



**ICT**  
International Institute  
for Counter-Terrorism  
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## **“Cubs of the Caliphate”**

### **The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The evolution of terrorism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century has led to the increasing involvement of children in terrorism. Traditionally, children have been treated as expendables and signal desperation on behalf of the terrorist organization, thereby commonly participating in suicide operations. The Islamic State, while reinforcing this trend, has begun to change the nature of child participation in terrorism: they play an active role in ISIS’s strategies and the fulfillment of their goals in both the long-term and the short-term. The perspective of longevity ISIS has adopted in equipping a future generation of fighters is unparalleled by terror organizations. ISIS has thus acquired via psychological and material means a cadre of fighters. The terror organization seeks to indoctrinate the children at young ages, exposing them to violence and isolating them from unacceptable values in order to create the perfect fighters who love to fight for the sake of building the Islamic State and see violence as a way of life. In creating a future generation, ISIS seeks to solidify and expand the Caliphate. ISIS also uses its brutality against children to gain worldwide attention and display its extensive power and influence beyond the Middle East. The terrorist group will likely expand its recruitment and use of children, paving a future in which ISIS becomes an interminable force.

\* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

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## BACKGROUND

A child soldier or terrorist is defined as any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes.<sup>1</sup> The initial discussion surrounding the use of children in conflict revolved primarily around their presence in African conflict, most notably Sierra Leone. The presence of children in conflict, however, is rampant throughout the world, and was introduced to the Middle East during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

However, as the nature of conflict and conventional warfare changes, child recruitment has become a common phenomenon of modern conflict.<sup>3</sup> As civilians have become more involved in war and conflict in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century, the standard laws of war have been abandoned and children became more vulnerable to the new tactics of warfare.<sup>4</sup> Although many humanitarian agencies have ceased to keep track of the number of child soldiers in the world, it is estimated that 300,000 children, most of them under 15, are involved in conflict worldwide.<sup>5</sup> The average age for a child soldier or terrorist is 12 years old, but children as young as 5 years old have been involved in conflict, as seen in Uganda.<sup>6</sup> The Secretary General to the United Nations Security Council on children and armed conflict has listed 127 different parties that recruited or used children in situations of armed conflict in 17 countries or territories from 2002 to 2007. Of these, 16 parties have been persistent violators and have appeared on the list

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2007). *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. The United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Singer, Peter (2006). *Children at War*. University of California Press.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF (2009). *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and United Nations Children's Fund.

<sup>4</sup> Singer, Peter (2006). *Children at War*. University of California Press.

<sup>5</sup> Singer, Peter. "Books: 'Children at War'" E-mail interview by *The Washington Post*. June 12, 2006

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

four consecutive times.<sup>7</sup>

40% of the world's armed forces, rebel groups, and terrorist organizations have used children.<sup>8</sup> Government forces are likewise not innocent: the *2004 Global Report*, published by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Force, documented ten situations of armed conflict in which governments deployed children. The *2008 Global Report* documented nine. Although the number of states that have deployed children as part of their national armies has declined, children are deeply entrenched in warfare where states are involved in armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> Children have therefore been involved in almost every major conflict in the world,<sup>10</sup> at least 75% of the world's conflicts on every continent,<sup>11</sup> but most commonly in the Middle East and Africa. These areas have witnessed an increasing number of children joining terrorism and carrying out violence.<sup>12</sup> In 2013 alone, the United Nations documented 4,000 cases of child recruitment, with thousands more likely undocumented.

Children and terrorism have long intermixed throughout modern history and is by no means new to Syria, let alone ISIS. Numerous parties have been involved in child recruitment in Syria: The Syrian government, Free Syrian Army (FSA)-affiliated groups, the Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG), Ahrar Al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and of course, the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS).<sup>13</sup> In 2015 so far, 1,100 Syrian children under the age of 16 have joined the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). 52 children

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<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (2009). *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and United Nations Children's Fund.

<sup>8</sup> Singer, Peter. "Books: 'Children at War'" E-mail interview by *The Washington Post*. June 12, 2006

<sup>9</sup> Child Soldiers International (2012). *Louder Than Words: An Agenda for Action to End State Use of Child Soldiers*. London.

<sup>10</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2004). *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*. London.

<sup>11</sup> Singer, Peter. "Books: 'Children at War'" E-mail interview by *The Washington Post*. June 12, 2006

<sup>12</sup> Gray, David H., and Tom Owen III Matchin (2008). "Children: The New Face of Terrorism." *International NGO Journal* 3, no 6: 108-14.

<sup>13</sup> Secretary-General of Children and Armed Conflict (2014). "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic." *The United Nations Security Council*.

have been killed, with 8 acting as suicide bombers.<sup>14</sup> The United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child further reported that as of January 22, 2015, ISIS has abducted 858 children since June 2014.<sup>15</sup>

## **THE EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN IN TERRORISM**

Children have historically been involved in terrorism and other situations of armed conflict. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. First, one simple yet crucial characteristic of terrorism explains the trend of children involvement in terrorism: terrorism adapts according to the counter-terrorist measures taken against it.<sup>16</sup> This principle explains the evolution of terrorism throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Post 9/11, for example, terrorist groups became less hierarchical and more decentralized in order to avoid detection. Similarly, terrorist attacks committed in the West have increasingly taken the form of lone-wolf terrorism, the hardest form of terrorism to detect and gain intelligence on.<sup>17</sup> In the same capacity, as men been the dominant players in terrorism, they have subsequently become targets of suspicion. Carrying out certain operations like suicide bombings thus becomes increasingly difficult and the probability of success is decreased. Due to the onset of suspicion on men, women's participation initially became advantageous to terrorist groups. Mia Bloom, a prominent writer on terrorism and suicide bombings, states,

“Terrorist groups may also find women useful as suicide bombers because of the widespread assumption that women are inherently nonviolent. Women can bypass, for example, Israel's restrictive checkpoints and border policy, which has proven fairly effective against Palestinian insurgent organizations inside the occupied territories. Since the mid- 1990s, it has been almost impossible for unmarried men under the age of forty to get

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<sup>14</sup> Janssen, Zeina. "ISIS Is Indoctrinating Children in Iraq by Forcing Them to Behead Dolls." Business Insider. July 20, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Motaparthi, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>16</sup> Potter, Phillip (2014). "Political Violence and Terrorism." Class Lecture, from The University of Virginia.

<sup>17</sup> Hoffman, Bruce (1997). "The Confluence of International and Domestic Trends in Terrorism." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 2: 1-15.

permits to cross the border into Israel. Women don't arouse suspicion like men and blend in more effectively with Israeli civilians."<sup>18</sup>

As women have increasingly become involved in terrorism, their involvement became less of a phenomenon and the scrutiny cast upon them intensified. Counter-terrorist measures have adjusted to this trend, and women can no longer evade suspicion as effectively.

Children, more so than women, are associated with innocence and non-violence. As one Taliban fighter stated during their rise in Afghanistan during the 1994 civil war, "Children are innocent, so they are the best tools against dark forces."<sup>19</sup> They arouse virtually no suspicion at all, certainly not to the degree of men and now women. Using children in terror operations heightens the probability of those operations succeeding, especially those in which security and counter-terror measures are the primary obstacle. Therefore, their recruitment by terror groups all over the world reflects the changing tactics of terrorism over time.

The increasing involvement of children in terrorism is a strategic maneuver as terrorist organizations aim to increase the probability of operational success. In the same capacity, though using children in terrorism is strategic, it also reflects desperation.<sup>20</sup> Due to oppressive counter-terrorist measures, especially post-9/11, committing terror has only increased in difficulty.<sup>21</sup> Recruiting is therefore more difficult as well, and targeting children can be a last effort to grasp the needed personnel for not only operational success, but survival. Children, particularly vulnerable targets, can be either forced or targeted to become involved in terror operations when recruits are simply lacking. Therefore, the increasing involvement of children in terrorism reflects oppressive counter-terrorist measures in two ways: it is a strategic changing of tactics in order to ensure operational success, but also a show of desperation to ensure survival.

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<sup>18</sup> Bloom, Mia (2007). "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend." *Daedalus* 136, no. 1: 94-102.

<sup>19</sup> Singer, Peter (2006). *Children at War*. University of California Press.

<sup>20</sup> Potter, Phillip (2014). "Political Violence and Terrorism." Class Lecture, from The University of Virginia.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

In light of how children involvement in terrorism has become a trend due to the evolution of terrorism, ISIS recruitment of children is not surprising. The group actively recruits children, dubbing them the “Cubs of the Caliphate.” ISIS sets itself apart from other terror groups, however, in how the group is changing children involvement in terrorism. ISIS recognizes the need to pursue long-term goals in order to ensure future stability. The group sees children as its future, a perspective few terror organizations have adopted. Furthermore, in addition to ensuring long-term stability, children play an active role in ISIS strategy while most terror organizations see children as expendables.<sup>22</sup> ISIS uses children in a systematic and organized manner, and demonstrates an uncharacteristic transparency concerning this practice. Traditionally, terror groups do not advertise their recruitment of children and seek to hide the practice. ISIS is therefore unmatched by other terror groups in regard to its use of children. This article therefore details children involvement in ISIS: how ISIS recruits its children, the roles they play in the terror group, and how children fit into ISIS’s multi-layered strategy.

