



International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism



The ISIS Prison System: Its Structure, Departmental Affiliations, Processes, Conditions, and Practices of Psychological and Physical Torture

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Executive Summary

- ❖ This paper endeavors to explore the ISIS prison system, the arrest or abduction, interrogation and confession and total detention processes; as well as the condition of detention facilities, and the physical and psychological torture taking place within the terrorist organization's jails.
- ❖ Fifty-five ISIS cadres (defectors, returnees or prisoners) and 17 Syrian civilian interviewees who had been detained by ISIS were interviewed regarding their knowledge

of and first experiences of incarceration in ISIS prison facilities. Their reports are compiled and dissected into three phases: 1) abduction/arrest, 2) initial processing including interrogation and confession phases, and 3) post interrogation processing.

- ❖ The accounts obtained from ISIS cadres, detainees and sources on the ground provided a chilling portrayal of ISIS' prison system. The detention facilities are run by different entities. These entities are namely: the Islamic police, military police, hisbah (morality police), raid squads, and Emni (security forces). Methods of detention, conditions, and torture and punishment varied across the aforementioned entities.
- ❖ Throughout their abduction/arrest and interrogation, detainees are subjected to a number of psychological methods of torture. These include the threat of execution, promises to receive similar fates as other tortured fellow detainees, solitary confinement, and the placement of severed heads in cages in which detainees are being held. Elaborate physical torture includes seven methods named as follows: Lashing, the Fuel, Bisat al-Rih (Flying Carpet), Shabeh (Ghost), German Chair, the Biter, and the Tire.
- ❖ It is hard to assess whether ISIS operatives gained actionable information or confessions as result. For many of the tortured interviewed detainees as well as the defectors, confessions meant that they would be executed by the terrorist organization. Though, detainees appear to collectively develop coping mechanisms and strategies including sharing information to avoid coerced confessions to inhibit the effectiveness of ISIS' interrogations.
- ❖ The use of torture serves as a reinforcement of ISIS' brand of terror. In that sense, torture is a violent method that scares civilians into submitting to ISIS' theological codes and socio-political aims.
- ❖ Throughout detainees' time in shared cells, they were expected to participate in sharia courses. The first course was called Redemption. The sharia lectures were often delivered

by highly ranked sharia figures. The courses are carried out to indoctrinate detainees in ISIS ideology prior to their release.

- ❖ The last phase of the incarceration starts when the interrogation is concluded. Former detainees reported that they were not made aware beforehand of meeting sharia judges.
- ❖ Detainees who have been cleared of their purported offences and those who have survived ISIS' punishment are subjected to conditional release. ISIS is reported to offer former detainees to either make a ransom-like payment, or for those with skills needed by the terrorist organization to work for ISIS directorates. ISIS operatives try to coerce former detainees who can neither make the payment nor possess the skills deemed valuable by the terrorist organization to commit suicide operations.
- ❖ The presented findings illustrate that ISIS jailors cooperate with media operatives to use, most probably coerced, pre-execution testimony for its propaganda.
- ❖ The current paper also puts forth a number of names and details on ISIS operatives engaged in detaining, torturing, and extorting civilians to supply the terrorist organization with material support.
- ❖ Evidence of the terrorist organization's handling of hostages suggests that they were subjected to various methods of psychological and elaborate physical torture.
- ❖ The category of detainees that ISIS uses as sabaya or sex slaves include the Yazidis captured in Iraq, wives and daughters of captured Free Syrian Army and Jabhat al Nusrah cadres. These women are either sold or given to foreign fighters, ISIS cadres or outsiders or held in detention facilities in both Syria and Iraq. Those held in detention centers are subjected to repeated rapes by ISIS cadres who are given access to them as a reward for service.
- ❖ The report also demonstrates a level of sophistication in the organizational structure and governance of ISIS' prison system and interrogation processes.

- ❖ Based on evidence provided throughout the paper, ISIS has been observed to move its detention facilities when fearing territorial loss. This trend may be informative in reading future movements of the terrorist organization. Alongside ISIS cash reserves and ISIS leadership, the cities of Mayadin and al-Bukamal, Deir ez-Zor received a significant number of detainees and hostages. The aforementioned indicators suggest the operational significance of the two cities in taking the fight to ISIS.

Introduction

This article examines abuses, including torture, within ISIS' detention facilities, the organizational structure and departmental affiliations of the ISIS prison system, the interrogation and confession phases of detention, the identities (where reported upon) of those carrying out prison abuses, detention-release and detention-execution processes, and the numbers of individuals within ISIS' jails. Data was collected over the last year and a half from 55 ISIS cadres interviewed in the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism's (ICSVE) *ISIS Defectors Interviews Project* who were either in (non-ISIS) prisons, defected from ISIS, or returned home as foreign fighters from the group as well as one Free Syrian Army leader who shared his knowledge about ISIS prisons and methods of torture and punishment, the latter having freed prisoners from an ISIS prison and observed first hand the conditions of torture and prison treatment. The 55 ISIS cadres were from Syria (n=33) Iraq (n=18), Balkans (n=1), Europe (3) and had varying levels of knowledge about the ISIS prison system, some having been imprisoned themselves and tortured, others learning from their friends and family members' experiences. Likewise 17 Syrian civilians: men, women, and teenagers who had themselves suffered in ISIS detention centers in Syria were also interviewed by ICSVE between 6 April and 24 May 2017 in which victims shared their excruciating experiences in ISIS detention centers.

To document the epidemic of psychological trauma in civilian populations across ISIS held territories, is to state the obvious. Like all conflict zones, but particularly for those living under the brutality of the so-called Islamic State, there is a high degree of posttraumatic stress among the populations. While it is still too early to make any widespread assessments of the degree of psychological traumatization that exists for everyone living under Islamic State—we can say from our interviews with those who have suffered under ISIS detention that they are clearly suffering from severe symptoms of posttraumatic stress as well as symptoms of dissociative disorders and are in need of psychological interventions. Assuming that endeavors to heal the psychological scars of populations that have been terrorized for years are accessible and in place, such initiatives are, and will be, challenging in Syria given what the population has endured.

The wife of a former detainee emotionally recounts her utter state of helplessness facing her husband's post-ISIS detention dissociative state of being (i.e. his normal psychological states of consciousness no longer fully functioning) [1]:

He would be staring at the television for hours without saying a word. At first I thought he was watching. One time I talked to him. I remembered asking him what he wants for lunch. I repeated the question three times. I took the remote control and changed the channel. He kept on staring. I kept changing to other channels and after a while I turned the television off. He kept staring at it. Sometimes I'd find him in the living room corner hunched, moving his head up and down. He shivers as though it is freezing; he breaths heavily. I don't know what to say. I just cry. Do you know what I should say?

The woman uses her scarf to dry the drops from her eyes as she waits for an answer.

¹ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May, 3 2017)

With conflicts currently raging, international borders closed, and funding from major donors for aid organizations failing to prioritize rehabilitation programs in a country torn by wars, little psychological help is currently available. Obtaining security and physical survival are priorities. Reaching out for psychological assistance is not yet a priority—even if help were available, and for many fear and stigma stands in the way of getting help. Likewise, notwithstanding the immense need for such initiatives, when it comes to those held and tortured in ISIS detention facilities, still not enough is currently known about what happens to them. This report is an attempt to rectify that.

Over the last year and a half and specifically in the last months, ICSVE researchers attempted to assemble information regarding ISIS detention centers, their departmental affiliations, structures, procedures, and conditions. Interviews of the 55 defectors, prisoners and returnees were conducted by the second author (along with Ahmet Yayla for the Syrians having defected and fled into Syria and with Ardian Shajkovci for the Iraqi former ISIS cadres prisoners and Haris Fazilu for the Kosovar returnees) in their native language through translation about their reasons for joining ISIS, their experiences with the group and their reasons for leaving, if defectors. All had direct knowledge of arrests and abductions, 11 had direct experience with ISIS prisons, 7 having been held themselves and in most cases tortured, and three served as part of the ISIS prison system—one working in the court with the prisons, another as a guard for 475 women held as sex slaves, one as a female hisbah member who tortured women in detention, and the fourth an Iraqi cadre who regularly visited a “sabaya” prison to engage in rape. The 17 Syrian interviews of civilians held and tortured by ISIS were conducted by the first author in Arabic, without translation. In all cases, informed consent was obtained, with particular care taken in prison settings to ascertain that prisoners were speaking freely and felt free to decline any questions as well as were warned not to answer anything that could further incriminate them. Interviews of the ISIS civilian

victims were carried out in private settings, in a gentle and soothing manner, and interviews were stopped if they caused too much distress, in order to minimize the re-traumatization of victims. In that regard, it should be noted that both ISIS cadres and civilians often found it highly traumatizing to speak about their ordeals under ISIS, yet deeply wanted others to bear witness to their lived truths. Additional information regarding the organizational aspects of the detention facilities was obtained, during the 6 April and 24 May 2017 time period, from a network of individuals on the ground who were willing to share details of what they know with the first author. ISIS held the former detainees for periods ranging from a few days to sixteen months. Both categories of interviewees reported to ICSVE on the conditions of their words being reported anonymously (names given in interviews are all changed in reporting here). All the civilian victims had been detained in ISIS-held territories in Syria.

The accounts obtained from ISIS cadres, detainees and sources on the ground provided a chilling portrayal of ISIS' prison system. The detention facilities are run by different entities. These entities are namely: the Islamic police, military police, hisbah (morality police), raid squads, and Emni (security forces). Each facility oversees the detention of individuals accused of taking actions that are deemed punishable by the respective entity. Methods of detention, conditions, and torture and punishment varied across the aforementioned entities. The following sections aim to disambiguate ISIS' prison system, clarify the detention process, and document psychological and physical abuses. Moreover, findings regarding the locations, conditions, and recent developments regarding local and foreign hostages are also discussed.

Abduction and Arrest

Interviewees reported different methods of arrests and abductions. Generally, the former detainees were captured in public. In the case of ISIS fighters many described being arrested

trying to escape, or returning to it in amnesties, upon capture—when fighting for a rival group, when accused of a crime, etc. In the case of civilians, masked men in or around the outskirts of Raqqa city captured the majority of the interviewees. For instance, one of the former detainees, a 37-year-old man, was captured by three masked ISIS operatives around Panorama Park, Raqqa. He told ICSVE that he was riding a microbus that was heading towards Raqqa city [2]:

On my way to Raqqa we were stopped by an ISIS fighter, around 20 meters before a roadblock. The driver got off the minibus. After talking to a masked ISIS fighter he asked all of us to get out. We stood in line and gave our Syrian IDs to the ISIS fighter. He took them and walked back to the roadblock. There were five pickup trucks loaded with masked ISIS men. One of them looked at the IDs and then came with nine other fighters. They called everybody by name and gave them their IDs back; except me. They stared at everybody else and demanded they return to the bus. I didn't say anything. One of them hit me with the back of his rifle on my lower jaw. After I got hit, I fell to the ground and I hunched. I looked toward the minibus. They all saw it but they were scared to say anything. One of them [the ISIS captors] asked me to raise my head. After I did he kicked me on the chest with the sole of his shoe. I fell to the ground and right away covered my head. Two fighters started kicking me. I heard one of them saying not the face. One of the fighters ordered them to stop and pulled me up, inspected me, cuffed my arms, and blindfolded me. I did not say anything. I did not want to anger them.

The ISIS modus operandi is to train their cadres to *hear and obey*. Practicing extreme intimidation techniques and doling out punishments among the local populations, they expect obedience from civilians as well [3]. Indeed, some of the interviewees' accounts indicated that the locals painfully learned that if they argued with ISIS operatives, they would get even

² Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 15, 2017)

³ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

more physically abused upon their capture. A 12-year-old- child and a former detainee, now 13, who reported about fighting back by arguing and pushing an ISIS operative, was threatened and sustained physical abuse [4]:

A very old ISIS man; his white beard was dyed with henna, shouted, 'You thief come here.' I looked at him and around me. He pointed at me and said, 'You steal shoes from the mosque.' We will cut your hand. I answered him, 'It's one like you that is a thief.' He came to me and held my sweater. I spit on him and told him, 'Let go of me son of a whore!' He punched me in the face. Another one came and kicked me. I could not fight back. There were a lot of them. Every time I fell they got me up and kicked me. I lost consciousness. I woke up in the hospital. When I woke up the old man came and told me, 'We will arrest and discipline you.' I could not even move. Everywhere hurt. I was scared that he would cut my hand. He was a crazy old man.

