

# FULCRUM GLOBAL



*The publishing arm of the Society for Defense and Strategic Studies (SDSS)  
at American Military University (APUS)*

## INTELLIGENCE BRIEF #4

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**SUBJECT: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Utilization of Social Media**

**COUNTRY/REGION: Global**

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) burst onto the international scene and took recruiting to a whole new level. It began with their overwhelming support with social media and brute force, then taking control of Syria by force during their civil war. Afterwards, they moved to retake Iraq and restore the original boundaries of the Islamic Caliphate of old. ISIS recruiting techniques and utilization of current technology took Western Intelligence agencies by surprise and vastly increased their electronic footprint to a global spectrum. Technology and social media made it possible for them to achieve this without requiring the use of traditional recruiting techniques.

### **Customer Questions:**

1. What is the origin and goal of ISIS?
2. Who does ISIS target with Social Media?
3. What has this sphere of influence allowed ISIS to do?
4. Whose methodology for attacks do they follow?
5. How many known terrorist organizations have sworn allegiance to ISIS?

### **CURRENT ASSESSMENT:**

“The people of my family will face trials and torture and rejection until a nation comes from the east that carries with them black flags,” a key verse to recruit converts for ISIS (Gorka, 2015). The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have been upfront about their goal of creating a caliphate and taking control of all Islamic followers. This organization plays a direct competitor to recruiting for Al Qaeda (AQ) in the region, given they originated from Al Qaeda Iraq (AQI), as well as being called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) prior to ISIS. Many of the ranking members and assets went with the changes because they wanted a true Islamic Caliphate. The group initially took full advantage of an unstable country in Syria when many various factions were rebelling against Bashar Assad’s brutal reign and continual utilization of chemical and biological weapons against his own population, by using Social Media to incite support. Unlike Egypt during the Arab Spring, the internet connection was never severed and an organization known as the Syrian Electronic Army (SEA) emerged on the side of Assad and viciously went after anyone that was anti-Assad. At one point SEA even hacked the White House’s Twitter account and posted false accounts of the White House being under attack and caused the stock market to temporarily plummet.

To combat the SEA, ISIS had their own teams of hackers that were trained in Information Technology and Computer Science that began their own cyber barrage against all countries of the world that opposed them. They began to utilize social media to post their loots or “booty” as they would call it in Arabic when they would overrun Syrian military compounds. Then came the post-attack pictures and recruitment posts, which consisted of the dead bodies of the soldiers and personnel, whom they considered to be the “enemies of Allah”. This continued throughout their campaign and during their push towards Northern Iraq, Baghdad, and the area around the U.S. Embassy. ISIS utilized Twitter and YouTube to reach potential followers that lived mainly in the United States and several nations in Europe. Their strategy was to encourage those loyal to the cause to assist them in their fight against what they considered to be a tyrannical push of aggressive governments that are trying to destroy their version of Islam.

ISIS utilized videos of dead bodies and then they broadcasted how life appears after they have “liberated” cities that were not following Islamic Law in their version. They would also show videos that displayed ruthlessness when teaching kids to execute suspected spies without ever providing a shred of proof. These targeted tactics and videos appealed to those looking for a cause and a destiny to live by. This has even been documented when they called for girls to fly to Syria in order to become brides to ISIS fighters and breed more fighters for future generations.

### **ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT:**

Twitter has blocked almost 90,000 pro-ISIS messages per-day that were posted during 2015. During 2015 there were 17 million tweets and 24,000 ISIS Twitter accounts from another analytical review. To fully comprehend the capability that Social Media has made in terms of a recruiting impact, 9.3 billion tweets that have originated in Arabic, that were reported by Arabic speakers to Anonymous that they thought were affiliated with ISIS. Some of the keywords that were used to analyze these accounts were utilized by Hashtags such as #Islamic\_State being number one from origination until Twitter shut it down. Between 2014-2015, the U.S. had 82 individuals affiliated with ISIS and they were interdicted by law enforcement officials. Of these 82, 52 were between the ages of 15-25, and the others were between 26-47 years of age. Seven of these were under the age of eighteen, and indicates that ISIS is targeting younger generations on a global level.

This campaign via social media has resulted in ISIS calling for lone wolf attacks throughout the world. This follows the early attempts by AQ operatives and Usama Bin Laden friend, Abu Musab Al-Suri, who called for this type of activity back in the 1980’s and 1990’s. He specifically called for the utilization of small cells to act independently and carry out lone wolf attacks, however, Usama Bin Laden decided against this approach. Al-Suri’s training and background on setting up organizations across two continents has been on the U.S.’s radar because of his close friendship with Usama Bin Laden and the entire Al Qaeda network. He was a violent-minded individual that had extensive training throughout the Middle East that include nuclear training in Iraq. He was at odds with Usama Bin Laden because of not being aggressive enough and had foresight for having smaller cells operating with closed communication of other cells. This was done to minimize the potential effect of the exploitation of a cell. Al-Suri had the foresight to look at inciting lone-wolf attacks back in the 1980’s and it is now more prevalent in the Islamic State’s agenda. It is reported that there are at least 21 major organizations that have sworn allegiance to ISIS. Some of these are organizations that the U.S. has been fighting against in Iraq and Afghanistan since the early invasions to remove the violent leaders of those countries.

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### **FINAL DATE OF ANALYSIS AND SUBMISSION:**

Wednesday, July 26, 2018 - 11:00 AM

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