10-3-2015

Classification, Visualization, and Analysis of the Islamic State's Narrative

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Capstone Project

for

Masters of Science in Geographic Information Science

3 October 2015

Abstract

The Islamic State (IS) declared the establishment of a Caliphate on June 29, 2014 in Mosul, Iraq. Since that declaration, IS has communicated a four-part narrative to the global community through *Dabiq* magazine, its e-publication. Each of the ten editions of *Dabiq* has provided insight into IS's aspirations and reinforced its message of rejecting post-colonial structures. Critical to realizing its objective is establishing a foothold for the Caliphate through *jihad* (holy war), establishing legitimacy through *jamaah* (governance), achieving *tawhid* (unity), and expanding through *hijrah* (immigration). Each publication contains these narrative elements to document IS's progress. Classifying, visualizing, and mapping will provide the analytical insight necessary to quantify the prioritization of IS narrative elements and identify the organization's motivation.

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Introduction

      Over the last 16 months, the Islamic State (IS) has successfully

demonstrated the ability to manage a multi-front conflict, generate billions in

revenue, expand the boundaries of the Caliphate, and, most surprisingly,

attract immigrants to the Caliphate. Much of its success is attributable to the

deliberate and consistent

employment of its religion-based

narrative. IS leaders are

methodically employing a

narrative to mobilize sympathetic

elements of the global Sunni Islam

population. They communicate

this narrative through official IS

media outlets, social media, and

micro blogging sites. Authors have

pedantically detailed the strategic

framework for this narrative in ten

editions of the *Dabiq* e-magazine.

Each publication of *Dabiq* has

The Original 1916 Pico-Sykes Border: A goes to France, B goes to Great Britain

Figure 1   **Osman 2013**

reinforced the call for *jihad* (holy war), establishing legitimacy through

jamaah (governance), achieving *tawhid* (unity), and expanding through

hijrah (immigration). IS leaders have systematically included geographic

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elements in the narrative to create a multi-generational conflict between Islam and the Western world. The mobilization message within the narrative calls for the destruction of idolatry, innovation, and post-colonial structures—specifically the Pico-Sykes border between Iraq and Syria. Figure 1 illustrates the original 1916 Pico-Sykes border. Mark Sykes, representing Great Britain, and Francois Georges-Picot, representing France, secretly drew up the borders following World War I. In the agreement, France gained control of the "A" area, or modern-day Syria, and Great Britain gained control of the "B" area, or modern-day Iraq (Osman 2013). Fundamentally, IS leaders designed the narrative to strengthen IS's contiguous boundaries, continue non-contiguous expansion, and encourage religious violence in Western countries. Destruction of post-colonial structures, such as the Pico-Sykes border, is a method of strengthening IS while weakening post-colonial structures. Physically removing the boundary between Iraq and Syria represents a tangible and symbolic victory to further the IS narrative.

Brief History

One can trace the genealogy of radical Islam, and the sources of inspiration for IS, to select traditions of Islamic jurisprudence. An increasingly active vocalization advocating violence to achieve a political end has allowed IS and its predecessor Al Qaeda (AQ) to persevere. On the surface, IS and AQ are ideologically similar (Barret 2014). However, in reality, their nuanced theological interpretations and geographic aspirations

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place the organizations in diametric opposition. AQ's interpretation of a defensive jihad justifies the use of violence against non-believers and colonial remnant governments. IS's interpretations significantly overreach AQ's interpretation and advocates for an active jihad. Under this interpretation, IS is compelled to cleanse its Caliphate of apostasy. By its definition, apostates include tribalists, secularists, Shiites, and anyone who rejects the legitimacy of the Caliph (Barret 2014).

IS's declaration of a Caliphate is a paradigm-shifting event and a serous departure from contemporary jihadist tradition. Establishing a Caliphate has three preconditions and implications: (1) Recognizing the legitimacy of a Caliphate compels loyal adherents to immigrate to its boundaries, (2) maintaining the legitimacy of the Caliphate mandates the enforcement of strict and medieval interpretations of Sharia law, and (3) the larger the Caliphate grows, the longer it will endure, and the effectiveness with which it enforces Sharia law will continue to inspire global support (Barret 2014).

Benefit of the Research

Every combat commander from Sun Tzu through present-day military strategists will affirm the necessity of understanding adversaries. In the summer of 2014, the U.S. government significantly underestimated IS's resilience. The conventional wisdom at the time characterized IS as an AQ jayvee team. In retrospect, that assessment was entirely inaccurate. Due to

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this failure to fully understand the enemy, the U.S. government is still trying to understand IS and the full potential of the threat it poses.

In an effort to better understand IS's strategic ambitions, an analysis of its primary means of communicating with people outside of the Caliphate is of great importance. As of September 1, 2015, IS has published ten editions of *Dabiq* to provide a step-by-step guide to supporters to join and support the Caliphate. Each edition of *Dabiq* contains thematic indicators of a unified narrative. Quantifying the value of each independent element may serve as a point of focus for the development of counter messaging strategies. Moreover, visualizing the spatial distribution of where narrative elements are present may help to characterize IS's political motivations. This paper seeks not to fully understand IS and identify ways to defeat the organization, but to provide practitioners and planners with a starting point for classifying, quantifying, visualizing, and analyzing the temporal and spatial components of IS narrative elements.

Preliminary Literature Review

A meaningful analysis of the IS narrative will require an interdisciplinary research approach using primary and secondary source data. As a starting point, research will be conducted across the topics of geopolitics, narratology, propaganda, IS history, and cartography, as well as a primary source evaluation of *Dabiq* magazine.

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Geopolitics

In the summer of 2014, IS gained control of mass swaths of Iraq and Syria using blitzkrieg-like tactics (Price 2014). Its advances all had common characteristics; they were swift, brutal, and predominantly in Sunni majority communities. Its seemingly unstoppable tactical successes in Iraq led to the nearly instantaneous collapse of the Iraqi Army (Price 2014). In predominately historic Sunni strongholds, such as Ninewa Province, the people offered little popular resistance. In some instances, the local populace embraced IS as a liberating force (Barret 2014).

Areas in southern Iraq, such as Bagdad, with a higher Shia population, provided a more unified defense against the initial IS onslaught. Areas in northeastern Iraq, in what is frequently referred to as Kurdistan, provided little tactical success for IS. The organization continues to meet strong resistance from the local population. The Kurdish resistance forces have been the primary ground force ally for the coalition-led efforts in Iraq and Syria (Price 2014).

Following its immediate battlefield success, IS redoubled its efforts in propaganda production. IS's official media wing, Al-Hayat Media, began producing *Dabiq* magazine to publicize its narrative in June 2014. The first edition offered four critical narrative themes for continued success: jihad, jamaah, tawhid, and hijrah. These themes appear to have particular

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religious meaning in the context of the contiguous area IS controls in Iraq and Syria.

Beyond its stated aspirations of building and growing a Caliphate within captured areas of Iraq and Syria, IS has global aspirations. IS has published details on social media of its five-year plan for expansion, which includes areas of North Africa,

Islamic State 5 Year Plan

Figure 2   **Martel 2015**
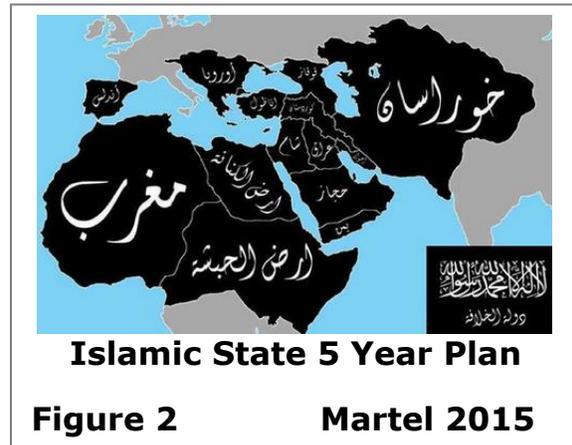
the Middle East, Southwest Asia, Europe, and China (Martel 2015). Figure 2 shows a graphic allegedly posted to a Twitter account associated with the Al-Hayat Media Center. This image shows a very ambitious expansion plan that is somewhat validated by subsequent expansion. This aspiration is supported by the continual pledges of allegiance received from like-minded Islamist organizations around the globe. To date, IS has accepted pledges of allegiance from organizations with ties in Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Egypt (Milton 2015).

Narratology

The study of narratology suggests that narratives are a basic and constant form of human expression regardless of ethnic origin, primary language, or enculturation (Barthes 1975). Narratives provide a linear progression and sequence to link event actions in a discernable and

repeatable format. According to the *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (FM), a narrative, "an organizational scheme expressed in story form," is central to insurgencies. Additionally, the FM highlights the role narratives perform: They channel ideology, express collective identity, model behavior, provide reasons for actions, and aid in interpreting others (Zalman 2008).

Across linguistic and cultural barriers are reoccurring commonalties in successful narratives. Those narrative themes have been summarized as the three main elements of a narrative (Van Dijk 1975):

- **Audience:** Implies that the subconscious of the audience develops a cognitive map of incoming information with the intention of recreation. Fundamental to this logic is that the audience seeks to become the narrator through including itself in the story.

- **Setting:** A story must occur at a given time and place. Given humans' struggle with spatial cognition, much of that information will be a simplification. A narrative can summarize details and truncate times.

- **Plot:** Events that happen in a story provide the basic framework for the narrative. A good plot must have a beginning, middle, and end that outlines a series of events. These events must follow each other on a causal basis; it must make logical sense that one thing comes after another.

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Each edition of *Dabiq* reinforces the IS narrative through calls to action. According to IS's ideological interpretation, the establishment of a Caliphate morally compels adherents to immigrate to the Caliphate. If they are unable to immigrate, they have the option of establishing a local franchise or conducting attacks attributed to IS.

Propaganda

Propaganda is a complementary function to terrorism. The act of terrorism is a highly choreographed event used by terror organizations to communicate a message to a broader audience. This is an ideal example of the metaphor of the "theater of terror" (Bueno et al. 2003). The "theater of terror" explains that the attacks, and even the victims, may have little to do with the motivation. In the modern age of propaganda, the goal of a terror attack is to gain mass media coverage (Bueno et al. 2003).

A body of quantitative analysis examining propaganda content has identified thematic elements in contemporary Islamist propaganda design. A key element seen in nearly every jihadist media production is the justification for the use of violence (Weiman 2008). Furthermore, in the contemporary information environment, a qualitative assessment has identified three coalescing strategic nuclei in messaging (Torres 2006)**:**

- **Religious nucleus:** Fundamental principles of the hyper puritanical Salafist movement, including the need to return to the glory of the

prophet and his companions as described in the Haditha and the Quran.