A very few of the interviewed former detainees were not subjected to physical abuse upon their capture. These interviewees were commonly older and known in their local communities which may have been factors protecting them from public abuse. Moreover, they were seized during the first months of ISIS' takeover of Raqqa city at a time when ISIS cadres were still working to win the support of local communities rather than intimidate them into acceptance. The case of a victim interviewee, a 54-year-old man, who was approached at his workplace, is reflective of the segment of detainees who were not physically abused at the time of their arrest. This former detainee asserted that he was not ill-treated by his two captors [5]:

I was not beaten or threatened by them. They parked their cars in front of my office. The driver stayed behind the wheel. Two ISIS men stood by the door and two others made their way in. They told me that they wanted to ask me a few

⁴ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 21, 2017)

⁵ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 3, 2017)

questions. One of them went through my desk and took my computer case. The other escorted me to the car and then blindfolded me.

Similarly, ISIS cadres reported that those arrested for smoking, dress infringements, or breaking ISIS rules were taken by the ISIS hisbah and placed in ISIS jail where floggings and other punishments would take place. In the case of women, if they were arrested, these beatings took place privately inside the prisons where the women were flogged on their bare skin or “bitten” with a metal device. Two defectors and one woman who had served in the ISIS hisbah told about women using this metal device to “bite” other women on fleshy parts of their bodies including their breasts—causing one woman to bleed to death. The hisbah member who bit other women as a form of punishment explained [6]:

We would take off the clothes of the woman until she is in her underwear then we would beat her with a lash and then there are special women in the hisbah for biting and they would bite that woman. So we would torture that woman so badly that when the husband came from the other side she wouldn't be able to walk. Then from out of this prison she would feel I would never do this again because of the things she suffered from the imprisonment. Her husband needed to pay a fine and he need to purchase the proper abaya and sign the paperwork that he would comply to the rules completely in the future.

While women were usually flogged privately in ISIS jails, one defector recalled a Syrian woman, who was observed without her niqaab outside of her home, being beaten in public by ISIS cadres causing her to miscarry her child then and there; leaving a trail of blood from where she sat while she was flogged mercilessly [7].

⁶ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian Umm Rashid (May 10, 2016)

⁷ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." Perspectives on Terrorism 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S.. Isis Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

Men could be taken to ISIS jails as punishment for their wives' or female family member's dress infringements where they were made to pay a fine and they also suffered public floggings, or in the extreme case, beheadings. Men were also targeted for arrest when an ISIS cadre was unsuccessful talking a father into giving his daughter for marriage or the ISIS cadre coveted the man's wife. These instances usually ended in executions [8] although there were exceptions as this defector told us [9]:

So there was an old man he had two girls. One of the foreign fighters came and eventually offered him two million Syrian pounds and the old man was trying to stall him. Finally they arrested the old man and accused him of being a spy for the regime. So when they detained him as a spy it means he will be killed. So the old man gave in and said you can marry my daughter but we cannot have a wedding when I am detained. So they released him the next day. When he got out he pretended he was preparing for the wedding but he took his daughters and escaped to Turkey.

Men and women were also arrested for suspicions of spying, trying to escape, passing messages to the Free Syrian Army, being traitors to the group, for having any contraband, using mobile devices without ISIS permission, for breaking any ISIS rule, and especially for engaging in sexual relations outside the strict ISIS rules. ISIS cadres also reported detaining suspects at checkpoints in Iraq and Syria who were judged as undesirables—Yazidis, Christians and Shia, and when enough were assembled, marching them off to a secluded area where they were executed by gunshot [10]. One ISIS defector recalls how ISIS dealt with the al-Sheitat battle and arrests of opposing fighters [11]:

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Ali (December 18, 2015)

¹⁰ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." Perspectives on Terrorism 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S..

After we swept the region we came back to Deir ez Zor, the first battle was done, after we got a bit of rest we were told to go and attack al Sheitati because there were Jaysh al-Hur and regime among them. So we took the women of al-Sheitat as our slaves and arrested many men. How could we do this? They were Muslims. Of course we arrested many men also. They were tried at the court and they were sentenced—to be killed. So we beheaded them. Our group beheaded thirty-five men after the trials. . . . The soldiers did not fight back so we started to arrest soldiers, but we were ordered to behead them without waiting. There were not trials.

From July 2016 onward ISIS became more brutal in their arrests, abandoning their policy of trying to win the hearts of those they ruled in favor of intimidation tactics. Interviewees arrested in the time period following July 2016 recalled being physically abused before they were taken to detention facilities, as in the case of a 26-year-old man who was captured in a crowded part of Raqqa. He reported his terror over what happened when he was walking with his young brother [12]:

I was taking my brother to my sister's house. A group of ISIS masked men pointed at me and shouted something. I got scared and felt that my feet were too heavy to move. There were a lot of people; they all just stared. One of the ISIS men, who I recognized, put a gun on my head and told the others that he should just kill me. I was worried about my brother. Nobody came to take him. I told the gunman to let my brother go. I told him he can kill me afterward. He pressed my jaw so hard with his other hand while holding his gun on my forehead and said, 'Shut up!' They took me to the car. My brother was crying.

ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

¹¹ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Halim (March 2, 2016)

¹² Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 7, 2017)

The majority of interviewees were detained individually. Two cases indicated collective arrests. One case was recorded in the Raqqa countryside. One of the former detainees, a 38-year-old man, described his capture as part of a larger operation [13]:

Around 13 ISIS pickup trucks that were loaded with fighters entered the town. ISIS fighters went on a door-to-door search. They took 9 of us into their pickup trucks and blindfolded us before they took us out of our town.

Detention Facilities

The accounts of former detainees show a horrifying portrayal of ISIS detentions conditions many of which reflect the detention practices of Bashar al-Assad and Sadaam Hussain's security forces—using extreme forms of torture. The brutality of ISIS operatives inside the prisons ranged in intensity and duration across the facilities of the five entities that are described below.

Islamic Police

The Islamic police is an entity that reports to and cooperates with a number of ISIS directorates. This police unit is reported to be under the control of the ISIS Emni, or its intelligence apparatus [14] It also functions independently and refers cases to the hisbah (the morality police). This force carries out similar rules and functions of the former Syrian governorate law enforcement department. Under ISIS command, this force oversees the enforcement of ISIS laws from speed limits to sharia. Operatives of Islamic police are authorized to write tickets, give warnings, or arrest civilians for traffic or sharia offenses. This police force does not handle cases that involve arms trading, spying, or conspiring

¹³ Almohammad, Asaad. Research (May 19, 2017)

¹⁴ For a more complete description of the ISIS Emni see: Speckhard, Anne, and Ahmet S. Yayla. "The ISIS Emni: The Origins and Inner Workings of ISIS's Intelligence Apparatus." Perspectives on Terrorism 11.1 (2017) and Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne. The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report (April 12, 2017)

against ISIS. As of early May 2017 our on the ground interviews estimated the number of non-administrative operatives of the Islamic police at 183 men (foreigners and Syrians).

Muhammad al-Bazi, a Syrian national, was the emir of this police force as of mid-March 2017; promoted to that current position by Abu Luqman, the emir of the ISIS Emni [15]. The locals paint a grim picture of al-Bazi's involvement in the torture and killing of people ISIS deems as its enemies [16]. In the past he was reported to have forced two men out of hiding after detaining and threatening the lives of their wives and children. The children and two women were put in cages with the tribal leaders of the two men called to view them. Under this duress, the men surrendered themselves to be slayed by al-Bazi in exchange for freeing their families.

The main base for the Islamic police was located in the northern wing of al-Baladi Stadium (See Map 1) as of late April 2017 where there is also a detention facility. This entity does not hold detainees for more than a week. Former detainees of the Islamic police reported being detained in group confinement at this location where they endured physical abuse and insults. Individuals here were commonly detained by the Islamic police after the issuance of complaints from sharia judges for not paying traffic or business fines, or not paying utility fees.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid



Map 1. The Base of Islamic Police (latitude, longitude: 35.957858, 39.004947)

The detention facility in the Islamic police base at al-Baladi Stadium is made up of three small rooms and a large hall. There are four subdivisions divided by locality that report to this main base. The southern division is in charge of processing complaints (see Map 2).



Map 2. Southern Division (latitude, longitude: 35.9562195, 38.9884937)

- The northern division is in charge of financial complaints (see Map 3). The operative in charge of this division is known as Abu Mustafa.



Map 3. Northern Division (latitude, longitude: 35.963601, 39.0192533)

- The eastern division is in charge of overseeing traffic related complaints. It is located in the same facilities as the northern division. The western division is in charge of cooperating with sharia judges to obtain arrest orders (see Map 4).



Map 4. Western Division (latitude, longitude: 35.94601, 39.016563)

Military Police

The ISIS military police is an entity that reports to both the ISIS Emni and the Directorate of Fighters. Up to May 2017, the emir of the military police was a Saudi national by the name

Abdul al-Kafi al-Shmari (a.k.a., Abu Hajir) [17]. Interviewees reported that under his command the military police force oversaw the enforcement of sharia laws related to participation in jihad [holy war as defined by ISIS], that is arresting and detaining ISIS operatives who do not have legitimate reasons to abstain from jihad and military cases (e.g. cases against fighters). Interviewees reported that the ISIS military police runs its own detention facility that is designated to arrest ISIS operatives after the military police receive complaints from a sharia judge. The complaints, in some cases, are presented to the sharia judge by local civilians and are then sent from the sharia judge to the emir of the ISIS military police. ISIS military police are used to punish ISIS operatives who are found guilty, these punishments used as a means to maintain strict discipline and obedience in the ranks of fighters and more importantly to maintain a strong, positive image among the locals.

During late March 2017, ISIS military police activities experienced a decline. ISIS leaders were no longer as concerned with winning locals hearts and minds and locals who had written complaints against ISIS operatives were no longer heeded, and instead humiliated and physically abused. As of mid-May 2017, Abu Rajiha al-Shami was the emir of the ISIS military police. He replaced Abdul al-Kafi al-Shamari. In that time period and with the change in military police leadership, the military police shifted their focus from ISIS members to locals.

Interviewees reported that as of mid-May 2017, members of the military police were seen patrolling the city stopping civilians so they could inspect their IDs and go through their phones checking for infringements in music, videos or communications that might threaten ISIS. Besides harassing civilians, the military police oversaw an operation to search for and

¹⁷ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne Reports The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report (April 12, 2017)

arrest deserters. They were also in charge of vetting Medical Certificates (MCs) provided by fighters who want to abstain from combat roles. The military police was reported to push those with minor injuries to join the fight against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The headquarters of the military police is located in Raqqa city (see Map 5) whereas the detention facility of the military police is run from a two-story building in Raqqa city.



Map 5. Headquarters of Military Police (latitude, longitude: 35.954312, 38.998223)

It is on the ground floor of a two-story building, the higher floor being used for administrative purposes. A hisbah women's prison is based in the same facility.



Map 6. Detention Facility of the Military Police (latitude, longitude: 35.942772, 39.023957)

Hisbah

The hisbah, not to be confused with the Islamic police, is ISIS' morality police. While the Islamic police function as a replacement of normal Syrian law enforcement, hisbah operations target those not abiding by ISIS' moral code (e.g. dress code, demeanor, prayer, etc.). Hisbah operatives patrol the streets of ISIS-held territories in vehicles and on foot to observe and ensure civilians and ISIS members' obedience to their strict interpretation of sharia rules. The obvious target of hisbah is women [18]. The hisbah bears great resemblance to the Saudi's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. That might explain why the ranks of the hisbah are dominated by Saudi nationals although ISIS defector and returnee interviews also made clear that foreign women were routinely invited to join the ranks of the hisbah [19].

