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Master's Thesis of Political Science

# Origins of the Islamic State's iconoclastic terrorism:

Syrian nationalism, caliphism, and state-building

이슬람국가의 성상파괴테러의 기원:  
시리아 국가주의, 칼리피즘, 그리고 국가건설을  
중심으로

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# Origins of the Islamic State's iconoclastic terrorism:

Syrian nationalism, caliphism, and state-building

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이 논문을 정치학석사 학위논문으로 제출함

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## Abstract

The thesis aims to explain the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) iconoclastic terrorism. While previous explanations focused on economic incentives of looting and selling artifacts, Shia–Sunni rivalry, and theology of Islam to understand the group's destruction of cultural heritage, this thesis attempts to explain its actions by examining how iconoclasm fits into the objective ISIL proclaims as the ultimate goal: establishment of a caliphate.

The study approaches the question by looking into similar state-building efforts by the Assad regime, which ISIL clearly understood and imitated in its own project. The Assad regime and ISIL are both minoritarian rulers and in need of a new national identity in order to establish a state. First, Hafez al–Assad was an ethnic minority and his Ba'ath Party had failed to merge Syria with Egypt. Therefore, the Assad regime needed to create a new national identity that overshadows the characteristics that make the regime a minority rule and combine all Syrians together. It led to nationalist archaeology that selectively praised historical eras when Islam and ethnic homogeneity played limited roles. While the Assad regime's Syrian nationalism proceeded, the emphasis on non–Islamic history became a cause of growing reluctance among Sunni Syrians who make up an overwhelming majority of the Syrian population. This anxiety among Sunni Syrians and the Syrian Civil War paved way for ISIL to earn popular support.

On the other hand, ISIL too suffered from characteristics that made its rule minoritarian. Although the group began as a local extremist organization Al-Nusra, it was never a dominating force of the region. On top of western influences that opposed ISIL's religious fundamentalism, it had to compete with the Assad regime's armed forces and the Free Syrian Army militarily. Also, it had to compete with other regional extremist groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda religiously. It meant to that ISIL had to respond to the Sunni population's call for the revival of a caliphate in a way that counters all of the competitors. To ISIL, iconoclastic terrorism is an efficient and effective means to achieve that goal. Destruction of cultural heritage not only exaggerates its coercive power but also displays firm adherence to Sharia law, thus play a role in military and religious competitions. Also, the act of breaking artifacts, that the Assad regime once used as a representative icon of its Syrian identity, became an icon that represents ISIL's caliphism. Given that Sharia law deems any glorification of a physical image as idolatry, using the act of breaking the idols as an icon of its ideology is a convenient and appealing choice for ISIL and its supporters.

Tracing the origins of ISIL's iconoclastic terrorism revealed that it inherited the habit of using political archaeology from the preceding regime. Although it is important to protect and cherish cultural heritage, it is important to acknowledge how archaeology has been utilized to serve a political purpose. Only when governments treasure history as treasures, not

as tools of control, we will be able to truly protect our cultural heritage.

**Keyword** : Islamic State, iconoclasm, minoritarian rule, state-buidling, national identity.

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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Study Background.....	1
1.2 Terms and Definitions.....	5
1.2.1 Key Terms.....	5
1.2.2 Defining Terrorism and Iconoclasm.....	7
Chapter 2. Literature Review .....	11
2.1 Earlier Studies on Terrorism.....	11
2.2 Iconoclasm as a Terrorist Tactic.....	13
2.2.1 Financial Gains.....	15
2.2.2 Shia–Sunni Rivalry.....	16
2.2.3 Theology of Islam.....	17
2.2.4 Alternative Explanation: State–Building.....	18
Chapter 3. Hypothesis.....	22
Chapter 4. The Assad’s and Daesh’s Political Archaeology .....	30
4.1 The Assad Regime’s Nationalist Archaeology.....	30
4.2 Daesh’s Caliphate and Political Iconoclasm.....	40
4.3 Breaking Down Daesh’s Behaviors: Palmyra.....	54
Chapter 5. Conclusion .....	63

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Syria: Reported heritage incidents by damage type (August 2014 to April 2015).....	3
Figure 2. Daesh’s illustration of its roadmap to <i>Khilafah</i> .....	21
Figure 3. Noyes’ model of the politics of iconoclasm .....	26
Figure 4. Images appeared in Syrian banknotes since 1970.....	36

## List of Pictures

Picture 1. National identity building through political archaeology under minoritarian rule by the Assad regime and Daesh.....	28
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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Study Background

In 2014, terrorism research entered a new phase as a different type of terrorist group emerged. The Islamic State, also known as *Daesh*, burst onto the international scene when it seized a significant portion of Syria and Iraq and proclaimed statehood. What sets the Islamic State apart is the type of violence it exhibits. Granted, all terrorist attacks are vicious and shocking, as terrorists are literally those who “terrorize” others. However, members of the Islamic State are reported to be not only stoning and beheading civilians, as horrible as these actions already are, but also to be attacking museums, religious locations, and even World Heritage Sites. As early as July 2014, local media has reported on Daesh’s looting of artifacts from museums located within its controlled territory. While initial reports mostly called the incidents “looting,” the attacks involved raiding and destroying buildings and monuments. Footage released by Daesh revealed deliberate explosions intended to completely destroy mosques, churches, and shrines that were treasured by locals and adherents of the Islamic faith. Graves of Islamic prophets crumbled while

the rest of the world watched in horror. Since then, Daesh quickly gained a reputation as an iconoclast. Fortunately, the horror of Daesh's actions has come to an end since Syrian and Iraqi government forces have taken command of nearly all territories formerly controlled by the terrorist organization. However, it has still inspired scholars to understand what perpetuated such actions. This research attempts to contribute to this trend of scholarship in the hope of never letting this tragedy be repeated in the future.

