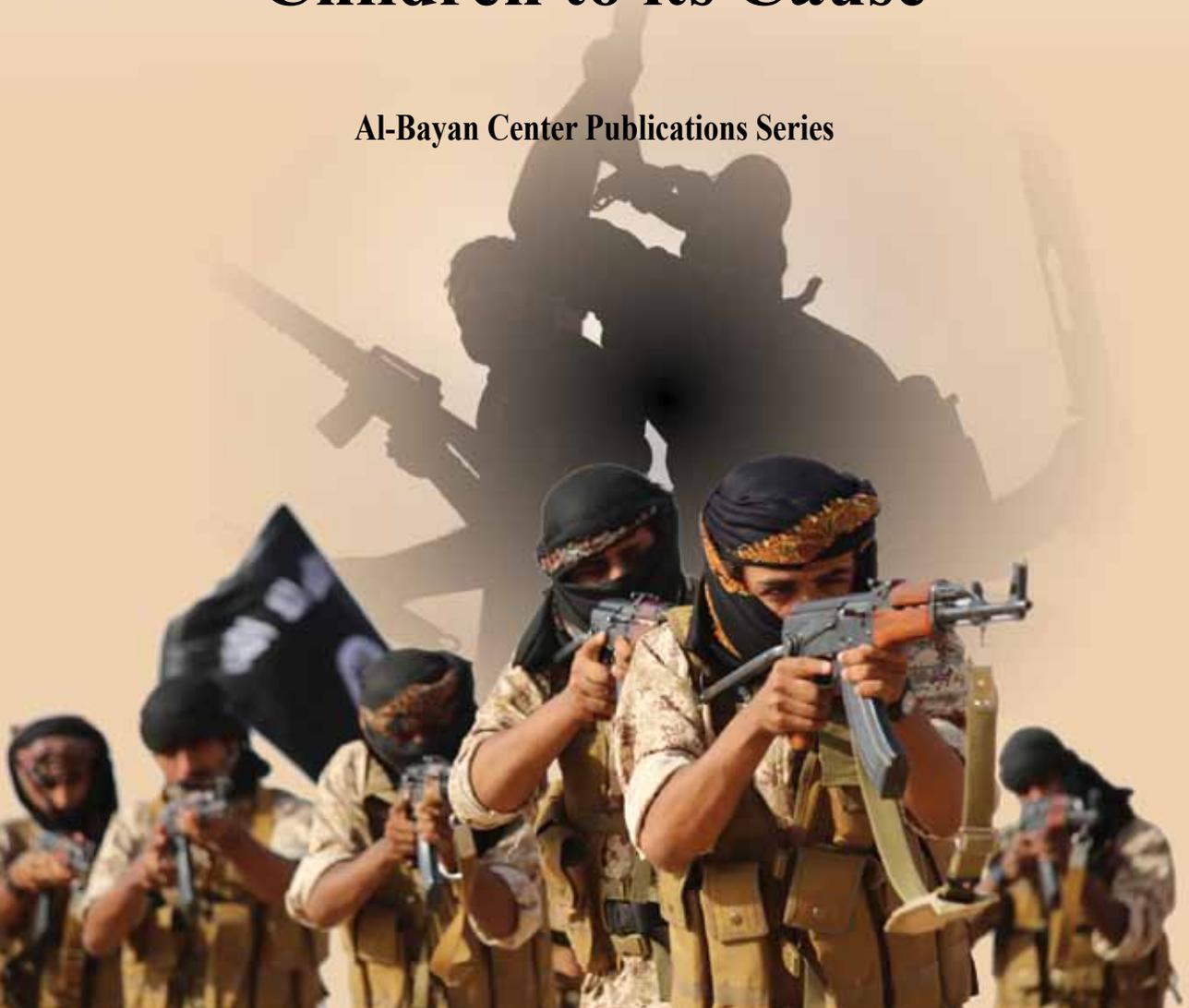


مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies



The Cubs of the Caliphate: How the Islamic State Attracts, Coerces and Indoctrinates Children to its Cause

Al-Bayan Center Publications Series



About

Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies is an independent, nonprofit think tank based in Baghdad, Iraq. Its primary mission is to offer an authentic perspective on public policy issues related to Iraq and the neighboring region. Al-Bayan pursues its vision by conducting autonomous analysis, as well as proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern academia and policymakers.