- **Political nucleus:** An agenda to re-establish the Caliphate, politically uniting the countries with a Muslim majority and removing tyrants who govern Muslim states.

- **Instrumental nucleus:** The need to mobilize the Muslim world so it can regain consciousness of its greatness and the humiliation it suffers. This demands action on behalf of a vanguard of genuine believers

A propaganda technique terrorist organizations commonly employ is the projection of a Manichean world (O'Shaughnessy et al. 2009). They simplify the worldview to good versus evil. Islamist propaganda makes no room for negations, dissenting opinions, or compromise. Such propaganda allows for only absolute elements and the apocalyptic inevitability of a clash between Islam and the West.

IS: The Organization

The etymology of the name IS conveys an evolving geographic ambition. That ambition has transitioned over time and represents a nuance in its aspirational geographic intent. In 2005, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the original founder of what is now IS, pledged alliance to AQ leadership and formed Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I). The geographic ambition in that era was to

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form an Islamic Sunni State in western and central provinces of Iraq

(Fishman 2008).

AQ-I formed additional alliances in Iraq and transitioned into the

Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006. Shortly after its formation, U.S.

counterterror efforts killed Zarqawi and most of ISI's top leadership (Barret

2014). The ISI leadership was eventually transferred to Abu Bakr al

Baghdadi, the current self-proclaimed leader of the Caliphate.

Under the leadership of Baghdadi, the organization has taken on new ambitions and grown significantly. His has consolidated alliances with numerous Sunni factions in Iraq and Syria, developed a globally recognized brand of ultra-violent jihad, and

Note: The Levant and Sham are both historic names describing areas of modern-day Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. The Islamists likely use these terms to reinforce their position on the illegitimacy of post-colonial political boundaries.

declared himself the Caliph (Barret 2014). Following this declaration, the

organization changed its name again, this time to the Islamic State of Iraq

and the Levant (ISIL). An alternative translation yields the name the Islamic

State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS). After months of battlefield success, and

expansion beyond the contiguous boundaries of Iraq and Syria, the name

changed again. The current name, IS, reflects the lofty ambitions of building

a Sunni Caliphate from North Africa to China. The capital of the Caliphate is

Dabiq, a city of historic and apocalyptic signification in northwestern Syria

(Adnani 2014).

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Cartography

Scholars, journalists, activists, lobbyists, individuals, and terrorist organizations all exploit the narrative power of maps to tell non-fictional stories as support tools in their research and to assist in developing arguments about places. The potential of maps to both decipher and tell stories is virtually unlimited (Carquard 2014).

Harley's early work in cartography, the *Second Text within Maps*, examines the relationships among political interests, power, and the hidden agendas of maps. Harley argues that maps provide a powerful rhetoric and can be critically examined as texts themselves. Overall, Harley concludes that through map deconstruction one can read "in the margins of the text" and identify contradictions to the apparent honesty of the image. Of equal importance, Monmonier, in *How to Lie with Maps*, identifies challenges associated with evolving digital cartographic practices and encourages healthy skepticism by consumers.

Clearly, IS understands the value and power of including geographic and cartographic elements in its propaganda publication. Nearly every edition of *Dabiq* includes explicit examples of the use of maps or satellite imagery. One of the clearest examples is the publication of its five--year plan on Twitter (see Figure 2). The image is designed for maximum impact for a very diverse audience. For IS's followers, it is inspirational to see the narrative in action for IS's expansion. For the Western audience, the

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intention is to instill fear and enhance the perception that IS remains unstoppable.

IS has also routinely provided text-based descriptions of its expansion. In each of the ten editions of *Dabiq*, IS has announced recent expansions and administrative boundary revisions. IS refers to its administrative structures, similar to provincial boundaries, as a wiliayats. Wiliayats are contiguous within Iraq and Syria and non-contiguous across North Africa and the Middle East. When IS announces a new administrative boundary, it provides a relative description within the text of *Dabiq*. It describes the cities or terrain features contained within the wiliayat. The contiguous boundaries purposefully ignore the Pico-Sykes border and span areas within Iraq and Syria. IS has yet to publish an official wiliayat map, but freelance journalists are actively compiling the information and mapping their findings. The boundaries used for this analysis were compiled by Alex Konstanos and published on an open street map in google earth. The boundaries were checked against the information in *Dabiq* for consistency.

Design and Implementation

Data Sources

The primary data source for this analysis is IS's official publication, *Dabiq* magazine. *Dabiq* is produced by IS's Al-Hayat Media Center and provides a venue for presenting the IS narrative to a global audience. As of September 1, 2015, ten editions of *Dabiq* were available. Each edition of

Dabiq magazine was independently assessed for propaganda characteristics as defined by the work of O'Shaughnessy et al. Each edition clearly meets the definitional criteria of propaganda and demonstrates the characteristics of the religious, political, and instrumental nucleuses.

Below are summaries of all ten published editions of *Dabiq* magazine. The shortest edition, *The Return of Khilafah*, is 26 pages, and the longest edition, *From Hypocrisy to Apostasy*, is 83 pages. For ease of analysis and interpretation, the following describes each edition independently following the three narrative components: audience, plot, and setting. Each edition of *Dabiq* targets three primary audiences. The three audiences can roughly be defined by their location. For IS-contiguous provinces, the audience is primarily the local population. The second target audience is sympathetic jihad groups. This element of the narrative is intended to gain their support and expand the non-contiguous provinces. The third target audience is lone wolf attackers. This group is primarily located in Western countries and cannot otherwise participate in the Caliphate.

The primary plot element is the key component discussed in each edition; generally, such elements are related to the title. In addition to discrete plot elements, each edition contains consistent thematic narrative elements. The first edition contains the narrative elements, and they provide the framework for this analysis. The four elements are (1) jihad (holy war),

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(2) jamaah (governance), (3) tawhid (unity), and (4) hijrah (migration) (Adnani 2014).

The opening remarks of every edition include a quote from IS's founding member, Abu Musab as-Zarqawi: "The Spark has been lit here in Iraq and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusaders army in Dabiq." The opening quote reinforces IS's ambition to draw Western powers into a broader regional conflict and ultimately stage an apocalyptical battle in Northwestern Syria.

1. **The *Return of Khilafah*:** The primary plot element discussed in the first edition of *Dabiq* is the religious authority and precedent for establishing a Caliphate. In this edition, IS provides details and context to convince the readership that its movement will be viewed historically as a true Caliphate. It offers readers with a call to action to join the Caliphate and avoid the blight of hypocrisy and apostasy. Within the text, IS compels followers to migrate (hijrah) to the Caliphate, experience the glory of holy war (jihad), join the family of the Caliphate (tawhid), and help establish a new community (jamaah). It also furnishes step-by-step guidance for establishing franchise organizations for followers unable to join the Caliphate in Sham. The following are the steps laid out in the first edition of *Dabiq*:

(Step 1) Jihad – conduct destabilizing attacks and prevent the regime from providing for its people; (Step 2) Jamaah – develop a sense of community that coalesces around a common enemy; (Step 3) Tawhid

– Establish a Caliphate and spread tawhid; (Step 4) Hijrah – move forces to areas of ungoverned or politically unstable spaces. (Adnani 2014)

In the first edition, nearly every aspect of the content is set to Iraq and Syria (Adnani 2014).

2. **The Flood:** The dominant plot element for the second edition of *Dabiq* compares IS's movement to the great flood. In Old Testament tradition, this is a reference to Noah's ark. In its analogy, IS associates the establishment of a Caliphate to a flood meant to cleanse Earth. The Manichean worldview offers room for only one religion. If you are not a follower of the Caliph, you are an opponent. If you are an opponent, you are an apostate. Apostates are valid targets for jihad. Their rejection of Islam is punishable by death. In this edition, IS highlights numerous IS victories throughout Iraq in Syria. Aligned with its stated mission, IS provides numerous examples of jihad, jamaah, and tawhid and a select few examples of hijrah. In this edition, the propensity of reporting is set in Iraq and Syria. Interestingly, IS includes a specific call to action from individual followers who are abroad and unable to migrate to Sham. IS offers guidance for followers to pledge their loyalty on social media and conduct attacks in their home countries. The specified locations for the attacks are the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and any country supporting the war against IS.

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3. **The Call to Hijrah**: As the edition title suggests, the plot element contained within the third edition is hijrah (migration) to IS. Much of the discussion centers on the religious mandate to migrate to Sham and join the jihad. IS makes significant appeals to an educated Western audience by criticizing all educated Muslims, including doctors, lawyers, engineers, bureaucrats. IS calls them hypocrites for dodging their obligation to engage in jihad. IS gives educated Muslims an alternative option; if they migrate to the Caliphate, they can serve the community in their current profession. IS strengthens its appeal by highlighting the status of working-class slaves, a status many disaffected minorities feel they occupy in modern societies. IS makes it clear throughout this edition that its ambitions go far beyond violence. IS is building a Caliphate and needs followers to establish a society based on medieval interpretations of Sharia law.

This edition also marks the American entry into the fight on IS. IS draws an explicit connection between U.S. interventions and the beheading of American journalist James Foley. In IS's words, the killing of James Foley was retaliation for U.S.

Location of the Historic City of Dabiq

**Figure 3**   *Dabiq* **Magazine**
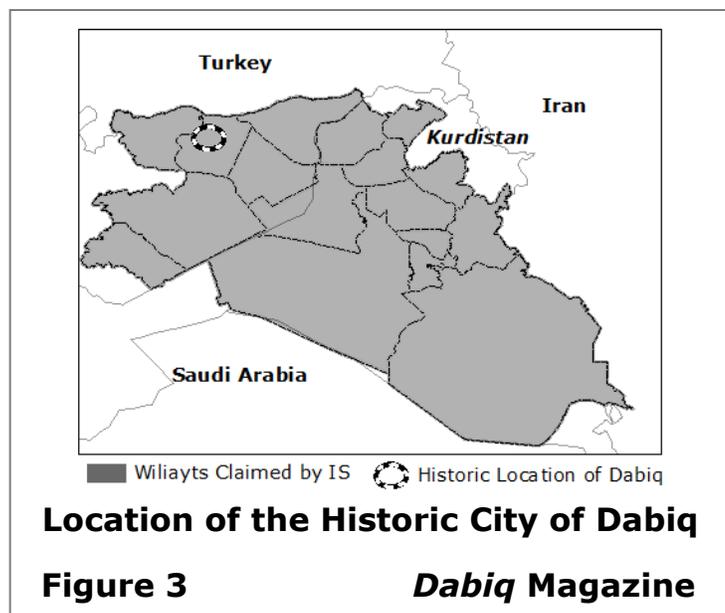
air support and interventions against IS operations in Iraq and Syria.