One apparent problem all researchers tackling this phenomenon share is a lack of data. By nature, terrorist activities are clandestine. In fact, the first reports on the destruction of cultural heritage had to rely solely on footage released by Daesh. For this reason, there has not been meaningful progress in producing a reliable database. Undeterred, scholars cleverly developed ways to continue to collect data on iconoclastic activities. Most notably, the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) has been tracking damage to cultural heritage by studying satellite images to monitor heritage loss in Syria and Iraq (Lawler, 2014). Moreover, they have been accepting reports online of damage to cultural heritage from residents in affected regions. So far, this has been the most extensive effort to monitor iconoclastic behavior of Daesh. Unfortunately for this research, ASOR has yet to make its database open to the public.

Still, it is possible to catch a glimpse of the data it has collected (Danti, 2015).

According to ASOR’s data, deliberate destruction and vandalism make up a significant portion of incidents, next to much anticipated looting and accidental ruin. Clearly, iconoclasm is a problem that calls for close examination. It is at this point that this research begins its journey. If one is to accept Robert Pape’s assumption regarding the strategic nature of terrorist attacks, why are terrorists attacking World Heritage Sites? How does iconoclasm contribute to fulfilment of its goal?

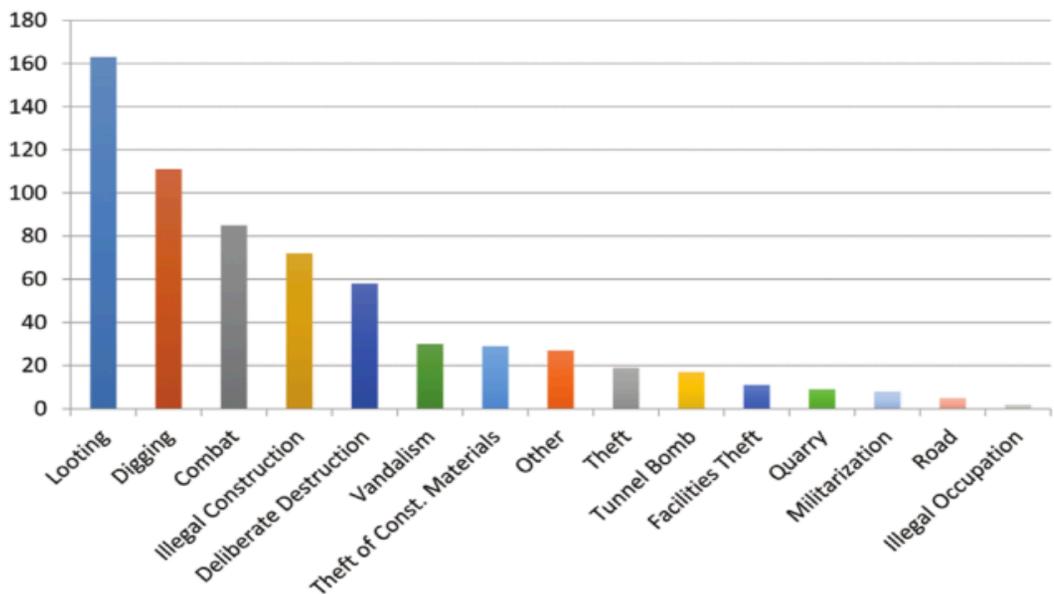


Figure 1. Syria: Reported heritage incidents by damage type (August 2014 to April 2015). Adapted from “Ground-Based Observations of Cultural Heritage Incidents in Syria and Iraq,” by M. D. Danti, 2015, *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 78(3), 132–141. Retrieved March 22, 2017.

This paper theorizes that Daesh, which aspires to become a state, engages in iconoclastic terrorism to aid its state-building efforts. Iconoclasm is inherently a political phenomenon: Symbols are an important part of national identity in modern states. Particularly, nationalistic archaeology has been frequently used by modern states to build their national character. Thus, Daesh destroys and dismantles the symbols of archeology and history to undermine an existing identity for the creation of a new one. Therefore, iconoclasm is a reactionary response made within the constraints of religious doctrine to the politically motivated icon-making of a modern state.

This research will proceed in the following order: First, it will establish a lexicon of terms that will appear frequently. Additionally, it will define two key words: *terrorism* and *iconoclasm*. In Chapter 2, the research will review existing relevant literature. It will begin by discussing different approaches to terrorism studies to identify where this research is situated within the general scholarship. Then, it will review existing explanations regarding the Islamic State's iconoclastic terrorism and their limitations. This process will reveal what Daesh claims is the central motivation for its iconoclastic terrorism. Chapter 3 will review literature on identity and state-building and synthesize a model of state-building based on minoritarian rule, identity, and symbolism. Chapter 4 will examine how, since 1970, the Syrian Republic has utilized nationalistic

archaeology as a means of creating national identity. It will further reveal that Daesh also aspires to create its own national identity based on the political use of archaeology, but that it seeks to utilize the destruction of archeology as a symbol of this identity. Finally, it will evaluate the consequences of iconoclasm.

## 1.2. Terms and Definitions

Before jumping into extensive discussions on this topic, it is important to define a few key terms. The following three terms will appear frequently and it is essential to explain them now to minimize confusion.

### 1.2.1. Daesh, Islamic State, and Islamic Nation

From this point, the terrorist group known as the Islamic State will be called *Daesh*. Daesh is an acronym for the Arabic phrase *al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham*, which translates to “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.” It is similar to the Arabic word *Daes*, which means “one who crushes something underfoot,” and *Dahes*, which translates to “one who sows discord.” Combining these terms, *Daesh* is a derogatory name that the group deserves for its heinous crime. However, more important for this study, Daesh is clearly different from a concept that will be explored extensively: The Islamic State.

From this point, *Islamic State* and *caliphate* will refer to a type of government based on Islamic religious law. The specifics of an Islamic state will be discussed extensively in future chapters. Finally, *Islamic nation* will refer to any nation–state whose state religion is Islam. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia fall into this category.