## **RECRUITMENT**

ISIS’s recruitment strategies targeting children are by no means new. As with ISIS’s general recruitment practices, the group aims towards appealing to the material wants and needs of children, as well as their psychological state of being. Furthermore, ISIS has opened child recruitment offices, reflecting the impressive organization of ISIS’s child recruitment and the importance of the practice for the group’s strategies and goals. At least two such offices exist in two Syrian cities; al-Mayadin and al-Bokamal, where ISIS works to attract children living near the Islamic State territory. Children are thus systematically targeted.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, ISIS’s recruitment strategies are broad and children are thus recruited in a variety of ways. As John Horgan and Mia Bloom, two terrorism experts, say of child recruits, “They are the children of foreigners who join the fight, the children of supportive locals, abandoned children found in IS-controlled

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to say ISIS does not put children in roles as expendables

<sup>23</sup> Syrian Observatory For Human Rights. "IS Organization Continues in Attracting Children, and Recruit More than 400 Children from 'Ashbal Al- Khilafah'." March 24, 2015.

orphanages, children coercively taken from parents, and runaway children who themselves volunteer for service to IS.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Ambiguous Membership**

Children are commonly brought into the fight if they are related to older figures involved in ISIS, most notably parents. Children can be recruited if they are the sons of fighters<sup>25</sup> or if their parents travel to Islamic State, where they, as well as their children, become citizens of the Islamic State.<sup>26</sup> ISIS reportedly encourages parents to send their children to training camps,<sup>27</sup> and will often seek parents’ consent as well.<sup>28</sup> In November 2014, ISIS released a propaganda video of Kazakh child soldiers receiving training in an ISIS school. The group described Kazakh fighters as having prepared themselves and their children for aggression in the on going war. The Kazakh fighters likely brought the child soldiers with them in order to train with ISIS.

*The China Daily* also reports, “Thousands of foreign fighters have flocked to IS areas from all over the world, many of them with their families.” In November 2014, two young boys who spoke perfect French appeared in a video holding guns and claiming to be in Raqqa, Iraq. They claimed to be from Strasbourg and Toulouse, and could not have been more than 10 years old. Moreover, in August 2014, a young boy from Belgium states on camera that he wants to be a jihadist so that he can “kill the infidels of Europe, all the infidels.”<sup>29</sup> His father, an Islamist, brought the child to ISIS territory.

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<sup>24</sup> Horgan, John, and Mia Bloom. "This Is How the Islamic State Manufactures Child Militants." VICE News RSS. July 8, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Al Shamary, Ammar and Gilgamesh Nabeel. "ISIL grooming children to be killers; Terrorists cross a new line, groom kids for brutality." *USA Today*. March 12, 2015

<sup>26</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Maley, Paul and Greg Bearup. "Aussie Child's Sick Head Grab." *The Herald Sun*. August 11, 2014.



In situations where children enter ISIS via familial connections, it is unclear how voluntary a child's involvement with ISIS is. Whereas ISIS describes the children as "being happy" with their training and subsequent indoctrination, this type of recruitment leaves unanswered questions concerning whether or not children know the nature of activities they have been brought into. The role of the parents, or other adult figures in a child's life, is an important factor in how children become involved in ISIS. The environment these adult and family figures create may often determine how openly a child embraces his or her role in ISIS. If extremist Islamic values are consistently taught and a child grows up emerged in such an environment, they are more likely to embrace involvement in ISIS once they are encouraged to join the group or targeted by ISIS recruiters.

### **Voluntary Membership**

Despite the ambiguity concerning the amount of say children have in joining ISIS when brought by their parents, children also voluntarily join ISIS, albeit after being lured in by the organization. ISIS's ability to convince children to choose ISIS is noteworthy. In the past, terrorist groups and other armed groups that recruit child soldiers are often taken by force or are otherwise given up as martyrs. ISIS's success in convincing children to choose ISIS membership reflects the organization's larger success in recruitment, and its impressive ability to reach people all over the world.

### *Material Appeal*

Children are vulnerable targets: they are more easily attracted to the material and psychological benefits that ISIS offers. Materially, ISIS offers children a variety of gifts. Abu Hassan, a resident of Mosul, attests, "They are providing their fighters with everything: gasoline, salaries, supplies and women to marry, gifts."<sup>30</sup> Payment is another incentive for families to send their children to join ISIS. Although the children receive

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<sup>30</sup> Al Shamy, Ammar and Gilgamesh Nabeel. "ISIL grooming children to be killers; Terrorists cross a new line, groom kids for brutality." *USA Today*. March 12, 2015.

half the payment of adult fighters, which is \$200 per month, child terrorists have rarely been paid such a salary throughout terrorism's history.<sup>31</sup> Especially in war-torn Iraq and Syria, ISIS simply offers a better standard of living for children.

Not only are Iraqi and Syrian children susceptible to ISIS recruitment, however. The poor neighborhoods of Ankara in Turkey, particularly Hacibayram, are major sites for child recruits.<sup>32</sup> It is unclear if these children were recruited in Turkey or in Syria while traveling back and forth.<sup>33</sup> ISIS may also offer a better standard of living by providing access to institutions and systems – namely, a healthcare system. Abu Mohammad, an activist living in Raqqa, attested that private health care facilities in the city had been closed, and public hospitals were open but treatment is highly priced. ISIS aids in providing healthcare and access to other institutions, such as schools, that are otherwise difficult to access amidst a chaotic Syria and Iraq.<sup>34</sup> The prospect of an improved standard of living is thus a major incentive for joining ISIS, and ISIS certainly takes advantage of this.

Besides payment, ISIS attracts children even through simple items like toys and candy. The group often targets mosques and Muslim festivals, where children are in attendance, and recruiters entice them with toys like Spiderman and Teletubbies.<sup>35</sup> Here they set up “media points”: booths displaying ISIS propaganda. They host events in order to distribute candy and soda alongside religious pamphlets and CDs to children.<sup>36</sup> Due to their vulnerability as targets, children are susceptible to using mere toys as the sole

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<sup>31</sup> Unless they become suicide bombers, in which families of the children usually receive payment recognizing the sacrifice

<sup>32</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>34</sup> Bacchi, Umberto, and Arij Limam. "Isis Mimics Britain's NHS with 'Islamic State Health Service ISHS'" *International Business Times RSS*. April 24, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Al-Tamimi, Aymenn Jawad (2014). "The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham." *Middle East Forum*, January. no 27.

<sup>36</sup> Janssen, Zeina. "ISIS Is Indoctrinating Children in Iraq by Forcing Them to Behead Dolls." *Business Insider*. July 20, 2015.

reason to join ISIS. And if their parents object, ISIS often threatens them until the parents have little choice but to send their child to train with ISIS.<sup>37</sup>

Mohammed, a boy living in Syria interviewed by CNN, stated, “My friends and I were studying at the mosque, and they taught us that we should enroll in jihad with the [Islamic State]. I wanted to go, but my father did not allow me to.”<sup>38</sup> ISIS sent militants to their house, and Mohammed’s father, unnamed, attests that ISIS threatened to cut off his head if he prevented Mohammed from joining the camp.<sup>39</sup> Besides toys, children can be attracted to ISIS’s weapons and uniforms, again using such items to legitimize ISIS membership. Raed, another Syrian boy, was recruited by ISIS at age 16. He spoke to Human Rights Watch, stating, “When ISIS came to my town...I liked what they are wearing, they were like one herd. They had a lot of weapons. So I spoke to them, and decided to go their training camp in Kafr Hamra in Aleppo.”<sup>40</sup> Child recruits, especially those recruited by ISIS’s appeal to a child’s desire for toys and candy, are often unable to understand the bigger picture and are unaware of the larger ISIS ideology they are consequentially taught once recruited and sent to camps.

### *Psychological Appeal*

The psychological aspect of ISIS’s recruitment is crucial to understanding the group as a whole and its success in recruiting people from all over the world. Although the psychological aspect of recruitment is not new and was systemized under Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, which recognized the relevance of creating recruitment videos, websites, and even a recruitment manual,<sup>41</sup> ISIS’s success in recruiting people globally through psychological methods is historically unprecedented. Much of ISIS’s prowess,

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<sup>37</sup> Williams, David. "Children of Jihad: ISIS Parades Its Boy Soldiers as Fanatics Close in on Baghdad." Mail Online. May 18, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Razek, Raja, Nick Paton Walsh, and Nick Thompson. "CNN Exclusive: A 13-year-old Witness to ISIS' Atrocities in Syria." CNN. December 30, 2014

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Motaparthi, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>41</sup> Hoffman, Bruce (2003). "Al Qaeda, Trends in Terrorism, and Future Potentialities: An Assessment." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 no. 6: 429-442

especially in the West, can be attributed to ISIS' global reach and influence. Reportedly, American fears of terrorism as of December 2015 are as high as such fears following 9/11<sup>42</sup>, which is undoubtedly attributable to ISIS's uncanny psychological appeal. This characteristic of ISIS, therefore, cannot be understated. Children are by no means immune to this aspect of recruitment. Most notably, ISIS offers young people a new identity, a sense of belonging, and a different set of values and beliefs, meaning a Salafist-jihadist interpretation of Islam.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview with CNN, a former child fighter in ISIS that goes by the name Yasir explained how being a part of ISIS made him feel proud, strong, and filled with a sense of purpose.<sup>44</sup> At young ages, especially during the teenage years, children are in search of an identity, purpose, and a self-esteem boost, making them even more susceptible to ISIS recruiters. Groups like ISIS provide answers that children are looking for, whether concerning their faith, belonging, or purpose.<sup>45</sup> Children in worn-torn areas like Syria and Iraq are also more susceptible targets, not only because ISIS has served as an outlet for Syrian and Iraqi frustration and grievances, but because ISIS provides a sense of order in an otherwise chaotic and order-less world.<sup>46</sup> Especially in Iraq and Syria today, children's lives are lacking in the structures that give meaning to social and cultural life, namely the home, school system, health systems, and religious institutions.<sup>47</sup>

Because ISIS operates as a pseudo-state, they aid in providing welfare, education, and religious services to the people living in areas under its control. ISIS therefore offers a

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<sup>42</sup>Martin, Jonathan and Dalia Sussman. "Fear of Terrorism Lifts Donald Trump in New York Times/CBS Poll." The New York Times. December 10, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Ganor, Boaz (2015). "Four Questions on ISIS: A "Trend" Analysis of the Islamic State." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no 3.

<sup>44</sup> Damon, Arwa. "Child Fighter Tormented by ISIS." CNN. November 13, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> DCSF (2008). *Learning Together to Be Safe: A Toolkit to Help Schools Contribute to the Prevention of Violent Extremism*. Annesley: Department for Children, Schools, and Families Publications.

