

## Research Article

## Open Access

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# Bringing the transnational into ‘new wars’: the case of islamic state

DOI 10.1515/irsr-2015-0018

Received: November 25, 2014; Accepted: January 21, 2015

**Abstract:** In her seminal 1998 work on ‘new wars’ Mary Kaldor developed a heuristic framework usefully for understanding the characteristics of armed non-state groups involved in contemporary conflicts. This framework was derived from analysing the 1992-1995 Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict. Some two decades after this however, adjustments may now be necessary. A focussed examination of the strategy used during 2014 by Islamic State Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) reveals Kaldor’s framework may now need to include a more explicit focus on the transnational. Since the mid-1990s, the transnational has been made more accessible by advances in social media in particular, and by globalization more generally. ISIS’s use of the transnational indicates this may be an area that astute non-state actors can advantageously exploit - perhaps better than states - although there are some difficulties involved. ISIS’s success suggests that the transnational may in time have greater influence on the politics of international society.

**Keywords:** new wars, armed non-state groups, transnational networks, ISIS, social media, legitimacy.

By November 2014, the armed non-state group Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) had gained control of a substantial portion of the territory from north of Aleppo to south of Baghdad, and which included the major cities of Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. As a result of a victorious military campaign ISIS’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, now ruled a newly created self-declared caliphate called *The Islamic State* within which more than six million people lived. To achieve this, ISIS transformed itself from a small, marginalised terrorist group into an effective

combined arms land force able to defeat Syrian and Iraqi government armed forces and several other armed non-state actors. Such an achievement is unparalleled in modern times (Barrett, 2014: 58) and makes the group the most successful contemporary armed non-state actor in the waging of what Mary Kaldor terms ‘new wars’.

Kaldor’s ‘new war’ construct was originally developed based on her analysis of the 1992-1995 Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict that argued that a novel, different form of war was emerging (Kaldor, 2012). While some dispute her ‘new wars’ idea, the concept continues to stimulate interest and remains a heuristically useful framework for examining contemporary conflicts (Latham & Christenson, 2013: 767-769).

Kaldor considers that the four principal characteristics of new wars related to the type of actors involved, their goals, the methods employed and how the wars were financed (Kaldor, 2013: 2-3). These four particular aspects though, apply as much to the actors involved as to classifying the overall conflict. They can usefully illuminate the characteristics of ‘new war’ combatants.

This article uses Kaldor’s four principal characteristics as the basis for a focussed examination of ISIS in November 2014, after its initial period of rapid territorial expansion. Kaldor though implicitly considers ‘new wars’ from the perspective of the state and contrasts non-state actors against this form of entity. This article instead explicitly places an armed non-state actor at the centre of the discussion. So doing allows determining whether Kaldor’s four principal characteristics are present in a contemporary armed non-state group and if additional factors now need inclusion. Kaldor derived the four characteristics from studying a conflict that occurred some two decades ago; some adjustment in light of present circumstances may be necessary.

The article determines there might be a need for the transnational to be added to the four characteristics. The use of the transnational by armed non-state actors has been progressively enhanced as globalisation has steadily deepened but this steady process has markedly accelerated recently with the rapid development of social media. As

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the article discusses, ISIS's strategic use of social media to build legitimacy and create a transnational imagined community is particularly striking and innovative. Other non-state actors waging similar 'new wars' may learn from ISIS's success in this area and adopt its practices, suggesting the transnational may progressively gain greater influence on the politics of the international system.

The article however, examines only a single case study that is inherently unique, even if it does encompass a complex range of issues. Any conclusions reached are accordingly best tentative and in need of further substantiation. Moreover, the article in so focussing on one specific aspect may overlook whether other new characteristics are also necessary to add to Kaldor's four. The article also does not critically review the 'new war' idea but rather uses the construct as a starting point for discussion.

## ISIS through the New War Lens

The origins of ISIS can be traced back to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian of the majority Sunni branch of the Islamic faith. Al-Zarqawi joined al-Qaeda while fighting in the Afghanistan War and, on return to Jordan, formed a terrorist group intending to overthrow its government. With the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, al-Zarqawi purposefully transformed his group into al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). AQI focused on inciting sectarian violence in Iraq, frequently attacking Shia Muslim mosques and religious gatherings; the group developed a reputation for well-organized multiple suicide attacks, the use of foreign fighters and well-publicized brutality including beheadings. After al-Zarqawi's death in a US air strike in 2006, the group's name changed to the Islamic State of Iraq becoming ISIS in April 2013. Across the decade, the group proved able to exploit Sunni grievances to gain active support for its agenda. While focused coalition Special Forces attacks proved damaging, it was only when Sunni groups turned against the armed non-state actor during the 2006-8 'tribal awakening' that it significantly declined.