Another term this research frequently uses is minoritarian rule. The exploration of the concept of minoritarian rule begins with the concept of right to self–determination defined in Human Rights Covenants of 1966. It states:

All peoples have the right of self–determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (U.N. ICESCR art. 1 para. 1)

Dinstein (1976) extended from this idea and concluded that the right to self–determination entitles people “to establish a sovereign state in the territory in which it lives and where it constitutes a majority”. This postcolonial concept of self–determination paved legal ways for international lawyers and nationalists to legitimize secession from dominating foreign forces and create a new state. But the end of colonialism did not translate to establishment of sovereign states by majorities. The colonial divide–and–rule tactic paved way for minorities to inherit ruling structure of the colonial dominators and constitute what is now known as minoritarian rule. Simply put, a group of

people who make up a minority of demography set a rules and conventions of a territory. But Dajani (2012) states that minoritarian regimes in the Middle East, Bahrain, Syria, and Israel/Palestine, exhibit distinctive characteristics that stretches beyond rule of a simple, numerical minority. He states that these minoritarian regimes in the Middle East control military and security institutions with members of an ethnic or religious group that is of minority. Also, they are autocratic and present democracy as threat to the regimes' survival and benefitting groups. Lastly, they use majoritarian tyranny and sectarianism as excuses against political liberalization. But for the purpose of this research, minoritarian rule simply refers to the sovereign state run by numerical minority of the demographic because how minoritarian rules form and overcome their limitations is essentially what this research aims to explore.

### 1.2.2. Defining Terrorism and Iconoclasm

The first wave of what were previously known as “terrorist experts” appeared in the 1970s. These specialists included David Rapoport and Martha Crenshaw. Rapoport (1971) was the first to identify terrorism as a unique form of political violence. He clarified terrorism as an act distinct from terror tactics. According to Rapoport, terrorism is discriminant homicide for destruction of a corrupt society.

Building upon Rapoport's definition, Crenshaw attempted to conceptualize a general theory that explains the origins of terrorist groups and terrorists. In her remarkable study, although she limited terrorists' motivation as solely political, she laid the foundation for the modern definition of terrorist organizations:

Groups who want to dramatize a cause, to demoralize the government, to gain popular support, to provoke regime violence, to inspire followers, or to dominate a wider resistance movement, who are weak vis-a-vis the regime, and who are impatient to act, often find terrorism a reasonable choice. (Crenshaw, 1981, p. 389)

Subsequent studies have narrowly defined *terrorism*, with some variations. Enders, Sandler, and Gaibullov (2011, p. 4) define it as "the premeditated use of threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups against noncombatants in order to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims." Some disagree and limit it to a political act (Crenshaw, 2014), while others broaden it to include actions aiming to harm immediate victims (Pape, 2005). Despite these differences, most studies define *terrorism* as a synthesis of three components: perpetrator, target, and goal.

However, it is difficult to trace the concept of *iconoclasm* to its origin. Since it literally means "image breaking" in ancient Greek, it is reasonable to

assume that an act of breaking an image or a symbol can be traced back to ancient times. Noyes (2013) points to the biblical story of the Golden Calf as the first written record of iconoclasm. In it, Israelites build a golden calf to represent God and Moses in turn destroys the symbol and punishes those who revere it. After this story became well known, a long list of iconoclastic actions followed. Beginning with the sacrifice of livestock, the targets of iconoclasm vary as much as the types of icons do. Monuments and sculptures such as obelisks and towers that were specifically designed to commemorate history or an idea are frequent and obvious targets of iconoclasm since their physical destruction symbolizes an opposition to the abstract and intangible ideas they represent. Important structures such as government buildings or corporate headquarters are also frequent targets of iconoclasm because they are constructions with utility beyond that of a workplace. They represent the power and authority that an organization holds over its constituents, customers, group philosophy, and more. Similarly, a human body can be more than just a functional individual since a person may be a symbol of the ideas that he or she holds. Icons are erected using tangible elements to represent intangible concepts. Therefore, all targets are marks because they represent something more than their physical value. Thus, iconoclasm is an act of breaking and undermining the abstract concept that the physical ramification represents. With this in mind, this research attempts an extensive study on the act of symbol-breaking as a terrorist tactic. As defined above, terrorism is a

strategic act of political violence. In this context, Daesh's iconoclasm will be interpreted by first identifying the ideas that the targeted symbols represented and what the undermining of those symbols meant to this terrorist organization.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Earlier Studies on Terrorism

Since the tragedy of 9/11, scholars from different disciplines have been pouring into the field of terrorism studies. Rightfully, they are spending much of their time and energy debating both the origin of terrorism and the explanations for terrorists' actions. However, they implement different approaches and methods for tackling these questions. Using techniques ranging from psychological analysis at the individual level to more recent game-theoretic approaches, scholars have dissected terrorists and their organizations in many ways.

A series of quantitative studies by James Piazza fall into this category. Piazza used cross-national data and a terrorist incident archive to find the statistical relationship between terrorist attacks and variables ranging from poverty (2013a) to minority discrimination (2011; 2012) to consumer price (2013b). Similar studies find a statistical relationship between terrorist incidents and varying levels of state failure (Newman, 2007; Piazza, 2007; Tikuisis, 2009). Quantitative analysis using cross-national data and a terrorism incident database is insightful in that it provides hints on which variables are linked to terrorist activities.

Subsequently, scholars can utilize these hints to begin thorough descriptive studies on specific cases. Despite this upside, these large-N studies by themselves fall short in providing detailed explanations and policy recommendations tailored for specific terrorist campaigns. Although these studies are helpful in explaining the phenomenon of terrorism, they are insufficient in providing an answer to the question of this research, which concerns a specific terrorist tactic.

Fortunately, more detailed research on specific terrorist tactics exists. In 2005, Robert Pape published a groundbreaking work on terrorism. One of the first examples of empirical research post-9/11, Pape's work provided an intriguing explanation for suicide terrorism. His research examined the timing, goal, and target of suicide attacks, as well as the reasons behind these components. To summarize briefly, Pape found that suicide attack campaigns, as irrational as they appear at the individual level, are chosen as methods of action for economic reasons. Suicide attacks are rising in frequency because they have proven to be an effective means of coercion. They manifest as a type of coherent and organized campaign, most frequently for political or secular purposes.