<sup>46</sup> Gray, David H., and Tom Owen III Matchin (2008). "Children: The New Face of Terrorism." *International NGO Journal* 3, no 6: 108-14.

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF (2009). *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and United Nations Children's Fund.

restoration (albeit an incomplete one) of these systems, and is better suited to provide the needed structure and order in a child's life. In addition, ISIS receives and takes care of children who suffer from congenital malformation. Though this strategy appeals to their desire for a better standard of living and a more promising future, it additionally appeals to a recruit's sense of identity and community. Fixing congenital malformation permits a recruit to become more fully accepted in society.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, ISIS seeks to evoke jealousy in children, yet another strategy ISIS uses to recruit children. When the group deliberately displays children possessing new clothes, weapons, and medals, other children not involved in ISIS desire the same and feel like outsiders. This sense of jealousy can result in children choosing to join ISIS, or otherwise solidify their reasoning to join the group.<sup>49</sup> The psychological appeal of ISIS, especially as seen in young adults and teenagers in the Western world, should not be underestimated in children living in ISIS-affected areas. ISIS is able to use a variety of psychological methods to reach the audience it so desires to reach.

### **Involuntary Membership**

Although much of ISIS's recruitment is voluntary, ISIS's recruitment of children has extended to means of force. ISIS's forceful membership, however, primarily affects ethnic minorities living in Syria and Iraq. Many Kurdish children have become members of ISIS via kidnapping, a common tool utilized by the Islamic State. On May 30, 2014, approximately 600 Kurdish children aged 14 to 16 were kidnapped as they rode on buses from Aleppo to Kobani after having traveled to Aleppo to take exams. They were returning home when their buses were stopped. Out of the 600, 186 boys were kept and sent to schools, where they were trained and indoctrinated.<sup>50 51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Syrian Observatory For Human Rights. "IS Organization Continues in Attracting Children, and Recruit More than 400 Children from 'Ashbal Al- Khilafah'." March 24, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Gray, David H., and Tom Owen III Matchin (2008). "Children: The New Face of Terrorism." *International NGO Journal* 3, no 6: 108-14.

<sup>50</sup> Harkin, James. "Up to 186 Kurdish Students Kidnapped by Isis in Northern Syria." *The Guardian*. June 26, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

If not forced to join ISIS, the terrorist group kills minorities indiscriminately, including children. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, said that from January 2014 until September 2014, 693 child casualties were reported. As of June 2015, more than 400 children have been kidnapped in the Anbar province of Iraq and taken to ISIS bases in Iraq and Syria.<sup>52</sup>

In the case of women, ISIS often keeps young girls, where they become concubines of fighters. Gawry Rasho, a Yazidi women freed by ISIS in April 2015, attested that ISIS had thousands of Yazidis in captivity. She was released after 8 months, but they kept her 7 year-old daughter. While ISIS releases some young and elderly Yazidis, Gawry mentions that children are often taken by force, where they are forced into marriage and selected for sex. She says, “They treated girls and young women very badly. I saw them choose them and take them, and if they refused they would beat them.”<sup>53</sup> Young minority girls are vulnerable targets of this type of ISIS “recruitment,” while boys assume a variety of roles. Boys kidnapped by ISIS subsequently undergo training, whereupon completion of the training are either released or given a role in the ranks of the Islamic State.

### **International Recruitment**

The threat of ISIS with regards to children is real even outside of the Middle East.<sup>54</sup> The recruitment of children outside of the Middle East is mostly psychological, not material. ISIS makes these children feel loved, wanted, and understood, and then subsequently uses these emotions to distance the child from his or her parents and loved ones. Schoolboys and girls have left Western countries with the aim of joining ISIS, among

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<sup>52</sup> Hall, John. "ISIS Beheads a Libyan Soldier outside a Mosque for 'Education Purposes'" Mail Online. June 4, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Otten, Cathy. "Yazidis Tell How Fearful Isis Kept Them on Move." The Independent. April 10, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Nazeer, Zubaidah. "Families Lured by Promise of Homes, Jobs and Money." *The Straits Times*. March 18, 2015.

them Germany and the United Kingdom. In March 2015, 70 young women, including 9 schoolgirls, left Germany to join ISIS. German intelligence believes approximately 400 people have left for Iraq and Syria, of which 24 are minors. A few of these minors are under 13 years old, and four were female.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the United Kingdom believes approximately 900 Britons have left to join ISIS as well.<sup>56</sup> Most of them are young adults and teenagers, but the exact number of children among the 900 is unclear.

Indonesia is also a vulnerable target for child recruitment, being a predominantly Muslim nation. The Secretary-General of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission noted that since August 2014, Islamic State extremists have infiltrated extra-curricular Islamic classes as clerics. Here, they propagate to children that ISIS's brand of Islam is good, encourage them to join ISIS, and advocate for the fight against the unbelievers. To further solidify this indoctrination, children read the same messages through social media and the Internet.<sup>57</sup> ISIS has weaponized education, using schools where Islam is taught to reach children internationally and essentially brainwash them. Islamic countries are especially vulnerable to ISIS's weaponization of education. As will be discussed later, education is a crucial tool in not only reaching children domestically and internationally, but reforming them as well.

Furthermore, as ISIS gains influence and begins to establish branches in the vicinity around Iraq and Syria, child recruitment will increase in North Africa and other areas in the Middle East. ISIS has reportedly set up camps through its Libyan branch in order to train children. Many of the recruits are African children between 12 and 15 years old, brought from nations like Nigeria, Mali, Ghana, and Niger with the help of Boko Haram, who pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in March 2015. Other recruits are

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<sup>55</sup> "German spy chief: 13-year-old children joining extremist groups." Al Arabiya News. September 22, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Hall, John. "ISIS Beheads a Libyan Soldier outside a Mosque for 'Education Purposes'" Mail Online. June 4, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Cassrels, Deborah. "Radicals Target Children in Recruitment Drive." *The Australian*. September 30, 2014.

Libyan and Egyptian.<sup>58</sup> By recruiting children internationally, ISIS can display its brutality and spread its influence, which ultimately causes a heightened sense of panic in the Western world.

Concerning overall ISIS recruitment, foreign fighters comprise half of ISIS's members, which include nearly 4000 Westerners. As of January 26, 2015, approximately 20,730 people have come from 90 countries in order to fight for ISIS, most of these people hailing from Arab nations.<sup>59</sup> In Europe, France (1,200), the United Kingdom (500-600), and Germany (500-600) have produced the largest numbers of foreign fighters.<sup>60</sup> Relative to population size, however, most foreign fighters hail from Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. An estimated 11,000 people come from the Middle East, and 3,000 originate from the countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>61</sup> Of course, it is not immediately clear how child recruitment fits into this picture, as a child is much less capable of making the trek to Syria and Iraq from a distant nation. Children hailing from Western nations are more likely to come with their families to Syria and Iraq, as had been the case for Belgium and Australia.

### **Areas Impacted**

Child recruitment is likely heaviest in areas under ISIS control, as ISIS's previously-mentioned child recruitment strategies have most directly affected these areas. ISIS creates communities centered on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law, and children are apt towards accepting such a community with fewer reservations. Children do not need parental permission to be members of ISIS and families that so refuse to allow their children to join experience the danger of ISIS's threats more bluntly than families miles away from ISIS.

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<sup>58</sup> BBC Monitoring Middle East. "Islamic State reportedly trains children to fight in Libya secret camps." *BBC Monitoring Worldwide*. April 1, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> "Foreign Fighter Total In Syria/Iraq Now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in 1980s." The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence. January 2015.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



Countries in the immediate vicinity of ISIS are also more vulnerable to recruitment. Jordan, for example, has experienced a large outpouring of foreign fighters, as well as Saudi Arabia, which borders Iraq. Areas of Turkey have been targets of child recruitment as well, especially poorer neighborhoods and those bordering Syria. Early in 2015, ISIS announced its annexation of territory in Algeria, Libya, the Sinai, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.<sup>62</sup> ISIS has remained somewhat true to this announcement, as they have a significant presence in the Sinai Peninsula and Libya, as well as in Nigeria (likely due to the allegiance of Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram).<sup>63</sup> Libya has major potential to become a replica of the Islamic State –ISIS formally accepted the terrorist group Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam as its own, thus taking the name “ISIS.” This terrorist group had been involved in military and government activities in Libya prior to taking the name ISIS, therefore giving ISIS access to such activities as well. ISIS now operates in Benghazi, Sirte, Tripoli, and Derna.<sup>64</sup> As a result of these annexations, more training camps geared towards children have emerged, and children residing in annexed territory are the most vulnerable to becoming recruited.

Therefore, though Iraq and Syria continue to be hotspots of ISIS recruitment, as ISIS seeks to extend its territorial influence to these other nations and refugees flee from Iraq and Syria, child recruitment will become more internationalized and mostly impact Egypt, Libya and Nigeria. Furthermore, Southeast Asia has begun to see growing ISIS influence, most notably in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.<sup>65</sup> At least eight children have been brought with their families to ISIS territory from Malaysia.<sup>66</sup> Areas

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<sup>62</sup> “ICSR Insight: The Islamic State Model.” The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence. January 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Batchelor, Tom and Levi Winchester. “Mapped: Terrifying Growth of ISIS in Just One Year, and How Asia & Russia is the Next Target.” Express: Home of the Daily and Sunday Express. August 18, 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Rodzi, Nadirah H. “Malaysian Police: Malaysian Children Being Trained in ISIS Camps.” Asia One Group. January 12, 2016.

most impacted by ISIS's presence will experience heavier child recruitment –the Middle East, North Africa, and, increasingly, Southeast Asia.