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www.bayancenter.org

info@bayancenter.org

The Cubs of the Caliphate: How the Islamic State Attracts, Coerces and Indoctrinates Children to its Cause

Since its declaration of a Caliphate in 2014, the Islamic State (IS) has released a number of publications depicting children participating in rallies, undergoing training, undertaking combat operations and even executing prisoners. Armed groups exploiting children in warzones is nothing new and across Iraq and Syria, many factions have been accused of employing children as spies and messengers to actual soldiers¹. However, the scale and sophistication employed by the IS in attracting, coercing, training and indoctrinating children into its cause is particularly noteworthy. Referred to as the “Cubs of the Caliphate” (ashbal al-khalifa), these children are not just a present-day threat on the battlefield, but a potential threat for the future, as the question of what happens to them once the Islamic State is defeated remains,

For armed groups and insurgencies, using children in their operations have a number of pragmatic benefits: Children often appear less suspicious to security forces, are easier to indoctrinate and often difficult to fight against for a number of practical² and political³ reasons⁴. The IS is certainly aware of these benefits when it includes children in its operations. However, the IS’ motivations for recruiting children extend beyond simple pragmatism. By training children in not only warfare but also ideology, the IS seems to be working towards consolidating its state-building project and making sure that even if its organisation comes to an end, its ideology will persist⁵. Moreover, although the IS has attracted a number of foreign fighters into its fold, it has consistently failed to attract the loyalty of major jihadist organisations or worldwide grassroots support. The fact that the IS seems to not just train children as soldiers but raise them as a new generation of citizens loyal to its cause supports the notion that it has “given up” on gaining the

1. “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic”, United Nations Human Rights Council, 13-August-2014

2. i.e, Smaller target, tendency to cause hesitation among adult soldiers during a firefight.

3. i.e, The act of killing a child, even one that is an armed fighter, is likelier to elicit a backlash when used in conjunction with a savvy media campaign.

4. Mia Bloom, Josh Horgan, “The Rise of the Child Terrorist”, Foreign Affairs Magazine, 9-February-2015, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2015-02-09/rise-child-terrorist>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

5. Charles C. Caris, Samuel Reynolds, “ISIS Governance in Syria”, Institute for the Study of War, July 2014, p. 18

support of the adult population in the areas it inhabits⁶.

The purpose of this report is therefore to analyse how the IS recruits children into its cause, whether through forceful means like kidnap and coercion or through means based on enticement to encourage children to join voluntarily. It then looks into the training camps and schools operated by the IS to see how the children are gradually de-sensitised to violence trained in combat and ideology.

How the Islamic State Recruits Children

The IS uses a wide variety of tools to recruit children into its cause, both voluntarily and involuntarily. More often than not, these tools are part of the IS' wider state-building apparatus and are deployed alongside other projects aimed at the general population in areas it has under its influence. This report has identified four primary sources of underage recruitment for the IS:

- Public Events, Projects and Services
- Enticement and Gifts
- Kidnapping and Forced Recruitment
- Children of Islamic State Supporters
- Public Events, Projects and Services

As a result of the Syrian Civil War and the US occupation of Iraq and the subsequent insurgency, many areas across Syria and Iraq have suffered from endemic insecurity, scarcity and unavailability of public services. Under these circumstances, one of the Islamic State's greatest sources of legitimacy in the areas it controls has been the restoration of security and services in the areas it controls⁷. The IS is well aware of the propaganda value of such efforts and in the areas it has limited control over or has not consolidated yet, it tends to engage in a "charm offensive" designed towards familiarising the locals with the positive side of the IS. Referred to as Da'wa ("the call"), these events cost the IS little but

6. Caroline Mortimer, "ISIS Forces Yazidi children to behead dolls as part of their 're-education' training", The Independent, 20-July-2015, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-forces-yazidi-children-to-behead-dolls-as-part-of-their-re-education-training-10400947.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

7. Nour Malas, "Iraqi City Mosul Transformed A Year After Islamic State Capture", The Wall Street Journal, 9-June-2015, <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-city-of-mosul-transformed-a-year-after-islamic-state-capture-1433888626>>, [22-March-2016]

can build up tremendous grassroots support. Da'wa sessions involve distribution of food and drink, informing the locals about “matters of their religion”, and informing the locals of its policies in a manner that will avoid backlash⁸. Although aimed at the population as a whole, these events have a specific youth focus due to the IS' aforementioned long-term planning and its seeming distrust towards adults. Observers report that in Aleppo, the Da'wa sessions aimed at youth involved competitions and contests with prizes for winners, Qur'an reading sessions, video viewing parties to regale them with “epic battles” and members of the organisation handing pamphlets to children⁹.