The hisbah's directorate captures, arrests, tortures, and fines individuals accused of or seen acting in manners that go against ISIS' morality codes. The headquarters of the hisbah used to be run from the old Environment Directorate in Raqqa, Syria. Their general detention facility was based at that headquarters. The hisbah's headquarters and jails moved between a number of schools for the period from mid-2016 to January 2017. As of mid-May 2017 the headquarters of the hisbah was reported to be run from a building in Raqqa city (see Map 7).

¹⁸ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 22, 2017) The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers. ICSVE Research Reports

¹⁹ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate. Advances Press, LLC, 2016



Map 7. Headquarters of the Hisbah (latitude, longitude: 35.9500054, 39.0137815)

The hisbah women's detention facility is located in the same building. Women who are detained for activities other than conspiring against ISIS or cooperating with coalition forces are commonly held in facilities that belong to the hisbah. They get detained, interrogated, tutored, or executed by women of the hisbah. Thirty female ISIS operatives were reported to be running that detention facility and ICSVE researchers spoke to one who had worked inside the hisbah prison torturing other women [20].

As of April 2017, the hisbah men's detention facility, which used to be based at Mawia School, was a target of an aerial attack. The current location of their detention facility is still unknown. Interviewees reported that detainees who survived the aerial attack were moved to

²⁰ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S.. *Isis Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016

an Emni prison in Raqqa city. Both men and women who were detained by the hisbah endured torture. In the past men were forced into hard labor as one defector recounted [21]:

The hisbah also finds people to dig ditches for the fighters, to make ditches around airports etc. They use the locals, not the fighters to dig these ditches because most of the time the airplanes shoot at them. So the locals die digging the ditches, not the fighters.

As of January 2017, prisoners were only detained for short periods and then released after they received ISIS punishments, attended a sharia course, and paid fines. The fines vary across offences and are often lower for men. The fines women have to pay range between 3,500 and 5,000 Syrian Pounds. It is noteworthy that the aforementioned fines are paid when women are deemed to be involved in activities that the hisbah considers minor offences. Also those paying the fine get an ISIS regulation niqab (double thickness over the face) upon their release. That said, even those held for short periods still suffer some form of physical torture; often being flogged and also being “bitten” with a metal device on the fleshy parts of their bodies. One ISIS defector told about a woman who died after having bled out from this sort of torture [22]. Moreover, it was reported that individuals captured by the hisbah for major offences (e.g. Zina [sex outside of wedlock]) are no longer detained in facilities under the control of hisbah. As of mid-March 2017, those types of detainees have been held in an Emni prison in Raqqa city.

²¹ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Halim (March 2, 2016)

²² Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016

Raid Squads (Mudahmah)

Raid squads are often called death squads by the locals. This force is unique in ISIS structure. They are not bound by permissions from sharia judges. While the leadership of raid squads report to Emni, they also cooperate with other ISIS directorates (e.g. directorate of war, directorate of fighters, etc.). The squads conduct operations, carry out arrests, or eliminate targets be they civilians, ISIS members, or enemy fighters [23]. The emir of raid squads reports to the emir of the Emni. Ahmad al-Nasir, a Syrian national, was the emir of the squads as of late March 2017. He was appointed by the emir of the Emni in Syria in December 2016. Al-Nasir's second in command is a Syrian national by the alias Abu Mhiar.

The squads use black Jeeps. The doors of their vehicles have a sticker that reads *Islamic Caliphate (Raid Squads)*. The squads have eight vehicles in Raqqa city. The emir of the squads does not drive a Jeep. His car is often parked in front of the squads' base. To detain targets they raid their houses and workplaces, set checkpoints, and ambush them in the streets. They often operate at night. Details obtained from former detainees and sources indicate that the squads run a number of detention facilities. It is unclear whether they cooperate with Emni operatives in managing their prisons.

As of late May 2017, the headquarters of the raid squads was obtained (see Map 8). Before mid-March 2017, the squads ran two facilities in Tabqa, Raqqa; one was based in al-Hai al-Awal and the other in the Tabqa's Dam. The squads were reported to have moved detainees from Tabqa to their headquarters in Raqqa as of mid-March 2017. The base at their headquarters had detention facilities. The operative who ran that prison is known by the alias Abu Hamza Karama. As of mid-May 2017, he was reported to be a key ISIS interrogator.

²³ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 12, 2017). The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report.

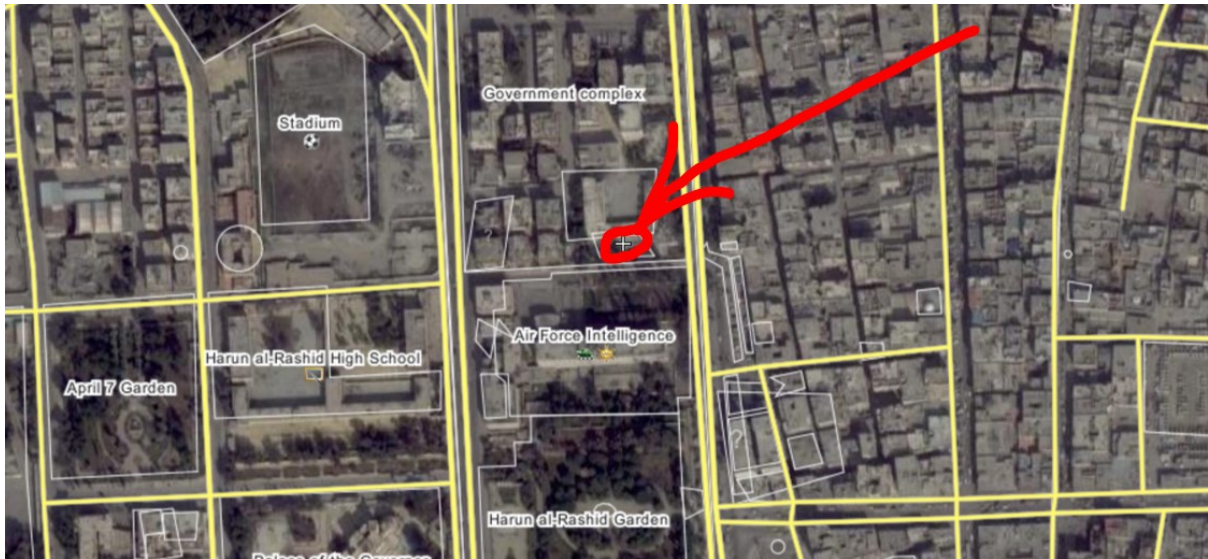
Information obtained from former detainees indicated that he also interrogated, and participated in and ordered the torture of a number of detainees. A large portion of the detainees in the aforementioned facility were accused of trading arms with and/or supplying arms to rival forces.



Map 8. The headquarters of Raid Squads (latitude, longitude: 35.956110, 39.006252)

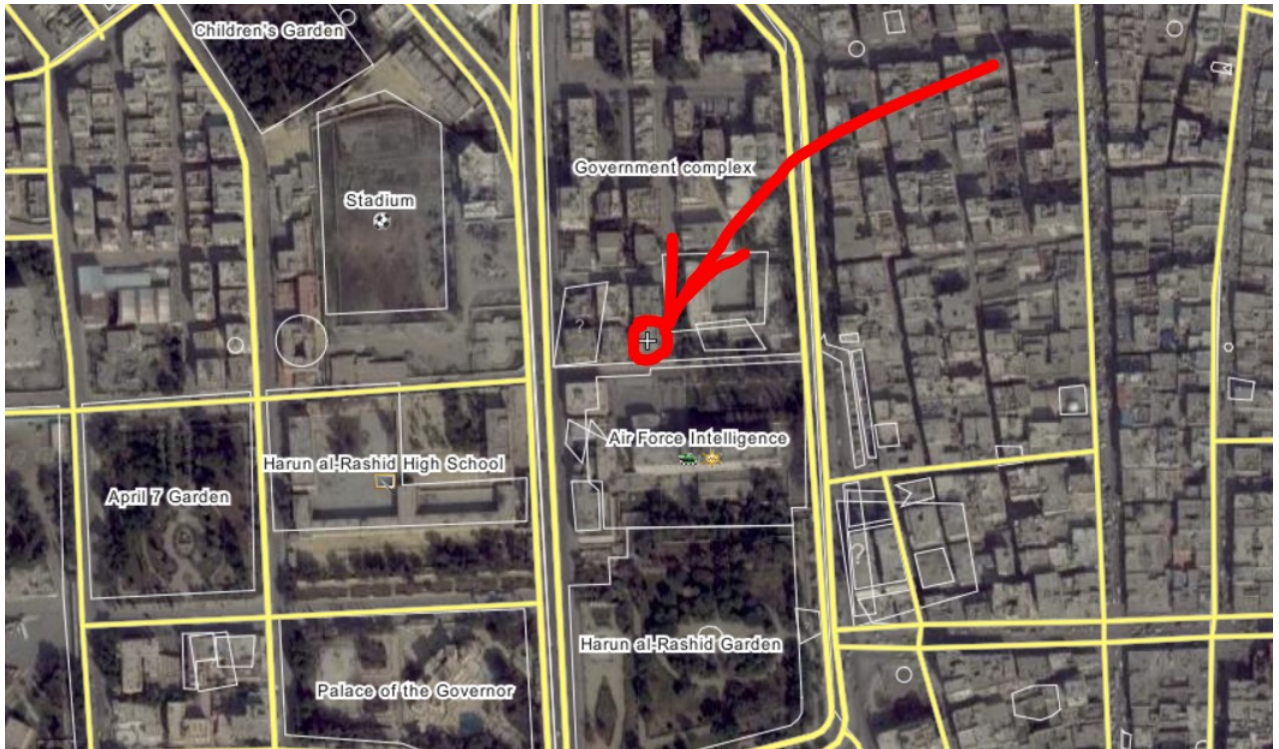
As of mid-May 2017, female operatives from Khadija Bintu Kwaild Battalion, an entity that reports to the special operations office of the Emni [24], cooperated with the raid squads. Jointly they ran a female-only detention facility. This prison is designated to detain the foreign wives of ISIS operatives who are deemed as traitors. The operatives detained eighteen women on the suspicion of spying. The location of the facility was obtained (see Map 9). The prison is in the basement of the governmental building circled on the map below.

²⁴ Almohammad, Assad & Speckhard, Anne (April 22, 2017) The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers. ICSVE Research Reports.



Map 9. The Raid Squads Female Detention Facility (latitude, longitude: 35.951874, 39.009918)

This detention facility is made up of 5 rooms and a hall. Two female interrogators by the aliases Aum Bakr and Aum Khadija run the facility. Both operatives are married to French nationals. This joint operation is overseen from a base outside the prison facility (see Map 10). The husbands of the two operatives were reported to belong to ISIS raid squads. Their husbands were seen in that building. It is also reported that besides suspected spies, there are a number of women who were detained after a failed attempt to escape to Turkey.



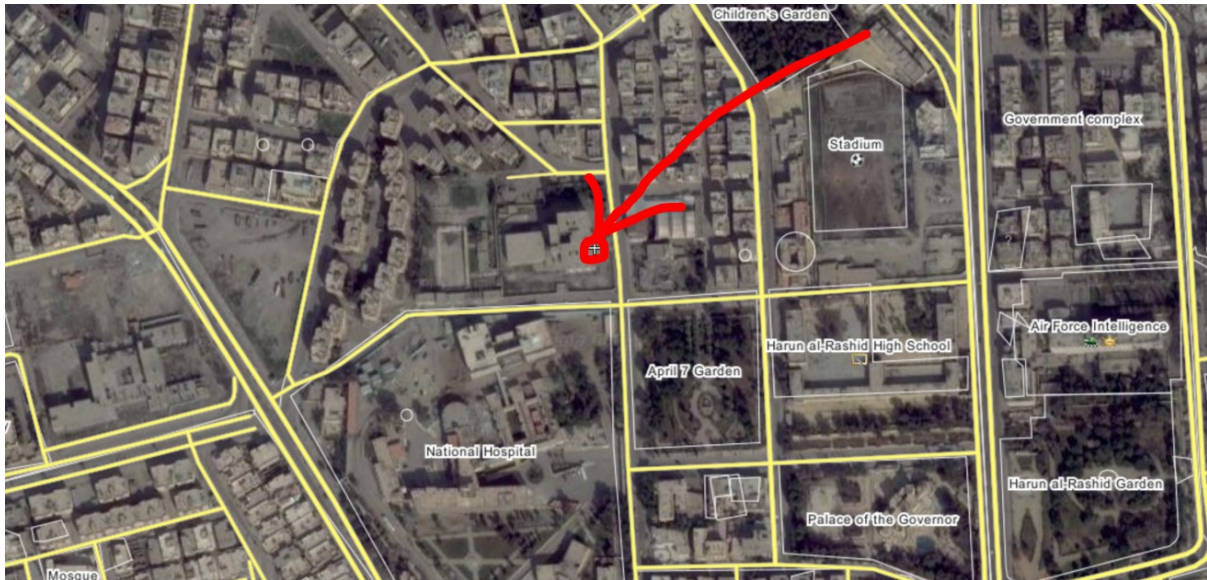
Map 10. Joint Operation Base (Latitude, Longitude: 35.951800, 39.009271)

Furthermore, as of mid-May 2017, the raid squads were reported to be running two male-only detention facilities, besides the one in their headquarters. One of the prisons is located at Raqqa's Children Hospital (see Map 11).