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**Areas under ISIS control:** 1-Egypt; 2- Libya; 3- Nigeria; 4- Syria; 5- Iraq

**Areas with large ISIS influence:** 6 –Algeria, 7 –Morocco; 8 –Mali; 9 –Saudi Arabia; 10 – Yemen; 11 –Afghanistan; 12 –Pakistan

**Areas with some ISIS presence/ability to worsen:** 14 –Bosnia; 15 –Russia; 16 – Indonesia; 17 –Malaysia; 18 –Philippines



## ROLES

Throughout the history of terrorism and war, children have typically been treated as expendables and filled dangerous roles, or otherwise filled roles that do not require much skill. For example, throughout the Syrian Civil War, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) has used children as cooks, messengers, lookouts, and cleaners and preparers of weapons. Kurdish forces have used children similarly, as they often man checkpoints and transfer

<sup>67</sup> Batchelor, Tom and Levi Winchester. "Mapped: Terrifying Growth of ISIS in Just One Year, and How Asia & Russia is the Next Target." Express: Home of the Daily and Sunday Express. August 18, 2015.

information and military supplies.<sup>68</sup> Children typically fill these lesser roles, while more skilled and important human capital is directed towards filling combat roles.

As in other Syrian groups, child recruits as young as 9 years old fill a variety of roles in ISIS. They also become cooks, cleaners, messengers, guards, weapons carriers, and the like.<sup>69</sup> Yasir, a boy interviewed by CNN, describes how he was consistently strapped into an explosive vest, given a pistol, AK-47, and a radio, and then told to guard an ISIS base in Deir Ezzor, a city in eastern Syria.<sup>70</sup> Emad, a former teacher from Raqqa, told Human Rights Watch that in November 2013, the 6 guards of the Islamic court run by ISIS in Mansoura were children between 12 and 16 years old. They carried weapons and explosive belts, similar to Yasir.<sup>71</sup> Children have also served as medics to the injured, and are forced to give blood in order to aid the wounded.<sup>72</sup> Notably, ISIS uses them as spies to inform on the enemy, as well as on people living in ISIS-controlled communities.<sup>73</sup> ISIS aims to instill paranoia in citizens of the Islamic State, as citizens live in a perpetual state of uncertainty, never knowing if they are being listened to or watched, even by their own children. ISIS enforces its rules through a morality police called al-Hisbah, and they have asked children to inform ISIS on their parents' compliance with the rules.<sup>74</sup> This helps to create the environment of fear that keeps people living in line with ISIS ideology.

Furthermore, the use of children in suicide bombings has emerged as a phenomenon in modern terrorism. From 1980-2003, boys and girls under 18 years old carried out 13

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<sup>68</sup> Secretary-General of Children and Armed Conflict (2014). "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic." *The United Nations Security Council*.

<sup>69</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Damon, Arwa. "Child Fighter Tormented by ISIS." CNN. November 13, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>72</sup> Edmiston, Jake. "The Cub of Baghdadi: Islamic State reports boy 'martyred'." *The Vancouver Sun*. October 10, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*

percent of suicide bombings.<sup>75</sup> Children have therefore become prime choices for suicide terror missions, and have been used as human shields as well, both in Syria and beyond. In 2000, Hamas convinced a semi-retarded 16-year-old boy to be the suicide bomber in an failed operation meant to target an Israeli checkpoint in Nablus. Roughly 29% of the suicide bombings in the Occupied Territories from 2000 to 2008 were committed by youth under 19 years old.<sup>76</sup> Two Moroccan twin sisters belonging to al-Qaeda, 13 years old, were caught in 2003. Iraqi insurgents began to strap children with explosives during the 2003 war with the United States.<sup>77</sup> The youngest suicide bomber to be recorded, from Colombia, was only 7 years old.<sup>78</sup> Boko Haram, as the group increases its violence, has used children frequently as suicide bombers. Additionally, a 7-year-old girl participated in a suicide operation in Nigeria in February 2015.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly, then, use of children as suicide bombers is not an atrocity unique to Syria and Iraq. Even the Syrian government has reportedly used children as human shields, forcing children to line up between the army and the FSA or other attackers. In this manner, the Syrian government aims to dissuade enemies from attacking, as the enemy must kill the children in order to reach government forces.<sup>80</sup> Using children as suicide bombers is additionally advantageous to terror groups, especially as children are less likely to garner suspicion, as opposed to men and even women. Counter-terrorism measures against children involved in terrorism are much more difficult, not only because children are less suspicious and thus harder to counter, but because both international and national standards regarding the prosecution of children involved in terrorism is so unclear. It is therefore advantageous for terrorist groups to use children in operations. The United

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<sup>75</sup> Emilsen, William (2008). "Teenage Suicide Missions: The Role of Religion in the Recruitment of Young Suicide Bombers." Forum on Public Policy Online 2008, no. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Singer, Peter (2006). *Children at War*. University of California Press.

<sup>78</sup> Singer, Peter. "Books: 'Children at War'" E-mail interview by *The Washington Post*. June 12, 2006

<sup>79</sup> "'Seven-year-old Girl' Kills Herself and Five Others in Nigeria Suicide Bombing." *The Guardian*. February 22, 2015.

<sup>80</sup> Secretary-General of Children and Armed Conflict (2014). "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic." *The United Nations Security Council*.

Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan concluded that some of the suicide bombers in the country were children aged 11 to 15. They were forced, promised money, or tricked into filling the role. Likewise, al-Qaeda affiliated groups in Iraq used children as decoys in suicide car bombings.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that children kidnapped or otherwise trained by ISIS are in danger of becoming cannon fodder by becoming suicide bombers to carry out terror attacks. In May 2015, approximately 500 children were kidnapped from two Iraqi provinces and brought to ISIS territory, and are in danger of being brain washed into becoming suicide bombers. Intense social pressure exists on children to commit themselves to this task.<sup>82</sup>

The Human Rights Watch, in a 2014 report, interviewed former ISIS child fighters. One boy, now 17, reported that children signed up for suicide missions, and he only did so because of the pressure they received, stating, “They had a list of people who volunteered to do suicide bombing operations. I signed up on the list, but reluctantly and at the end, so my name was [several hundred down].”<sup>83</sup> Children are encouraged to become martyrs, as becoming a martyr for the sake of defeating the enemies of Islam is a core part of ISIS ideology. The group avoids using the language “suicide bombing”, rather opting for “martyrdom honor” or “martyrdom operation”, which only serves to trick and brainwash children into participating in suicide operations. Extreme Islamic ideology is thus used to pressure or force children to become suicide bombers. ISIS has established camps in areas under its control to train adolescents for such missions. Families can be forced to send their children to these camps: originally families could escape this duty by paying a fine, but attendance is now compulsory.<sup>84</sup> Families under ISIS control therefore must live in fear of their children being lured into suicide operations. Typically the families of

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<sup>81</sup> UNICEF (2009). *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and United Nations Children's Fund.

<sup>82</sup> "ISIS Releases Moms' Guidebook to Raising 'jihadi Babies'" RT English. 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>84</sup> Cockburn, Patrick. "A Woman's Life With ISIS: Wife, Mother, Suicide Bomber." *Independent Press Ltd*. May 16, 2015.

suicide bombers receive compensation, gifts, or popularity in return for the martyrdom of their children, and thus parents may encourage their children's participation in such missions.<sup>85</sup> It is unclear how precedent this is in the case of ISIS, however. Nevertheless, as the US-led airstrikes persist, and ISIS operations expand in response, the tendency of children to become involved in suicide bombing plots and to be used as human shields is only increasing.<sup>86</sup>

Children have also begun to take on a new role in ISIS, one that children typically do not fulfill in terrorist organizations, but has nevertheless become a trend separating ISIS from other terror groups. Children partake in executing, torturing, or beating prisoners. In late August 2014, a 16-year old boy reportedly cut the throats of two soldiers captured in Tabqa airbase.<sup>87</sup> In March 2015, ISIS accused Muhammad Said Ismail Musallam, a 19-year old Israeli-Arab man, of being a spy for the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency. The video of his execution shows a camouflaged boy and militant standing behind a kneeling Musallam. The boy, described as a "Cub of the Caliphate" walks in front of Musallam and shoots him in the head.<sup>88</sup> The Human Rights Observatory describes a boy, between 10 and 12 years old, who had the job of whipping prisoners in an ISIS prison in Tal Abyad.<sup>89</sup> In January 2015, ISIS released a video showing two boys, who appear to be between 10 and 12 years old, shooting two Russian intelligence agents.<sup>90</sup> These roles serve to expose children to violence, as their participation in violent acts enables them to continue on a violent path and lose the ability to feel remorse. ISIS has a clear purpose in

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<sup>85</sup> Loadenthal, Michael (2014). "Reproducing a Culture of Martyrdom: The Role of the Palestinian Mother in Discourse, Construction, Transmission, and Legitimization." *In Motherhood and War: International Perspectives*, 181–206. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>86</sup> Nebehay, Stephanie. "Islamic State Selling, Crucifying, Burying Children Alive in Iraq - UN." Reuters India. February 4, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>88</sup> Saul, Heather. "Isis Video Shows Child Militant Shooting Dead 'Israeli Spy' Muhammad Said Ismail Musallam." *The Independent*. March 11, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Motaparthi, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>90</sup> Al Shamary, Ammar and Gilgamesh Nabeel. "ISIL grooming children to be killers; Terrorists cross a new line, groom kids for brutality." *USA Today*. March 12, 2015.

giving these roles to children, as the emotional consequences will convert them into fiercer fighters for ISIS in the future.

Lastly, children partake in combat roles after receiving military training in ISIS schools, commonly fighting alongside adult fighters. Abu Musafir, a leader of the Fursan al-Furat battalion from Minbej in Aleppo, said he often saw children fighting in battles with ISIS. He stated, “Every battle we fight with Da`esh [ISIS] is a fight. We’re trying to stay alive. But when we finish the battle and look at the corpses [of the ISIS fighters], we see a lot of children.” He noted that as early as 2013, his battalion detained 30 children aged 13 to 15 after fighting a battle with ISIS in Minbej.<sup>91</sup> Children commonly participate in battle with ISIS, some even younger than 13 years of age. It is unclear how many children are actively involved in combat. ISIS attempts to justify its military training of children, stating, “Those who are over 16 and previously enrolled in the camps can participate in military operations because Usama Ibn Zaid (adoptive son of Mohammed) led an army when he was 17 or 18 years old.”<sup>92</sup> Children much younger than 16, however, have received military training and fought in battle with ISIS, according to sources like the United Nations and Human Rights Watch.