The education sector has been one of the hardest-hit sectors in Syria since the beginning of the civil war, with many schools either damaged by fighting or being used to house refugees. Syria's pre-war literacy rate of %90 has plummeted and it is estimated that 2.8 million Syrian children are out of school¹⁰. The education vacuum has proven ideal recruitment tool for many of the armed groups in Syria, including the IS. The IS has provided shelter and education for many out-of-school children in the region, grooming them for recruitment in the process¹¹. In areas it has tighter control, the IS has also re-opened schools, instituting a curriculum that emphasizes religious education and pro-IS ideology¹². Although most Islamic State school activity falls under training and indoctrination (and will therefore be analysed in the relevant chapter), in a region where there are few-to-none alternatives for education left, they are also a major source of initial exposure and recruitment for the organisation.

8. Charles C. Caris, Samuel Reynolds, “ISIS Governance in Syria”, Institute for the Study of War, July 2014, p. 15

9. Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Islamic State's Territorial Methodology”, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2016, No. 29, Pp. 2-3, <<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote29-Zelin.pdf>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

10. Maha Yahya, Maya Zreik, “Saving Syria's Lost Generation”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30-November-2015, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=62126>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

11. “Maybe We Live, Maybe We Die: Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria”, Human Rights Watch, 22-June-2014, <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

12. Charles C. Caris, Samuel Reynolds, “ISIS Governance in Syria”, Institute for the Study of War, July 2014, pp. 17, 18

Enticement and Gifts

The on-going conflicts across Syria and Iraq have not only led to a collapse of security and public services, but also a drastic reduction of incomes and opportunities, forcing many Iraqis and Syrians below poverty line. Just as the case in social services and security, the IS has used its ability to provide jobs and income to bolster its legitimacy, offering incomes, bribes and gifts to those it wants to recruit. Children and youth are no exception. As mentioned above, Da'wa sessions often feature gifts and competitions with rewards for winners attached to them. However, beyond rewards for winners, members of the IS have been known to offer small gifts (such as toys and sweets) to all children who participate in meet-and-greet events. Children have also been given simple but inclusive tasks (such as waving a flag for a photo) that bolster the sense of belonging among potential recruits¹³.

The IS has employed similar tactics towards older children and teenagers, although appealing to other forms of enticement. Observers in Iraq have noted that especially across Anbar, the organisation have regaled potential recruits with promises of power, status, prestige and revenge against the Shia. Recruiters of the Islamic State had access to luxury goods (such as high-end cars) that would be beyond the reach of an ordinary citizen, tying together notions of prosperity and the Islamic State¹⁴.

Beyond gifts and token rewards, the Islamic State has found cash to be just as viable a recruiting tool. At the height of its power, the organisation was earning significant funds through the oil trade, taxation, smuggling and looting. This has allowed it to offer its fighters much higher salaries than those of other armed groups or even members of the Syrian or Iraqi militaries. In a region wracked with poverty and lack of prospects, the notion of a steady income alone has driven potential recruits, young and old, to sign up with the organisation. Reports from the Human Rights Watch indicate that recruits signing up with the Islamic State are given a Kalashnikov, ammunition, uniform and tied to \$100

13. Mia Bloom, "Cubs of the Caliphate", Foreign Affairs Magazine, 21-July-2015 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-07-21/cubs-caliphate>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

14. Khoulou al-Amery, "Money, Cars and Guns: How the Islamic State Recruits the Young", Al-Monitor, 4-August-2014, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/08/is-money-cars-guns-iraq-recruit-youth.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

salary if underage, \$200 if adult¹⁵.

Kidnapping and Forced Recruitment

When the Islamic State swept across Iraq and consolidated itself in Syria, it began targeting a number of minorities, primarily Christians and Yazidis. What happened to the members of these sects varied but in most cases, the females were enslaved, adult males were executed and underage males were kidnapped and taken to training camps across Iraq or Syria to be indoctrinated into the IS' ideology¹⁶. However, the IS' kidnapping and forced recruitment of children does not seem to be limited to minorities. Residents in IS-occupied Mosul have expressed fears of their children being conscripted into the organisation¹⁷. These fears have apparently not been unfounded, as there have been reports emerging of recruiters visiting schools and playground to conscript children, with neither parents nor teachers having a right to object¹⁸.