The setting for much of the third edition is the Halab wiliayats of Syria from the perspective of the Syrian Army. The liberation of Halab includes gaining control of the historically significant city of Dabiq. The city of Dabiq is the namesake of the al-Hayat magazine and has significant meaning in the IS narrative. Figure 3 depicts a rough location for Dabiq in northwest Syria, in the Halab wiliayat, as described in this edition of *Dabiq*. Additionally, Dabiq is referenced in historic Islamic texts, as the final battle between Islam and Rome. Additionally, the city of Dabiq is explicitly identified by founding member Abu Musab as-Zarqawi as the location IS will face the crusading army (Adnani 2014).

4. **The Failed Crusade**: The primary plot of the fourth edition is the U.S.-led coalition against IS. In the message, IS provides anecdotal evidence of the destruction of the Pico-Sykes border separating Iraq and Syria. IS highlights post-colonial structures, treaties, and puppet governments as primary points of grievance. In this edition, and several subsequent editions, IS denounces the Pico-Sykes border as a conspiratorial plot to weaken Arab unity and instill human-made governments.

In this edition, IS introduces a new geographic component to its establishment of a state. In the fourth edition, IS announces the formation of two new administrative boundaries called wiliayats, which are similar to provinces. In the vernacular IS refers to administrative areas as wiliayats. The two new wiliayats are represented in Figure 4 and are located in Western Iraq. The new

Two New Wiliayats: Furat and Fallujah

Figure 4   *Dabiq* **Magazine**
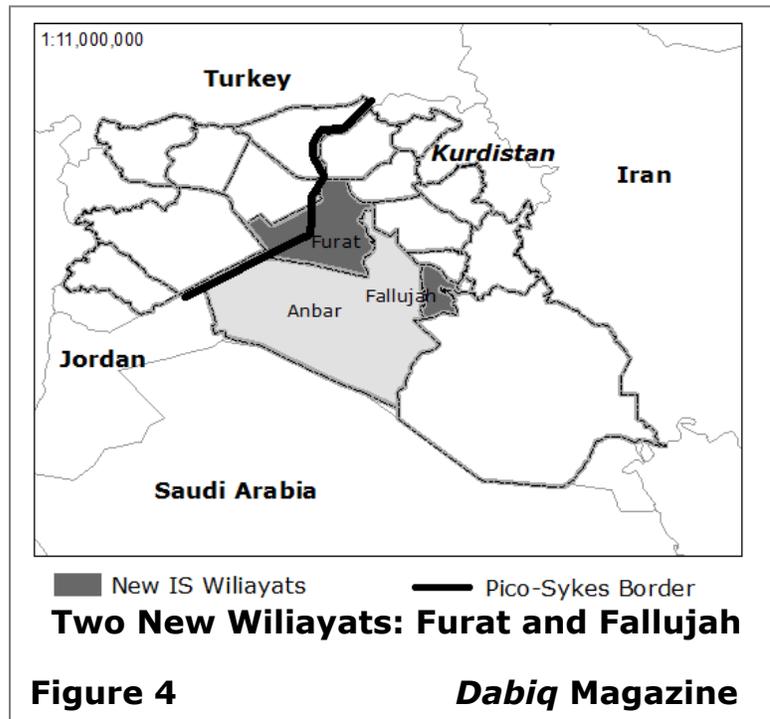
wiliayats, Furat and Fallujah, are what would be considered contemporary al-Anbar province in Iraq. IS includes in the text a description of the areas encompassed by the new administrative boundary. Establishing new provinces is IS's method of emphasizing the destruction of post-colonial geographic boundaries.

The setting for most of this edition is Iraq and Syria. Thematically, IS provides significant detail on battles and victories in Iraq and Syria. Most significantly, IS justifies with visceral hatred its victories against the against the Yazidi peoples near Mount Sinjar. In its interpretation, the Yezidis are a devil-worshiping cult, and IS must exterminate them. IS devotes several

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pages to providing religious justification for the genocide and enslavement of IS's captives and characterizes U.S. intervention as futile.

5. **Remaining and Expanding**: The plot of the fifth edition of *Dabiq* devotes particular emphasis to IS's continued expansion. From IS's perspective, the organization is still winning the tactical and strategic war. The conflict in Iraq and Syria has served as a battle cry for the Muslim world to coalesce and mobilize.

IS has received and accepted pledges of loyalty from numerous jihadist organizations around the region. Figure 5 depicts the

Islamic State Non-Contiguous Wiliayats

Figure 5   *Dabiq* **Magazine**
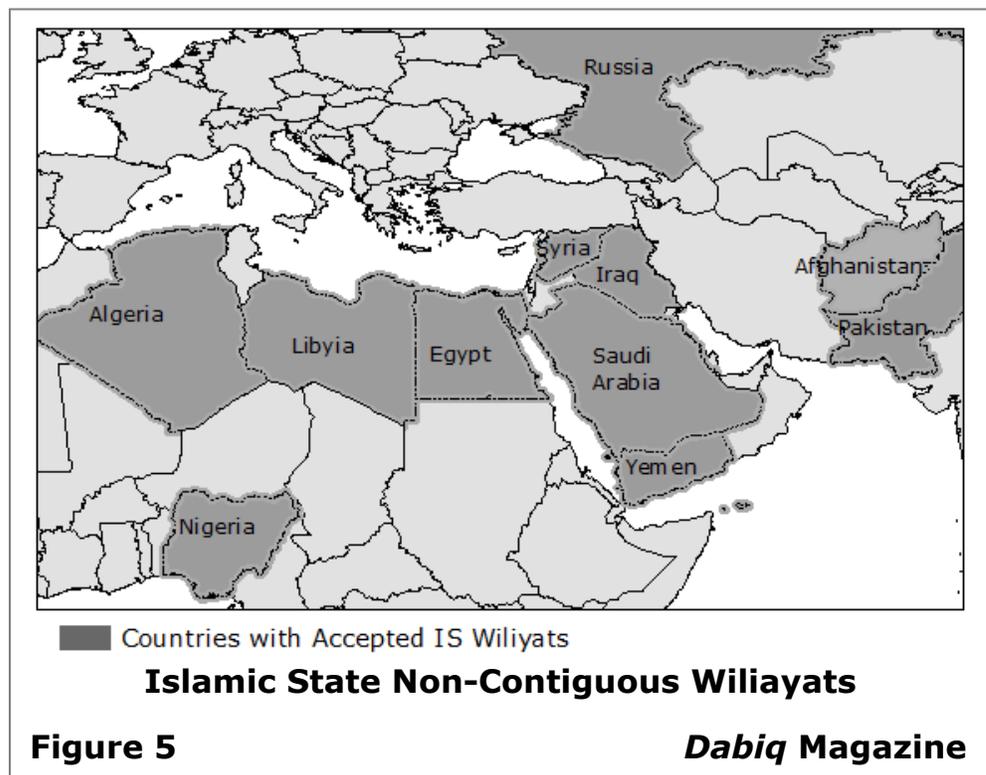
countries of origin for incoming pledges, predominantly in the Middle East and North Africa. IS has accepted pledges of loyalty from organizations in the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. Throughout the fifth edition, examples of each of the four narrative elements are present in

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all of the newly proclaimed franchised wiliayats. The edition closes with the

taking of credit for three lone wolf attacks. IS asserts that the terrorist

attacks in Australia, Canada, and New York were inspired by IS's call to

action in the second edition of *Dabiq*. At this point, IS has demonstrated

significant control within the contiguous boundaries of its state in Iraq and

Syria, expansion to non-contiguous wiliayats throughout the region, and a

global presence through the use of attributed lone wolf attacks (Adnani

2014).

6. **Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan:** The plot for the sixth edition of *Dabiq*

deviates slightly from previous editions' narrative elements. In this edition,

IS devotes nearly half of the content and commentary to challenging AQ

ideology and actions. Much of the grievances form open challenges to AQ

leaders and AQ actions in Afghanistan and Yemen. The core grievance

centers on the fact that AQ has had a presence in those locations for years

and has never attempted to establish Sharia law. AQ has primarily devoted

its resources to self-preservation and plotting external attacks.

On the surface, AQ and IS may seem like very similar organizations

with similar tactics and objectives. However, from an insider's standpoint,

they are ideologically incapable of cooperation. IS views the establishment of

a Caliphate, along with the jamaah requirements, as being of paramount

importance. IS openly and willingly declares war on anyone that is opposed

to its doctrine. In contrast, AQ primarily views Western intervention as its number one priority, which is external jihad against the West.

Paradoxically, the inclination and desire to attack Western targets is how IS starts this edition. Similar to the fifth edition, IS takes credit for declared acts of terror around the world. In this case, it is taking credit for additional attacks in Australia and France. In both instances, the actions are praised by IS as being dedicated forms of tawhid and pledges of loyalty to the Caliph.

7. **From Hypocrisy to Apostasy**: The seventh edition narrative describes the transition of hypocrisy to apostasy. IS discusses the disappearance of the "gray zone" as it relates to the establishment of a Caliphate. In general terms, it is dividing the Arab community into two camps: those who support the Caliphate and those who do not. Those who do not are officially guilty of apostasy. In IS's interpretation, apostasy is a crime punishable by death. The play on words allows for repentance from individuals who were not quick to join. IS suggests that not living under Sharia law previously made one a hypocrite. Now that people have the option to affiliate themselves with the Caliphate, they are apostates if they do not. The seventh edition devotes several sections to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France. Since the perpetrator of those attacks officially proclaimed loyalty to IS, this is a huge media victory. For this particular event, IS leaves no ambiguity about whether it was a random act of violence or an inspired act. This edition, like

the previous editions, hits on all four elements of the narrative and demonstrates sufficient spatial diversity. The edition includes numerous interviews from fighters who have immigrated to Sham, pledging loyalty from Pakistan, and conducting attacks around the world (Adnani 2014).