Map 11. Raqqa's Children Hospital (latitude, longitude: 35.944255, 39.004100)

The other facility is located at the new building of Baath Party in Raqqa (see Map 12). Civilians are not allowed to visit those detained within the two facilities. The raid squads are reported to mask individuals escorted into and out of those two facilities. Additionally, a large number of ISIS operatives have been seen guarding each facility.



Map 12. Raid Squads' Detention Facility (latitude, longitude: 35.951773, 39.004998)

Emni

The Emni is ISIS' intelligence apparatus. Their operations are rather complex, spanning a number of functions that go beyond the collection of intelligence [for more on the Emni see 25]. The Emni runs its own detention facilities. Former detainees' accounts indicate that those held in such prisons had suffered extreme forms of torture and for longer periods compared to those detained elsewhere. For example one ISIS defector who recalled an

²⁵ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 12, 2017) Reports The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report.

operation in which ISIS was trying to find a leak in which the Emni used acid as a method of torture [26]:

They were using acid to torture people and get information out of people. FSA was not targeting randomly but were targeting convoys with IS security and intel and ISIS wanted to know who is leaking this information out to the FSA.

One of the functions of the ISIS Emni is security, including vetting new recruits to the group. ISIS defectors recounted small facilities near the Turkish border run by the Emni in which foreign fighters arriving without any recommendation were held until they were deemed trustworthy and allowed into sharia and weapons training, the first steps to joining the group. Those who could not be vetted were sent to the front to fight for ISIS with the judgment that if they died in battle it was fine, if not, they had proved their loyalty and valor [27].

Detainees in Emni jails generally fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Former members of rival fighting groups
- Conspirators: those suspected of taking actions or involved in activities that undermine ISIS.
- Those accused of or involved in providing support to members of groups that have battled or are still battling ISIS.
- Hostages.
- Those referred by the Islamic police, hisbah, military police, or raid quads.

²⁶ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian Abu Ali (December 18, 2015)

²⁷ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016

It is noteworthy that all major interrogators, even those operating outside the Emni structure, have been trained by the Emni.

Information obtained from former detainees, as of mid-May 2017, and other on the ground interviewees, as of late April 2017, showed that ISIS moved hostages and detainees in Emni prisons from the city of al-Bab, Aleppo to Tabqa, Raqqa. That movement took place in August 2016. During that period detainees were moved to two facilities in Tabqa city; one was located at Burj al-Baladia (the governorate tower) and the other was south of the terminal station in an eight-story building. The latter jail (a.k.a. 101) was run from the basement of the eight-story building. At the time Turki Abdul Aziz, a Saudi national, was in charge of the Emni operatives running both detention facilities. Former detainees reported that Turki frequented both prisons. During that time he would deliver sharia lectures to detainees within the two facilities.

Syrian ISIS defectors told ICSVE that the practice of lecturing to those captured from other groups in hopes of turning them to join Islamic State was common. When trying to turn them, good meals were offered and the lecturer was someone well versed in shariah trying to convince al Nusra prisoners, for example that the Islamic State was righteous. One defector recounted [28]:

So when they took over, all Jabhat al Nusra fighters were imprisoned. So I was among the prisoners. I knew I was one of them, but I could not talk to the other Jabhat al-Nusra guys about it. They took us to a mosque. We were allowed to pray and have tea. An ad-Dawlah sheikh came and talked to us.

²⁸ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Samir (February 9, 2016)

Similarly another al Nusrah fighter who joined ISIS after being imprisoned recalled [29]:

We were three hundred at the front. At that time Bashar's soldiers were shooting at us and ISIS solders came from behind and captured all of us. So we were imprisoned at the same place we had been guarding. They took all of our weapons, explosives and ammunition. First they brought us meals. They brought meals we had not seen for the last two years. It was very fancy. Even some people ate from hunger the cats up to then... We stayed in the prison for five days and then they took us to the shariah camp and then they were propagandizing themselves, they said we are establishing the Caliphate of the Prophet Mohammed's time. They said, 'We have the sword to save Islam and we have the book to teach the people.' ... [After escaping briefly and being recaptured]... They imprisoned us, hung us on the wall, they told us, 'Aren't you going to understand? The real Islam is lasting, we are not going to go away. We are here forever.' And then they brought us to the second floor again. There was food that I had never seen in my life, so super and nice foods. And they brought a Sheik from Syria and that Sheik also became a ISIS member and he started to talk to us. He mentioned about the foreigners who are coming from Europe and the United States to become ISIS members, everyone is joining and becoming a ISIS member and helping us, and he starts to give us examples of the good of Islamic State.

As of mid-February 2017, the aforementioned facilities were evacuated and relocated. The largest portion of the detainees was moved to jails in the cities of Mayadin and al-Bukamal, Deir ez-Zor. Some were released while others were moved to the main Emni detention facility in Raqqa. Abu Faiz al-Libi, a Libyan national and key Emni operative, oversaw the release and relocation of the released detainees.

It is reported that the Emni is increasingly being put in charge of overseeing the detention of those held by other entities (e.g. the hisbah, military police, etc.). Information obtained in late

²⁹ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Valid (December 19, 2015)

May 2017 indicates that the Emni was running eight detention facilities across Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, Syria. That said, based on accounts obtained from former detainees, the main Emni detention facility is located in Raqqa (see Map 13 [M: Male, F: Female]). That prison is divided between male and female wards. The male ward is managed by eighteen Emni operatives. The head of operations at that facility is an Iraqi national by the alias Abu Adnan al-Baghdadi. He reports to two key Emni emirs, Muhammad al-Abdullah (a.k.a. Abu Atika, Haj Idris) and Abdul Rahman al-Sahu (for more on the emirs see, [30]). The operations in the female ward are overseen by three female Emni, two Tunisians (Aum Qutada and Aum Zaid) and one Syrian (Aum Abdul Rahman).



Map 13. The Main Emni Detention Facility (latitude, longitude: 35.957197, 39.004832)

Interviewee reports indicate that Abu Anas al-Iraqi (he shares the same alias with ISIS' former finance emir), the Emni's emir in Iraq, was in charge of the above detention facility sometime before June 2014. That corroborates a previous report [31]. He was reported to be a

³⁰ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 12, 2017) The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report.

³¹ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, "Standardized ISIS Detention Procedures: Structured Brutality, Battlefield Adaptability," July 22, 2015

key interrogator and torture trainer. As of mid-May 2017, former detainees who were jailed at different facilities reported information on key Emni interrogators. Their details are as follow:

- Abu Laith: a Libyan national.
- Qaswara: A Saudi national.
- Abu Mariam: A Palestinian national.
- Abu Rajiha al-Shami: A Syrian national from Raqqa city.

Moreover, it was reported that as of early April 2017, al-Shami became ISIS' chief interrogator.

Detention

As presented in an earlier section, ISIS was reported to be running a number of detention facilities. Many are highly sophisticated entities whereas others are simple cages erected to hold detainees, as one ISIS defector recounted [32]:

In al-Jafra field there were some cages. Each large cage was divided into four, so you could put several people in each section. We saw the cages, but not the people in them. When we went out for a walk, we realized these were the prisons.

Detainees were arrested by differing entities (e.g. Islamic police, the hisbah, Emni, etc.) that processed them based on their purported offenses. The duration of detention and intensity of torture varied across facilities. Each prison is part of a larger structure involving a chain of command and departmental affiliation. However as of late May 2017, ISIS started to move those detained for long sentences (e.g. those accused of major breaches of sharia [murder,

³² Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Musab (November 7, 2015)

blasphemy, adultery, etc.]) to Emni facilities. Moreover, Abu Luqman, the Emni emir, reportedly ordered the release of those detained for minor offences. It was reported that ISIS is increasingly cutting the costs of their operations. The move by the Emni's emir is aimed at reducing the cost of running detention facilities. That is not to say that ISIS limited the operations and costs of prisons that involved entities other than the Emni. Data obtained on the May 27, 2017 indicate that the Islamic and military police, hisbah, and raid squads are still maintaining prisons in Raqqa city. However, their activities regarding new arrests experienced a decline.

Details presented in the earlier section showed that the Baladi stadium is the main and largest ISIS detention facility. On May 27, 2017 it was reported that the stadium hosted jails that belong to the Emni, Islamic police, and raid squads. As mentioned earlier, the Emni facility receives all prisoners who were accused by ISIS to have committed major offences. In the following section, descriptions of that prison facility, the conditions, and the procedures taken by ISIS are provided. The details were obtained from a number of interviewees and on the ground sources familiar with the facility.

As of mid-May 2017, the communal cells in the section designated to hold male detainees (see Map 13) had just over 1,290 prisoners. This section has 31 shared cells. At least 40 detainees were held at each of these cells. There are 30 solitary cells within the facility. They are next to each other. Each cell is 1.5 x 1 meter. Each cell has a toilet. In the female section of the facility, the northern side of the stadium (see Map 13), there were at least 120 female detainees. The majority of the detainees were accused of conspiring against ISIS. Some of the detainees were moved from hisbah facilities to the Emni prison. Those women were accused of major breaches of ISIS' sharia laws. The facility had 13 communal and 5 solitary cells. According to interviewees, ISIS serves the same meals in both sections.

Initial Process

Accounts obtained from former detainees indicate that after their abduction or arrest, ISIS operatives drove them to undisclosed locations. Up to this stage, detainees were not aware of their purported offences. All interviewed former detainees reported being blindfolded from the moment they were seized by ISIS operatives and for the few first hours in the detention facility. Moreover, ISIS operatives were reported to drive for long hours and take unnecessary turns so the detainees would be unable to recognize the location of the facility. The case of three former detainees who were seized from their workplace sheds some light on the aforementioned process. The details were obtained from one of the interviewees, a 28-year-old man [33]:

We were working when we noticed that the ISIS Emni surrounded our office. Three pickup trucks stopped in front of the office. The men entered our office and told us they were associated with the Emni department. After introducing themselves they told us that they had a few questions. They were polite; they did not insult or beat us. My two co-workers and I were taken to separate cars. I was blindfolded. They did not ask me anything. They drove for over an hour. The three of us were taken to a large room. We could hear other men screaming. We could hear that they were beaten. We were still blindfolded. I could hear my friend getting beaten. We were handcuffed and our hands were behind our backs. I heard my co-workers shouting that they were not criminals. Soon they started beating me with water hoses and sticks. I shouted the same; I told them I am not a criminal, I did not do anything. We stayed in that place for around 4 hours. I heard the interrogator telling them [ISIS captors] to take us and change our clothes. We were taken to another room. They removed our blindfolds. There were other men there. We were given Pakistani dark clothes. Then they took me to a solitary cell. It was 1.5 x 1 meter. There was a toilet in it. On my way to the cell I recognized the location. They changed it but I had been there before. It was al-

³³ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 13, 2017)

Baladi stadium. It was not far from where we got arrested; no more than 5 minutes driving.