ISIS today is a well-organized armed non-state group with a centralized command and control system where talented deliberate planners devise long-term campaign plans for implementation in a decentralized manner by experienced regional commanders depending on the local conditions. Jessica Lewis writes ISIS is 'typified by its operational planning, as opposed to a disrupted and leader-centric terrorist organization' (Lewis, 2013: 8). In this, the group has two distinct functions: first to expand

and defend ISIS territory through military means and second to govern and administer that territory and its population.

ISIS's military forces are comparatively small. General James Austin, Commander U.S. Central Command, estimates that the group probably only has some 9,000-17,000 committed fighters (Marrapodi, 2014). Accordingly, the group often seeks tactical success through using deception to confuse defenders, rapid mobility to quickly mass and achieve local superiority in numbers, and aggressive raiding by small formations (Knights, 2014: 3). ISIS now occasionally uses captured Iraqi tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery for combined arms assaults. Generally though, the group employs car bombs and suicide attacks to panic defenders before a mass assault that aims to quickly overwhelm through shock action. These mobile strike elements are small, numbering perhaps some 3,000 fighters, with the remaining ISIS manpower used mainly for defensive operations (Knights, 2014: 7).

ISIS's governance structure is hierarchical, multifaceted and comprehensive with a core leadership group, a Shura Council religious advisory body, 24 governors and various subordinate councils including military, security and intelligence, religious affairs, finance and media. This structure is then mirrored at each of the lower-level provincial, district and town levels (Barrett, 2014: 29-34). ISIS divides governance into administrative (religious education and enforcement, courts and punishment) and services (humanitarian aid, essential food supplies such as bakeries and key infrastructure such as power and water) (Caris & Reynolds, 2014: 4). In the early stages of governing an area, the focus is on religious administrative matters and quietly eliminating opposition, a process originally used to rebuild its influence in Iraqi's Sunni areas and counter the impact of the 'tribal awakening.'

In Kaldor's new war's framework the actors involved are various combinations of state and non-state actors not just the regular armed forces of states (Kaldor, 2013: 2). ISIS operates in a sea of dissimilar state and non-state actors. Opposing ISIS, is an impressively large array of regional and extra-regional states together with numerous non-state actors including militias, rebel insurgent groups and competing terrorist organisations. ISIS itself though is adept at absorbing the members of other existing non-state armed groups into its organisation, attracting foreigners to its ranks, and receiving pledges of allegiance from external Islamic Jihadist groups. ISIS has also been able to become significantly more effective militarily through forming loose, shifting alliances of convenience

with several large Sunni non-state armed groups including some led by former Ba'athists and others by Sufi followers of Islam fighting for Iraqi nationalist ideals (Stanford, 2014). Aymenn al-Tamimi considers though that the longer such aligned groups 'put off breaking with [ISIS], the more difficult it will become' (Knights, 2014: 5-6).

Central to the new wars framework is the idea that the goal of such wars is identity politics, defined as 'the claim to power on the basis of a particular identity....' (Kaldor, 2012: 7). ISIS stakes its claim to power on a particular religious identity loosely derived from the Salifist teachings of the Sunni writer Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, perhaps the most influential Jihadist ideologue alive today (Barrett, 2014: 11) (McCants, 2006: 8). ISIS taps into Maqdisi's Salifist Jihadist's notion that Muslims should return to the simplicity and unity of early Islam and blends with it a hardline takfirism that considers those who oppose Islamic rule are either apostates or infidels and must be eradicated. Accordingly, ISIS takes a literal reading of the *Quran* and holds that any deviations are blasphemous and must be purged, including the minority Shia branch of Islam and all existing governments of Muslim countries (Barrett, 2014: 5,18). Through establishing a community of believers who practice Islam in its purist form, ISIS considers it will be able to restore the caliphate of the earlier Muslim golden age in accordance with God's wishes. This particular position defines ISIS's identity, drives its behaviour and informs the group's actions.