ISIS is clearly not the first to recruit children into its rank to fill both dangerous and low-skilled, but important, roles. No other group, however, has used children in such a systematic and organized way. They have now presumed the role of executioner and actively volunteered to die in terror operations. Additionally, groups are typically not vocal about their child recruitment. ISIS, however, is quite intentional and vocal about their recruitment and use of children. While other groups use children mostly because they desperately need the personnel in the short-term, ISIS’s recruitment of children is a part of its strategy as a group and a part of its aim to achieve long-term goals.<sup>93</sup> ISIS has

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<sup>91</sup> Motaparthi, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>92</sup> Vice News (2014). *The Islamic State*. Film.

<sup>93</sup> The China Daily, “Islamic State Recruits, Exploits”

therefore differentiated itself with regard to its systematic, and more brutal, use of children.

## **STRATEGY**

Why does ISIS recruit and use children? This is the most crucial question to answer with regard to children's involvement in ISIS. ISIS's use of children is not random nor reflects complete desperation on behalf of the group.

### **Creating the Future**

ISIS has a pressing need for children because it must ensure its future. Unlike other terrorist organizations, ISIS is a pseudo-state in that it controls a significant portion of Syrian and Iraqi territory as it expands its Caliphate. Its possession of territory reflects one of the group's main goals: Establish a Caliphate. This goal will only be successful if ISIS prepares for the long-term. In order to ensure a successful Caliphate, albeit one that is stable and is able to survive a generation, ISIS must prepare a next generation. Children, therefore, are the next generation of ISIS. Child recruitment, and the subsequent mental and physical training, is within the framework of a plan of action adopted by the organization which seeks to form a strong army in the future that is capable of committing acts even more atrocious than the acts the group currently commits.<sup>94</sup> These children are a part of what ISIS denotes "the generation of the Caliphate."<sup>95</sup>

The Islamic State is open about their desire to create militants for the future, stating in *Dabiq*, their magazine, that "The Islamic State has taken it upon itself to fulfill the Ummah's duty towards this generation in preparing it to face the crusaders and their

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<sup>94</sup> BBC Monitoring Middle East. "Islamic State reportedly trains children to fight in Libya secret camps." *BBC Monitoring Worldwide*. April 1, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Maley, Paul and Greg Bearup. "Aussie Child's Sick Head Grab." *The Herald Sun*. August 11, 2014.



allies in defense of Islam and to raise high the word of Allah in every land.”<sup>96</sup> Education is the single-most important tool for creating this generation, both in terms of military education and mental preparation. ISIS promotes this education through schools, which the group has set up throughout Iraq and Syria. Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, an anti-ISIS activist group, has documented the presence of at least five known youth training camps in the Raqqa province.<sup>97</sup> One of these camps, the Sharea Youth Camp, is specifically for children aged 5 to 16 years old, located in the town of Tabqa. Approximately 350 boys train there. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has also documented the presence of the Al-Bouhtri School in Al-Bab, Aleppo, which has been used as a recruitment and military training school for boys under the age of 18.<sup>98</sup> Once in these schools, the children’s education is divided into two parts: instruction in Islam and military training. The aim of ISIS schools is strikingly similar to the aim of the infamous Hitler Youth program –creating perfect, loyal, and obedient soldiers for the future.<sup>99</sup>

### *Physical Training*

ISIS has set up a number of schools for the purposes of training children militarily and preparing them mentally. In these schools, children learn to shoot live ammunition with AK-47s, how to fight in battles using hand-to-hand combat, as well as how to drive.<sup>100</sup> ISIS releases posters advertising these schools, encouraging adults to come and teach. One new school, located in the Raqqa province, is specifically for English-speaking children. Reportedly, the five children of the infamous Sydney terrorist, Khaled Sharrouf, train there. The boys’ school is called Abu Musab Zarqawi School and the girls' school is

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<sup>96</sup> Islamic State. “The Lions of Tomorrow.” *Dabiq* 8, 20-21.

<sup>97</sup> “Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children.” *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). “Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria.” *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>99</sup> Vinograd, Cassandra, Ghazi Balkiz, and Ammar Cheikh Omar. “ISIS Trains Child Soldiers at Camps for ‘Cubs of the Islamic State’” NBC News. November 7, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Right “Pakistan: IS Has Recruited at Least 400 Child Soldiers in Syria since January.” *Right Vision News*, March 27, 2015.

called Aisha School, which resides next door. These two schools are for children aged as young as 6 to 14, and they run for three hours everyday from 9 AM until noontime.

In a video released by ISIS, young boys are seen undergoing physical training in the school while holding ISIS flags.<sup>101</sup> Children are given similar attire to adult ISIS fighters, sometimes wearing masks or kaffiyehs over their faces to reinforce their military training. They carry weapons with them, at times too big and heavy for them to carry.<sup>102</sup> A proud and eager 9-year-old boy interviewed in the Vice News documentary *Islamic State* discussed his plans to go to camp to receive training on “The Russian” or Kalashnikov rifle. Despite his age, the boy admitted his ability to shoot a gun and to prior experience shooting weapons. In another ISIS video, showing Kazakh children training in a school, children sit in a group wearing matching camouflage uniforms. One boy strips and re-assembles a machine gun, and other child soldiers carry out gun maneuvers and tactical formations. Other boys are seen exercising in a gym and practicing martial arts.<sup>103</sup> Riad, a former ISIS child fighter, describes a camp he attended in Kafr Hamma, Aleppo with between 250 and 300 people, many of them under 18 years old:

“It was a very difficult camp. They gave us a very severe training. We would wake up, pray, after prayer maybe around 9 a.m. we did exercises, then rest in the room, then Sharia courses, then military study, then more Sharia courses, then some rest, prayer. [Between afternoon prayers], they didn’t let us sleep, they would come in our tent and fire into the sky and [send us] to guard a trench. Many times we fell asleep in this trench because we were so tired.”<sup>104</sup>

Another foreign fighter describes the military drills they underwent:

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<sup>101</sup> Chambers, Geoff. “Teaching Terror to the Junior Jihadis.” *The Daily Telegraph*. February 24, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Marcus, Jeffrey. “U.N. Report Details ISIS Abuse of Women and Children.” *The New York Times*. October 4, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Wyke, Tom. “ISIS Release Shocking New Video of Child Soldiers from Kazakhstan Being Trained with AK47s.” Mail Online. November 23, 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) “Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die” Human Rights Watch.

“We used to crawl under webbing. There was fire above it, and we would be firing our weapons. We would jump through large metal rings and the trainers would be firing at our feet and telling us if we stop we will be shot. I was very careful not to stop running, I didn't stop, even if I was exhausted, out of breath, I didn't stop.”<sup>105</sup>

Military training similar to adult fighters, often involving intense drills and duties, is a regular part of child recruits' schooling.<sup>106</sup> Once they complete their training, the children graduate from their schools. In an ISIS video, children dressed in military uniforms line up to shake hands with a sheikh. They are called the "generation of lions, protectors of religion, dignity and land." Their skills and training are tested before ISIS decides where to send the children. Many of them desire to fight on the front lines.<sup>107</sup>

### *Mental Training*

The mental preparation involved in becoming a useful fighter for ISIS is extensive, and is the most essential aspect in creating the future Islamic State, even more so than military training. A child, once he grows older, will only be so useful if he acquiesces with ISIS ideology and views violence as a way of life. In order to be the future of ISIS, these children must acknowledge and understand the ways of ISIS. According to a report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, ISIS prioritizes children as a vehicle for ensuring long-term loyalty and an adherence to their ideology, creating a cadre of devoted fighters that will see violence as a way of life.<sup>108</sup> As Steven Salinsky, director of the American Middle East Media Research Institute, so aptly stated,

“The next generation [of Muslim youth have already been] brainwashed to hate the West and to strive for jihad and martyrdom. They have been

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<sup>105</sup> Razek, Raja, Nick Paton Walsh, and Nick Thompson. "CNN Exclusive: A 13-year-old Witness to ISIS' Atrocities in Syria." CNN. December 30, 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>107</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*

trained on the battlefield and know how to create bombs and suicide belts and to behead and crucify the innocent. This is something we must be prepared for and understand.”<sup>109</sup>

The necessary mental training and preparation children receive involves several dimensions, including indoctrination, exposure, and a concept denoted “total organization.”

### Indoctrination

Indoctrination involves embedding ISIS ideology into children, which they primarily learn in schools, or through their family members. In areas under its control, ISIS has closed schools or altered the curriculum to fit ISIS ideology.<sup>110</sup> In schools, children learn about Sharia and Islamic creed. They are taught how to pray and forced to pray 5 times a day, as required by Islamic law.<sup>111</sup> Subjects like art, history, science, and sports are deemed incompatible with Islam and are therefore not taught.<sup>112</sup> Some children simply do not understand what they are being taught, but nevertheless undergo the indoctrination. A boy named Mohammed stated that while he understood the concept of fasting and the importance of prayer, he did not understand the word “infidels” and why they should be fought.<sup>113</sup> As an example of ISIS indoctrination, a resident in Fallujah, Iraq describes how his six-year-old son began playing with a water pistol and screaming “I am a fighter of the Islamic State!” When at an ISIS checkpoint, the son shouted, “We love the State!” when the fighter asked, “Which state?” the boy replied “The Islamic State,” to which the fighter replied, “Good boy.” Following the incident, the father moved his family to an area under Kurdish control.<sup>114</sup> Through this

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<sup>109</sup> "ISIS Releases Moms' Guidebook to Raising 'jihadi Babies'" RT English. 2015.