The conflicts across Iraq and Syria have produced many orphans and the IS has taken many of these children as recruits against their will. Residents of Mosul reported that after the city was taken over in 2014, militants have gathered "hundreds" of children from the city's orphanages and took them to an undisclosed location, presumably to be trained¹⁹. The organisation has continued to draw recruits from orphanages, most recently kidnapping 25 Turkoman children from

15. "Maybe We Live, Maybe We Die: Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria", Human Rights Watch, 22-June-2014, <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

16. Caroline Mortimer, "ISIS Forces Yazidi children to behead dolls as part of their 're-education' training", The Independent, 20-July-2015, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-forces-yazidi-children-to-behead-dolls-as-part-of-their-re-education-training-10400947.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

17. Mohammed A Salih, "Mosul Under ISIL: 'No Internet, No Shaving'", Al-Jazeera, 29-March-2015, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/mosul-isil-internet-shaving-150323061307541.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

18. Abdullah Al-Thuweini, "IS 'forcing children to join ranks in Mosul", Al-Araby, 12-May-2015, <<http://www.alaraby.com.uk/english/news/2015/5/12/is-forcing-children-to-join-ranks-in-mosul>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

19. Mushreq Abbas, "The 'Caliphate Cubs' of IS", Al-Monitor, 4-June-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-isis-children-recruits-army-qaeda-execution.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

a Mosul orphanage, reportedly to use as suicide bombers²⁰.

Children of Islamic State Supporters

When the Islamic State declared itself a caliphate in 2014, it called for its supporters to travel to its territories to live under its banner. Since then, not only have a large number of its followers travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the IS, a percentage of them have taken their families and children with them²¹. Activists from IS territories such as Raqqa report that outside locals and Westerners, Chechen fighters seem to be particularly well-represented and a large number of them are reported to have brought their families with them²². While there is no indication on how many of these immigrant children were then signed up with the Islamic State, an eyewitness from Mosul has put their number in the “hundreds”²³.

How the Islamic State Trains and Indoctrinates its ‘Cubs’

As children are such a focal point of the Islamic State’s recruitment and training programme, it is no wonder that those living within its territories are exposed to its ideology and are targeted by its policies on a regular basis. Based on reports by activists, eyewitnesses and survivors, children recruited by the IS (or otherwise part of the organisation even if they have not been formally included as one of the ‘Cubs of the Caliphate’) are trained and indoctrinated in a number of ways to ensure their loyalty to the organisation. This report has identified three main sources of training and indoctrination:

- Families
- Schools
- Training Camps

20. Abdelhak Mamoun, “ISIL Booby-Traps 25 Turkoman Children After Kidnapping Them From Orphanage”, Iraqi News, 17-March-2016, <<http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/isis-equips-25-turkoman-abducted-children-blow-joint-forces/>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

21. Brenda Stoter, “Radicalised Western Mothers Lead Children into Islamic State”, Al-Monitor, 13-April-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/islamic-state-syria-western-women-children-join.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

22. Hadil Aarja, “ISIS Enforces Strict Religious Law in Raqqa”, Al-Monitor, 21-March-2014, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/03/isis-enforces-islamic-law-raqqa-syria.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

23. Mushreq Abbas, “The ‘Caliphate Cubs’ of IS”, Al-Monitor, 4-June-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-isis-children-recruits-army-qaeda-execution.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

Families

As mentioned above, when a number of foreign fighters travelled to IS' territories to join the organisation, they brought with them their families too and a lot of children from these families were then recruited into the Cubs of the Caliphate. These children are exposed to the Islamic State ideology not just at camps or in schools but at home as well, in an environment that actively reinforces the behaviour promoted by the organisation. This group arguably represents the greatest challenge towards dealing with former recruits in the post-IS era as unlike other recruits, these children were not forced, pushed by circumstance or enticed by a charm offensive but are rather part of the organisation's "true believers". More so, reports by activists from Raqqa show that this demographic has access to the highest level of salary and perks offered by the organisation²⁴. As a result, analysts fear that standard deprogramming techniques such as stable post-war economic and family environments would likely fail with these children²⁵.

However, families who do not support the organisation (or are downright hostile to it) can still inadvertently reinforce pro-IS behaviour. In areas taken over by the organisation, stories have spread have of militants paying children to spy on their parents²⁶ or even ordering them kill their parents to prove themselves loyal²⁷. While the impacts of this phenomenon in IS-held urban centres such as Mosul and Raqqa have not been fully explored yet, it is likely that fear of spying and reprisal by their own children compels many parents to avoid showing hostility to the organisation even in their own homes, allowing IS propaganda to go unchallenged.