The majority of former detainees who were held at Emni facilities had spent some time in solitary confinement. This portion of the interviewees was held from 1 to 14 days in solitary confinement after their arrival to the detention facility. All of those interviewees were unaware of the reason behind their detention at that stage. One of the interviewees, a 23-year-old man, recounted the experience leading him to realize the reason of his detention [34]:

After 5 days in solitary confinement, where I had to pray on time, they opened the door. They handcuffed and blindfolded me. Nobody had spoken to me for those 5 days. Before they put me there they told me I had to pray. I only got stale bread and soup. They did not give me a spoon. The men took me to a room. The interrogator asked them to keep me blindfolded for a second. When they took it off, I saw a man masked with cemedanî [a tradition Middle Eastern Headscarf]. I looked around me; I saw things I had never seen before. There was a man on the floor. He had torture markings and bruises on his face, on his body, everywhere. It looked as though they had just shot him in the shoulder. He was not dead yet. He kept opening and closing his mouth; like a fish out water. There was another man; his arms and legs were tied. He was on metal chair. I thought they broke his back. He had burns on his chest and stomach. I did not know whether he was dead or unconscious. The last man was still conscious. His hands were cuffed and hanged on a fixed metal ladder. His feet did not touch the ground. I could see that he was trying to touch the ground with his toes. The room was big. It did not have any windows. The interrogator did not speak directly. First thing I heard him saying was confess or we do the same to you. I did not know what to say. I spoke respectfully. I told him, 'Brother I do not know why I was arrested. I swear by Allah I did not do anything wrong.' He said that I was lying and it seemed that I won't confess. Another man walked to me and took my shirt off. He put me on my knees and poured water on my back. I was still in cuffs. He used an electric stick on me. He electrocuted me with it. I lay on the ground and he kept electrocuting me and kept saying that I should confess. I lost consciousness. I woke up in the

³⁴ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April, 9 2017)

solitary cell. After another 3 days in solitary confinement they took me to another interrogator; it was in a smaller room. I was blindfolded the whole time. He told me that they know I am getting money from foreigners in Turkey and that the charity work we did was a sham. He told me that I should tell them everything about the sources of our funds. He told me that I should confess what kind of information I was providing them with. I told him that there is no such a thing. I told him we accept donations like food and clothes. I told him we just distribute the donations. I told him who worked with me and the names of all of the donors. He kept interrogating me for over 3 hours. I was seated on the floor. He said that he would have me moved to a communal cell and that he would summon me the next day. One guard took me to cell number 3. In the cell there were 23 other detainees.

Detainees in shared cells wear cards around their neck. The card has the processing number of each detainee. ISIS has files on the detainees containing detainees' processing numbers, personal details, accusations, and sentences, which are stored using two Microsoft applications (Excel and Access). ISIS also has physical files that contain the aforementioned details on each detainee. Detainees are dressed in a type of dark Pakistani ethnic clothing. Inside the facility, detainees have to follow their religious duties (e.g. praying, fasting, etc.). They are also expected to keep the facility clean. Two meals are distributed every day; one at 1 pm and the other at 7 pm. The dinner meal changes from time to time. The two most frequent dinner meals were reported to be soup and boiled eggs. Female detainees are also expected to follow religious duties and keep the facility clean.

Torture

As showed earlier, torture appears to be used from the moment of abduction, in some cases, to the time leading up to the initial interrogation. Earlier sections presented statements from former detainees illustrating evidence of physical and psychological abuses. The earlier discussion provides a lens on detainees' experiences, starting from the moment they are

seized by ISIS operatives to their detention in shared cells. This paper demonstrates that the lion's share of abuse was recorded during the actual interrogation phase. During that period, ISIS operatives reportedly use a mixture of physical and psychological methods of torture. The following subsections disambiguate both methods.

Psychological

As showed earlier, the psychological abuse starts from the moment of abduction. Earlier statements uncovered that ISIS operatives commonly threatened to kill their victims. The case of one of the interviewees, a 38-year-old man from Raqqa, offers an instance of this kind of psychological abuse [35]:

One of them [ISIS operatives] was my classmate in college. I looked him in the eyes and asked, 'What is the problem brother?' He looked at the other men and abruptly put his gun on my head. He spoke as though he was drunk or on something. He mumbled, 'Let me kill this infidel. Ya [Oh] Allah just let me kill this traitor'. He then took a knife, went behind my back, and kicked the back of my knees. I knelt on the ground. He said, 'Stand up Mamhwn [fagot].' I stood up and he stayed facing my back. Then he put his knife on my throat and the gun on my head temple. I thought he was going to kill me.

ISIS operatives' threats to kill their captives continue even after the detainees are placed in shared cells. The detainees are kept in a constant state of fear. ISIS operatives go to elaborative methods to terrorize the detainee population. The experience of a 61-year-old man, a former detainee, is evidence of this method's use by ISIS operatives in detention facilities [36]:

They [ISIS operatives] came and took some of us [detainees] to get dressed in orange jumpsuits. One of them asked me what my name was. I realized that they just picked us randomly. They brought us back to our shared cell. They demanded

³⁵ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 20, 2017)

³⁶ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April, 10 2017)

that we all kneel. There were 4 of us. One of them said, 'Now you can profess the shahada [the Muslim profession of faith which states 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah']. Two of them argued whether they should allow us to die as Muslims. I remembered one of the young detainees told me sometimes they would bring detainees and shoot them in front of us. I thought I was about to get killed; I thought that was just it. They pointed their guns at the back of our heads and shouted Takh [bang bang]. They laughed. They told us that one of us will get killed. They left us in the cell. None of the 4 of us slept. The next day they just asked us to change. They did not take any of us but I was afraid that they would come back for me.

In other instances detainees witnessed the killings of other prisoners as this ISIS defector recounted [37]:

In the prison, in two and a half months, ISIS killed 13 prisoners during interrogations to have us scared, to spread the fear among us. They were killed in front of everyone.

The threat of killing is not the only psychological method at ISIS' disposal. Captors in detention facilities also used a number of other tools. For instance, the hisbah was reported to keep women in small animal cages. One female defector who had served in the hisbah recounted [38]:

We would imprison women in the cemetery with skeletons, in a cage in the middle of the cemetery as a punishment. Most of the time when we went back to the cage in the morning, the woman was crazy.

³⁷ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Valid (December 19, 2015)

³⁸ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian Umm Rashid (May 10, 2016)

The same defector recounted how they treated men whose wives made repeated offenses to the dress code [39]:

We would take the husband and put him in a football field where coalition forces used to bomb a lot. We had a prison and we would put him in that prison. Most of the time he would die of fear because of the explosions in that field.

Another ISIS defector recalled the cages used by the hisbah [40]:

When they arrest people they put them in a cage and write a paper attached to their chest that says their crime.

The leftover food of male detainees, often served in dirty bowls, is given to caged female prisoners. Moreover, female hisbah operatives, on occasions, threw severed heads into the cages to amplify detainees' state of terror. One interviewee, a 32-year-old woman, who was detained at a hisbah facility provided chilling details on ISIS' psychological abuse [41]:

They brought her [a fellow detainee] back. She was unconscious. They put her in the cage next to mine. One of the hisbah's women carried a severed head of a young man. I was so scared that I made some sound. She [the woman carrying the severed head] told me to shut up or she will use the biter on me herself. They put the severed head next to the unconscious woman and locked the cage. I looked away. I did not want to see the head. The woman [the unconscious detainee] woke up and pushed herself to the end corner of the small cage, as far as she could from the head. She kept looking around and breathing heavily. Then she started to get closer to the head. She turned it towards her so she can see the face. Once she saw the face she started howling. She howled so loudly and for too long. She kept slapping her face as she wailed. I thought she knew him. They came the next day and took the head away. One of the hisbah women told us that the head belongs to the woman's [the fellow detainee's] infidel brother. The woman did not eat or

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Halim (March 2, 2016)

⁴¹ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May, 24 2017)

... speak a word for 2 days after they removed the head. They took her somewhere; maybe they released or killed her. Nobody told us anything about her; we were scared to ask. I would want to die if I were her.

Solitary confinement is also a psychological tool that ISIS operatives use at many stages of the detention process. As stated earlier, upon arrival to the detention facility, after being physically abused and before they become aware of their purported offences, detainees are placed into solitary cells (see the description of this type of cells above). Most male interviewees spend from 1 to 14 days in solitary confinement. Moreover, those detainees were subjected to interrogation and torture before and after being held in solitary cells. A 46-year-old man, who spent 14 days in solitary confinement, spoke about his ordeal [42]:

I thought I knew that I spent three days in it [solitary cell]. I knew I prayed 14 times. I was taken to the solitary cell in the afternoon that meant I prayed once at home. 5 prayers a day; 14 [prayers] meant three days. I was not sure it was 14 but I told myself every additional 5 meant an additional day. Nobody spoke to me. I tried to speak to the guards but they did not speak back to me. All I could do was count the prayers. At some point I forgot. I got so angry I started hitting the walls. If you stay there for a week, you would go mad. When they took me to the interrogator, he asked me, 'do you know how long you have been here?' I think I said a hundred and a thousand [sic]. He laughed and told me you were there for 14 days only. I remember because they kept calling me 14. He asked me if I want to go back to the solitary cell. I begged him not to. He said confess or I will keep you there for a hundred and a thousand days. He laughed and asked the guards to come and take me to the communal cell. 'He is of no use for me now' he told the guards and continued, 'bring him back to me in 3 days.'

Threat of a similar fate is another method that ISIS' operatives were reported using in detention facilities. That psychological tactic's aim is to terrorize detainees and force them to confess. As presented earlier, after spending sometime in solitary confinement, detainees

⁴² Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 27, 2017)

would be taken to torture chambers to meet their interrogator. In those chambers, the detainees were exposed to other victims of torture and promised to receive a similar fate from their interrogators. Another instance of the use of this method was obtained from a 24-year-old man who reported [43]:

Sometimes they [ISIS operatives] come carrying a severed head; sometimes they tell us about an executed fellow detainee. They would tell us where they executed him and why. They would always say that is the fate of infidels; that is your fate.

Physical

The earlier discussion indicates that physical torture, often in combination with psychological abuse, was present throughout the phases leading to further interrogations. That is to say, interviewees recounted evidence of torture, from the moment the victims were seized by their captors to their initial interrogation,. One ISIS defector recalled of ISIS prison [44]:

They have special torture chambers where they carry out hanging people from their hands on the wall and putting nylon bags on their heads.

Based on interviewees' testimonies, physical torture escalates as the interrogation continues.

One ISIS defector described this escalation [45]:

Someone told ISIS I was not a good person for them. They asked me to come to the police station. I spent three days in prison, alone, in solitary. In the morning they came to bring food and then they left. This went on for three days. After three days they said we are sending you to Tel Abyad. My hands were cuffed and I was taken by care to Tel Abyad to a big court there. It was a sharia court. I saw many people and I felt very happy to finally see something. I drank some tea and I waited for two hours until they called me and took me by hand in iron cuffs, to

⁴³ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 1, 2017)

⁴⁴ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Kareem (March 24, 2016)

⁴⁵ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Walid (21 October 2015)

torture me. They spread my arms wide and hung me from the iron cuffs by my forearms and wrists from a steel bar. They didn't tell me anything about why they were doing this, without giving me any reason. They left me there for around two hours. I had so much pain, and started to cry many things from the pain in my hands and my body. I cried and shouted. They did this again the next day and I cried and shouted again through the day and night. The next day they took me again, this time they blindfolded me. They told me, 'You know where we take you now.' I answered, 'No I don't know!' They said, 'Now we take you out to kill you.'

Moreover, ISIS operatives use water hoses, canes, industrial cables, and picanas (a prod that produces low current and high voltage electric shocks, see Picture 1) to torture victims.



Picture 1. Picana

It is noteworthy that canning is both a method of torture and a punishment. As outlined earlier, the five aforementioned tools were used to torture victims in the early stages of their detention. Those tools are also elements of more elaborate torture methods. Details obtained from the former detainees interviews uncovered that ISIS operatives employed seven major torture methods: Lashing, the Fuel, Bisat al-Rih (Flying Carpet), Shabeh (Ghost), German Chair, the Biter, and the Tire. In the following sections these methods are discussed.