ISIS's mode of warfare reflects this. With the collapse of the Syrian state and failing Iraqi governance, ISIS has occupied large areas with relatively little fighting through exploiting the support of Sunni inhabitants. In having gained this territory, as Kaldor sees being characteristic of new wars, ISIS's 'aim is [then] to control the population by getting rid of everyone of a different identity (and indeed of a different opinion) and by instilling terror' (Kaldor, 2012: 9). ISIS actively works to drive out those who do not wish to embrace the Salafist, takfiri Sunni identity. A determined campaign of sectarian cleansing is undertaken to remove Shia, Yazidis, Shabaks, Christians, dissenting Sunnis and any others holding unacceptable views from its new territories. Non-Muslim and heretical communities are initially warned to leave, then strategically targeted with steadily escalating violence including large-scale kidnapping and murder sprees, and car bombings that intensify over a two to three week period (Knights, 2014: 4). ISIS also cuts off water and power supplies to such groups to further encourage their displacement. Importantly, this is not necessarily ethnic cleansing as even non-Arabs can remain or indeed immigrate to ISIS areas, they simply need to embrace the desired religious identity and become part

of a community of believers. As Caris and Reynolds note 'ISIS maintains social control by eliminating resistance....' (Caris & Reynolds, 2014: 4-5) .

Kaldor argues that in 'new wars', fighting units finance themselves through plunder, the black market and external assistance; war sustains war as 'a war logic is built into the functioning of the economy' (Kaldor, 2012: 10). ISIS has been particularly successful in this, being considered 'the best-funded terrorist organization [the US] has confronted' (Johnson & Trindle, 2014). Unlike many such groups however, less than five percent of its revenues comes from external donors with most instead derived from local criminal activities (Cohen, 2014). ISIS's revenue comes from oil sold on the black market, taxes, special road tolls, the sale of captured equipment, the operation of stolen factories, selling antiquities and various traditional criminal activities including kidnapping, looting, smuggling, extortion and protection rackets (Barrett, 2014: 10). In this, ISIS's revenue raising is deeply intertwined with those it is fighting. Oil has been sold to the Syrian state and through the Kurdish black market to Turkey; Iraq has purchased grain as ISIS controls some 40% of the country's annual wheat production (Lannin, 2014). ISIS's ongoing expulsion of non-believers further allows the ransacking of entire towns and suburbs previously occupied by Shia, Christians, Yazidis and others deemed unacceptable (Barrett, 2014: 46).

Considering finance though highlights an area where Kaldor's four characteristics may be insufficient. Kaldor drawing on the 1992 Bosnian War considered that globalisation was of most importance from an armed non-state actor perspective in terms of financing their activities (Kaldor, 2012: 94-118). The ISIS case though suggests other ways how contemporary globalization two decades later can be exploited by armed non-state actors. In this regard, ISIS's use of the Internet's modern forms of social media is particularly innovative, important and requiring of deeper consideration.

## ISIS's Use of Social Media

ISIS has made unprecedented use of social media to advance its cause, integrating this with its broader political, military and governance strategies (AlTamimi, 2014). Robert Hannigan, the head of the UK's GCHQ communications intelligence agency, sees this as quite unlike earlier uses of the internet by older terrorist groups that simply 'saw the internet as a place to disseminate material anonymously or meet in "dark spaces".... [In contrast] ISIS has embraced the web as a noisy channel in which to promote itself,

intimidate people, and radicalise new recruits' (Hannigan, 2014). Al Qaeda for example has a web presence on social media but uses mainly older platforms like websites and forums. ISIS is quite different in actively exploiting the newest forms of social media (Ryan, 2014). In this, ISIS is not simply pushing out information, instead there is a distinct well-funded, well-considered strategy at play. ISIS's use of the name Islamic State for its new territory exemplifies this sophistication in defining its identity, delineating its audience and making a claim to be a certain form of entity encapsulating specific qualities.

ISIS uses its centralized direction and decentralized execution approach to manage its social media information strategy. The high-level media council, believed led by Syrian Abu Amr al-Shami, manages the group's official statements and its social media presence (Barrett, 2014: 52-53). ISIS spokesperson Abu Bakr al-Janabi notes that the geographically dispersed media department produces distinctly different categories of information:

the ISIS official media account, which publishes all its video releases, ISIS province accounts, which publish live feed info and pictures, the ISIS mujahideen accounts, where fighters talk about their experience and daily life, and ISIS supporters, who counter Western, Shia, and tyrants' propaganda and lies (Powell, 2014).