Schools

The Islamic State's ambitious social projects make it clear that it does not perceive itself as a rogue insurgency but a bona-fide state and nowhere is this clearer than its schooling system. The organisation does not simply want

24. Hadil Aarja, "ISIS Enforces Strict Religious Law in Raqqa", Al-Monitor, 21-March-2014, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/03/isis-enforces-islamic-law-raqqa-syria.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

25. Mia Bloom, "Cubs of the Caliphate", Foreign Affairs Magazine, 21-July-2015 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-07-21/cubs-caliphate>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

26. Kate Brannen, "Children of the Caliphate", Foreign Policy Magazine, 24-October-2014, <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/24/children-of-the-caliphate/>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

27. "Kill Your Parents,' IS Orders 12-Year-old Child Soldiers", Al-Araby, 19-January-2016, <<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2016/1/19/kill-your-parents-is-orders-12-year-old-child-soldiers>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

militants but future citizens loyal to its ideology. Schools, in that respect, represent the organisation's first line of indoctrination and training as well as acting as sources of recruitment. Most information regarding these schools comes from the Islamic State's social media posts and is primarily sourced from Syria where the organisation has governed the longest. Such posts show that the curriculum is focused heavily on religion, with sheiks teaching children the proper way to pray and worship and the organisation providing Qur'an's for the students²⁸. It is unclear if other topics are taught in these schools. However, activists from Mosul report that the organisation has "removed biology, chemistry and even Islamic studies lessons" from schools, retaining maths, emphasizing Arabic and instituting a new version of the religious studies classes²⁹. This shows how single-minded the Islamic State's pursuit of a religious ideology is and how entrenched its effort to promote and perpetuate have become.

Training Camps

The Islamic State camps are the main and most infamous source of training and indoctrination for its militants and where the Cubs of the Caliphate are based. Reports indicate that most of these camps are located in remote regions where the organisation can have a better isolate and control the children³⁰. To date, a number of former Cubs have managed to escape the camps (or were released by the IS due to injuries) and the accounts of these witnesses paint a stark picture of the environment within these camps and the methods employed by the IS to train and indoctrinate its Cubs.

Just like its schools, the training camps of the Islamic State have a significant religious element, training children in the IS' jihadist ideology. Children undergoing training in these camps are made to learn and recite verses from the Qur'an and taught to become hateful of the enemies of the caliphate³¹.

28. Charles C. Caris, Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria", Institute for the Study of War, July 2014, pp. 17-18

29. Mohammed A Salih, "Mosul Under ISIL: 'No Internet, No Shaving'", Al-Jazeera, 29-March-2015, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/mosul-isil-internet-shaving-150323061307541.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

30. Mushreq Abbas, "The 'Caliphate Cubs' of IS", Al-Monitor, 4-June-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-isis-children-recruits-army-qaeda-execution.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

31. Mushreq Abbas, "The 'Caliphate Cubs' of IS", Al-Monitor, 4-June-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-isis-children-recruits-army-qaeda-execution.html>>,

Children who refuse are reportedly punished in a number of brutal ways, such as an 11 year old who had his legs broken by militants when he refused to become a footsoldier³². Similarly, those who fail to show the necessary adherence to Islamic practices are punished in a number of ways including crucifixion³³.

An additional level of ethno-religious training is applied on the children who belong to a non-Sunni background. Children from such backgrounds are not allowed to speak other than Arabic³⁴ (if their background includes a non-Arabic language) and were forced to change their non-Arabic names into Arabic ones³⁵. Yazidis, in particular, were taught that they are “dirty”³⁶ and were referred along derogatory lines such as “polytheistic” or “satanic” to justify the group’s intolerance towards them and present themselves as helping these children towards a righteous path³⁷. In addition, children are taught to dress and mimic the appearance of the older militants and are often compelled to dress in a manner that resembles traditional Afghan fighter attire, presumably to suppress the local identities of the children³⁸.

Desensitising children towards violence represents another step of training. As the organisation’s ideology explicitly promotes violence towards its enemies, desensitisation represents an important step to ensure that the Cubs will be able to stomach violent acts. Based on eyewitness reports, desensitisation occurs on a step-by-step basis, starting with exposure to violence through a visual medium,

[Accessed 23-March-2016]

32. “Kill Your Parents,’ IS Orders 12-Year-old Child Soldiers”, Al-Araby, 19-January-2016, <<http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2016/1/19/kill-your-parents-is-orders-12-year-old-child-soldiers>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

33. Joshua Berlinger, “ISIS’ Child Solders: What will happen to the ‘cubs of the caliphate’?”, CNN, 28-May-2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/20/middleeast/isis-child-soldiers/>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