Lashing is ISIS' primary method of torture. It is also a form of public punishment. In the case of physical abuse, captors use canes, hoses and industrial cables to beat victims. Moreover, lashing is often used as an element of other methods of torture (e.g. Shabeh, German Chair, etc.). Victims are often abused with this tool in early stages of their detention. A 33-year-old man who was seized in Deir ez-Zor reported being tormented by his captors [46]:

They [ISIS operatives] took me to a big room. They removed my blindfold. One of them pointed to a wall where chains were installed and demanded that I face the wall. They raised my arms and cuffed each of my arms to the dangling chains. I pleaded to them. I swore to them that I was not affiliated with the Free [Free Syrian Army]. They did not listen. One of them started lashing me with something; maybe a cable. I counted seventeen.

The Fuel might be the least common method. The English word Fuel is used to describe the method. ISIS operatives pour crude oil on seated and cuffed victims and demand that they confess or they will light them on fire. The same 33-year-old man who detailed being lashed by his ISIS captors also survived this gruesome form of torture [47]:

The next day [after the lashing] I was brought to the same room. The interrogator was seated on a chair. In front of him there was a concrete seat. They put a gun to my head and forced me to strip naked and then they cuffed me to the concrete seat. The interrogator was Tunisian. He shouted, 'Confess that you are infidel.' I did not say a thing. He suddenly became so mad and started prating something about a video and the Free [Free Syrian Army]. At some point he showed me the video. It was of me with the Free [Free Syrian Army]. I thought if I say anything they would kill me. He brought a gallon jug and poured oil on me; from the chest down. He said confess or I will burn you. I thought he was trying to scare me. I

⁴⁶ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 14, 2017)

⁴⁷ Ibid

did not know that he would do it. Next thing I remember was waking up in a hospital.

The victim offered to share a picture of some of his burn marks (see Picture 2). The burns started from his chest and continued to his knees. He reported that his genitals were severely burned too. His closing statement was [48]:

I thank Allah for being fortunate to have two children. I had them before.



Picture 2. A 33-year-old man bears scars he reported were resulted from being tortured using fuel © Private

Bisat al-Rih (Flying Carpet) is a torture method made of two hinged metal or wooden boards; a rectangular bar is installed on the upper board (see Picture 3). The flying carpet is mobile and can be placed on a stage or table. It can also be folded. Victims' legs and arms are tied with their back against the boards, making them unable to move as their captors inflict pain up on them. The captors often fold the board, bending victims of torture in a variety of

⁴⁸ Ibid

L-shape positions. Another position that captors use to maximize pain is carried out by bending the two boards inward and close to each other. In this V-shape position, the victim's feet and head are brought close to each other, causing serious, often permanent, injuries to the spine. In that position victims are beaten (often on the soles of their feet) with water hoses, canes, thick industrial cables, and/or are tormented with electric shocks (mainly applied on sensitive areas [e.g. genitals]). An account of one of the interviewees, a 37-year-old man, indicated ISIS' use of this torturous position [49]:

On it [Bisat al-Rih] my head was so close to my feet. They [ISIS captors] almost broke my back. It still hurts. I cannot get up quickly; I need to get myself seated slowly. When they put me on it, they beat me with a cable. Then, they started electrocuting me. They put water first. I do not know how many times they did it before I passed out. I do not know how long they kept me on it. When I woke up I was still on the Bisat [Bisat al-Rih].



Picture 3. Bisat al-Rih (flying carpet)

⁴⁹ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 15, 2017)

Shabeh (Ghost) is one of the most commonly used methods of torture by ISIS. Captors handcuff victims' with their hands behind their backs to employ this method. Then the captors use the handcuffs by hanging them to handles, doorframes, or hooks to suspend the victim's body so that the victim's feet are above the ground. Victims are then beaten using industrial cables, canes, water hoses, and/or electric prods. They are often left in this position for days. This method causes severe pressure on victim's shoulder sockets, dislocating the victim's joints and may result in damage to the brachial plexus leading to permanent disability. A former detainee, a 26-year-old man, recounted his experience [50]:

My hands were handcuffed behind my back. They [the ISIS captors] hung the handcuffs to a rope that dangled from the ceiling and then pulled the other end of the rope. It was so painful it felt that my ribs shattered. I screamed. I was shot once. It was more painful. They kept me in that position for one day... When I was there [in that position] they first beat me with a cane, on my chest and on my thighs. Then one of them took off my underwear and poured water on it [his penis]. Before they did anything I cried, 'for Allah's sake sheikh'. They looked at me begging them. One of them started getting the electric prod closer to me and said that he will neuter me. It was so painful that I lost consciousness right away.

The German Chair is employed using a metal seat. The seat's back is designed in a way allowing the captor to move it backward. Using this method, captors tie the victim's arms and legs to the seat and abruptly jerk it backward, leading to severe pressure on the victim's limbs and neck and resulting in acute stress to the victim's spine. This method often leaves survivors with permanent injuries. When victims are placed in that torturous position their captors often beat them with industrial cables, canes, and/or electric prods. Victims' accounts indicated that ISIS combined this method with another (Shabeh). In that scenario, victims are

⁵⁰ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 9, 2017)

hung downward (upside-down). The case of an interviewee, a 27-year-old, describes an instance of that method [51]:

On the chair [the German chair] they [the ISIS captors] tied my legs. There were two of them. One of them stood on my tied legs. I was facing the ground. The other forced two of the chair's feet from under my armpits. He then handcuffed me. The man behind me pulled the chair [an arm on the chair]; my legs were on the ground and torso up. My body was almost in a 90 degree angle. It was very painful I thought I would die on it. I thought there was nothing more painful. I thought they broke my back. I thought that was the most painful thing until another one [ISIS captor] pulled my cuffed arms. I thought they broke my back and at that moment I thought they were splitting my chest in two halves. After that they lifted me up with something that they hung the handcuffs on. My head was the closest part of my body to the ground. I felt the pressure on my shoulders; all of my weight was on my shoulders... I think they kept me in that position for a few hours. I do not know how long.

The Tire, as the name suggests, employs a tire with a large center hole. Using this method, the victim's head and legs are forced through the rim of a large tire, bending him and immobilizing the victim's movement. Once forced into that position, victims are beaten using industrial cables, canes, and/or electric prods. Torturers use this position to amplify the inflicted pain. ISIS operatives who use water hoses to beat victims' on the soles of their feet use a play on words calling the method, Lakhdar Brahimi, after the former United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria who was deeply hated and disrespected by ISIS [52]. One of the interviewees, a 47-year old man, recalled his suffering during ISIS' interrogation [53]:

⁵¹ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 25, 2017)

⁵² Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

⁵³ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 17, 2017)

I was holding the sides of the tire with my hands while my head and legs were on the other side of the tire. I heard a Tunisian shouting my turn; it is time for Lakhdar Brahimi. He started to beat my legs and then he hit me on the soles of my feet.

The Biter is mainly applied on female detainees accused of breaching sharia law. The tool is composed of iron jaws. Overall, the tool looks like large tongs or pliers. Captors often apply the metal jaws to the victims' breast causing severe pain. One of the interviewed former detainees, a 63-year old woman, was tormented with the biter. She detailed the events, with a degree of confusion, during her interview [54]:

My daughter-in-law told me that my niece just got hospitalized. We have animals at home. I was cleaning after them so I showered before leaving the house. I was in a hurry. There was hand soap in the bathroom so I quickly washed myself with it. I took one of the boys with me. Your aunty [one of the common ways older women from Raqqa refer to themselves] is an old woman. They want us to wear it [niqab] all the time and they do not allow us to walk without a Haarm [brother, father, son, grandson]. I cannot see through it [niqab] anyways. I took one of the boys to walk me to the hospital. We walked passed a group of women and men. The men shouted and ran towards me and the boy. They started to hit me with their canes. The hisbah. I hunched on the ground. I asked them what I did. One man said that when you wear a perfume it is like you have Zina [sex out of wedlock] with every male who smells you. I told that I do not smell. I remember the hand soap might have a scent. I told them the story. They did not want to listen. I was crying the whole time. The women of hisbah took me to jail... In the Hisbah jail they tied me to a chair and uncovered my chest. I cried and begged them to forgive me. One of them [a female ISIS captor] told me to shut up. She then looked at my breast and asked me what happened. I told her I had cancer. She told me that she will make the other side look the same. She asked me whether I heard of the biter. I just cried. When she bit me with it I screamed so that maybe all the people in Raqqa heard me. They [ISIS] tortured us, killed us, made us immigrants; may Allah avenge for what they did to us.

⁵⁴ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April 18, 2017)

Post-Interrogation Process

Once detainees were moved to shared cells, and prior to the conclusion of interrogations, they were exposed to sharia courses. The courses start as Fiqh (basic Islamic teaching) and get more advanced. Detainees have to attend all lectures. As of mid-May 2017, ISIS sharia teachers were reported to deliver two lectures every week; on Mondays and Thursdays. ISIS also distributes sharia books to literate detainees. Both of these activities are carried out to indoctrinate detainees in ISIS ideology prior to their release.

One of the former detainees, a 28-year-old man, explained the way some detainees manipulated ISIS jailors [55]:

We would pretend to be reading their books. We would act as though we are asking each other questions from the books. In the classes we would engage with the Shari [the sharia's lecturer]. If they come [ISIS guards] and see that we are reading their book, they would spare us from their wrath.

The first course was reported to last for forty days. This course is called Istitabah (Redemption). As indicated earlier, there are other courses that detainees have to take during their prison sentence. Before being killed, Abu Ali al-Sharai (see ICSVE's report on the Emni [56]) use to lead the so-called Redemption course. As of mid-May 2017 the operative in charge of that course is a man by the alias Abu Muhammad al-Magribi, a Moroccan national. He is high in the ranks among ISIS' sharia judges. Another operative who is also high in these ranks is a Saudi national by the alias Abu Abdullah al-Jazrawi. The later operative, during mid-May 2017, used to conduct sharia lectures at the Emni prison facility every Monday and Thursday. Abu Luqman, the Emni's emir (see ICSVE's report on the Emni

⁵⁵ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April, 13 2017)

⁵⁶ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 12, 2017) Reports The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. ICSVE Research Report.

[57]), was also reported to visit the facility and conduct lectures, sometime before December 2016.

The Sharia Judge

Upon the decision of interrogators, detainees would be presented in front of an ISIS sharia judge. This phase often preceded the conclusion of elaborate torture and marked the end of interrogation. Former detainees did not report being told about the end of their interrogation. Moreover, the guards only took them to the same interrogation room without telling them that they would now appear in front of an ISIS sharia judge. However, the accounts of one of the interviewees, 54-year-old man, indicate that detainees became aware of signs of this change and how to respond appropriately to avoid further negative repercussions [58]:

The brothers [fellow detainees] taught us how to deal with them [ISIS captors]. First rule: never confess to the interrogator. If you are seated on the floor, that means you are still being interrogated. Second rule: never incriminate yourself in front of the judge. If you know you did something, you should avoid mentioning anybody with any knowledge about it. You ought to bring the names of those without any knowledge of any breach of sharia law for example; those from ISIS or those who sympathize with them. Those names should be part of your story, the thing they arrested you for, but not aware of anything you did against ISIS. And you would know when you appear in front of the sharia judge. The treatment improves. He would ask whether you talked to your family. You would be seated on a chair. If you do well, you will still have to be detained for more, be you innocent or guilty. You would know if there is a punishment or not.

Once ISIS' sharia judges make their decision, the detainees are taken back to the communal cell, except for those sentenced to execution. Out of those sent back to communal cells, there are detainees who wait for their punishment and those who are kept in limbo. Psychological and physical abuses do not stop after this phase. However, most former detainees reported

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May, 3 2017)

that they were not subjected to elaborate physical torture from this phase onwards, a pattern that interestingly follows reports of those tortured under the Iraqi regime as well [⁵⁹]. Moreover, ISIS' Emni jailors were reported to allow family visits to some of the detainees. One of the interviewee, a 38-year-old man, discovered that ISIS allowed for a conjugal visits for those who met the judge and had spent over two months in the Emni jail [60]:

I know one detainee who was in the prison for seven months. I do not know why but they [ISIS captors] allowed him to spend 40 minutes with his wife. He told me that they took him to a room in the higher floor. It was closed from everywhere. I asked him whether they allowed him to sleep with his wife and he nodded in agreement.