8. **Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa**: For the eighth edition of *Dabiq*, the

primary plot element present is the rejection of secularism, nationalism, and patriotism. Thematically throughout this 68-page periodical, IS condemns post-colonial structures as un-Islamic. IS specifically discusses the

Two New Wiliayats: Jazirah and Dijla

Figure 6　　　　　　*Dabiq* Magazine
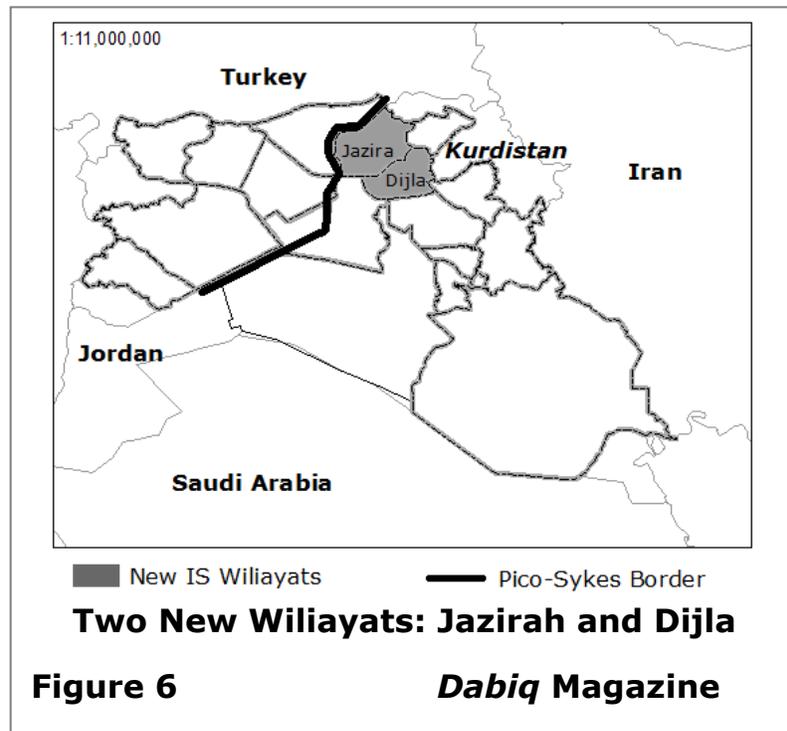
necessity to erase the Pico-Sykes border separating Iraq and Syria and the expulsion of tribal influence. Like the previous three editions, IS has devoted print space to taking credit for terrorist attacks, in this case in Denmark, Tunisia, and Yemen. In its interpretation, this is another example of the rejection of nationalism. It is clear from the context of the message that the notion of attacking targets abroad is well within the scope of its goals. In this edition, IS announces two more wiliayats within the contiguous boundaries.

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The new divisions will enable IS leadership to better administer jamaah for the people of norther Iraq. Figure 6 depicts the two new wiliayats, Jazirah and Dijla, as IS describes in this edition of *Dabiq*. In addition to evidence that it is expanding its sphere of control within its contiguous borders, IS continues to gain tawhid from outside the area. The most recent and significant addition of tawhid comes from Nigeria. Boko Haram has pledged loyalty to IS and continues its murderous rampage across Western Africa (Adnani 2014).

9. **They Plot and Allah Plots**: The primary narrative plot element IS discusses in the ninth edition revolves around conspiracy theories. The fundamental argument is that conspiracy theories are an excuse to neglect the duties of jihad. IS goes further than in previous editions in discussing nationalism, secularism, and patriotism. In this edition, it takes a historical look at the post-World War I boundaries of Pico-Sykes. In its view, the establishment of the border separating Iraq and Syria is a core grievance of the Caliphate. IS has gone to great lengths to erase all meaningful enforcement of the border and redraw new provincial boundaries.

In line with previous editions, IS has taken credit for and affiliated itself with the art show shooters in Texas. It justifies and commends the attackers for defending the mocking of the prophet Mohammed. For the ninth edition, IS takes an inward look and reports more on Iraq and Syria than in the last six editions. A significant amount of reporting in this edition

focuses on the deliberate liberation of the Yarmuk Camp in Dimashq wiliayat in southern Syria. It documents the liberation battle, alliances, and post-liberation conditions on the ground. Lastly, in the ninth edition, IS dedicates several sections to highlighting the perceived hypocrisy of U.S. and Western powers' alliance against IS (Adnani 2014).

10. **The Laws of Allah or the Laws of Men***: In the tenth edition of *Dabiq*, the common narrative theme is jamaah through the enforcement of Sharia law. IS dedicates more than half of the text to comparing its medieval interpretation and enforcement of Sharia law to that of contemporaries. It challenges the authenticity and desire of the current rulers on their lack of enforcement and provides numerous examples of how and where IS is enforcing Sharia law.

It also dedicates several sections within the text to criticizing its opposition. IS expresses particular religious and political grievances against the Kurdish resistance forces and declares the Kurdish resistance apostates. Its harshest judgments attack the Kurdish affiliation with socialism and communism. IS further attacks the populist resistance movement for its historic and current alignment with a nationalist agenda. That nationalist agenda is wholesale written off as apostasy and further justification of IS's jihad against that resistance movement.

Like previous editions, the tenth edition of *Dabiq* announces the pledging of loyalty, acceptance, and establishment of a new wiliayat. The

new wiliayat is in the Caucasus mountain region of Dagestan and will be called Qawqaz. Numerous jihadist organizations from this region have pledged loyalty to IS. However, beyond pledges of loyalty and the establishment of a wiliayat, IS reports very little in *Dabiq*.

Lastly, this edition of *Dabiq* comments on an event described as Bloody Sunday. Based on the context, IS takes credit for coordinating three near simultaneous attacks in one day. The attacks took place in France, Tunisia, and Kuwait. All three attacks were designed to inflict casualties against citizens of countries that are supporting the fight against IS. Thematically, this seems to be in line with IS's jihad narrative element, identifying civilians as legitimate targets for terrorist activities (Adnani 2014).

Research Methods

Common to all ten editions of *Dabiq* are affirmative indications of propaganda elements and the thematic use of a religious-based mobilization narrative. The classification of narrative elements provided in the first edition of *Dabiq* will serve as a framework for classifying the text in each of the ten editions. The classification of narrative elements will allow for the development of a data dictionary and rules for data capture for each of the four narrative terms: jihad, jamaah, tawhid, and hijrah.

Figure 7 depicts a data dictionary to associate synonymous terms to the narrative elements. Each narrative element included in the database

must have an identifiable spatial reference. Identifiable spatial references

can be

explicit or

implicitly

derived from

the context.

Data entries

representing

more than

one location

or more than

one narrative

element will

Narrative Element	Data Dictionary
Hijrah	Migration, joining the fight, presence of foreign fighters, linguistics, families' moving, occupation
Jamaah	Governance, law enforcement, taxation, education, administration, public services, charity
Tawhid	Unity, pledges of loyalty, brotherhood, friendship, martyrs, repenting
Jihad	Liberation, attacks, combat, post-combat carnage, pre-combat training

Narrative Element Data Dictionary

Figure 7   *Dabiq* **Magazine**

be duplicated. Data entries must have an explicit or implicitly derived

temporal aspect. Narrative elements quoted from historic Islamic texts, such

as the Quran or Haditha will not be included in the database.

The narrative element database from the 10 editions of *Dabiq* yielded

766 data points, which will facilitate quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Since each data point has a temporal, spatial, and contextual component,

the data will support a range of analytical techniques.

Dabiq is a primary data source published by IS's media arm. The

results of the data provide insight into the most important narrative

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components for IS's message, the most valuable locations, and the correlation of location to narrative elements. Assessing narrative elements offers a quantitative metric to aid in identifying the most valuable narrative elements from an IS perspective. Mapping the narrative elements furnishes insight into which narrative elements are occurring when and where.

Results

Quantifying Narrative Components

Starting with narrative elements, the data were collated to provide a visualization of the importance of IS locations for each of the elements. Figure 8 displays the narrative identifying jihad as the dominant element with 35% of the narrative. The

Narrative Element by Frequency

Figure 8   *Dabiq* **Magazine**
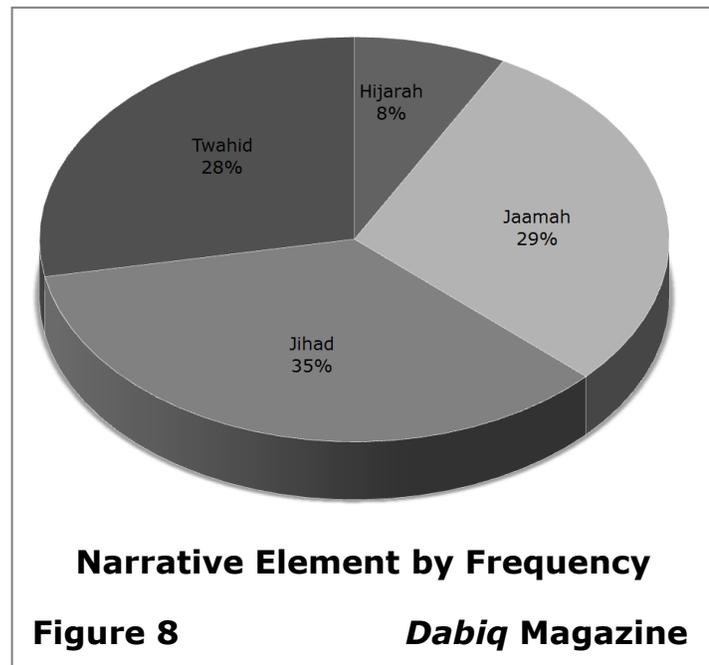
second most common element reflecting the priority for sense of community and rule of law is jamaah at 29% of the narrative. In a close third, at 28%, is tawhid, reflecting IS's value of brotherhood and unity among followers. In a somewhat surprising last place, occupying 8%, is hijrah. Hijrah is the narrative element that necessitates migration to join the Caliphate.

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Given the Western media hype of the number of foreign fighters migrating to join IS, it is somewhat surprising that hijrah is by far the least accounted for narrative element in *Dabiq*. The anecdotal evidence present in *Dabiq* of hijrah primarily takes the form of rare interviews of recent immigrants and commemorations of foreign martyrs. The significantly low value on hijrah potentially indicates that IS's strength comes from indigenous support and alliances within the jihadist community, not wholly from individual immigration.

Narrative Analysis by Geographic Location

Quantifying narrative elements across geography provides analytical insight into the intrinsic value of a specific location. Figure 9 breaks down the 766 data points across the globe to identify a baseline of geographic importance to the narrative. As expected, Iraq and Syria dominate the geographic setting in terms of narrative elements. Iraq has 276 data points; in a close second is Syria, with 273 data points.