34. Milad Qasem, Raed Qirani, “Islamic State Trained Yazidi Children as Soldiers”, Al-Monitor, 13-November-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2015/11/yazidi-children-islamic-state-soldiers.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

35. Caroline Mortimer, “ISIS Forces Yazidi children to behead dolls as part of their ‘re-education’ training”, The Independent, 20-July-2015, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-forces-yazidi-children-to-behead-dolls-as-part-of-their-re-education-training-10400947.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

36. Ibid

37. Milad Qasem, Raed Qirani, “Islamic State Trained Yazidi Children as Soldiers”, Al-Monitor, 13-November-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2015/11/yazidi-children-islamic-state-soldiers.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

38. Ibid.

continuing with simulated acts of violence and culminating with the Cubs being made to perform actual acts of violence. To this end, Cubs are first made to watch executions (either live or in propaganda videos) to break their initial aversion towards violence. As they receive physical training on handling weapons, they are taught to perform executions using dolls that are often modelled after the appearances of IS' prisoners (e.g. A doll with an orange jumpsuit). Children are told to behead these dolls to practice for actual beheadings³⁹. Finally, the Cubs are ordered to perform actual executions on captives. The manner of the execution (e.g. with a knife or gun) and how it is presented varies but the organisation has consistently provided high publicity for these events⁴⁰.

The final and most practical element of the Cubs' training is, of course, physical training. Unlike its religious training and desensitization programmes, the physical training of the Cubs is not particularly unique and their methods can be found across a number of armed groups and national militaries around the world. This suggests that instructors of the Cubs possess skills in modern military training; a fact that makes the Cubs even more dangerous in the battlefield. Those who attended the cubs reported that the training was very arduous, involving day-long exercises that were described as "severe". The training was only broken up by prayer sessions and sharia courses and it is reported that the militants specifically prevented trainees from having time off, assigning them to guard duty if there was nothing to do⁴¹. The severity of the training not only served to erode resistance among the less willing participants and enforce discipline, but was reportedly useful towards building a sense of camaraderie among the Cubs and bolstering a sense of pride when they successfully completed a portion of their training⁴². After initial training, the Cubs are given practical duties depending on their skills. Many Cubs would perform guard or patrol duties while those who

39. Mia Bloom, "Why ISIS is Increasingly Using Kids as 'Cubs of the Caliphate'", Huffington Post, 23-May-2015, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mia-bloom/isis-kids-cubs-caliphate_b_6903638.html>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

40. Joshua Berlinger, "ISIS' Child Solders: What will happen to the 'cubs of the caliphate'?", CNN, 28-May-2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/20/middleeast/isis-child-soldiers/>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

41. "Maybe We Live, Maybe We Die: Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria", Human Rights Watch, 22-June-2014, <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

42. Joshua Berlinger, "ISIS' Child Solders: What will happen to the 'cubs of the caliphate'?", CNN, 28-May-2015, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/20/middleeast/isis-child-soldiers/>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

showed skills in communication and ideology would be taken on as recruiters for the group⁴³. Similarly, those unable to perform the duties of a footsoldier would be trained as suicide bombers⁴⁴, although some Cubs are apparently given a choice between acting as footsoldier or a suicide bomber and receive further training accordingly⁴⁵.

Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and The Future

As the Iraqi Security Forces and their affiliates continue to make strides in recapturing and liberating occupied Iraqi land, the looming question of ‘how does one deal with the Cubs?’ after said liberation remains a crucial one.

The Cubs provide unique challenges to the socio-political framework of Iraq, particularly when considering the brutality of the IS in comparison to other terrorist organisation that have also engaged with the militarization of children; the case of Iraq adds an extra layer of difficulty due to the family unit; tribal networks; and, often whole villages being incriminated in pushing children to become a Cub of the Caliphate.

Despite these increased and unique challenges, there are several similarities and shared experiences with the recruitment and use of child soldiers in other conflicts. The universal paradigm that is oft drawn upon is the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) model that has been employed by all UN peacekeeping operations following civil conflict.

The steps indicated include:

1. The identification of Child Soldiers, disarming them to demilitarize the environment that they are living in; and, often there is a cathartic and ritualistic public destruction of weapons to entrench the idea that this is the end of the militarized phase.