ISIS's media outputs are provided in multiple languages and distributed to carefully selected timings and schedules that aim to take advantage of global media outlets and their news deadlines. A wide variety of social media platforms are used including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Diaspora, internet memes and YouTube accounts. ISIS's output is generally of a professional standard approaching that of mainstream media outlets and often uses techniques common to Hollywood movies, reality TV shows and MTV music videos to capture, engage and hold its audience (Rose, 2014).

The dissemination of the centrally developed and controlled material is outsourced to its supporters and shows considerable understanding of the technologies involved. The decentralised nature of modern forms of social media now allows each supporter to easily and seamlessly on-forward ISIS material received to numerous others. Richard Barrett notes:

the Islamic State is crowd sourcing its propaganda. There is no precedent for this, given the novelty of social media platforms and file sharing sites, and so, in a counterintuitive move, The Islamic State has maximized control of its message by giving up control of its delivery (Barrett, 2014: 51).

To assist this, an Android App called *Dawn of Glad Tidings* was developed by a Palestinian affiliate in consultation with ISIS leaders in Iraq and Syria (Kingsley, 2014). Launched in April 2014 and available on the Google Play store for several months, the App allowed users to sign up after which a stream of links selected by ISIS's centralised social media department would be posted to the user's account in a manner that evaded detection and countering by antispy algorithms (Powell, 2014). These posts including hashtags, hyperlinks, images, videos and other content that would then be re-tweeted globally; almost 40,000 tweets were automatically posted each day and timed to support the ISIS advance on Mosul during early June 2014 (Miranda) (Hannigan, 2014). Many of these retweets, according to a web-based data mining software, apparently originated in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries (Irshaid, 2014).

ISIS addresses two distinctly different audiences: its friends and everybody else. For its friends, ISIS shows life within the Islamic Caliphate as idyllic, stable, prosperous and welcoming (Lewis, 2014: 12). Typical of this genre, a video released in August 2014 to mark Eid al-Fitr, an important Islamic holiday, targeted non-Arabic speakers and included interviews with ISIS foreign fighters from the US, Europe and South East Asia alternating with apposite images of peaceful street life and children playing. The *Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah* video posted to Twitter and on YouTube included Briton Abu Abdullah al-Habashi observing 'I don't think there's anything better than living in the land of khilafah.... We don't need any democracy, we don't need any communism or anything like that, all we need is sharia' (Rose, 2014). An American, Abu Abdurahman al-Trinidad, explains 'You have to be here to understand what I'm saying. If you stand away you will not understand.' The video article ends wistfully: 'I wish you were here' (Fields, 2014).

For those who do not adhere to ISIS's identity the image is the polar opposite. Videos extolling extreme violence are produced showing beheadings, mass killings, gun battles, executions and numerous dead bodies. This ISIS media genre aims to create widespread fear through stressing ISIS's savagery and inhumanity (Eisenstadt, 2014: 4). The well-known ISIS long video *Flames of War* includes gruesome images and florid narration: 'The heavy shelling let out thunderous roars that cast fear into the hearts of the enemy, and left them breathing the thick fumes of death...' (Rose, 2014). Such media releases make ISIS appear much larger than it really is, minimize the role other aligned groups play and support its military campaign by disheartening defenders. Iraqi ISIS supporter Abu Bakr al-Janabi claims such media is 'ISIS saying to

them (those opposing ISIS): look what will happen to you if you cross our path. And it actually worked: a lot of soldiers deserted once they saw the black banners of ISIS' (Kingsley, 2014).

ISIS's media strategy accordingly has a very practical aim: building the armed non-state actor's material and non-material power. The group's aim is to create a territorially-based caliphate with a very specific religious identity that is engaged in a long-lasting war to expand its frontiers. As part of gaining the power necessary to achieve this vision, ISIS is purposefully using its social media campaign to build supportive transnational links. ISIS has proven effective in doing this in two specific areas: building its legitimacy among a specific global audience and inducing foreign fighters to its cause.

## Building Transnational Legitimacy

Legitimacy is an important asset for non-state actors (and states) in allowing them to gain the effective support, or at least the acquiescence of, those local and international actors important in terms of the extraction and mobilization of the manpower, money and material needed to implement a strategy. The legitimation of a strategy should ideally be such that it not only encourages active support: 'but also stigmatizes free-riding as evil or treasonous.....' (Christensen, 1996: 20).