Country	Frequency
Syria	276
Iraq	273
Egypt	35
Pakistan	34
Libya	32
Yemen	28
Dangastan	22
Saudi Arabia	15
Algeria	12
Nigeria	12
France	6
America	5
Tunisia	5
Denmark	4
Kuwait	3
Canada	2
Philippines	1
total	766

Frequency by Country

Figure 9   *Dabiq*

The remaining countries represent non-contiguous IS-affiliated wiliayats. In order of priority, they are Egypt (35), Pakistan (34), Libya (32), Yemen (28),

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Dagestan (22), Saudi Arabia (18), Algeria (12), and Nigeria (12). From the evaluation of these data points, IS likely views the contiguous wiliayats within Iraq and Syria as most valuable. Further, IS likely views the official non-contiguous wiliayats across the Middle East and North Africa as on the second tier of importance. This analysis is consistent with the calls to action outlined in the first and second edition of *Dabiq*. The first call to action compelled adherents to immigrate to the Caliphate, wage jihad, and establish jamaah and tawhid. The reproach for not conducting hijrah was to pledge loyalty to the Caliph and start a franchise node in one's home country.

Further geographic analysis of the narrative elements is possible across Iraq and Syria. In nearly every case, the narrative element data capture process allowed for an analysis at the wiliayat level. Since the overall value to the narrative for Iraq and Syria are nearly equal, each will be assessed independently. Figure 10 illustrates the narrative distribution within Iraq. The Ninewa wiliayat had 126 associated data points, which is by far the highest frequency of data points in Iraq. The city of Mosul is the secondary capital for IS and lies in the Ninewa wiliayat. Adding a layer of complexity to the analysis, IS has divided the contemporary Iraqi province of Ninewa into three IS wiliayats: Ninewa (126), Dijla (10), and Jazirah (17). The declaration of the two new administrative wiliayats did not come until the eighth edition of *Dabiq*. It is nearly impossible to determine prior to the

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declaration where exactly the data fall. For continuity of analysis, all three wiliayats will be grouped for analysis but assessed as independent. Similarly, the contemporary Iraqi province of Anbar was divided in the fourth edition of *Dabiq*. The new administrative wiliayats associated with Anbar are Furat and Fallujah. The three wiliayats will be combined for visual analysis and

Province	Frequency
Ninewa	126
Anbar	27
Salahuddin	21
Fallujah	19
Jazirah	17
Baghdad	16
Furat	14
Diyala	10
Kirkuk	10
Janub	8
Dijla	5
total	273

Frequency of Narrative Elements: Iraq

Figure 10   *Dabiq*

assessed independently. Anbar has the second-highest number of narrative element data points at 26 with the addition of Furat (14) and Fallujah (19). The remaining Iraqi wiliayats in order are Salahuddin (21), Bagdad (16), Diyala (10), Kirkuk (10), and Janub (8). Both Bagdad and Janub are in Shia-dominated areas of Iraq, so IS's claim of control is likely aspirational. The number of narrative element data points reflects a combination of activity through jihad and control through jamaah.

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Figure 11 illustrates the narrative distribution within Syria. The Raqqah

wiliayat had 105 associated data points, the highest in Syria. The city of

Province	Frequency
Raqqah	105
Halab	88
Barakah	38
Dimashq	20
Kahir	15
Homs	10
Total	276

Frequency of Narrative Elements: Syria

Figure 11 *Dabiq*

Raqqah is the primary capital for IS and lies in the Raqqah wiliayat. The next highest frequency of narrative components is attributed to Halab wiliayat. Halab wiliayat is directly adjacent to Raqqah and south of the Turkish border. Purely from a homogeneity and logistical standpoint, it makes analytical sense

that Halab and Raqqah would have the highest raw count for narrative

components. The remaining Syrian wiliayats in descending order of

importance are Barakah (38), Dimashq (20), Kahir (15), and Homs (10).

The lower narrative element data capture in these areas likely indicates less

IS control and fewer activity areas. Additionally, each of those provinces

lacks major population centers under IS's sphere of influence.

Temporal Visualization of Narrative Components

Within the database, a key data capture component was the *Dabiq*

edition number. The edition number corresponds with an Islamic calendar

date and provides a metric with which to conduct temporal analysis. The

edition number coupled with the primary narrative components and

geographic location provide a powerful visualization for analysis. The

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visualization coupled with the context of narrator, plot, and setting provide a basis to make critical analytical judgments.

Narrative Element over Edition: Iraq

Figure 12   *Dabiq*
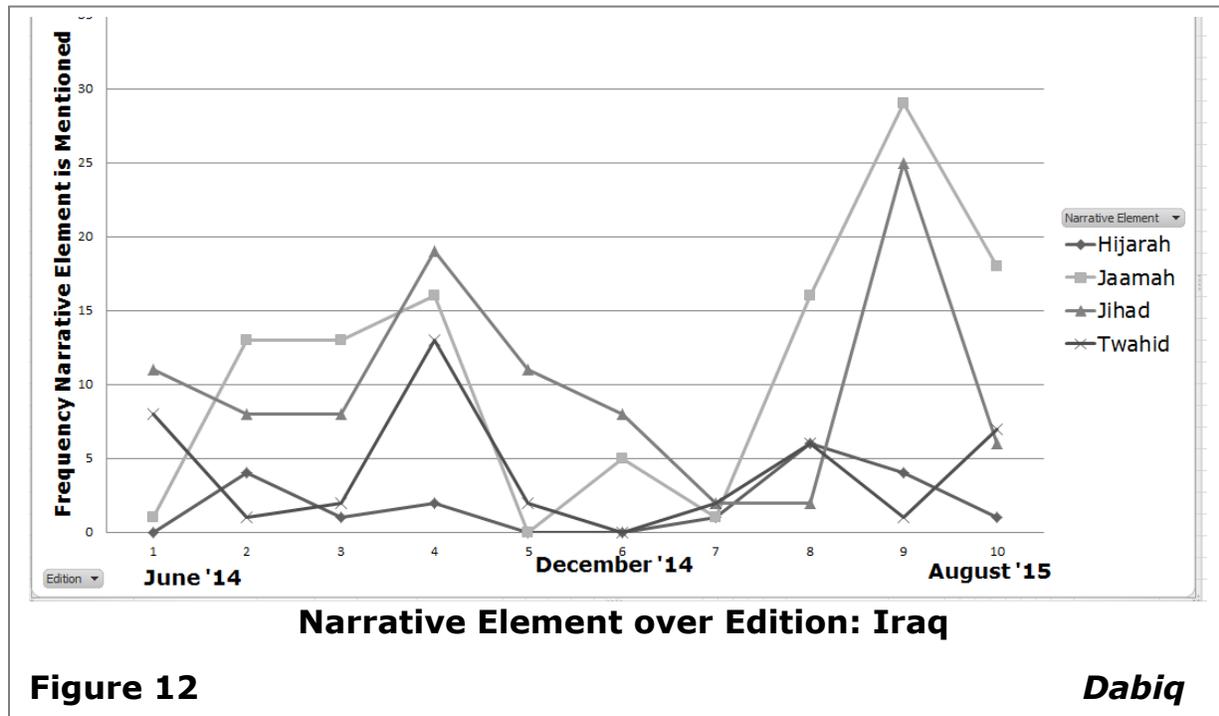
Starting with Iraq, in the first edition, all four narrative components are readily identifiable. However, Figure 12 shows a clear narrative emphasis on the components of jihad and tawhid. Based on the context, the key information component is that the struggle in Iraq will lead to unity. In the second and third editions, the primary narrative component is jamaah. This is likely a reflection of the state of conditions on the ground. After the initial onslaught of violence, IS's priority became establishing governance and instituting Sharia law. With the fourth edition, one observes a significant spike in the narrative components of jihad and tawhid.

This is a reflection of extending the Caliphate into new areas of Iraq and establishing new relationships. In the fifth edition, titled Remaining and

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Expanding, the narrative components bottom out across Iraq. The focus of this edition is expanding the non-contiguous boundaries of the Caliphate to new areas in the Middle East and North Africa. Similarly, the sixth edition is outwardly focused, dedicating more space to discussing Afghanistan and the conflict with AQ. In the seventh edition, the focus of *Dabiq* is addressing a wide range of grievances and provides very little detail on the status of the Caliphate. For the eighth, ninth, and tenth editions, one observes massive spikes in the narrative components of jamaah and tawhid. In these editions, the length of the publication has also increased significantly and the format has been somewhat changed. IS is primarily interested in conveying its moral high ground for establishing a Caliphate. In this context, it justifies use of jihad for eliminating dissent and implementing effective administration and legitimate governance. It dedicates significant content space to describing the administration of courts, taxation, civil service, and the resumption of medical student training.

As shown in Figure 13, in Syria, there is a notable lack of the narrative element of hijrah. The remaining three narrative elements are represented, with a notably high representation of jamaah. Given the context of Raqqah's being IS headquarters in Syria, IS likely put greater effort into establishing governance early in the conflict. For the second edition, one observes a significant spike in the mention of jihad. Analytically, this corresponds to the main plot element and the desire to instill fear and passivism in the

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populace. Elevating the fear of retribution is likely a strategic move to quell

any thought of resistance to IS.