<sup>110</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Prothero, Mitchell. "Kidnapped Kurdish Students May Be Getting Jihad Lessons from ISIS." *Republican American*. June 22, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Damon, Arwa. "Child Fighter Tormented by ISIS." *CNN*. November 13, 2014.

<sup>114</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

indoctrination, children learn to love fighting for the sake of building the Islamic State.<sup>115</sup>

Furthermore, ISIS is beginning to recognize the importance of starting the indoctrination process young, at an age where the ideas the children receive can be controlled and they are the most susceptible to such ideas. *A Sister's Role in Jihad*, a guidebook for ISIS women, instructs mothers how to raise mujahedeen children. ISIS emphasizes the significance in starting young (as babies), stating, "No child is ever too young to be started off on jihad training."<sup>116</sup> ISIS considers the role of raising daughters and sons to be mujahedeen as one of the most critical roles women play in jihad. The guidebook instructs mothers to tell their children bedtime stories about martyrs and jihadi heroes. It instructs mothers to establish a "total organization" environment, stating, "Eliminate your television completely if you can (it mostly teaches shamelessness, anarchy, and random violence) and keep a check on the company your child is in."<sup>117</sup> Otherwise, mothers can show their sons Islamic and military training videos, books, and Internet sources. The guide tells mothers to teach their boys to direct their anger towards the enemy, "the infidels", by having them practice on a punching bag, for instance.<sup>118</sup> In this manner, mothers are also encouraged to physically train their boys by enrolling them in a variety of activities: Archery, target-shooting, martial arts, driving, swimming, exercise, darts, navigation, etc. All of these activities build skill-sets useful for fighting alongside ISIS, which calls military training a "must" for children.<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, an Islamic State member attests to the active process of indoctrinating children at a young age, stating, "We established a nursery to teach the Quran and

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<sup>115</sup> Maley, Paul and Greg Bearup. "Aussie Child's Sick Head Grab." *The Herald Sun*. August 11, 2014.

<sup>116</sup> Islamic State (2014). *A Sister's Role in Jihad*.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

religion to young children to teach them how to become, one day, leaders who rule the world and lead Muslims on the path to Sharia.”<sup>120</sup> Considering how important the first several years of life are for learning both moral and social values, this strategy of indoctrinating children when they are very young ensures a child’s compliance with ISIS ideology in the future. Children indoctrinated as toddlers and infants do not know a different way of life, and thus they view ISIS ideology and tactics as normal and right. They lack countering perspectives. The role that parents or family members can play in children’s involvement in ISIS is crucial, both in a child’s recruitment to ISIS, as well as their physical training and indoctrination. Parents can encourage their children in jihad by, for example, proudly posting on social media pictures of their children dressed in jihadi clothing or partaking in jihad.<sup>121</sup>

The incorporation of children in ISIS should not be viewed solely as a result of ISIS leaders and fighters dragging them into the fight. Children’s involvement and development as ISIS participants is a result of the environment the entirety of ISIS creates –by ISIS leaders, non-military members, family, and friends.<sup>122</sup> As an example, an ISIS member featured in the Vice News documentary on the Islamic State appears with his 7-year-old son –the father had brought the boy from Belgium where they resided prior to joining the Islamic State. Their conversation went as follows:

*Son:* My name is Abdullah.

*Father:* Raise your voice.

*Son:* Abdullah!

*Father:* Are you from Belgium or the Islamic State? (the boy shyly turns to his father). Talk to him, tell him you’re from the Islamic State.

*Son:* (turns back to camera) The Islamic State.

*Father:* Do you want to go back to Belgium? Why? What is over there?

*Son:* Infidels.

*Father:* Infidels. What do we have here?

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<sup>120</sup> Vice News (2014). *The Islamic State*. Film.

<sup>121</sup> Stalinsky, Steven, and R. Sosnow. Print Report. Washington, D.C.: Middle East Media Research Institute, February 7, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> Islamic State (2014). *A Sister’s Role in Jihad*.

*Son:* The Islamic State.

*Father:* Do you like the Islamic State? (The boy nods) Are you sure?

*Son:* Yes.

*Father:* What do you want to be, a jihadist or to execute a martyrdom operation?

*Son:* A jihadist.

*Father:* A jihadist. Why do we kill the infidels? Stand up. What have the infidels done? What have the infidels done?

*Son:* They kill Muslims.

*Father:* Because they kill Muslims. All the infidels? Like the infidels of Europe?

*Son:* The infidels of Europe, all the infidels.

The conversation that transpired between father and son makes it clear how influential of a role the father has in the son's life. Abdullah's father confirms the boy's answers through repetition, and encourages his son's confidence in the Islamic State and its ideology by demanding him to raise his voice, stand up, and look at the camera. Just as a parent teaches a child to say "please" and "thank you" so do adult figures involved in ISIS teach their children to "kill infidels" and think in line with ISIS ideology.

### Exposure

Exposure to violent acts serves to blunt feelings of guilt, remorse, or disgust associated with witnessing or participating in brutality and violence. Once these feelings are numbed and desensitized, children are much more apt to commit violent acts. Exposure to violence therefore reinforces violence as a way of life and enables children to become the brutal future fighters that ISIS ideology requires. Children are exposed to violence through schools, where they are shown videos of violent acts like beheadings. Children living in ISIS-controlled territory are also vulnerable to exposure, as ISIS often carries out executions –crucifixions, beheadings, shootings, and beatings –in public and leaves the bodies in the public square for several days afterwards.

Children are encouraged to witness these public executions, and the display of the bodies in public squares is hard to avoid. Children living in ISIS territory thus regularly witness brutality. ISIS has followed a consistent pattern in this manner –they usually announce the time and place of an execution through Al-Hisbah, the morality police, and encourage

residents to attend. Prior to executing the accused, ISIS announces their “crimes” and typically leaves the victim hanging on crosses for up to 3 days. Residents of ISIS-controlled territories interviewed by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic attested that executions have become common and that heads and bodies are always on display in the very public parts of town. Children cannot avoid such sites.

One father from Dayr Az-Zawr stated that in late July 2014 he saw the body of a man hanging from a cross in the town of Al-Mayadin. He stood frozen for some time because of the horror of the scene, before realizing that his 7-year-old son was with him.<sup>123</sup> In Mosul, after being taken by ISIS during its rise to power in June 2014, children as young as 8 years old watch a prisoner being shot in the back of the head as the crowd cheers.<sup>124</sup> In June 2015, ISIS beheaded Abdalnabi al-Shargawi, a volunteer for the Libyan National Army. He was beheaded in public in front of children aged 6 to 8 for “educational purposes”, who were told to gather around the body. The militant displayed the head of the soldier as children looked on.<sup>125</sup> A boy living under ISIS speaks about this process ISIS has developed to intentionally assimilate violence into daily life, stating, “When we go to the mosque, they order us to come the next day at a specific time and place to [watch] heads cut off, lashings or stonings. We saw a young man who did not fast for Ramadan, so they crucified him for three days, and we saw a woman being stoned [to death] because she committed adultery.”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). “Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria.” *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>124</sup> Williams, David. “Children of Jihad: ISIS Parades Its Boy Soldiers as Fanatics Close in on Baghdad.” Mail Online. May 18, 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Hall, John. “ISIS Beheads a Libyan Soldier outside a Mosque for 'Education Purposes'” Mail Online. June 4, 2015.

<sup>126</sup> Damon, Arwa. “Child Fighter Tormented by ISIS.” CNN. November 13, 2014.



Besides public executions, ISIS deliberately shows children videos of violence. In Raqqa, children are gathered to watch videos of mass executions of government soldiers.<sup>127</sup> The effects of exposure to violence are heightened when children are forced to participate in such acts. Children learn to behead through practicing on dolls.<sup>128</sup> Though not the actual act of beheading, the impersonation of the act aids in desensitization leading up to the actual act. Additionally, as mentioned previously, children who become members of ISIS may fulfill the role of executioner. Exposure to violence aims to prepare children for actual participation in violent acts such as execution. Continual exposure to violence can create children obsessed with violence. Reintegrating such children back into society is difficult and nearly ensures he or she will continue the violence in the future. This scenario is ideal for ISIS, as they will consistently be in need of extraordinarily violent fighters so long as they continue their current strategy of brutality as a means of gaining attention and continue to gain power by force. ISIS's deliberate process of desensitizing children to violence reflects this strategy, leading ISIS to commit extensive war crimes and child abuses.

However, exposure to violence is not merely achieved through public executions and schools. ISIS has made use of social media to expose people around the world to violence, and this exposure has had an effect on children outside of ISIS-controlled territory as well. Videos showing executions have been widely publicized by not only ISIS, but with the help of media outlets throughout the world. Exposure to such videos aids in encouraging violence in children, and this has been the case especially in other areas throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In many instances, children have posted videos online appearing to imitate the infamous acts of ISIS: James Foley's execution, for instance, or the murder of the 16 Coptic Christians in Libya in November 2014.

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<sup>127</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>128</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

In February 2015, an Islamic State propaganda video, filmed in Yemen, showed teenage boys re-enacting the execution of the Coptic Christians. Sticks replaced knives as the five teenage boys led five younger boys, around 10 years old, to the beach in order to carry out the imaginary execution. Their enactment closely resembled the actual film, with one boy reciting the speech given by “Jihadi John” prior to the Christians’ death. They completed the re-enactment of the murders with sounds of throat slitting and gasps of breath, and showed bloody waters, as could be seen in the end of the real video. Additionally, five days after Islamic State released the real video, a number of Egyptian boys re-enacted the murders and posted the video online. Again, the video included a re-enactment of “Jihadi John” as a boy pointed to the camera with his wooden stick just like the British jihadi.<sup>129</sup>

Like exposure to murders and tortures, playing out these scenarios may not be physically harmful, but are certainly mentally harmful in that they prepare children for real-life scenarios. Some incidents, however, do cause physical harm. On February 3, 2015, ISIS released a video showing captured Jordanian pilot Lieutenant Muath al-Kaseasbeh being burned alive as he stood in a cage. Even worse than the re-enactments of the execution of the Coptic Christians, a group of approximately seven boys trapped their 10-year-old friend in a wooden cage in Yemen in the village of Al Dahthath. They subsequently doused him with fuel and set him on fire. Luckily, residents came to his rescue when he called for help, but the boy suffered burns to his legs as his friends watched.<sup>130</sup> These disturbing re-enactments have not only occurred in the Arab world, but in the West as well. In August 2014, a young boy around age 8 was pictured beheading a doll dressed in an orange jumpsuit. The boy is displayed wearing black with a balaclava over his face,

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<sup>129</sup> Wyke, Tom. "Now Even Children Are Re-enacting ISIS Beheading Videos in Sick Stunt Staged for YouTube." Mail Online. February 24, 2015.