Legitimacy is fundamentally different to material forms of power in being relational, primarily ideational, intersubjective and social (Reus-Smit, 2004: 43). It is a quality that others grant and is thus 'inherently social, in the sense of involving interaction, communication, and accommodation' (Reus-Smit, 2007: 171-172). The correlation between the audience and the policy is crucial; Chris Reus-Smit continues:

Where one needs legitimacy will depend, therefore, upon where one seeks to act, and the relevant constituency will be determined by that realm of political action.... 'the social constituency of legitimation', the actual social grouping in which legitimacy is sought, ordained, or both. ...The crucial thing is that for an actor to attain a comprehensive legitimacy dividend, its realm of political action (which itself may be geographic or sectoral) and its social constituency of legitimation need to be coextensive, or at least approximate one another (Reus-Smit, 2007: 164).

There are some important issues though in this and in particular in 'the social constituency of legitimation.' The social constituency that ISIS has chosen to build legitimacy amongst is that of the Muslim public sphere, and specifically the Sunni subset of it. Opinion polls appear to indicate that some of the concepts ISIS has

selected to advocate have significance for many Sunnis. Many of those polled support Islam having a major role in politics, that their country's laws should follow the values and principles of Islam, and that their Muslim identity is more important than their national identity (Pew, 2013: 46-72; Pew, 2011). Moreover, some Sunnis further broadly support the idea of founding a caliphate, seeing this as a region where Muslims are united and enjoy security, stability and justice (Wahid, 2008; WorldPublicOpinion.org, 2007: 15-16). It is perhaps not surprising then that an informal social media poll indicated 92% of Saudis considered ISIS conformed with Islamic values (Al-Hayat, 2014). As Shadi Hamid writes:

ISIS draws on, and draws strength from, ideas that have broad resonance among Muslim majority populations. They may not agree with ISIS's interpretation of the caliphate, but the notion of a caliphate—the historical political entity governed by Islamic law and tradition—is a powerful one, even among more secular minded Muslims (Hamid, 2014).

Crucially, it is important to note the overwhelming majority of Muslims strongly oppose violent extremism and most terrorist groups (Pew, 2014). Some of the strategic objectives ISIS has selected may have broad popular appeal but the means they have adopted to achieve these are much less attractive. It is in this later area that ISIS as an organisation appears to focus its attempts to build legitimacy within its chosen social constituency.

Democratic states can claim input legitimacy but authoritarian actors like ISIS without any similar participatory process must rely on claiming output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999: 6). Seeking output legitimacy requires claiming the organisation's action is in accordance with extant social rules, the actor involved is built on core principles justifiable by these social rules, the actor has suitable expertise, the actions are demonstrably effective in addressing the issue and that the reasons for claiming legitimacy are persuasive (Hurrell, 2005).

ISIS's focussed social media campaign seeks to address these various aspects. The group claims to be acting in accordance with the *Quran*, or at least its literal reading of it. This claim is made and rigorously supported even if against mainstream contemporary social norms. In the English-language October 2014 *Dabiq* e-zine references to Islamic texts are made to justify the plunder of property owned by individuals who did not support ISIS (Barrett, 2014: 43). The same edition explains the enslaving of some 5,000-7,000 women and girls as a revival of an old custom justified under Shariah (Semple, 2014).

Similarly, ISIS claims its organization is built on and reflects particular social rules advocated by Salafist

Jihadist thinkers and believers in takfirism. ISIS's social media stresses it is fighting a jihad to advance the blend of these particular beliefs. In this, claims are made that others acknowledge ISIS's claim to such religious legitimacy. On 4 July 2014, during Friday prayers at the Grand Mosque of al-Nuri in newly captured Mosul, ISIS's leader Abu Bakr declared he had reluctantly accepted the title of Caliph at the behest of the community of Islamic scholars (Barrett, 2014: 13). It was not simply some form of self-aggrandizement but the reasoned judgment of learned others.

Moreover, the success of ISIS in achieving remarkable battlefield victories is proclaimed in its social media campaign as proving it has suitable expertise. Its social media in glorifying its extreme violence, beheadings and executions of prisoners reinforces the message that ISIS is a uniquely, effective organisation when it comes to making war, quite unlike many other Arab state and non-state actors in the last several decades. The combination of those factors may appear persuasive to some and convince them that the actions of ISIS make the organisation a legitimate actor, even if they disagree with certain aspects.