The concepts of hijrah and jihad spike in the third edition for Syria as a

point of comparison. During the same timeframe in Iraq, hijrah and jihad

have 50% less presence in *Dabiq*. Contextually, the quantitative analysis

supports the primary plot for the third edition, which is the call to hijrah. The

Narrative Element over Edition: Syria

Figure 13   *Dabiq*
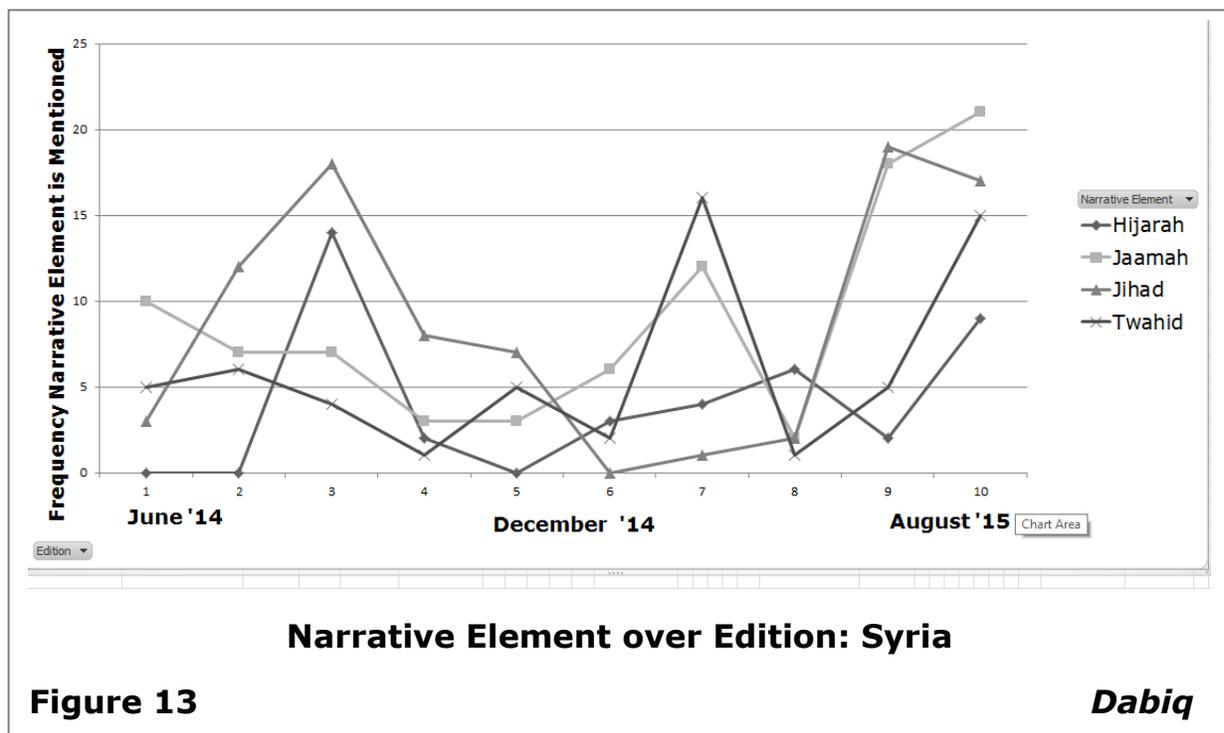
discrepancy between Iraq and Syria in this instance is likely a function of

accessibility for immigrants to access Syria versus Iraq. For the fourth, fifth,

and sixth editions, all data points for Syria decrease significantly. The data

follow a very similar trend as the Iraqi data. Contextually, the decrease in

representation is related to the outward focus of IS in those three editions.

The narrative consideration focuses on the expansion of non-contiguous IS

wiliayats. For the seventh edition, one observes significant data spikes in

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jamaah and tawhid. This is likely a reflection of the primary plot and setting elements in the seventh edition. They form an inward look and a reinvigorated effort to encourage followers to move to Sham. The direction IS takes to attain that objective is to de-emphasize the violence and emphasize the administration of services and brotherhood. Interestingly, in the eighth edition, one witnesses a sharp decrease in all reporting for Syria. For the ninth and tenth editions, jamaah and jihad dominate the Syrian narrative elements. The plot and setting elements for these data indicate that IS is expanding its themes from the sixth edition and its objective is to demonstrate legitimacy. It continues to provide examples of where it is expanding and where and how it provides services. It is also noteworthy that in the last three editions the length of the magazine and format for presenting provincial level updates has changed.

Cartographic Visualization of Narrative Components

Cumulative Narrative Elements

This visualization aggregates all four narrative elements by geographic frequency distributions and provides a foundation to identify the IS narrative's center of gravity. Within the contiguous boundaries of the proclaimed Caliphate are signs of significant variance within the narrative. The choropleth map in Figure 14 represents a three breaks quantile analysis for all four narrative elements. The three breaks provide a relative metric for assessing low, medium, and high levels for the recorded narrative

elements by wiliayat. Within *Dabiq*, narrative element instances are

Cumulative Narrative Elements: 3 Breaks Quantile

Figure 14   ***Dabiq***
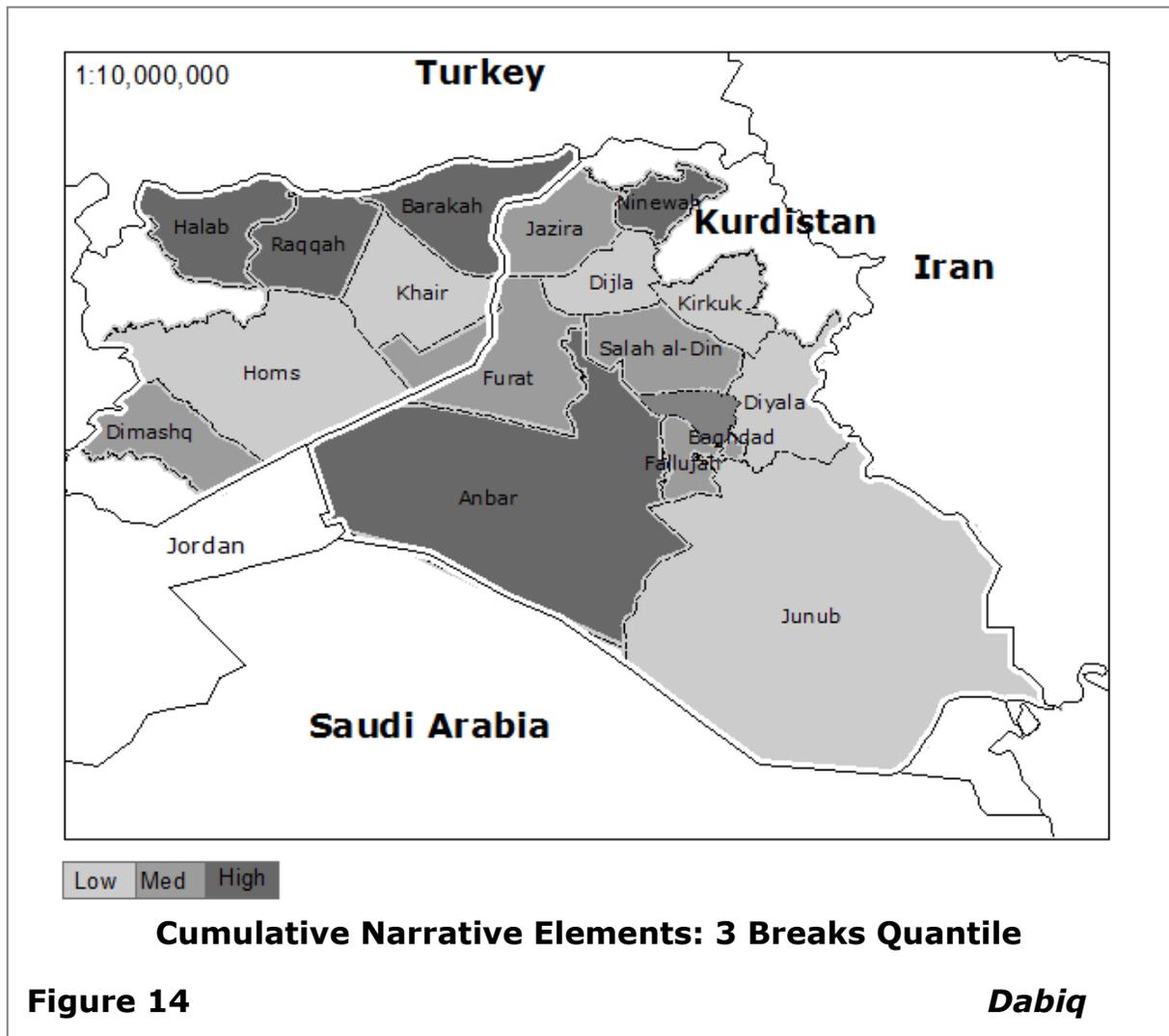
significantly higher in the Ninewa, Raqqah, and Halab wiliayats. This

enumerated visualization is in agreement with data from the previous
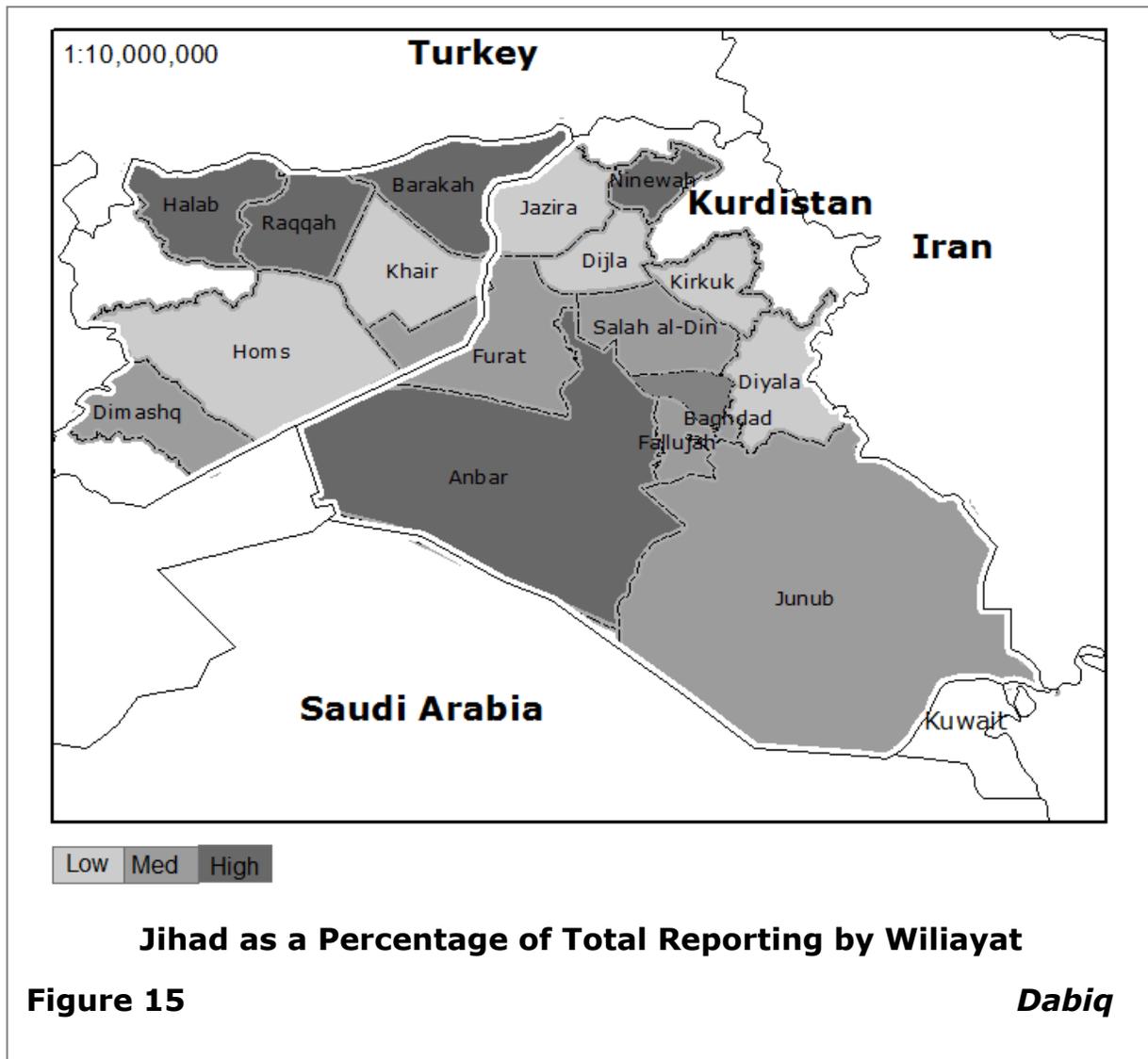
analytical steps.