43. Mia Bloom, “Cubs of the Caliphate”, Foreign Affairs Magazine, 21-July-2015 <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-07-21/cubs-caliphate> >, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

44. Mushreq Abbas, “The ‘Caliphate Cubs’ of IS”, Al-Monitor, 4-June-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iraq-isis-children-recruits-army-qaeda-execution.html>>, [Accessed 23-March-2016]

45. Ali Hashem, “Teenage Suicide Bomber Hopes For A Second Chance”, Al-Monitor, 6-January-2015, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/islamic-state-suicide-bomber-baghdad.html>>, [Accessed 22-March-2016]

2. Demobilization of Child Soldiers by removing them from the armed groups that they have been engaging with and holding them within interim care centres as their families are traced, located and reunited with the children⁴⁶. Children are held for differing amount of times contingent upon the conflict, for example within Sierra Leone they were held for six months, whereas within Afghanistan it only took a few days⁴⁷.

3. The final stage is the reintegration phase. This is the most important process within the programme in which the children are gradually reintegrated into their wider communities and society as functioning and contributing members. For an effective reintegration there must be a systematic rehabilitation programme in which the child is able to transition back to the innocence of childhood through reconnecting with her or his family and their wider community. The rehabilitation programme is also expected to account for the trauma that the child soldier and broader community would have inevitably faced and must undertake the necessary psychosocial therapy to provide treatment and facilitate an effective transition into civilian life.

Iraq's Unique Problem

The DDR scheme has proven to be effective in several peacekeeping missions throughout the world that have undergone civil conflict. It has worked particularly well in conflicts where the family unit has been traced and reunited with the Child Soldier as a means of creating a support network in conjunction with the rehabilitation programme undertaken. The case of the Cubs in Iraq posit a unique problem identified earlier in the report that the family and wider tribe that the family belongs to may be implicated collectively as supporters of or indeed a part of the IS.

This particular problem means that the family and wider tribe cannot be depended upon as an effective actor in the demobilization and reintegration phases of the Child Soldier's return to normalcy. If the family or tribe itself are part of the wider IS network, there needs to be an alternative way to ensure effective integration into wider society. In some cases, family members of the Cubs may in fact be taken to trial for involvement with IS activities, rendering

46. <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/the-children-of-islamic-state.pdf>

47. Wessells, Child Soldiers, p. 157.

them obsolete in the process of rehabilitation. Furthermore, cultural sensitivities, local knowledge and an acute awareness of the Iraqi way of life are important in concocting a pragmatic solution .

Although the DDR paradigm is one that has been effective across various conflicts, particularly across Africa and Afghanistan, the curious case of IS in Iraq presents fresh challenges for the Post-IS terrain. No theory, paradigm or methodology is universally applicable, and each requires customisation to fit local standards and needs.

Policy Recommendations

A local DDR

Following the DDR framework is an effective method with a proven track record to reintegrate Child Soldiers back into society. However due to Iraq's particular problem of implicated families and tribes in the IS networks certain adjustments are required to make the programme and effective one. After disarmament to demilitarize the Cubs we propose the following:

a. Independent assessments:

Every Cub is required to go through an independent assessment to ensure the adequate psychosocial care is provided to facilitate reintegration. Assessment is required through a team of qualified psychologists, teachers and healthcare professionals who have expertise in conflict and trauma to work with the children and to educate community leaders about the specific needs of the children in their local community. Assessment would quantify the level of each individual Cub involvement with the IS; the violence they have committed; the level of their affinity to the IS; and, the level of their general radicalization and belief in violent extremism. Completion of the assessment would provide a thorough framework and background profile for each former Cub that would present their individual requirements for successful reintegration. We recommend that these assessments are carried out by specialised NGOs that can provide independent and objective analyses, sanctioned by the Iraqi State.

b. Demobilization:

Whilst traditional DDR models encourage the return of the former Child Soldier to their families to remove them from a radicalised environment; with the case of Iraq however, families and wider support networks maybe implicated in having extremist views or a broad affiliation with the IS. Ideally there would be a State based support network in which children are placed in foster care if their families are implicated as radicalised or deemed unfit to re-home the former Cub. However, due to Iraq's lack of infrastructure and capacity to provide adequate fostering as an alternative to returning children to their families (if identified as implicated with the IS) we propose that children are returned to their families due to necessity and to establish a government affiliated "Social Services" that is trained by contracted specialists to monitor and evaluate each Cub and their family's progress upon the child's return.

c. Reintegration:

We also recommend that the government affiliated "Social Services" implement a mandatory rehabilitation programme that is designed with the help of contracted specialists to educate formers Cubs and their families about the implications of extremism, violent and non-violent, and a religious re-education. We recommend this programme provides a mixture of classroom based education and one-to-one mentoring that is focused on discrediting IS ideology through religious education provided by credible and respected Islamic Scholars who will provide a peaceful interpretation of the religion; diversity workshops in which they are taught about the diverse and varied ethno-religious make up of Iraq's different communities; and, psychosocial care/therapy that is tailored to deal with any vulnerabilities that the former Cubs may have due to the trauma of their experiences.