Conditional Release

After holding the detainees for a while and then after they are cleared by the sharia judge, ISIS operatives start talking to them about possible release. Most freed detainees reported their release was either on the condition of paying a specified amount of money or by working for ISIS. A 28-year-old male interviewee explained the conditions of his release [61]:

He [possibly a sharia judge] told me that they have good news for me. 'We are going to release you,' he said. He told me that I should call my family and ask them to bring 500,000 Syrian Pounds. I told him that we do not have that much money and that I was my family's provider. He paused for a few seconds and then told me that there is another solution. He said because I have accounting experience and experience in running charity organizations I can be useful. He told me that they will allow me the honor to work in the directorate of the Zakat. I accepted. I went there [the directorate] only once. Then I got an MC. The MC

⁵⁹ Speckhard, Anne. Personal communication with a former tortured Iraqi prisoner (June 2017)

⁶⁰ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 20, 2017)

⁶¹ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April, 13 2017)

said that I needed a surgery and that my condition was life threatening. I was allowed to travel. I had to run away.

Detainees are often encouraged to talk to their families to pressure them to pay their ISIS jailors. Not all detainees were extorted into working for ISIS. One of the interviewees, a 37-year-old, did not pay his ISIS captors or work for them. His jailors insinuated that his only way out was by carrying out a suicide mission [62]:

I told them [ISIS jailors] we do not have money. They did not ask me to work for them. They asked me to carry out a suicide attack. They said, 'We know you can drive. You only have to drive a car from point A to point B. I knew a 15-year-old boy. They made him the same offer. The next day they came and told us that he drove a car in a martyrdom operation. They did not tell me that you have to carry out a suicide mission but I knew that was what they wanted. I refused! They kept picking on me for three months. They would come and threaten to kill me. Sometimes they would kick me. After three months they released me.

Based on details obtained from former detainees, ISIS jailors appear to hold individuals who are cleared by the group's sharia judges for a period of time in which they coerce them into working for ISIS, extort fines or try to manipulate them into suicide missions. In most cases the detainees, are forced to pressure their families to pay a ransom-like payment for their release. ISIS operatives also appear to be doing their due diligence on detainees. Captives with valuable skills (e.g. financial, technical, managerial, etc.) are extorted to work for the group's directorates; especially when they are unable to pay for their release. Often times, the ransom-like payments that ISIS demands for the release of individuals with valuable skills are significantly higher, compared to the ones lacking such skills. Based on the above interviewee's account, the group appears to consider detainees' skills, or lack of them for that matter, and financial situation when proposing potential release. Those unable to pay and who lack the skills

⁶² Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (April, 15 2017)

that ISIS deems valuable were pressured into committing suicide attacks. When ISIS fails to force detainees into one of three aforementioned scenarios, the group subjects them to abuse and keeps them in limbo for months. ISIS appears to give up at some point, releasing these traumatized detainees.

Punishment and Execution

After deciding the fate of detainees, sharia judges in ISIS jails, or outside the control of jailing authorities in some cases, turn the detainees over to operatives within the facilities that update the files of the detainees and start taking measures to release (see above) or punish their captives. Cases of punishment vary.

An ISIS child soldier defector recalled being taken to witness punishments during his training [63]:

Yes, they put us in vans. They take us places to see it. They put prisoners in cages—five or six people were shut into a cage. They put them in the cage down into the water and then take them back up. No one knows what they did. Then they blow fire on them or burn them.

A document that surfaced online (see Picture 4) on the 16th of December 2014 details what the group calls Hudud (punishments).

⁶³ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Ibn Omer (November 5, 2015)

Allah)	
Cursing the prophet- peace be upon him: (Also reads: Blasphemy against the prophet Muhammad)	Killing even after repenting
Cursing the religion (Also reads: Blasphemy against Religion)	Killing
Sex out of Wedlock (Zina) (Also reads: Adultery)	Stoning until death for married adulterer 100 lashes and general exile (far from family [most commonly in prison]) for unmarried adulterer
Sodomites (their only term to describe homosexuals)	The killing of the one committing it and the one receiving it
Theft	Amputating a hand
Drinking alcohol	80 lashes
Slandering	80 lashes
Spying for infidels (unbelievers [including other Muslims])	Killing
Apostasy from the Islamic faith	Killing
Literally: Road Blocking (Read as: Ambushing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1- In the case of killing and stealing money: killing and crucifixion 2- In the case of killing: killing 3- In the case of theft: amputating the right hand and left foot 4- Terrorizing people: Exile from earth (life sentence in prison [without any visits be they family or otherwise] or killing)

According to accounts obtained from former detainees and defectors, the above table is not inclusive of all punishments. Moreover, based on information obtained from interviewed detainees, ISIS often brings detainees who survive the punishment back to the same prison facility. Those returnees are subjected to the same extortion process discussed in the above

section. One of the interviewees, a 54-year-old man, recounted a conversation with a victim who was lashed in public for drinking alcohol [64]:

I asked him if they [ISIS captors] already lashed you how come they brought you back. He answered, 'They want me to pay; they want money.'

Furthermore, the detainees who ISIS judges decide should be executed are processed swiftly. Once a judge orders the execution, within or outside the premises of the detention facility, ISIS captors arrange with media operatives to film the victim's testimony. As of mid-May 2017, a Tunisian man by the alias Abu Abdullah al-Tunisi oversaw this operation. He was reported to supervise operatives who filmed the pre-execution testimony of victims within the Emni detention facility. The victims are always dressed in orange jumpsuits and the video is filmed in room 11 of the facility in the southern part of the stadium. Detainees are instructed to read from a paper. It details their personal information and ISIS' justification for their execution. By the end of the film each detainee calls for people not to cooperate with 'infidels' [any party but ISIS] and not to conspire against Muslims and the "Caliphate". The media operatives leave the facilities once they film those awaiting their execution.

After getting filmed, the detainees are moved to a part of the facility that is designated to imprison those awaiting their executions. The number of that part of the facility is 1. After three days, ISIS operatives instruct those detainees to pray before taking them to the city/town center to be executed. Detainees from Raqqa city often do not get executed in their hometowns. For instance those from Raqqa city get taken to towns as far as possible from the city.

The executions are filmed by ISIS media operatives for propaganda purposes. Often times, ISIS operatives report that they found pictures of their bases or figures taken by those

⁶⁴ Almohammad, Asaad. Research Interview (May 3, 2017)

executed by the Emni. Those executed often face charges of conspiring with the infidels. Infidels in this case refers to the coalition forces and the Kurds. Former affiliates of and those accused of conspiring with the Free Syrian Army, Ahrar al-Sham, and al-Nusra are also executed. ISIS defectors told ICSVE researchers that ISIS held its sharia training for new joiners near a prison at the Tabqa Dam so that upon completion of their training, the newly trained ISIS cadres could be brought a prisoner to behead. These beheadings were part of the final process of swearing allegiance to ISIS and were filmed as well [65].

As of late April 2017, a man by the alias Abu Jibril was ISIS' key executer in Raqqa governorate. Detainees who are executed are often young. As of mid-May 2017, Abu Abdullah al-Masri oversaw the execution of individuals who were accused of cooperating with the aforementioned groups. The order of those kinds of executions comes from the highest ISIS sharia judge, not from those operating from Emni detention facilities.

In some cases the executions of prisoners is carried out in unusual manner as recounted by this ISIS defector [66]:

There is a well by the name of Hute. There they cover the eyes of the prisoners and tell them, 'You are free now, just walk now, but don't open your eyes.' They walk and fall into the well. It smells horrible because of all the corpses inside the well. I know that over one hundred people were thrown into that well.

As of mid-May 2017, more than 120 individuals, who were detained in Emni facilities, were executed in Raqqa governorate. As of late April 2017, 28 women who were detained in the Emni facility were executed. Out of that number, 15 were executed for conspiring against

⁶⁵ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

⁶⁶ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Abu Walid (21 October 2015)

ISIS. The rest were sentenced by sharia judges to be stoned to death after ISIS deemed them guilty of adultery. In the case of one such woman, an ISIS defector told about her being drugged and raped by an ISIS cadre, forced into marriage and then given for sex to his friends who also raped her. When she complained to the shari [ISIS judge] she was arrested, tried for adultery, stoned to death and crucified [67].

Sex Slaves

A special category of detainees are the civilian captives that ISIS uses as sabaya or sex slaves. These detainees include the Yazidis captured in Iraq, wives and daughters of captured Free Syrian Army and Jabhat al Nusra cadres. These women are either sold or given to foreign fighters, ISIS cadres or outsiders or held in detention facilities in both Syria and Iraq. Those held in detention centers are subjected to repeated rapes by ISIS cadres who are given access to them as a reward for service. One ISIS defector recounted being a guard in the Conoco facility in Deir ez Zor area where he guarded 475 female sex slaves that were subjected to systematic rape by ISIS cadres. Speaking of these women the defector said [68]:

They were sure they were going to get beheaded. They all believed that they would be killed one by one and that was what they worried about. So their psychology was anything that happens to us is better than being killed. So they accepted the rapes to stay alive. They were given rice, vermicelli, food, they were given some clothing, some were left with their own clothes, with regard to the shower, if they needed to go they were in the corridors of the prison, everything was in the corridor, they would open the door, use the toilets or shower in the

⁶⁷ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Ibn Mesud (November 6, 2015)

⁶⁸ Speckhard, Anne & Yayla, Ahmet, S. Research Interview of Syrian ISIS defector Ibn Ahmed (Nov 13, 2015) Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

corridors. They arrived in their own clothing but one by one they were given an abaya, something black to wear.

An Iraqi imprisoned ISIS cadre told of ISIS “sabaya” being held in a large house where he and others would go to take one for raping [69].

Hostages

Information regarding the treatment of hostages was also obtained from recently released detainees and interviews of civilians living in ISIS-held territories. Their testimony suggests that hostages were subjected to various methods of psychological and elaborate physical torture (see the section detailing both methods of torture).

As of early April 2017, it was reported that ISIS moved a number of hostages from Raqqa to the southern outskirts of Deir ez-Zor, Syria. Those hostages were detained in an Emni facility on al-Amasi Street in Raqqa. In the past, ISIS moved hostages between detention facilities. This movement is observed to take place prior to a territorial defeat of the terrorist organization. The same observation was recorded before the group lost its territories in al-Bab, Aleppo and before the coalition forces and their Syrian allies retook al-Tabqa dam [70].

As of early May 2017 Ali Juma al-Shwakh (a.k.a. Abu Luqman) (see ICSVE’s report on the ISIS Emni [71]) was in charge of handling the cases of foreign hostages; among them Americans, French, Turkish, Syrian, and Saudi nationals. Those hostages were moved from a detention facility at al-Tabqa dam as of late December 2016. The detainees were then moved

⁶⁹ Speckhard, Anne & Shajkovci, Ardian. Research Interview of an Iraqi ISIS cadre (April 2017)

⁷⁰ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (March 29, 2017) Why Taking the Tabqa Dam is Important in the Fight against ISIS and Retaking of Raqqa. *ICSVE Brief Reports*

⁷¹ Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 12, 2017). The ISIS Emni: Its Organizational Structure, Current Leadership and Clues to its Inner Workings in Syria & Iraq. *ICSVE Research Report*.

to another facility in al-Baath dam. This corroborates sources' accounts on the Emni's role in handling hostages that indicate that the Emni is the entity that oversees hostages-related operations. Furthermore, as of mid-April 2017, ISIS was reported to be more open to negotiate the release of hostages for ransoms. ISIS' Emni discussed terms with hostages in their facilities so that they could pressure their families to pay the ransoms. Many hostages were taken to undisclosed locations to call their families. It is noteworthy that former detainees stated that, as of early May 2017, al-Baath dam was one of the facilities where foreign nationals were held hostage. The facility was under the control of a key Emni operative by the alias Abu Hamza. He reported directly to Abu Luqman, the emir of Emni. Abu Hamza was also an interrogator in the facility. Under his command there were a number of interpreters who spoke French, English, Turkish, and Russian. The number of foreign hostages was just over one hundred. That said, it is unclear whether ISIS moved the hostages from al-Baath dam as the coalition forces and their Syrian allies make advancements to isolate and retake that dam.