While the ISIS social media campaign has focussed on addressing and claiming legitimacy mainly in the Sunni subset of the wider Muslim public sphere, this effort has been assisted by recent structural changes in the Arab public sphere that in large measure overlaps it. In the last decade the Arab public sphere has progressively tilted towards favouring the politics of identity, authenticity and resistance (Lynch, 2006: 26); all characteristics that ISIS as an armed non-state actor embraces and stresses. ISIS output legitimacy claims then have been aided by being made in a supportive background social environment.

Developments in the wider Muslim public sphere have provided further background support. In this public sphere the stricter and more fundamental understanding of Islam has become increasingly hegemonic in terms of defining what activities and behaviours are permissible. Marc Lynch writes that both the Arab and Muslim public spheres "have witnessed a powerful wave of Islamist efforts to impose censorship of the media, to tightly control the bounds of legitimate public disclosures, and to threaten, prosecute, or even kill those found to have "offended Islam" (Lynch, 2006: 85). This Islamist influence has progressively taken on a more sectarian tinge as the Syrian War has continued with a sharper division between Sunni and Shia being seen (Lynch, 2013). The growing hardline stance concerning religious matters taken within the Muslim public sphere in being compatible and in harmony with ISIS's particular understanding of Islam lends the organisation background support albeit unintentionally.

ISIS both reflects and draws on these developments in the overarching social structures of the Arab and Muslim public spheres. The organisation is a reflection of the social environment it operates within but has also been able to gain support from this environment through carefully focussed social media activities coordinated with its actions. While taking such a strategic position on building legitimacy however, ISIS evidently considers there is little need to consider wider audiences. The organisation appears to have made a deliberate decision to disregard building its soft power, that is convincing a wider audience to view the organisation favourably. Faisal Irshaid writes that:

Unlike other jihadist groups, such as the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria the Nusra Front, ISIS gives little consideration to the way it is perceived by the general public. It rarely posts photos about its charity work or the services it provides in the towns it controls. The Nusra Front, on the other hand, regularly posts statements and videos, showing the group's social services, including the distribution of food to the poor and traffic management (Irshaid, 2014).

This approach is continued in ISIS's deliberate extensive publicizing of its violent acts through extensive social media coverage. The beheading televised on social media of kidnapped aid worker Alan Henning on the eve of the Eid alAdha Islamic festival was seen by many as inhumane, against the teachings of Islam and in propaganda terms, 'a colossal own goal' (Rose, 2014). ISIS's approach in this area is in sharp contrast to the older Al Qaeda non-state actor group that in emphasising its target was Western influence was noticeably more interested to appealing to the broader Muslim community (Ryan, 2014). ISIS seems principally concerned with gaining legitimacy in the Sunni segment of the Muslim public sphere and consciously opposed to building its soft power. This wider audience seems of little concern to ISIS.

ISIS's social media campaign has strived to build legitimacy within the Sunni subset of the wider Muslim community. With this subset though there is an important smaller group, an enclave that has been further purposefully developed to be narrow, inward looking and consciously isolated from external intellectual debates.

## Incorporating a Transnational Community

ISIS's strategic use of social media in the contemporary international system has progressively created a supportive transnational imagined community that provides a virtual

alternative to the nation-states in which people physically live. Deepening globalisation has allowed ISIS to actively create a small-scale worldwide network of supporters that by choice wish to adhere to the group's identity and hold its values. Unlike some other non-state groups however, ISIS's community is not solely diaspora-based but instead has a broader foundation.

In figuratively moving away from their own nation-states, such transnational ISIS supporters transfer their allegiance from their own governments to ISIS or rather, given ISIS's chosen identity, to a particular understanding of God. Reversing the Enlightenment, when states became the sole legitimate authority and were territorially bounded, this move returns sovereignty to having a religious foundation that is appropriate globally (Davis, 2009: 226-227). This step finds ready acceptance from some. In the Middle East region particularly, but also within the wider global Muslim community, the separation of church and state has not been accepted by all instead being seen as a notion imported during the colonial era and at odds with more traditional cultural and religious practices (Haynes, 2013: 174-175).

The development of this self-referential globe-spanning community has been made possible by carefully exploiting particular characteristics of the new forms of social media. There is a tendency for on-line social media dialogue between rival camps to polarize opinions and reinforce prejudices (Marcus, 2012). The public sphere rather than unifying then fragments with disconnected islands of discussion that consider only their own viewpoints and the finding of evidence to support it. People 'like' and 'follow' those they agree with, views harden and opponents gradually appear more and more extreme and dangerous. This echo-chamber effect is exacerbated as the algorithms used in Google, Facebook, Twitter and various other social media deliberately try and connect 'like' people together (Martin, 2013).