Drake (1998, p. 55) attempted to find similarities in target selection among terrorist organizations with similar ideological motives. For example, he asserted that one separatist group will choose a type of target similar to that of another separatist group. Drake argued that ideology

provides a motive and framework for action. To a certain extent, this explanation is intuitively acceptable. It is reasonable to assume that extreme religious groups will target opposing religious groups' facilities. Drake expected a terrorist group to choose a target in accordance with the group's "distinctive political identity and aims." In this respect, his model is partially beneficial. It attempts to explain terrorist activities by their ideology, and thus, a type of political motive.

From Pape's and Drake's research, it is possible to infer that Daesh, as a strategic and political organization, also chooses its targets and tactics in accordance with its goals. Now, this research will review some of the existing theories on what Daesh aspires to achieve through iconoclasm.

## 2.2. Iconoclasm as a Terrorist Tactic

What, then, is Daesh trying to achieve? Why is it destroying cultural heritage? To begin, it is important to note Flood's study (2002, p. 646), which suggests the instrumental nature of Islamic iconoclasm. Flood compares what remains of artifacts from three drastically different periods of Islamic rule and shows that situational context limits methods and degrees of Islamic iconoclasm. He suggests that some acts of Islamic iconoclasm, although conducted under a facade of religion, were not done purely for religious purposes but were sometimes done for political or economic reasons. He distinguishes

iconoclastic activities into two types: “Instrumental iconoclasm, in which a particular action is executed in order to achieve a greater goal, and expressive iconoclasm, in which the desire to express one’s beliefs or give vent to one’s feelings is achieved by the act itself.” Additionally, Flood defines “iconoclasm as a product of a negotiation between iconoclasts and iconophiles, with the latter modifying existing images either for financial remuneration or to prevent more extensive alterations by those opposed to figuration.” In essence, one iconoclastic act, even if done under the same religious context as another, may differ from it depending on the situational context in which the action is committed.

Building upon Flood’s theory regarding multiple layers of motivation beyond stated reasons, Brosché, Legnér, Kreutz, and Ijla (2017) attempted to establish a typology of iconoclasm, identifying four major motives: conflict goals, military–strategic value, signaling, and economic incentives. Although there has not been extensive academic research on Daesh’s iconoclasm, a few journalists have posed a set of explanations that fit into Brosché, Legnér, Kreutz, and Ijla’s typology in varying degrees. However, more popular explanations regard more materialistic and immediate benefits of iconoclastic terrorism. Financial gain, Shia–Sunni rivalry, media attention, and Islamic theology are four main explanations that this research identified upon reviewing existing literature regarding Daesh’s behavior.

### 2.2.1. Financial Gains

From a strategic perspective, the most obvious goal for a terrorist organization's survival is cultivating economic resources. Just like any other organization, it, too, requires material means to proceed with its operations. At an individual level, economic gain seems to be a crucial motivator. Mironova, Mrie, and Whitt (2014) conducted a survey on individuals who volunteered with Islamic extremist groups in Syria. According to their findings, individuals make an economic choice by weighing the costs and benefits of abandoning or staying in their hometowns to join or oppose incoming extremist groups. Indeed, unauthorized excavations have been among the biggest threats to cultural heritage since 2014, when Daesh began to take control of the region. It is estimated that the international market for artifacts illegally taken from regions in conflict amounts to multiple billions of dollars (Hansen-Lewis and Shapiro, 2015). It is widely known that several antique shops in London sell blood-stained artifacts smuggled from Syria (Shabi, 2015).

However, there are debates regarding whether the economic explanation is satisfactory. If one is to regard Daesh's terrorism as a business model that provides economic incentives to members of its group, it does not explain why Deash often engages in total destruction of cultural heritage as

opposed to looting. In the case of Daesh, its destructive acts are different from simple thievery.

### 2.2.2. Shia–Sunni Rivalry

Michael Danti (2015) argued that Daesh is destroying Islamic heritage sites in other sectors to stoke sectarian tensions and proliferate conflict. Certainly, prolonged conflict among sectors within Islam, most notably between Shia and Sunni Muslims, points to group rivalry as a possible reason behind iconoclasm. Indeed, targets of destruction include Shia–Islamic artifacts.

However, a closer examination of destroyed cultural heritage suggests otherwise. In addition to Shia heritage sites, Daesh is also attacking Shiite–Islamic artifacts. If regional competition against different branches of Islam is the sole reason behind iconoclasm, Daesh should exclusively attack Shia–Islamic sites. Moreover, the fact that these attacks are meticulously recorded and broadcasted online also suggests otherwise. When the Taliban attacked a giant statue of the Bamiyan Buddha, it not only broadcasted its atrocious act but also invited foreign journalists to report on its destruction. Considering their own similar choices, it is more logical to assume that Daesh is engaging in iconoclasm mainly to show its strength to the West. Desire for media attention itself is another frequently noted motivation behind Daesh’s

iconoclasm. Yet, why Daesh desires media attention, especially from the West, remains unanswered.

### 2.2.3. Theology of Islam

While some researchers have focused on secular calculations by Daesh, others have turned to religious motivations for an explanation. Wood (2016) criticizes “Westerners” and their approach to the Islamic State as incognizant of a Western bias, stating that “if religious ideology [does not] matter much in Washington or Berlin, surely it must be equally irrelevant in Raqqa or Mosul.” Similarly, Ahmed (2016) highlighted the Salafi ideology as the primary motivation behind intentional destruction of cultural heritage. As a Salafist Muslim organization, Daesh attempts to “emphasize monotheism and to eradicate any form of association with God,” he argued. Rutelli (2015) also points to preventing idolatry as a primary motivation for Daesh’s destruction of cultural heritage. Indeed, in the early stage of Daesh’s advancement to the ancient ruins of Palmyra, it pledged not to destroy cultural heritage as a whole. Instead, it vowed to destroy artifacts with idolatrous characteristics. As promised, Daesh’s iconoclasm is mostly limited to local religious temples. Unfortunately, Daesh has not entirely limited its destruction to idols. It has destroyed ancient architecture, most notably the Monumental Arch in Palmyra, that does not have apparent links to idolatry. Daesh is also reported

to have destroyed the mosque where it declared the caliphate. What these examples suggest is that religious doctrine may provide limited explanation for some cases of iconoclasm.