Moreover, information obtained during early May 2017 uncovered that among detainees in the Emni detention facility in Raqqa there were foreign nationals who were affiliated with ISIS at some point. The aforementioned foreign nationals were arrested after being suspected of or while trying to desert ISIS. It was reported that American nationals were among the detainees/hostages. It is unclear whether the American nationals were kidnapped and held hostage or whether they had been affiliated with ISIS at some point. It is also reported that kidnapped aid workers were among the hostage population.

ISIS seems to be increasingly looking for sources of additional revenue. Information obtained in late May 2017 indicates that Abu Luqman delegated some power to two operatives to oversee negotiations regarding hostages. Both operatives belong to the Emni. However, that operation is run through ISIS' directorate of public relations. The directorate

facilitated the operations of two Syrian national, Emni operatives who were tasked with handling hostages' negotiation. They are Muhamad al-Khatib and Ibrahim al-Shwakh. Al-Khatib is in charge of overseeing the negotiations regarding Syrian hostages. Al-Shwakh, the uncle of the Emni's emir, is tasked with handling negotiations regarding foreign hostages. That said, al-Shwakh has the authority to set, accept, or deny ransoms regarding foreign and local hostages. Al-Shwakh cooperates with the Emni emir and the highest sharia judges in setting the terms of the negotiations.

Notwithstanding that ISIS appears to be desperate to generate revenue by charging ransoms, past instances indicate that many hostages were killed even after receiving ransoms. Moreover, sources reported that in a number of cases local hostages were killed after failed negotiations. Additionally, in recent months ISIS went to execute a local hostage after receiving ransom, a number of sources added.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has endeavored to provide a window into the ISIS prison system, the abduction and detention processes, the condition of detention facilities, and the physical and psychological abuses within the terrorist organization's jails. The presented information suggests a significant level of sophistication in the organizational structure and governance of ISIS' prison system. The departmental affiliations, roles, and connectivity between entities overseeing the group's incarceration system are described.

Five entities, namely the Islamic and military police, hisbah, raid squads, and Emni were found to operate as enforcement agencies and to handle separate detention facilities. Each entity arrests individuals based on a set of purported offences. For instance, while hisbah operatives arrest those seen or accused of sharia breaches, the Emni's detentions target those involved in or accused of threatening the security of ISIS. Some of the entities operate with

higher levels of autonomy. The Emni and hisbah manage functions within the power of their respective structures. The Emni, raid squads, and hisbah are exempted from obtaining arrest orders from sharia judges prior to detaining individuals in their facilities. Raid squads are the only entity that fully operates beyond the oversight of sharia judges, including their arrests, releases, and executions. However the squads, a department within the Emni, cooperate with other ISIS directorates (e.g., Directorate of Fighters).

Moreover, the Emni receives detainees that have been referred by the other four entities. The Emni is also in charge of overseeing the kidnapping, detention, execution, and negotiations regarding hostages. Operatives from the Emni operate from the Directorate of Public Relations to handle such negotiations. Additionally, the Emni has increasingly become the main entity managing the incarceration of individuals accused of major offenses.

Based on evidence provided throughout the paper, ISIS has been observed to move its detention facilities when fearing territorial loss. This trend may be informative in reading future movements of the terrorist organization. The movement of ISIS leadership and their family members and financial operations serves as good indicators of the locations of the group's operational bases [72]. However, reliable intelligence on the aforementioned indicators requires direct links either to people close to ISIS leadership or to vast financial records, both of which are extraordinarily difficult to access. The relocation of detainees is a more conspicuous activity that can be tracked using less sophisticated methods. Alongside ISIS cash reserves and ISIS leadership, the cities of Mayadin and al-Bukamal, Deir ez-Zor received a significant number of detainees and hostages. The aforementioned indicators suggest the operational significance of the two cities in taking the fight to ISIS.

⁷² Almohammad, Asaad & Speckhard, Anne (April 3, 2017) Is ISIS Moving its Capital from Raqqa to Mayadin in Deir ez-Zor? ICSVE Brief Reports

According to the accounts of the interviewees and sources, the incarceration experience in ISIS prison facilities is dissected into three phases: abduction/arrest, initial processing including interrogation and confession, and post interrogation processing. Based on the seventeen interviewees with former detainees, the abduction/arrest phase often takes place in public. The detainees provided details showing that ISIS operatives arrested them either individually or collectively. In the early months of ISIS' takeover of Raqqa, its operatives were less abusive when arresting elderly individuals who are known in their community. A movement towards more forceful methods was observed as the group became more established in Syria. Most interviewees were subjected to physical and psychological abuses upon their arrest. With the exception of those captured by the Islamic police and hisbah, the former detainees were not made aware of the reasons behind their abduction/arrest.

The second phase starts the moment detainees arrive at the detention facility. Upon their arrival, detainees are subjected to physical and psychological abuses. In that state of pain and confusion, abducted individuals are processed and placed in solitary confinement for periods ranging from days to weeks. After spending time in solitary cells, the detainees are taken to interrogation chambers where they are exposed to other victims of elaborate methods of physical torture and threatened with the same. In those chambers they are promised a similar fate and threatened with execution if they do not confess. Most interviewees are still unaware of their purported offences at that stage. Many of the interviewed former detainees were taken back to solitary confinement after being physically and psychologically tormented by their captors. Some were moved to communal cells. Detainees appear to collectively develop coping mechanisms and strategies including sharing information to avoid coerced confessions to inhibit the effectiveness of ISIS' interrogations.

The lion's share of elaborate psychological and physical torture occurs after the initial interrogation in detention facilities. Throughout their abduction/arrest and interrogation,

detainees are subjected to a number of psychological methods of torture. These include the threat of execution, promises to receive similar fates as other tortured fellow detainees, solitary confinement, and the placement of severed heads in cages in which detainees are being held. Elaborate physical torture includes seven methods named as follows: Lashing, the Fuel, Bisat al-Rih (Flying Carpet), Shabeh (Ghost), German Chair, the Biter, and the Tire. Many of the tortured former detainees were left with severe injuries. A few of them had permanent disabilities that resulted directly from the aforementioned physical torture methods. Interviewees reported that they became aware of the reasons behind their detention during this stage of their incarceration.

It is difficult to assess the levels of psychological trauma these detainees experienced and the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that occurs in those who undergo such treatment while in detention. We know that the assessment of PTSD among non-Western victims of torture remains challenging [73], yet we can state that many of the interviewees still suffer extreme posttraumatic and dissociative symptoms from their detention, which they evidenced and spoke about during their interviews. It is also noteworthy that a large portion of the interviewees are still living in highly traumatic situations. One instance of re-living torture was provided by the spouse of one of the former interviewees early in this paper. Another instance was obtained from the son of one of the interviewees, a 63-year old woman [74]:

⁷³ Johnson, H., & Thompson, A. (2008). The development and maintenance of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in civilian adult survivors of war trauma and torture: A review. *Clinical psychology review*, 28(1), 36-47.

⁷⁴ Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. "Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 6 (December 2015): 95-118 and Speckhard, Anne, and Yayla, Ahmet, S. *Isis Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate*. Advances Press, LLC, 2016.

I brought her here [outside Syria] right after they [ISIS] released her. There are women who wear niqab here. I remember we were walking slowly. Two women wearing niqab were walking behind us. They walked fast. When they got close to us she noticed them. Suddenly she was hunched, crying on the ground.

Hypervigilance was also noticed by a friend of one interviewee, a 27-year-old man:

It was like he was still living in Raqqa and they [ISIS operatives] were looking for him. His eyeballs were always moving. He would keep looking around himself. If a car is driving by or somebody shouts he would turn and spend some time studying them. He would stop me to inspect things.

To that end, some of the interviewees reported self-medicating using off-the-shelf pain killers but none reported seeking or undertaking any psychological therapies or taking any psychotropic medicines which would likely be unavailable to them in ISIS territory at this time anyway.

Based on statements provided by former detainees, ISIS' use of torture was a form of punishment in addition to functioning as an interrogation strategy, especially for those who were detained by the hisbah. It is hard to assess whether ISIS operatives gained actionable information or confessions as result. For many of the tortured interviewed detainees as well as the defectors, confessions meant that they would be executed by the terrorist organization. Victims who were executed may have been coerced to confess in front of a camera before they were killed. Clearly, the use of torture serves as a reinforcement of ISIS' brand of terror. In that sense, torture is a violent method that scares civilians into submitting to ISIS' theological codes and socio-political aims.

Throughout detainees' time in shared cells, they were expected to participate in sharia courses. The first course was called Redemption. The sharia lectures were often delivered by highly ranked sharia figures. Based on the interviewees' accounts, ISIS guards were less

abusive to those engaged in sharia courses. Detainees developed strategies to manipulate guards in the facilities. Through reading ISIS' sharia books and engaging in the sharia lectures, detainees, to some degree, were spared their ISIS captors' abuse. Defectors also told about accepting sharia lessons and ending their imprisonment by giving their bayats [oaths of loyalty] to the organization.

The last phase of the incarceration experience is the post-interrogation process. This phase starts when the interrogation is concluded. Former detainees reported that they were not made aware beforehand of meeting sharia judges. However, the changes signaling that meeting were observed by most of the detainees. Based on the obtained information, some of the former detainees in communal cells developed strategies to manipulate sharia judges and avoid confessing or being caught for crimes committed. Upon the decision of ISIS sharia judges, be they operating from within the detention facility or outside the premises and oversight of jailors, the detainees' files are updated and their captors start the next phase of processing them. Detainees who have been cleared of their purported offences and those who have survived ISIS' punishment are subjected to conditional release. ISIS, perhaps through their sharia judges, are reported to offer former detainees to either make a ransom-like payment, or for those with skills needed by the terrorist organization to work for ISIS directorates, in exchange for their release. ISIS operatives try to coerce former detainees who can neither make the payment nor possess the skills deemed valuable by the terrorist organization to commit suicide operations. Detainees who do not pay, work, or get coerced into suicide attacks are kept in the detention facility and abused for months before ISIS finally releases them.

As ISIS is currently desperate for funds, ISIS operatives detain individuals and subject them to abuses so as to generate additional revenue. This shows that ISIS will go to extreme and elaborate pains to fund its operations. It is also observed that ISIS is facing declines in

recruitment, especially of those with managerial and engineering skills. To that effect, the group seems to be coercing civilians to work for them using detention as a tool to terrorize individuals with desirable skills into working in its different directorates.

Punishments and executions are also used to terrorize civilians in ISIS-held territories into submission. The presented findings illustrate that ISIS jailors cooperate with media operatives to use, most probably coerced, pre-execution testimony for its propaganda. ISIS was found to use methodical processes before and after executions. Victims are often taken and executed far from their hometowns. Probably, ISIS fears igniting revenge in populations under its control giving the semi-tribal nature of areas under its control in Syria.

The current paper also puts forth a number of names and details on ISIS operatives engaged in detaining, torturing, and extorting civilians to supply the terrorist organization with material support. Ali Juma al-Shwakh (a.k.a. Abu Luqman) who is listed and sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Treasury [75] and United Nations Security Council [76] under the name Ali Musa al-Shawakh is largely involved in the aforementioned violations. Sources with direct knowledge of his involvement and personal history reported that Abu Luqman's real name is Ali Juma al-Shwakh and that he holds a bachelor degree in Arabic literature rather than in law. If confirmed, his name and details need to be corrected in both listings. Further investigations may be needed to list other names provided in this paper.

Throughout this paper, ISIS' prison system and its model of governance have been explored. The accounts of former interviewees have detailed on victims' incarceration experience, shedding some light on ISIS' physical and psychological abuses. Evidence of the terrorist

⁷⁵ Press Center, "Treasury Sanctions Major Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Leaders, Financial Figures, Facilitators, and Supporters" U.S. Department of the Treasury, 29 September 2015

⁷⁶ United Nations Security Council, "NARRATIVE SUMMARIES OF REASONS FOR LISTING" United Nations Security Council,

organization's handling of hostages and conditioned releases have been described. Torture, specifically, and detention, more generally, are used as tools to scare civilians into providing ISIS with material support and ultimately submitting to ISIS' theological codes and socio-political aims.

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