ISIS has astutely exploited social media to develop a useful transnational imagined community. This utility has been well demonstrated in the ultimate test of the allegiance of the community's members: joining ISIS in the caliphate as a fighter or expert.

ISIS has been remarkably successful in mobilizing the members of its transnational network to travel to Iraq and Syria and fight for it. These foreign fighters are effectively acting as a strategic reserve allowing the group to continuously replenish its ranks with fresh highly-motivated volunteers. Moreover, this is a manpower reserve beyond the view or reach of the anti-ISIS coalition (Eisenstadt, 2014: 2). By some estimates, in late 2014 half

of ISIS's members were foreigners from beyond Syria or Iraq.

In the last few years, some 15,000 foreigners have joined ISIS from some 74 countries, the largest such mobilization since the Afghan War of the 1980s. Some 70 percent are from the Middle East and Arab countries with many of these coming from Tunisia (3000), Saudi Arabia (2500), Morocco (1500), Jordan (1300), and Turkey (1000) (Barrett, 2014: 16).

ISIS has also been particularly successful in attracting Western foreign fighters with some hundreds of British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and Australian nationals joining. This success reflects that the ISIS social media program has consistently been undertaken in several languages including major Western ones and in a way that appeals to non-Arabs. A second reason may be that ISIS 'is less selective than a lot of other groups. If you come from the West, don't speak Arabic, you're not a particularly good fighter and don't have a particular skill, IS will probably still accept you' (Gordts, 2014).

ISIS though seems attracted to accepting less skilled volunteers at least partly because of their social media value in attracting, mobilizing and retaining other distant members of the transnational imagined community. ISIS showcases new foreign recruits on Twitter and Facebook with their nationality noted after their new Muslim names; online the group keeps calling these individuals by the name of the country they originated from (Ryan, 2014).

ISIS has also used social media as a command and control network to direct its foreign fighter transnational community. In late September 2014 spokesman, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, urged attacks on citizens of member countries of the international coalition opposing ISIS, wherever they were and by whatever means possible (Bayoumy, 2014). Senator Mike Roger, chairman of the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence stated that the message from ISIS to its supporters was 'we want you to...stay.... We want you randomly kidnap people off the street, behead them, videotape it, send it to use for further propaganda' (Mitchel, 2014). The intent so ISIS foreign fighter Abu Salman al-Faranci says is to 'terrorize...and...not allow [those in their home countries] to sleep due to fear and horror' (Malik, 2014).

ISIS seeks more than just fighters from its transnational imagined community. In July 2014 Abu Bakr appealed for 'scientists, scholars, preachers, judges, doctors, engineers and people with military and administrative expertise of all domains' to move to The Islamic State as it greatly needed their services (Ali, 2014). In an 11 July ISIS *al-Hayat Media* release, a Canadian, Abu Muslim, reiterated the call:

this is more than just fighting. We need the engineers, we need doctors, we need professionals, we need volunteers, we need fundraising ...there is work for everybody. Every person can contribute something to the Islamic State as it is obligatory on us. ... and you will be very well taken care of here. Your family will live here in safety just like how it is back home, you know, we have wide extensive territory...and we can easily find accommodation for you and your families (Halevi, 2014).

Unlike many armed non-state groups, ISIS often places its foreign members in important governance roles within its organization. In ISIS's capital, Raqqa, a general hierarchy has emerged with Iraqi, Saudi, and Tunisian military and religious figures occupying the top posts with Egyptian, European, Chechen, and Syrian fighters given positions of secondary importance (Al-Tamimi, 2014). ISIS's head of the Electricity Office is Sudanese, with a hospital administered by a Jordanian who reports to an Egyptian supervisor. ISIS also regularly staffs its various checkpoints around the city with foreign fighters from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya (Hubbard & Anonymous, 2014).

## Conclusion

Kaldor's four characteristics of new wars seem appropriate when looking at the case of the ISIS armed non-state actor. It operates within a complex sea of state and non-state actors, it has embraced identity politics, the way it fights wars reflects this, and it finances itself through plunder and the black market. This framework though misses the importance of the transnational for armed non-state actors such as ISIS. In this case there are several aspects that may be common to such armed non-state groups operating in this globalized age.