<sup>130</sup> "Yemeni Boys Reportedly Reenact ISIS Burning Death of Jordanian Pilot." Fox News. March 5, 2015.

carries a knife, and holds the doll by its hair. The next picture shows the severed head of the doll, blood painted on its face.<sup>131</sup>

Therefore, while ISIS's systematic manner of exposing children to violence through public executions and camps aims to prepare children for the future of ISIS, their tendency to expose children to violence all over the world via social media encourages such children to support and take part in ISIS activities. The true consequences of constant exposure to ISIS brutality via media outlets is unclear, but it is certainly an influence in children who choose to take part in violence, as occurred in the Yemeni re-enactment of the Jordanian soldier's death at the hands of ISIS.

### Total Organization

Lastly, ISIS creates its future fighters by isolating children from non-Islamic values, a concept denoted as "total organization." Sociologist Erving Goffman defined it as one that "has more or less monopoly control of its members' everyday life." This keeps other values ISIS deems incompatible with ultra-fundamentalist Islam out of society and out of children's lives. Children are taught so that they do not know a different way of life, which deeply instills the values ISIS is looking to instill, such as violence and an ultra-fundamentalist ideology. Young children are especially easy to mold because their minds are particularly impressionable. And once children are born into a certain system, in this case, ISIS's system, they have little choice but to identify with that system.<sup>132</sup> Isolation is a very useful tool in controlling all aspects of a child's life. One boy attests that when he attended ISIS schools, he was prohibited from seeing or speaking to family, and kept from everything he knew to be familiar. This was the case for approximately a month.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Joshi, Priya. "ISIS Posts Gruesome Image of Child Jihadist Re-enacting James Foley Execution with a Doll." International Business Times RSS. August 24, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." The Guardian. March 10, 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Damon, Arwa. "Child Fighter Tormented by ISIS." CNN. November 13, 2014.

As mentioned in *A Sister's Role in Jihad*, ISIS suggests that women keep their children away from television and other children that do not act in accordance with ISIS ideology, which ultimately allows ISIS to indirectly control children's lives and the environment they reside in. The younger the children are when undergoing indoctrination while keeping all other values out, the less they are able to resonate with another perspective or point of reference –they only see the world through jihadi ideology.<sup>134</sup> A young boy living in the Islamic State, as documented by Vice News, states, “In the name of God, my name is Daoud and I am 14 years old. I'd like to join the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and to kill with them because they fight infidels and apostates. The Islamic State, they haven't done anything wrong and God-willing they will not. We love the Islamic State.”<sup>135</sup> ISIS ideology becomes a normal part of their everyday lives. Children view the ideology as normal and right, not as fundamentalist or extreme.

As Dr. Natasha Underhill, an expert on terrorism in the Middle East at Nottingham Trent University, so aptly stated, “Children are a very smart selection by ISIS as they show an aim of longevity from the groups perspective - target the young, indoctrinate them quickly, make them extremely violent and the result is a ground force that is unstoppable in terms of their beliefs and loyalty to the group.”<sup>136</sup> ISIS crimes and abuses against children in the name of mental preparation reflect several dimensions of the group, including its tendency to prepare for the long-term and equip a generation for a long war against “infidel Muslims”, secularism and the West.

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<sup>134</sup> Vinograd, Cassandra, Ghazi Balkiz, and Ammar Cheikh Omar. "ISIS Trains Child Soldiers at Camps for 'Cubs of the Islamic State'" NBC News. November 7, 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Vice News (2014). *The Islamic State*. Film.

<sup>136</sup> Saul, Heather. "Isis Video Shows Child Militant Shooting Dead 'Israeli Spy' Muhammad Said Ismail Musallam." The Independent. March 11, 2015.

## Propaganda

### *Brutality*

ISIS separates itself from other terror organizations in how vocal and transparent the group is with regards to its recruitment, training, use, and indoctrination of children. ISIS's use of children reflects an important strategy of the group: the use of brutality to attract attention and to gain power and authority. ISIS's use of children reaches a new level of brutality, a characteristic that has given ISIS great infamy and aided its rise to power. Children ensure that ISIS continues to attract attention and be a focal point in global news. ISIS has not only used children in order to solidify its reputation of brutality, but has been quite transparent about the practice via social media and recruitment videos. ISIS's transparency aims to gain the attention of the world, particularly the West.<sup>137</sup>

According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "By publicizing its brutality, the so-called ISIS seeks to convey its authority over its areas of control, to show its strength to attract recruits, and to threaten any individuals, groups or States that challenge its ideology."<sup>138</sup> Considering how stigmatized children's rights violations are, it is more practical to gain attention and solidify its brutal reputation around the world through committing such abuses openly, rather than committing human rights abuses against adults. Professor Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, from Queen Mary University of London, reinforces, "It is so utterly sick and perverted and depraved that it guarantees global visibility: child abuse, pure and simple, it pushes other stuff to one side in a world where so much else is competing for our attention."<sup>139</sup> Using children in a systematic and vocal manner thereby meets ISIS's strategy to gain worldwide attention and display its power. This is made clear through the constant

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<sup>137</sup> "ISIS Releases Moms' Guidebook to Raising 'jihadi Babies'" RT English. 2015.

<sup>138</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>139</sup> Joshi, Priya. "ISIS Posts Gruesome Image of Child Jihadist Re-enacting James Foley Execution with a Doll." *International Business Times RSS*. August 24, 2014.

presence children have in ISIS execution and recruitment videos and photos.<sup>140</sup> ISIS frequently shows videos of child terrorists training, more so than detailing the training of adult fighters.<sup>141</sup> ISIS's use of children to demonstrate its power and brutality via such photos and videos is only reinforced more deeply once picked up by media outlets throughout the West.

### *Spreading Influence*

In addition to spreading influence by advertising its brutality, ISIS seeks to spread its influence by capturing non-Islamic minority children, indoctrinating them, and re-inserting them back into their respective societies. When ISIS overran Yazidi towns in 2014, they captured young Yazidi boys and sent them to schools for several months, where they were given Muslim Arabic names to replace their Kurdish-language names and infused with ISIS ideology. One Yazidi boy, terrified by the camp, escaped in March 2015. He attempted to bring his Yazidi friend along, but the boy grew to accept Islam and insisted on staying.<sup>142</sup> In May 2014, 153 Kurdish boys were kidnapped from a school in Aleppo and “religiously trained”, which subsequently involved exposure to videos of beheadings and instruction in militant ideology for a five-month period. Upon their release, the parents of the boys describe their fear of ISIS trying to inject their worldview into Kurdish society,<sup>143</sup> Converting young boys or indoctrinating them for a period of time and subsequently placing them back into their homes is an effective mechanism to not only break the coherency of minority cultures, but to spread both ISIS influence and fear amongst such minorities.

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<sup>140</sup> Edmiston, Jake. “The Cub of Baghdadi: Islamic State reports boy 'martyred'.” *The Vancouver Sun*. October 10, 2014.

<sup>141</sup> Marcus, Jeffrey. “U.N. Report Details ISIS Abuse of Women and Children.” *The New York Times*. October 4, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Janssen, Zeina. “ISIS Is Indoctrinating Children in Iraq by Forcing Them to Behead Dolls.” *Business Insider*. July 20, 2015.

<sup>143</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). “Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria.” *Human Rights Council*.

## Easy Targets

### *Affordability*

ISIS recruiting of children in exchange for money is also advantageous for the terrorist group, as children are paid approximately \$100 per month, about half the amount adult fighters are paid, which is approximately \$200 per month. Children are thus more affordable for ISIS.<sup>144</sup> Although ISIS has abundant sources of funding, via extortion, taxation, theft from Iraqi banks, oil, and kidnapping, ISIS will eventually lose its financial stronghold as oil prices fall, airstrikes targeting oil refineries continue, and borders surrounding Syria tighten. Additionally, ISIS's largest expenditure is salaries, as the organization prioritizes investment in people. Conversely, however, they have a habit of minimizing costs by looting military equipment, paying low salaries, and seeking to expropriate land and already existing infrastructure, eliminating the need to build.<sup>145</sup> Keeping this in mind, the decision to recruit children is financially wise for the organization. Although children are treated as adult fighters, ISIS can nevertheless pay children half the salary simply because they are children, and yet continue their investment in personnel. This practice fits ISIS's strategy of investing in people (their future) while maintaining costs.

### *Vulnerability*

Children, especially at the youngest ages, are among the easiest targets for recruitment and indoctrination, giving them the potential to become the perfect fighters for the Islamic State. ISIS targets the young because their minds are especially impressionable<sup>146</sup> and they are gullible to the ways of the society surrounding them.<sup>147</sup> Children living in ISIS-controlled territory, or ISIS society, are therefore especially

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<sup>144</sup> Stern, Jessica, and JM Berger. "'Raising Tomorrow's Mujahideen': The Horrific World of Isis's Child Soldiers." *The Guardian*. March 10, 2015.

<sup>145</sup> Almkhtar, Sarah. "ISIS Finances Are Strong." *The New York Times*. May 18, 2015.