We would also go one step further to ensure that the horrors of the past are not repeated by integrating a standardised version of this rehabilitation programme into the National School Curriculum from Primary through to Secondary education in a compulsory "Citizenship" class. This citizenship class will adapt the rehabilitation programme and focus on teaching Iraqi children from a young age what it means to be an Iraqi citizen with a focus on national values, tolerance, community and respect. By implementing this as part of the National Curriculum, Iraq will be able to raise a new generation of citizens who are committed to the betterment of their nation state and resistant to any future

extremist ideological penetration.

d. Restorative Justice

As part of the process of rehabilitation and integration into wider society, the concept of “Restorative Justice” has been one that has gained traction and popularity in recent years across Europe, particularly within the British penal system. This concept ‘enables victims to meet or communicate with their offender to explain the real impact of the crime. This is part of a wider field called restorative practice.

Restorative practice can be used anywhere to prevent conflict, build relationships and repair harm by enabling people to communicate effectively and positively. Restorative practice is increasingly being used in schools, children’s services, workplaces, hospitals, communities and the criminal justice system. Restorative practice can involve both a proactive approach to preventing harm and conflict and activities that repair harm where conflicts have already arisen.⁴⁸

Within the context of the Cubs we suggest using this method with older children who are psychosocially able to process and understand the gravity and consequences of their actions. We recommend facilitating sponsored visits for older Cubs to IDP camps such as the UNICEF sponsored camp in Karbala where they will be able to visit and interact with families and most importantly, children of a similar age range to them that have been affected by the actions of the IS. Through these interactions and visits, the victims will have the opportunity to explain how their lives were impacted by the atrocities of the IS. Furthermore, Restorative Justice allows the perpetrators and victims to come together in a controlled environment and discuss how they can move forward, reconcile and bring transformative change to wider society.

e. The Aarhus Model

This model named after the Danish city it was first introduced has been a controversial yet effective small scale project that we recommend should be used in conjunction with the aforementioned policies⁴⁹. In addition to Restorative Justice, older Cubs who are deemed to be deeper entrenched into IS ideology or other violent extremism should be part of a one-to-one mentoring scheme in

48. <https://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/what-restorative-justice>

49. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/12/deradicalise-isis-fighters-jihadists-denmark-syria>

which they are buddied up with a successfully deradicalised former extremist. This model works as an inverse to the Restorative Justice scheme.

The mentor would have undergone training to provide adequate mentorship for former Child Soldiers. They will be required to spend time with the Cub on a frequent basis to challenge their perceptions, world view and extremist ideology. The mentor will also talk about their personal experiences and similarities to the Cub's own subjective experience, this is a crucial step to demonstrate a shared understanding through which the Cub can relate to and begin to challenge their own views. Through the process of the mentor demonstrating empathy for the Cub's radicalisation process and understanding, a gateway is opened to achieve a cognitive change and effective, long-term deradicalisation. Upon completion of the mentorship programme, the Cub is then a potential candidate to become a mentor for future Cubs.

Conclusion

Many children and youth across Iraq and Syria have suffered heavily over the past years, traumatised by violence and the stresses of day-to-day survival. It will take significant investment and well-managed programmes for them to recover from the conflict and grow up without significant psychological problems. And this, in a region suffering from endemic instability, corruption, poverty and extremism is a difficult task already. The Cubs of the Caliphate adds a further layer of challenge to this situation. The Cubs have been led to believe in the legitimacy of an ideology that has wreaked havoc across the region and have witnessed (or committed) violence on a scale no adults (let alone children) should experience. These children will carry the trauma and experiences of their time with the Cubs even after the Islamic State is defeated. Ensuring that they don't perpetuate the IS' devastating legacy will not be cheap, easy or quick. But it is a task absolutely vital towards ensuring the region does not spiral into further violence over the years to come. By following the proposed policy recommendations, we believe that a foundation can be laid out that is specific and sensitive to Iraq's local needs in a Post-IS world. The use of a customised DDR programme with elements of Restorative Justice, Aarhus Model mentorship and a change in the National Curriculum, Iraq will be able to deradicalise the Cubs in addition to raising a generation that is resilient to the perverse nature of extremist ideology.