In choosing to use the transnational, some novel interlocking problems are presented to state opponents of the armed non-state actor. The group now threatens a state's interests in three domains: the local, the national and the global. A state must act to prevent local non-state actor supporters both attacking it and providing material support including dispatching fighters to the distant non-state actor. The state must also extend this concern to other nations around the globe where attacks on its interests might occur or material support for the non-state armed actor may be provided from. Lastly, the state must take action in the distant nation to degrade and defeat the hostile non-state actor. A non-state actor may not pose as large-scale threat as a hostile state actor may but it can still pose a complex one.

An example of this three domain type of conflict from the perspective of the state can be seen in middle-power Australia's managing of the ISIS problem (Bishop, 2014). New internal security laws have been passed, domestic

security tightened, multilateral support sought from allies and at the UN to impede ISIS's access to foreign fighters, and an expeditionary force dispatched to fight ISIS on the ground in Iraq. Fighting such an adversary in an integrated manner across these three domains is however problematic in terms of governmental structures and bureaucratic divides as these are built around traditional internal-external conceptual distinctions. Moreover, difficult issues with relationship to the infringing of civil liberties have been raised, risking domestic legitimacy and cohesion (Aly, 2014). In the age of globalisation it seems that non-state actors may be able to work more effectively and efficiently across the three domains than states can.

Moreover, using the transnational in such a way may be relatively low cost; a crucial issue for armed non-state actors who generally lack resources. Even so, this conceals that to maximise the gains, a sophisticated transnational strategy needs to be embraced and that this will invariably mean that there are downsides as well as gains. ISIS has focussed on using new forms of social media however while some images have built legitimacy amongst the desired social constituency, support from the broader social structure appears diminished.

In this, agency and structure are important. ISIS is using the internet strategically to purposefully advance its cause but in so doing the group is operating within an enveloping social structure. The social structure ISIS seeks material and non-material assistance from is in some respects broadly supportive of ISIS's ambitions for a new caliphate that deeply integrates the political sphere with Islam. This example suggests that armed non-state groups wishing to maximise their limited resources and influence should similarly seek to work with the social structure rather than against it. Agency needs to be aware of and responsive to structural conditions and demands. In this, the strategy to best exploit the encompassing social structure needs careful consideration to gain the maximum effect.

Even with a supportive structure though, a transnational imagined community with the weak links that social media provides cannot be considered homogenous or unwaveringly uniform in its allegiance. Instead it is probably as Hedley Bull postulated, neo-medieval, with many members responding to overlapping authorities and holding multiple loyalties (Bull, 1995: 245). Such a transnational imagined community is by its nature voluntary and many will choose to only subscribe to some constrained view of the non-state actor's sovereignty. The imagined community then may be fluid in its membership and in its level of commitment. Sustaining an extensive social media campaign may thus take on considerable importance to a non-state actor's continued existence.



In this there are deeper dangers. The transnational imagined community may in time dominate the overall armed non-state group and make the original concerns for specific in-country reforms seem of less importance. For ISIS, the large percentage of foreign fighters may further complicate the ability to resolve the war since many appear to be finding meaning in fighting and have little incentive to negotiate a peace (Mironova & Whitt, June 2014: 7). Moreover, the long-term future of the group may come to seem directly connected to continuing fighting as there may be worries that transnational support will whither if peace breaks out. ISIS could quickly disintegrate with its fighters joining other jihadist groups; certainly the group would no longer dominate the jihadist environment and networks. Considering such matters, making war may then become ISIS's fundamental purpose rather than establishing a successful caliphate.

This plays into notions of legitimacy. Already, the social consistency of most concern to ISIS appears beyond its territories. If the group does not need to respond to the needs and demands of its new state's citizen's it may become self-referential, ignore local concerns and govern through naked coercion, plundering and extortion as this is easier. Indeed, this process seems to have begun in its captured cities (Abbas, 2014). Non-state actors though have limited resources and governing in such a manner appears likely to be self-defeating. Allowing transnational networks to have too much influence could lead to the non-state armed actor failing. Transnational networks offer much to armed non-state actors but there are dangers associated with developing them.

This article used Kaldor's four principal characteristics as the basis for a focussed examination of ISIS and in so doing revealed that there might be a need to now include a more explicit focus on the transnational. Kaldor derived the four characteristics from studying a mid-1990s conflict and suggesting some tweaking now is consequently unsurprising. The transnational is being made more and more accessible by advances in social media in particular, and by globalization more generally. This may be an area that astute non-state actors are able to exploit better than states and in a different manner. The transnational may over time loom progressively larger in its influence on the politics of contemporary international society.

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