv}

Overall, seven means objectives contribute that ISIL achieves this objective. The first objective is broadly formulated and includes that ISIL Occupy, Defend, and Expand Territory. Middle East expert Knights cited the Institute for the Study of War that noted that “ISIL’s overall strategy of consolidating and expanding its caliphate.” SME 2 pointed that ISIL want to control “a large part of the territory”\textsuperscript{lxv} and SME 10 said that ISIL “want to recapture territories that belong to the Muslims.”\textsuperscript{lxvi} Two means objectives are dealing with ISIL “ferocious fighting ability.”\textsuperscript{lxvii} On the one hand, ISIL wants to Have the Ability to Fight like a Modern Army. Knight cited analysts who have noted, “ISIL has developed a highly-motivated cadre of quality light infantry forces since 2012,
drawing on the combat experiences of urban and mobile warfare in Syria, as well as from the prior combat experiences of foreign jihadists who served in the Balkans and Chechnya. Journalist Beauchamp concluded that ISIL “can fight like a modern military.” On the other hand, ISIL wants to Have the Ability to Fight like a Terroristic Underground Army. Knight observed that ISIL “when seeking to panic and dislodge enemy troops, ISIL almost always begins its local offensives with one or more mass casualty attacks on enemy headquarters and checkpoints.” Three means objectives lay the foundation for military actions. Firstly, ISIL wants to Secure Supply Lines and Resources. Secondly, ISIL wants to Increase Numbers of Fighters and Followers. Thirdly, ISIL wants to Provide Military Leadership and Resources. The seventh objectives deal with ISIL claim to power. ISIL wants to Be Recognized as the Leader of the Islamic State. These people see themselves on the same level, if not broader, you know, they claim to represent entire Sunni population.

Crosscutting Means Objectives

ISIL has two crosscutting means objectives that contribute to almost all fundamental and strategic objectives as well as most means objectives.

The first crosscutting means objective is to Convert or Kill Infidels. This objective seems to be constitutive for ISIL and their distinguishing mark to other not so radical Islamic movements. Journalist Beauchamp pointed out “they were kicked out of al-Qaeda in February 2014 because they ignored repeated warning to stop killing civilians, however, considers the life of those infidels as worthless. Al Baghdadi emphasized “And remember, if a thousand disbelievers were to survive mistakenly, is more beloved to us than killing a Muslim mistakenly”. Furthermore, he pointed out that they “will not stop until we quench our thirst for your blood”. ISIL uses killing strategically “to spook their military adversaries and drive out civilian population.” Knights went even so far to argue that ISIL has “prosecuted a determined campaign of ethno-sectarian cleansing in areas that it controls, removing Shi’a Turkmen, Yazidis, Shabaks, Christians and even Sunni Muslim Kurds from its new territories.” In their controlled territories, they let the choice either to convert to their strict version of Islam or to die.

The list of such potential subjects of idolatrous worship, which al-Wahhab condemned as idolatry, was so extensive that almost all Muslims were at risk of falling under his definition of “unbelievers.” They therefore faced a choice: Either they convert to al-Wahhab’s vision of Islam -- or be killed, and their wives, their children and physical property taken as the spoils of jihad. Even to express doubts about this doctrine, al-Wahhab said, should occasion execution.

Journalist Masi reported that ISIL killed thousands ISIL calls infidels. For example, “Islamic State killed 700 members of the al-Sheitaat tribe in eastern Syria on Saturday.”

The second crosscutting means objective is to Generate Profit. Money is decisive for ISIL since it allows to “provide better pay [and] better access to weaponry.” SME 8 pointed out that beside the idealistic part “there really is an economic greed part.” ISIL was strategically “taking parts of the country that could generate profit.”

They highlight the way in which they control resources and businesses, and that ranges from selling oil, controlling oil refineries, through to the trade in artifacts across the border in Turkey.

Some is from the Saudis and Qatari but it is a self-sustaining movement, controlling the local economy and smuggling, plus taking over oil fields all provide funding.
But the taggers---on are more driven by the economic components. This has been under---examined. The political economy is critical. You need to look at what opportunities are there for ISIL to survive and make a lot of money off of a dismembered or weakened state. Revivals of smuggling networks, inability to control borders, taking advantage of resources etc. all play a role.\textsuperscript{lxxxvi}

Furthermore, ISIL had "physical property taken as the spoils of jihad"\textsuperscript{lxxxvi}, \textit{i.e.} they enriched themselves.

\textbf{Illustrating and Describing the ISIL Followers` Objectives Hierarchy}

There are three strategic followers` objectives: \textit{Humanitarian Fulfillment}, \textit{Religious Fulfillment} and \textit{Personal Fulfillment}.

The first strategic objective is \textit{Humanitarian Fulfillment}. Especially, at the beginning in 2012 and 2013 there were recruits who pursued altruistic objectives.\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} Some of them wanted to \textit{Support Humanitarian Causes}, for example, \textit{End the War in Syria},\textsuperscript{lxxxix} \textit{Help in the Humanitarian Crisis},\textsuperscript{xc} or \textit{Build, Reform, Remove Oppression, Spread Justice, and Bring about Safety and Tranquility}.\textsuperscript{xci} Other recruits want to \textit{Support particular Sunni Causes} in for example \textit{Fight Oppression and Discrimination by Shia and West} or \textit{Re-establish Sunni Power and Place in History}.