<sup>146</sup> Vinograd, Cassandra, Ghazi Balkiz, and Ammar Cheikh Omar. "ISIS Trains Child Soldiers at Camps for 'Cubs of the Islamic State'" *NBC News*. November 7, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Gray, David H., and Tom Owen III Matchin (2008). "Children: The New Face of Terrorism." *International NGO Journal* 3, no 6: 108-14.

vulnerable not only to being recruited but to becoming accustomed to ISIS ideology even without attending a training camp.

### **Counter-Terrorist Measures**

Furthermore, conducting counter-terrorism against children is more controversial. While the US conducts airstrikes and targets ISIS leaders and fighters, it is unethical for the US to not only target child fighters, but to accidentally kill child fighters as collateral damage. This is an advantage for ISIS, who can use the death of children at the hands of the coalition as a means to point at the immorality of the United States and advance its recruitment. The higher ethical standards surrounding treatment of children and the lack of policy towards children involvement in terrorism work towards ISIS's advantage, who often disregards children's rights completely, even as nation states cannot. And while the United States and other nations torture or prosecute adult terrorists, how to handle child terrorists is much more unclear. There is no international consensus concerning the minimum age for criminal liability, but rather the minimum age differs across countries. The United Nations has created a number of non-binding resolutions encouraging the formation of a minimum age in which children can be held accountable for their crimes via The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice and The Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is a clearer standard for banning the recruitment of children. According to the Paris Principles of 2007, signed by 60 countries,

“Children who are accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were associated with armed forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators. They must be treated in accordance with international law in a framework of restorative justice and social rehabilitation, consistent with international law which offers children special



protection through numerous agreements and principles.”<sup>148</sup>

The Syrian Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child bans non-state armies from recruiting or using children under age 18 in direct hostilities. Conscripting or enlisting children under 15, including for support roles, is a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>149</sup> Syria itself has made legislative reforms in 2013 as well, criminalizing all forms of recruitment and the use of children under the age of 18 by armed forces and armed groups.<sup>150</sup> Although there is a standard for banning child recruitment, the standards for prosecuting children under international law are lacking and vague because law regards child recruits as victims, and rightly so. However, ISIS recruitment strategies have begun to blur the line between victim and participant, as they are training children to grow up to be terrorists and fighters for the future of ISIS –at which point they will become participants. When international laws do exist, the prosecution for children involved in terrorism is much more lenient than adults involved in terrorism. Thus, ISIS can use children to carry out their work and prepare the future of the Islamic State, while nation states are much less able to prosecute and conduct counter-terrorism against such child fighters.

## **THE FUTURE TREND**

As ISIS continues to create strongholds throughout Iraq and Syria, they will likely continue to expand their child recruitment process. When ISIS captures more land throughout Iraq and Syria, the group will be in need of more fighters to solidify control of those lands. Otherwise, ISIS may stretch itself too thin by controlling land it does not have the appropriate personnel to control.<sup>151</sup> In the same capacity, if ISIS wishes to establish a stable Islamic State and create citizens for the future, it needs communities and therefore needs families, as families are a basis for maintaining communities for

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<sup>148</sup> UNICEF (2007). *The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. The United Nations.

<sup>149</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>150</sup> Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (2014). "Rule of Terror: Living Under ISIS in Syria." *Human Rights Council*.

<sup>151</sup> Al Shamary, Ammar and Gilgamesh Nabeel. "ISIL grooming children to be killers; Terrorists cross a new line, groom kids for brutality." *USA Today*. March 12, 2015.

successive generations. ISIS is inviting children and women alongside men in order to encourage complete families to come to the Islamic State. By recruiting more children, ISIS is making an appeal to the family.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, as ISIS continues to expand and attempts to maintain a stable Caliphate, the group will increasingly need children –both as a means to solidify the group’s holdings and future.

Additionally, the number of child recruits will increase as long as ISIS faces some degree of desperation, most notably, if the US-led coalition persists and is intensified in the wake of the November 2015 Paris attacks that shook the world. During the battle for the town of Kobani on the edge of Syria in 2014 and early 2015, ISIS became more desperate for personnel and fighters, thus involving more children in the fight. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented that ISIS sent approximately 140 members, the majority under 18 years of age and new to the fight, to the battlefield of Kobani, where at least 6 of the minors were killed.<sup>153</sup> Several activists observed children fighting alongside ISIS militants during the battle. Mustafa Bali, a Kobani-based activist, attested to seeing the bodies of four boys, two of them younger than 14. At least one 18 year old carried out a suicide attack.<sup>154</sup> Once ISIS faces more formidable opponents in its rampage to capture Syria and Iraq territory, the influx of child recruits will increase.

Furthermore, when ISIS faces difficulty in recruiting adults, the organization supplements its losses by expanding child recruitment. In March, when ISIS had difficulties attracting adults to the group, ISIS appeared to boost its recruitment of teenagers and children.<sup>155</sup> Due to tighter border controls in the countries surrounding Syria and Iraq, most importantly the Turkey-Syria border, less foreign fighters have joined the ranks of ISIS

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<sup>152</sup> Nazeer, Zubaidah. "Families Lured by Promise of Homes, Jobs and Money." *The Straits Times*. March 18, 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Syrian Observatory For Human Rights. "IS Organization Continues in Attracting Children, and Recruit More than 400 Children from 'Ashbal Al- Khilafah'." March 24, 2015

<sup>154</sup> "Islamic State Group Recruits, Exploits Children." *The China Daily*. November 24, 2014.

<sup>155</sup> Hall, John. "ISIS Beheads a Libyan Soldier outside a Mosque for 'Education Purposes'" Mail Online. June 4, 2015.

since the beginning of 2015. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as of March 2015, ISIS has only managed to recruit 120 adults since the start of 2015.<sup>156</sup> ISIS will likely continue to face this difficulty in the future as more countries take action with regards to foreign fighters. Such difficulty obtaining adult recruits will become a factor in the expansion of child recruitment.

ISIS is not only expanding its recruitment of children, but the children they recruit are becoming younger. Although this trend reflects the recent recruitment difficulties ISIS has experienced, it also reflects how ISIS recognizes the advantages of indoctrinating children while they are young. As they have stated in *A Sister's Role in Jihad*, no child is too young to start jihadi training.<sup>157</sup> A former child recruit interviewed by the Human Rights Watch, who attended an ISIS training camp, attested, "The leader of the camp said [ISIS] liked the younger ones better. He told me, 'Tomorrow they'll be a stronger leader or a stronger fighter.'"<sup>158</sup> In 2013, an FSA military commander stated that he captured 30 children between ages 13 and 15 fighting ISIS and attempted to rehabilitate them by isolating them in a rural location and bringing religious leaders and male relatives to speak with them. Two medical service providers who were also interviewed treated children as young as 12 injured while fighting with ISIS. Other interviewees reported interacting with children 13 years old or younger who trained or served with ISIS. Later in September 2014, the United Nations reported that a 10-year child was killed fighting alongside ISIS.<sup>159</sup> In 2015, Abu Mohammad, a Mosul resident, attested to seeing a 5-year-old boy among the child soldiers carrying a weapon.<sup>160</sup> Since their rise in June 2014, ISIS has no qualms in increasingly targeting younger children.

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<sup>156</sup> "Pakistan: IS Has Recruited at Least 400 Child Soldiers in Syria since January." *Right Vision News*, March 27, 2015.

<sup>157</sup> Islamic State (2014). *A Sister's Role in Jihad*.

<sup>158</sup> Motaparthy, Priyanka (2014) "Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die" Human Rights Watch.

<sup>159</sup> Edmiston, Jake. "The Cub of Baghdadi: Islamic State reports boy 'martyred'." *The Vancouver Sun*. October 10, 2014.

<sup>160</sup> Al Shamary, Ammar and Gilgamesh Nabeel. "ISIL grooming children to be killers; Terrorists cross a new line, groom kids for brutality." *USA Today*. March 12, 2015.

## CONCLUSION

Much of the existing literature on children in terrorism evolves around children witnessing terrorist attacks or being passive participants. Obviously, there are dire psychological consequences for children who witness terrorist attacks. ISIS's use of children, however, has more than psychological consequences: the moral and physical consequences will be extensive as well. The assurance of a morally and psychologically disturbed generation of terrorist fighters is a danger to the entire world. Kofi Anna, former Secretary-General to the United Nations, reiterated, "If there is any lesson that we can draw from the experience of the past decade, it is that the use of child-soldiers is far more than a humanitarian concern; that its impact lasts far beyond the time of actual fighting; and that the scope of the problem vastly exceeds the numbers of children directly involved."<sup>161</sup> ISIS's use of children marks a disturbing trend in terrorism that has perhaps ushered in a new wave of terrorism separate from the post-9/11 era. Traditionally, terrorist groups use children when they are desperate, when counter-terrorist pressure is strong. They are treated as expendable, and become last minute fighters or convenient suicide bombers.

ISIS's use of children reflects this tradition to some capacity, but under ISIS the trend of children in terrorism is evolving. Children involved in terrorism are traditionally described as victims. Everything they witness or participate in is forced upon them. ISIS, however, teaches children to choose terrorism, or even to volunteer as suicide bombers. They are taught to become active participants. As one Islamic State fighter so aptly stated, "For us, we believe this generation of children is the generation of the Caliphate. God willing, this generation will fight infidels and apostates, the Americans and their allies, God willing. The right doctrine has been implanted into these children. All of them love to fight for the sake of building the Islamic State, and for the sake of God."<sup>162</sup> The

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<sup>161</sup> "'Use of Child Combatants Will Carry Consequences', Secretary-General Tells Event on Child Soldiers." UN News Center.

<sup>162</sup> Vice News (2014). *The Islamic State*. Film.

world must understand this phenomenon: ISIS is actively ensuring its future in Iraq and Syria and even beyond, abolishing territorial borders separating nations. Counter-terror measures must be adopted to hinder the active child recruitment process ISIS has so successfully implemented, or otherwise the world will face a future ISIS perhaps more lethal than the current generation of ISIS fighters.

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