As illustrated through a survey of literature and journalism, four main reasons behind destruction of heritage are economic gain, group competition, media attention, and Islamic theology. However, each of these explanations is unsatisfactory. While economic gain seems to be a legitimate explanation of iconoclasm at an individual level, it does not explain why Daesh loots and destroys cultural heritage. Furthermore, while regional competition partly explains target selection, it does not explain the destruction of Shiite-Islamic artifacts. Media coverage may be of use, as evidenced by Daesh's significant efforts to report its iconoclasm online, but it falls short in explaining why it seeks media coverage. Finally, Islamic theology may provide grounds and justification for iconoclasm, but this argument alone does not explain all of the iconoclastic behaviors of Daesh.

#### **2.2.4 Alternative Explanation: State-Building**

With unsatisfactory explanations present, this research theorizes by doing what other explanations fail to do or deliberately avoid: It focuses on what Daesh actually claims are its goals.

In July 2014, Daesh declared itself a caliphate in a well-publicized media operation. Daesh publicized its caliphate through local radio and online media in multiple languages. Incidentally, the first report regarding destruction of mosques and churches in Daesh-controlled territory came out in the first week of July. It can be argued that iconoclastic attacks are done to grab media attention and thus publicize a terrorist organization's declarations most effectively. This elaborate means for publicizing one's actions suggests that the act of destroying an idol is based less on a will to follow a religious doctrine and more on the interaction between the actor and viewers, who are altered by the action. In this case, the relationship is centered around Daesh's call for its followers to repatriate and populate its controlled regions with legal occupants of the Islamic State.

As evidenced by its name, Daesh aspires to become a state. While it began as an Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda, it broke off and merged with other groups and titled itself the "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI). Following territorial expansion to Syria, it declared a new caliphate and renamed itself the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL or ISIS). What is consistent with Daesh after it claimed independence from Al-Qaeda is its desire for recognition as a state, more specifically an Islamic state or a caliphate. In fact, some political scientists are cautiously suggesting the idea of categorizing Daesh as a state, though not a caliphate. Daesh once met all of the Montevideo Criteria, which function as the norms of international law (Coleman, 2014). In terms of

competence, Daesh runs what is the equivalent of a state since its organization has all the characteristics of one except for international recognition. In the first issue of *Dabiq*, the group's propaganda magazine, Daesh lays out a blueprint for building an Islamic state (Figure 2). In this process of state-building, destabilizing *Taghut* is not just a religious action, but part of a grand political scheme. Generally, taghut refers to the act of idolatry but it can be used to refer to a person or a group that rebels against God (Esposito, 2009). This effectively answers the first question of my research: Daesh's iconoclastic terrorism is a political terrorism intended to contribute to the group's state-building efforts. However, it still leaves plenty of unanswered questions. Why did Daesh specifically choose iconoclasm? How successful has iconoclasm been in aiding Islamic state-building?

to pave the way for the claiming of territory. All this led to the gradual collapse of any authority in the areas the crusaders would refer to as “the Sunni Triangle.”

The collapse was followed by the mujahidin quickly entering the vacuum left, to announce and establish the Islamic State of Iraq under the leadership of Amirul-Mu’minin Abu ‘Umar al-Husayni al-Baghdadi (rahimahullah) – a monumental event in the history of the Ummah.

It was the first state in “modern” times set up exclusively by the mujahidin – the active participants in the jihad – in the heart of the Muslim world just a stone’s throw away from Makkah, al-Madinah, and Bayt al-Maqdis.

In short, these phases consist of immigrating to a land with a weak central authority to use as a base where a jama’ah can form, recruit members, and train them. (If such a land does not exist or hijrah is not possible, the place can be formed through long campaigns of nikayah attacks carried out by underground mujahid cells.

These attacks will compel apostate forces to partially withdraw from rural territory and regroup in major urban regions.) The jama’ah would then take advantage of the situation by increasing the chaos to a point leading to the complete collapse of the taghut regime in entire areas, a situation some refer to as “tawahhush” (“mayhem”). The next step would be to fill the vacuum by managing the state of affairs to the point of developing into a full-fledged state, and continuing expansion into territory still under control of the taghut.

**This has always been the roadmap towards Khilafah for the mujahidin.**

Sadly, they are now opposed by the present leadership of famous jihad groups who have become frozen in the phase of nikayah attacks, almost considering the attainment of power to be taboo or destructive. And rather than entrusting the affairs of the Ummah to the pious mujahidin, the present heads of these groups insist upon leaving the matter out for grabs so that any munafiq can stretch out his arm and reach for the leadership of the Ummah only to destroy

05  
KHILAFAH



04  
TAMKIN



03  
DESTABILIZE TAGHUT



02  
JAMA’AH



01  
HIJRAH

Figure 2. Daesh’s illustration of its roadmap to *Khilafah*. Adapted from *Dabiq* 2, by Al-Hayat Media. Retrieved January 5, 2017, from <https://jihadology.net/category/dabiq-magazine/>

## Chapter 3. Hypothesis

From Corrigan and Sayer's vision of state formation, which stressed the natural development of a state from a society's everyday culture (1985, 35) to Tilly's (1992) interpretation of state formation based on use and control of coercive power, theories on state formation have been an important and debated area in the field of political science. Therefore, the decision to choose which theory to utilize in research is not based on one's belief in the general superiority of a specific theory, but instead on a theory's utility in providing an explanation for the question at hand. In this research, the question at hand, as discussed earlier, concerns the relationship between symbol, identity, and state-building. To address this matter, this research attempts to create a model of state-building by synthesizing theories on symbol and identity, as well as identity and state-formation.