The second strategic objective is \textit{Religious Fulfillment}. The three fundamental objectives related to this strategic objective cover a broad range. ISIL followers seek to \textit{Have Spiritual Fulfillment}, \textit{Implement a Pure and Strict Version of Islam, Fight for God}. Spiritual Fulfillment can be achieved by three means. Al Baghdadi requested from their followers to \textit{Sacrifice Life and Wealth}.\textsuperscript{xcii} The followers want to \textit{Become a Warrior of God, Martyr}.\textsuperscript{xciii} The two for mentioned objectives are for most of the followers` means to \textit{Have an Everlasting Hereafter}.\textsuperscript{xcv} A Pure and Strict Version of Islam can be achieved by three means. Al Baghdadi pointed out that their followers want to \textit{Pursue and Defend Sharia Law}.\textsuperscript{xcv} Nevertheless, others should not only pursue Sharia law, there are followers who joined ISIL to \textit{Execute ones Hardcore Ideology}.\textsuperscript{xcvii} An ideology of “superiority” is seen as one of the causes for a surge in foreign fighters.\textsuperscript{xcvii} These followers want to \textit{Demonstrate Superiority of their Religion}. There are also followers who want to \textit{Fight for God}, they want to \textit{Kill Infidels in Name of God}.\textsuperscript{xcvii} Al Baghdadi requested them to \textit{Support the Religion of God through Jihad} and they want to \textit{Defend the Caliphate}.

The third strategic objective is \textit{Personal Fulfillment} that encompasses six fundamental objectives. Four of them, \textit{Have Power, Improve Material Situation, Improve Self-esteem, and Belong to a Brotherhood} [respectively social group] and \textit{Have an Adventure} are broadly accepted and relevant for most individuals. However, ISIL followers try to achieve these objectives with means most individuals would certainly not accept. In contrast to the first four objectives, most individuals reject the remaining two objectives \textit{Attack Westerners and Jews} as well as \textit{Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality}.

Most of the followers felt in their earlier life helpless and humiliated.\textsuperscript{c} Therefore, they want to \textit{Have Power}. ISIL is perceived as a strong group by many followers\textsuperscript{c} and these followers are interested to \textit{Have a Powerful Position in a Powerful Organization}.\textsuperscript{cs} In their fights or while tyrannizing the population ISIL follower may experience the ultimate form of power, they \textit{Have the Power to Decide about Life and Death}.\textsuperscript{cs} Furthermore, for young individuals joining ISIL this is a way to escape from parental control. They want to \textit{Emancipate from Complacent Fathers}.\textsuperscript{civ}

Many followers were unemployed and did not see any perspectives in life. They were joining ISIL because they wanted to \textit{Improve} [their] \textit{Material Situation}.\textsuperscript{cv} Joining ISIL gives them the
opportunity to *Start Life Over and Have a Better more Authentic Life*.\(^{ci}\) Most people want to get rich and work honestly and hard to achieve this objective. In contrast, some ISIL followers behave like soldiers of fortune and accept harming other people to get rich. They want to *Get Rich by Plundering*.\(^{cvi}\) The third means objective that contributes to *Improve Material Situation* is to *Be on the Winners Side*. Al Baghdadi proclaimed, "That the believer will always win at the end".\(^{cvii}\) Feeling to be on the winners side is highly attractive, "who does not want to be on the winning team?"\(^{cix}\)

Most of the followers had not been successful in their earlier life, had been discriminated because being a Sunni and did not have a strong self-esteem. Therefore, they want to *Improve their Self-esteem*. ISIL offers the *Opportunity to Become a Hero*. Followers can be "rock stars in their own community".\(^{cx}\) Within ISIL, followers can *Be Part of an Elite Contributing to Something Important*. ISIL promised their followers that in thousand years they people would still talk about and admire them.\(^{cxi}\) Furthermore, ISIL followers want to *Live as a Muslim, Honorable with Might and Freedom*.\(^{cxii}\)

Many followers were outsiders in their earlier lives. ISIL offers them the opportunity to *Belong to a Brotherhood of Fighters*. Individuals join ISIL to *Be Part of and Accepted by the Group* or because they *Do not [want to] Stab ISIL Soldiers in the Back by not Joining of Leaving Them (Friendship Effect)*.\(^{cxiv}\) Others join because they want to *Enjoy Blessings of Brotherhood and Have an Adventure*.\(^{cxv}\) There are followers who blame the West or the Jews for their personal situation of the situation of Sunnis. They pursue the objective to *Attack Westerners and Jews*. For example, Al Baghdadi incited their followers to "stand up and rise [...] against the treacherous rulers – the agents of the crusaders and the atheists, and the guards of the Jews",\(^{cxvii}\) The followers want to *Be in a Direct Confrontation with Americans, Westerners, and Jews* and to *Take Revenge*.\(^{cviii}\) Furthermore, they want to *Trample the Idol of Nationalism and Destroy the Idol of Democracy*.\(^{cix}\) For some followers violence is an end in itself. For them ISIL offers the opportunity to *Pursue Sanctioned Violence and Brutality*.\(^{cx}\) For these followers it is important to *Be Part of a Feared, Authentic, Radical, Brutal, and Rigorous Movement*.\(^{cxv}\) Furthermore, they want to *Live the Life of an Outlaw (Killing, Raping, Plundering)*.\(^{cxc}\)

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\(^{i}\) Al Adnani, A. M. January 07, 2014. https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_43/content/Display/TRN2014041833830660#index=11&searchKey=16416945&rpp=100.
\(^{ii}\) SME 18.
\(^{iii}\) SMEs 15 and 16.
\(^{viii}\) SMEs 15 and 16.
\(^{ix}\) SMEs 12 and 13.
\(^{x}\) SME 10.


SMEs 10, 12, and 13.