On the lower end of the enumeration are the wiliayats of Homs, Khair,

Dijla, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Janub. For the most part, these wiliayats lie on the

boundaries of the Caliphate and represent areas that are not fully under IS's

control. The two exceptions are Khair and Dijla. Based on their proximity to

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Raqqah and Ninewah, they are likely underrepresented within the *Dabiq*

narrative elements. For Khair, the lower reporting is likely based on a

relatively lower and more sparsely settled region of the Caliphate. For Dijla,

the low reporting is likely explained by the late creation of the new wiliayat.

The new administrative boundary was not announced until the eighth edition

of *Dabiq*. In earlier editions, narrative elements in part targeting Dijla likely

targeted Ninewa as a whole.

Jihad as a Percentage of Total Reporting by Wiliayat

The narrative element jihad represents 35% of the topics covered in

Dabiq magazine. The data visualization in Figure 15 illustrates the narrative

element jihad as a percentage of total reporting across geography. This

allows one to analyze the data independently within each of the wiliayats.

For this analysis, 0-3% represents a relatively low number of reporting

events and 7-14% represents a relatively high number of reporting events.

The narrative element jihad is represented in the data dictionary as

liberation, attack, combat, post-combat carnage, and pre-combat training.

Within in the ten editions of *Dabiq*, IS has openly declared jihad against all

forms of resistance and apostasy. In its declared hostilities, it has included

Syrian government forces, Iraqi government forces, Kurdish resistance

forces, tribal militias, and generally any group that fails to pledge loyalty to

the Caliph.

For the temporal context, the graphic provides insight into where the preponderance of self-reported conflict has occurred to date. Similar to the amalgamated visualization in Figure 14, the northern wiliayats have the highest reported instances of jihad. In the context of its strongest resistance

Jihad as a Percentage of Total Reporting by Wiliayat

Figure 15   *Dabiq*

being Kurdish forces, it makes analytical sense for the most glorified combat to occur in hotly contested territories.

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In this visualization, Anbar stands out as a potential anomaly. Several geographic factors complicate this analysis. First, Anbar covers a massive expanse of uninhabited desert. The majority of the population and IS activities have likely occurred in the eastern portion of the wiliayat. Second, in the ninth edition of *Dabiq*, IS reports multiple enduring engagements among IS, Iraqi government forces, Shia militias, and Sunni tribal forces. Finally, in the fourth edition, IS subdivides Anbar into three wiliayats: Anbar, Furat, and Fallujah. For the first three editions, IS singularly attributes all the activities in those areas to Anbar. The situation in Anbar is highly contested. IS has not established enough security in the area to move to the follow-on phases of establishing jamaah and tawhid.

The wiliayat of Janub also represents a potential anomaly. As a percentage of total reporting, jihad is the most active narrative element in Janub. Janub represents a nearly homogenous Shia population and lies far outside of IS's control, so the narrative element for Janub is jihad. For the most part, the attacks in Janub are best described as hit and run tactics. From this standpoint, IS has little interest in actually controlling Janub.

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Tawhid and Jamaah Natural Breaks by Wiliayat

As a natural evolution of attaining the ultimate goals of the Caliphate,

Tawhid and Jamaah Natural Breaks by Wiliayat

Figure 16   ***Dabiq***
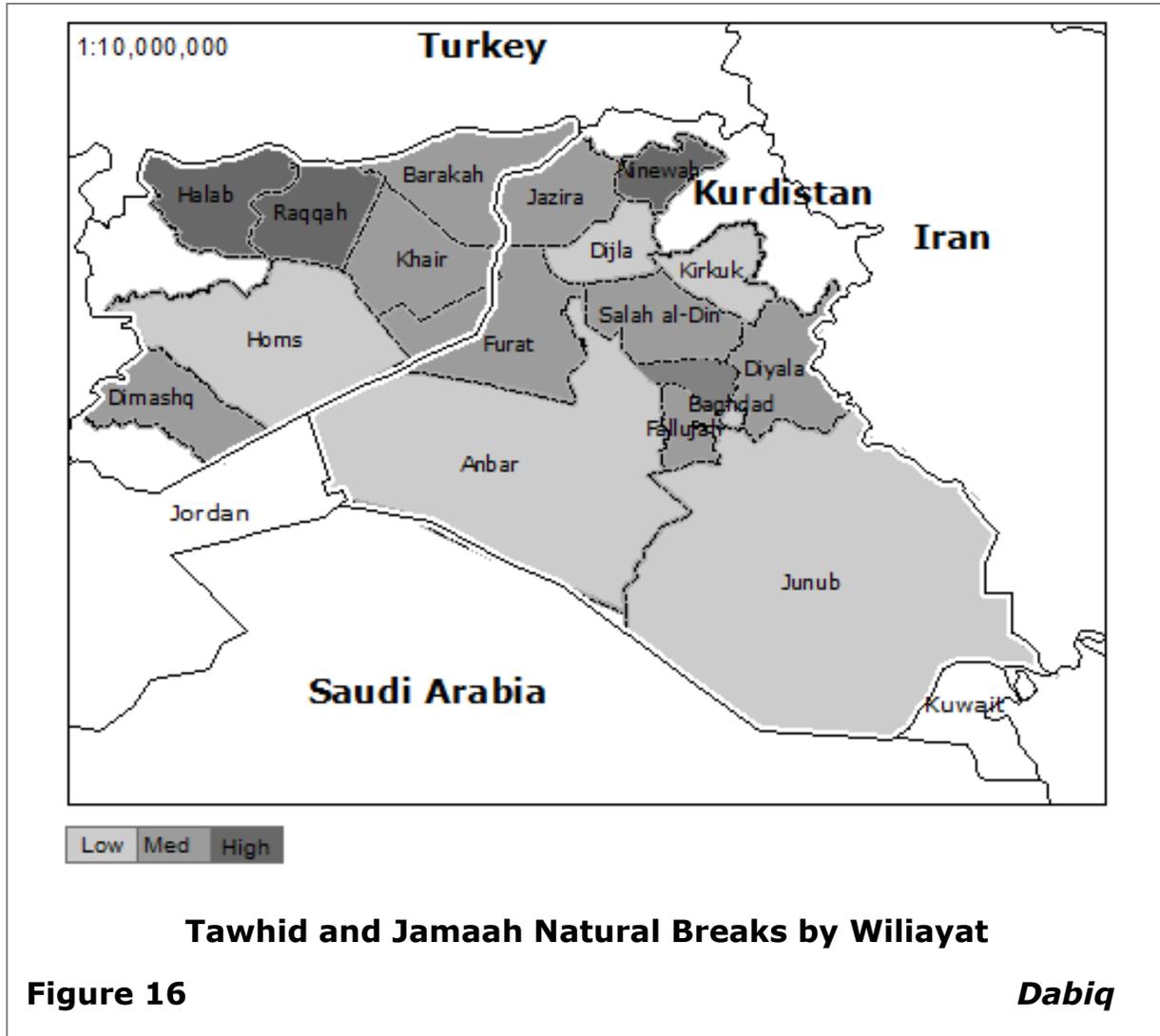
IS must establish governance and unity within its wiliayats. Viewed

independently, jamaah represents 29% of the total narrative, and tawhid

represents 28%. When spatially represented, the two elements are nearly

indistinguishable in their distribution. For visualization, the elements have

been combined for the contiguous IS wiliayats. For the visualization in Figure

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16, the sums of jamaah and tawhid have been displayed on a choropleth map using natural breaks. This technique provides a raw count of the combined narrative elements by wiliayat. The result is a revisualization that likely represents IS's control and absorption of a given population. Not surprisingly, Halab, Raqqah, and Ninewa have the highest reported levels of governance and unity. Wiliayats adjacent to those have the next highest. The further one moves from Raqqah and Mosul, the less control IS has on the local population.

The wiliayat Dimashq likely represents an anomaly. A significant amount of reporting covered in the ninth edition of *Dabiq* is dedicated to improvements of the Yarmuk Camp in Dimashq. The ninth edition is the only time IS directly identifies Dimashq as an area of control. The liberation and subsequent establishment of governance in Yarmuk is likely very limited in duration. It is unlikely that IS has the ability to project influence that far beyond its support bases in northern Syria.

Hijrah Natural Breaks by Wiliayat

The final narrative element visualized in Figure 17 represents the totality of the IS narrative. As IS outlines in the third edition of *Dabiq*, hijrah likely represents the full realization of the Caliphate. To maintain legitimacy within jihadi circles, it must continue to grow. To grow, it must attract immigrants to improve its ability to administer the newly gained territories.

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IS has gone to great lengths in its propaganda to portray the Caliphate as a place of opportunity.