A rich body of literature on the relationship between identity and state-building is present in the field of development studies. More specifically, researchers have stressed the importance of having a unifying body that bring people together under a common identity in building an effective state. In the classic study entitled "Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy," Michael Hudson (1977) argues that division within a political boundary, whether it is based on ethnicity, class, or religious clan, severely curtails development of a

legitimate political order. Kaplan (2009) criticizes the inflexible formulas for development imposed on fragile states by pointing to the positive relationship between identities, institutions, social cohesion, and state legitimacy and economic and political developments. Political fragmentation increases the cost of any interaction among citizens as well as the government. It also encourages opportunism, corruption, and neo-patrimonialism. Formal institutions become modes of rent-seeking and rivalry among competing groups. Easterly (2000) warns of an adverse effect that ethnic diversity has on growth and policy when institutions are weak. For example, a state of tribalism stemming from political and societal fracture overshadows a government's efforts toward building a modern, competent state.

Citing the literature above should not be mistakenly understood as stating that Daesh and development scholars have an identical goal. The legitimate and competent state that Daesh aspires to establish is markedly different from the one envisioned by a development scholar. Additionally, the ways in which these two parties address the identity issue are different. However, they still share the same belief regarding the importance of creating a cohesive society that wholeheartedly supports the state and its government.

On a different note, Hroch (1993, p. 6) discusses the nation-building process of an "exogenous" ruling class using a case from Eastern Europe. He argues that there are three steps exogenous elites follow in seizing effective control of a territory:

(1) [D]evelopment of a national culture based on the local language, and its normal use in education, administration and economic life; (2) the achievement of civil rights and political self-administration, initially in the form of autonomy and ultimately of independence; [and] (3) the creation of a complete social structure [...] out of the ethnic group.

Granted, Hroch's study describes a nation-building process that occurs through generation of elite groups that require decades of dissemination of information and assimilation. Daesh has been in existence for only a handful of years, thus far. However, Daesh is in a situation similar to the one that the elite groups in Eastern Europe were in when they initialized their nation-building process. Many of the cases analyzed by Hroch are similar to the case of Daesh in that Daesh is also an "exogeneous" elite group that, while sharing the same language and ethnicity as the region's majority population, advocates a foreign system of faith and order. Naturally, Daesh is looking to remedy the deficiencies that the Eastern European elites experienced.

While there are plenty of theories and studies that focus on the relationship between identity and state-building, there have only been a handful of attempts at making a connection among iconoclasm, identity, and state-building. Noyes' (2013) theory on the relationship between iconoclasm and politics is one study on which this research heavily relies.

Noyes interprets iconoclasm from the early stages of Calvinism and Wahhabism as manifestations of a conservative belief in religious purity. Additionally, he argues, iconoclastic activities in dramatically different locations and periods have contributed to formations of group identities. In the eighteenth century, the Bedouin army of Muhammad ibn Saud, whose family later became one of the founding forces of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, utilized iconoclasm within Wahhabism as an important tool in unifying local clans (pp. 80–89). The destruction of St. Pierre in 1535 signaled the beginning of the formation of a new social class and a generation that would later become the Calvinists, a group with its own theory of government based on John Calvin’s work entitled *The Institutes* (pp. 56–58).

Based on two prototypes, Noyes models a relationship between state-building and iconoclasm, as shown in Figure 3. In Noyes’ framework, a prerequisite for the entire process is a shared commitment to a monotheistic religion. In both prototypical cases, religious leaders invoked pre-existing religious doctrine on monotheism, some of which had been lost in practice, to seek legitimacy for their iconoclastic actions. Once utilized, iconoclasm leads to an alienation of dissidents after its target is framed as corrupt. At the same time, the religion of the iconoclast becomes the new *de facto* religion. This process of alienation of unwanted elements and affirmation of those that are wanted requires a theological emphasis on unity in government as well as the political authority of a religious ruler as an extension of the will of God.

Noyes' model is valuable in that it identifies a connection among the social, theological, and political aspects of iconoclasm. However, it is inadequate for the purpose of this research in its current form. For example, it does not explain why Daesh chose iconoclasm, above all else, as its primary tool in creating its identity. Differently put, Noyes' model does not explain why some groups use iconoclasm as a political tool while others do not, nor does it explain why some groups with monotheistic religions do not use iconoclasm as a political tool.

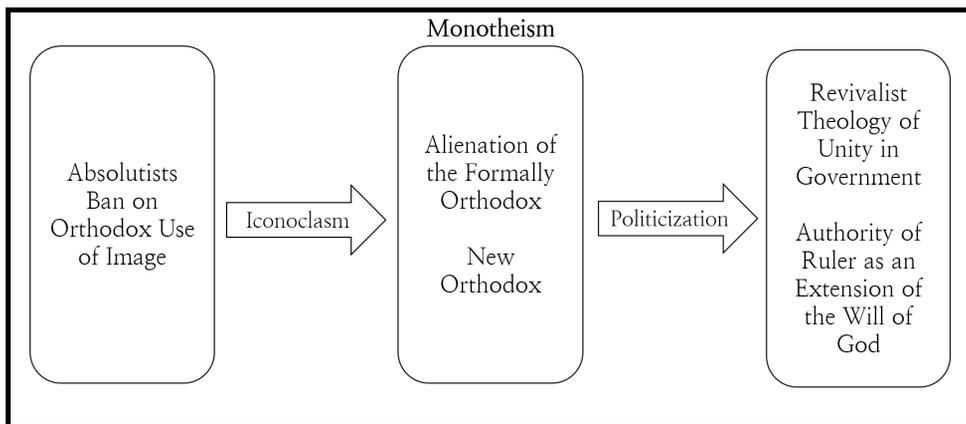


Figure 3. Noyes' model of the politics of iconoclasm. Adapted from *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam*, by J. Noyes, 2013.

Here, this research makes its contribution. This research theorizes that iconoclasm is in fact a form of symbolization. Where states use arts and

history for a political purpose, the opposing body of controlling elites follows suit by building its own symbol to suppress what exists and create a new identity. In the case of states that are prohibited from creating a symbol due to religious reasons, the act of breaking an existing symbol is in fact a symbol in itself and is celebrated. The following figure illustrates the crux of this research.

First, minoritarian elites in charge of building and ruling a state are faced with a legitimacy problem. Whether ethnic or religious, a minority group in charge of ruling the majority must prove how its interest is in line with that of the ruled majority. To do so, it must establish a common ground that connects minority rulers and majority subordinates. Therefore, it seeks to do so by utilizing archaeology in a political manner. Minoritarian rulers emphasize a historical period where the characteristic that makes them a minority is not a factor. For example, for a racial minority ruling group, it would be advantageous to emphasize the success and glory of an historical era when the dominant group was racially diverse and thus nullify the political disadvantages of being a racial minority. This selective process of stressing and de-stressing certain eras depending on political utility in the present applies to icons. Often, the symbols of an era chosen by the ruling group appear on flags, government seals, passports, and banknotes.

This reification of the selected history through an icon becomes a symbol of a national identity that subsequently serves the purpose of the ruling

group. While this process is obviously evident to those being ruled, similar methods are often required and chosen by the challenging group that seeks to build its own state.

	The Assad Regime (1970–)	Daesh (2013–)
Minoritarian Status	Ethnic Minority Rule, Failed Attempt at Merger with Egypt	Rivalry with Al-Qaeda and Taliban, Rivalry with Multiple Forces in Syrian Civil War
Political Archaeology	Making of Icons	Breaking of Icons, Praising the Breaking of Icons as Symbols of Faith
National Identity	Syrian Nationalism	Caliphism

*Picture 1.* National identity building through political archaeology under minoritarian rule by The Assad Regime and Daesh.

Although Daesh’s caliphism is vastly different from the Assad regime’s pan-Syrianism from an ideological perspective, its modes of state-building efforts are similar. This is uncoincidental because Daesh operates within the constraints that the Assad regime created. When Daesh advanced

to the Levant area to expand its power to the Syrian region, it quickly became aware of the dissatisfaction among the ruled majority regarding the unacceptable use of icons for political purposes. Hence, Daesh imitated the process favored by its potential supporters by stressing their versions of history. However, Daesh could not engage in a similar, alternative icon-building process because Sharia law prohibited them from creating icons. Instead, the tradition necessitated the breaking of false gods. Therefore, Daesh engaged in iconoclastic enterprises that appeased the ruled majority who were discontent with the previous ruling group's use of history and icons while using its icon-breaking activity as a symbol of its adherence to the holy scripture.

## Chapter 4. The Assad's and Daesh's Political Archaeology

This chapter analyzes how cases in the Syrian Republic and Daesh in Syria fit into the model discussed in the previous chapter. First, it will examine how Syria's Assad regime used historical artifacts and heritage sites to build national identity prior to the Arab Spring. Evidence of the state's utilization of the region's arts and history will be laid out in this chapter. Then, it will examine how Daesh came to strive for state-building and how its position as a minoritarian ruling group in a multi-frontal competition compelled it to utilize iconoclasm as a mode of state-building. Daesh's view on the Assad regime's political utilization of archaeology was inevitably hostile; however, Daesh's iconoclastic behaviors were intrinsically a mimicry of Assad's nationalistic archaeology. Daesh's endeavor seems to have had two major characteristics: It exaggerated the group's military capacity as well as adherence to its efforts, inciting fear among dissidents.

### 4.1 The Assad Regime's Nationalist Archaeology

Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad, have been the reigning leaders of the Republic of Syria since 1970. Given that the Assad family has been

controlling all aspects of the country for nearly five decades, it is surprising to know that Hafez al-Assad began his career as an aspiring soldier desperately trying to prove himself worthy of respect despite his background as an ethnic minority. The ruling Ba'athist Party fell under the control of a dictator only seven years after its historical failure to merge the entire country with Egypt under pan-Arabism. This happened during the midst of an identity crisis following the French Mandate, which suppressed development of any national identity. These circumstances, which made the Assad's regime a minoritarian rule, forced Hafez al-Assad and the Ba'ath Party to create a new identity which would make citizens overlook their past failures and personal complexes and bring them together under one leadership. Here, archaeology became an important tool for the regime, which used it to create symbols of national identity.

After achieving independence from France on April 17, 1946, similar to most new states, the Republic of Syria went through a painfully long and arduous period of upheaval. From an international perspective, it entered the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, got involved in the Second Arab-Israeli War (or the Suez Crisis) in 1956, and signed a pact with the Soviet Union in 1956. On the domestic side, there were two military coups in 1948 and one in 1954. The state merged with Egypt in 1958 and another military coup occurred in 1961, which led Syria to secede from the United Arab Republic. Another series of coups followed until the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party took control of

the cabinet in 1963. More commonly known as the Ba'athist Party, the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party controlled Syria until Hafez al-Assad took over in 1970.

Despite this period of chaos, the Republic of Syria and its successive governments were heavily engaged in the nationalization of archeology. Immediately after obtaining independence, the Republic of Syria staffed the *Service de Antiquities* (a bureaucratic organization concerning artifacts and archaeology under the French Mandate) with Arab scholars. In 1959, the government founded the *General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums* (GDAM) and subsequently reconstructed the National Museum of Aleppo in 1966 (Gillot, 2010). In 1966, the newly adopted Syrian Antiquities Law (*Qânûn al-'athâr*) seized control of archaeological excavations by mandating that interested parties secure a government license issued by the antiquities agencies. The law also mandated that all findings must be turned over to the government and formally published to curtail any abuse by private entities. However, in 1970, when the Ba'athist Party's oppressive dictator, Hafez al-Assad, became prime minister and president just a year later, state archaeology took a wild political turn that ended in it being used as a political tool. To understand the origin of the state's heavy involvement in archaeology, it is necessary to recognize exactly what country the Ba'athists and Hafez Assad inherited, what Hafez al-Assad had to overcome as a political leader from an ethnic minority, and what the Ba'ath Party believed.