However, despite this emphasis and calls to action, hijrah only represents 8% of the total narrative. That relatively small number can be

Hijrah Natural Breaks by Wiliayat

Figure 17   *Dabiq*
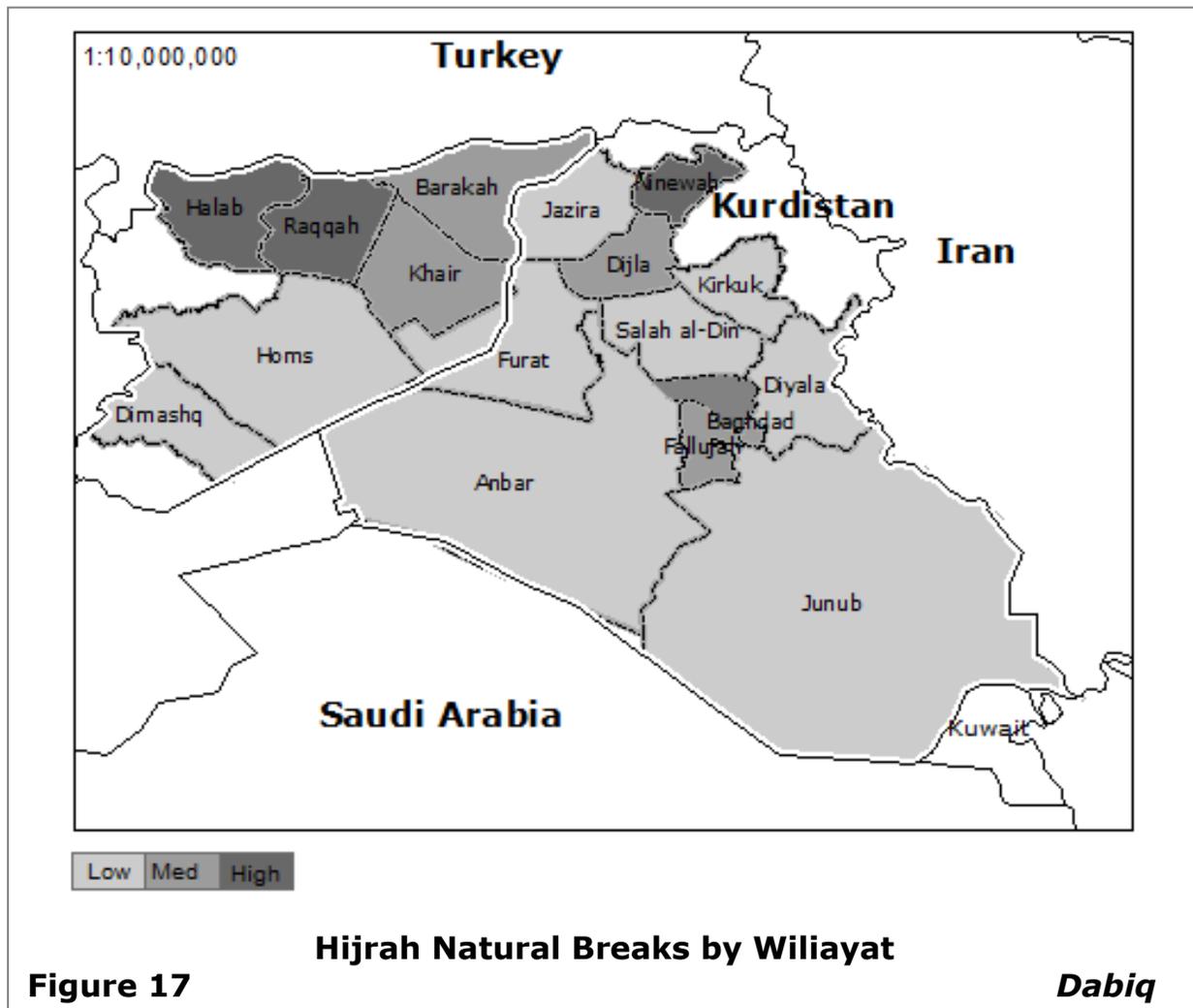
further isolated to areas that are under the highest level of control. Halab, Raqqah, and Ninewa are the areas that have the highest anecdotal indication of immigration. The anomalies indicated in Fallujah represent an analytical judgment to dual-classify series of suicide bombings in the city of Ramadi as

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both jihad and hijrah. In reality, that likely fails to meet the desired intent for attracting immigrants.

Conclusion

The geopolitical context predicating the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria is nested in ethno-sectarian divisions. Ethno-sectarian divisions transcend the contemporary political boundaries separating modern Iraq and Syria. IS has realized its greatest military and governance success is in historically Sunni-dominated areas. IS has faced the greatest organized resistance in areas with a predominantly Kurdish population. IS has also faced resistance in areas where the Shia-dominated governments of Iraq and Syria maintain popular and military support.

IS's primary venue for communicating its religious-based narrative to the outside world is *Dabiq* magazine. As of September 1, 2015, IS has published ten editions of *Dabiq* through the Al-Hayat Media Center. Each edition of *Dabiq* reveals classic narrative elements Van Dijk described, including audience, plot, and setting. The first edition of *Dabiq* outlines the objectives of the magazine and provides a taxonomy for classifying IS's strategic narrative. The strategic narrative comprises four thematic elements: jihad, jamaah, tawhid, and hijrah.

Each of the ten editions of *Dabiq* independently, and collectively, meets the contemporary definition of Islamic propaganda as described by Torres, including a religious, ideological, and political nucleus. Additionally,

IS has mastered the "theater of terror" Bueno et al. described. IS has effectively synchronized the timing and delivery of its narrative with highly choreographed and heinous acts of violence. One of the best examples is the release of the decapitation video of a U.S. reporter coinciding with the declaration of jihad against the United States. Finally, IS has consistently projected a view of a Manichean world as described by O'Shaughnessy et al. Its messages consist of absolute elements and the apocalyptic inevitability of a clash between "true" Islam and the West.

IS seemingly appeared out of nowhere in the summer of 2014 as an unstoppable and rapidly advancing force in Iraq and Syria. The organization was originally downplayed and characterized as an AQ JV team. In reality, IS has had an enduring presence in the region, predating the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The founding IS leadership had ideological and pragmatic associations with AQ in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Barret describes, IS was nearly destroyed by the end of the U.S. combat operations in Iraq in 2008. Since 2008, IS has continued to rebuild and refine its ambitions. Through its propaganda and strategic narrative, IS has detailed its regional and global ambitions. One of its clearest messages calls for the destruction of idolatry, innovation, and post-colonial structures—specifically the Pico-Sykes border between Iraq and Syria.

Assessing each edition of *Dabiq* reveals an ambitious framework to establish and administer a Caliphate. The Caliphate has a three-tier spatial

scale: the contiguous, non-contiguous, and global scale. At the contiguous scale, IS has created administrative boundaries that supplant the Pico-Sykes border dividing Iraq and Syria. The new boundaries intentionally span areas of Iraq and Syria. The non-contiguous scale pertains to pledges of loyalty and acceptance of franchise wiliayats across the Middle East and North Africa. At the global scale, IS has reached out to a Western audience and advocated for lone-wolf attacks in Western countries.

The taxonomy detailed in the first edition of *Dabiq* provides a framework for quantitative and qualitative analysis of IS narrative elements. Each of the narrative elements represents the four phases of IS expansion of the Caliphate. In agreement with the steps outlined in *Dabiq* number one, it is apparent through quantification that there is a sequencing priority within the narrative elements. The first step for IS when entering a new area is to extinguish resistance and dissention through jihad. Once it has dismantled the current system, the next step is to implement jamaah and establish tawhid. Finally, after these three conditions have been met, the Caliphate becomes appealing for hijrah.

The classification, visualization, and analytical processes have revealed spatial prioritizations to IS narrative elements. The results of the analysis are most succinctly summarized by Tobler's first law of geography. Based on the visualization of the narrative elements, the wiliayats, starting with Halab and extending east toward Ninewa, are the power centers for the Caliphate.

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The level of IS control decays precipitously across the contiguous wiliayats the further they are removed from the state capital of Raqqah. The anomalous visualization is caused by newly established administrative boundaries. The new boundaries introduced in Iraq and Syria changed the precision of the data and caused erroneous reporting. The visualization of the IS narrative will eventually reflect greater control in Kahir, Jazirah, Furat, Anbar, and Salah al-Din.

The classification, visualization, and analysis of the IS narrative elements illuminate IS's true intentions. IS has presented a religious-based narrative to achieve pragmatic political goals. It has used religion as a basis for justifying violence while taking tangible steps to realize the primary political goal of destroying post-colonial structures, including the Pico-Sykes border. Supplanting administrative boundaries and controlling territory on both sides of the contemporary border is a systematic decision to change the status quo.

Discussion

Removing veracity from the discourse, the IS narrative is an extremely powerful tool for coalescing and mobilizing a globally restive Sunni population. The IS narrative appeals primarily to an underrepresented and often hopeless Sunni youth. In counterterrorism journals, scholars frequently speculate that the attraction for Westerners would be jihadism as primarily adventurism versus a religious mandate. The existence of IS provides a

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setting for unfolding the plot elements of the narrative. The narrative becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that fosters the Manichean worldview and the inevitability of a clash of civilizations.

In practical terms, the veracity and authenticity of the IS narrative is a moot point. Long after IS becomes a degraded and defeated military, its narrative will persist. The actions it has set in motion will almost certainly result in a multi-generational challenge for the entire region. The sectarian underpinnings have further divided an already strained existence among the Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish populations throughout Iraq and Syria.

IS has realized tangible steps toward renunciation of post-colonial structures. It has contributed to the destruction of the Syrian and Iraqi governments. The Pico-Sykes border distinguishing those two countries has at least been temporarily supplanted through the destruction of border control points. IS has gone further and literally posed an alternative administrative alignment through the creation of new wiliayats that straddle the historic Pico-Sykes border.

The intensity of the Syrian civil war, the fierce resistance by Kurdish forces, and the lack of unity in the Shia populace make it decreasingly likely that post-colonial borders will survive. In the near term, conflict has coalesced along ethnic and sectarian lines and will continue to define the region. In the long term, those boundaries will likely recognize semi-autonomous Sunni regions, Kurdish regions, and Shia regions.

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Areas for Further Research

The process of classifying, visualizing and analyzing the narrative elements contained in *Dabiq* magazine is simply a starting point. IS's media wing has multiple venues for messaging a global audience for recruitment and fundraising. The narrative element framework, data dictionary, and analytical methodologies can be scaled to accommodate additional data sources.

Applying the above analytical methodologies to regional media, social media, and micro blogs would significantly improve verification of the IS narrative. The inclusion of additional data sources would verify the decentralized delivery of a unified message. The more coherent and consistent the message remains across delivery platforms the more deeply the community of interest has internalized the content.

Numerous social media data mining tools, such as mention map, hoot sweet, and tweet deck, would provide venues for additional data discovery and validation. For more analytically rigorous and reliable results, commercially available or custom data mining should be developed. There are numerous challenges with incorporating new data sources. Some of the upfront concerns are associated with data precision. The data in the initial model were only precise at the wiliayat level. Data provided from a commercial social media data mining service would be georeferenced and provide much greater detail. Regional accessibility to the Internet is also an

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analytical challenge. It is highly likely that the preponderance of IS narrative

reporting on social media would come from populated areas with services

such as electricity and Internet. Areas in the desert would go underreported.

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