The French Mandate not only intentionally refrained from developing human resources for adequate and independent administration, but also encouraged sectarian politics since it saw any kind of Syrian nationalism to be a threat to French rule. This habit continued through decades of turmoil, which was perhaps partially incited by the tradition of sectarian politics itself (Fearon, Kasara, and Laitin, 2007). When the Ba'athist Party seized power, Arab identity was more prevalent and popular than Syrian nationalism (Fildis, 2012). Internationally, borders to neighboring Islamic nations were technically respected, while local and regional influences still had a stronghold on political and social communities. Although few decades had passed since the end of the French Mandate, the social condition that the Ba'athist Party inherited was abundantly clear: Syria was severely lacking in national identity.

For Assad, who was a member of an ethnic minority born to a poor peasant family, social and political integration was a necessity if he was to stay in power. Traditionally, Sunni Muslims had been degrading Assad's ethnic group, the Alawites, due to their religious differences as well as their politically separatist tendencies (Reich, 1990). The demographic majority group's belief in the Alawites' social inferiority was not only a problem for Assad in his rise to power as the son of a poor peasant family, but also in his role as a leader of a country.

Finally, the Ba'athist Party's minoritarian characteristics encouraged reconsolidation of the Syrian identity. Born as a result of a merger between

an agrarian reform party, the Arab Socialist Party, and the Arab Ba'ath Party, the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party became a major political force in the early 1950s. Yet, the merger of two major political forces was not enough to end an era of factionalism; hence, the party proposed a state merger to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser in search of institutional and social stability. However, this also ended in failure in 1963 following Nasser's growing demands for centralized power over the Levant region. This failure affected the party's elites, encouraging them to move from pan-Arabism to Marxism. It subsequently led to an emergence of a minoritarian leadership primarily comprised of Alawites, who had predominantly been rural (Abboud, 2016, p. 29). This minoritarian rule became a core characteristic of the Ba'ath Party and Assad, who wanted an absolutist rule through control over political parties that incorporated groups beyond his core factions, who were predominantly rural (Seale, 1990, p. 172). This desire for power through the façade of democracy compelled Assad to adhere to pan-Syrianism to draw support from the majority. Unlike pan-Arabism, pan-Syrianism claimed historical rights over traditionally Syrian regions spanning from Syria to parts of Iraq, Jordan, Israel (Palestine), and Egypt. Pan-Syrianism was essentially areligious, as it stressed language and geography as two main characteristics that held the nation together (Pipes, 1990, pp. 101–103). In turn, it sought to thwart the social and demographic dominance of the Sunni Muslims, who threatened religious and ethnic minoritarian rule of the Ba'ath Party. For

example, the Ba'ath Party had been seamlessly incorporating pan-Syrianism into Syrian nationalism, although more recent changes made subtle note of Syrian patriotism which was specific to actions regarding the modern Republic of Syria (Bollinger, 2011). The party's minoritarian character, which began as a result of a socialist shift following the failure of pan-Arabism, created a need for consolidated popular support which in turn led to an active state intervention in archaeology in search of a new identity.

Although Bollinger (2011) claims that the general population is well aware of the Assad regime's pan-Syrianist focuses, the intensity of the regime's efforts requires explaining. One salient and undeniable piece of evidence regarding the government's view on history and national identity can be found in its currency. Currency normally bears portraits of notable people, architecture, artifacts, and other elements that represent glorious achievements that citizens should admire and thus consider the foundation of their national identity. In an authoritarian regime such as Assad's, the choices regarding what goes on paper money are not only a true representation of what people tend to perceive as important, but also of what example the government believes model citizens should follow. Hence, these deliberate and selective choices reveal the regime's stance on history and heritage as well as national identity. Recognizing these benefits, Zisser (2006) and Jones (2018) note that the history that the Assad regime celebrates and promotes as a root of national identity was chosen in mere passing.

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010-2018
Ugarit Kingdom Prehistoric	Ruins of Kingdom of Ugarit	500 ₪			
	Carved Head of Ugaritic Prince	500 ₪			
	Ugarit Gold bowl	500 ₪			
	The goddess of spring in ugarit	50 ₪			
	First Alphabet Tablet				50 ₪
Palmyrene Empire 3 BCE	Oldest Musical Note				500 ₪
	Elia Tablet				
	Palmyra	100 ₪		500 ₪	
	Queen Zenobia	100 ₪		500 ₪	
Roman Syria 0~2 CE	Temple of Baal				200 ₪
	Roman Theater	25 ₪	5 ₪		100 ₪
	Norias of Hama	1 ₪	5 ₪		50 ₪
	Minerva: The Goddess of Victory		5 ₪		200 ₪
	Marcus Julius				100 ₪
Umayyad Caliphate 7~8 CE	City gate of Bosra				100 ₪
	Roman Mosaic				1000 ₪
	Castle of Aleppo	5 ₪		50 ₪ (from 1977)	
Umayyad Caliphate 7~8 CE	Door of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi	50 ₪			1000 ₪
	Umayyad Mosque	10 ₪ (~1977)			2000 ₪
	Umayyad Dinar	1 ₪			1000 ₪

Figure 4. Images appeared in Syrian banknotes since 1970



This research further considers salient evidence and analyzes banknotes in detail.

Since Hafez al-Assad gained control of the country in 1970, there have been 52 renewals and additions to Syrian banknotes. Analyzing the appearances of artifacts in banknotes reveals a few key points. First, artifacts from the Roman Syrian Era (0–2 CE) have been appearing more frequently on banknotes (Figure 4). While a Roman theater was the only Roman Syrian artifact used in 1970 when Hafez al-Assad gained control, the number of artifacts from the same era grew to three in 1978 and remained until the Bashar al-Assad's rule increased it to four in 2015. Second, despite the Ottoman empire being the most recent historical era, its artifacts have disappeared from Syrian banknotes. Only Al Azem Palace appeared on the ten pound note from 1978 to 1996. Third, artifacts with characteristics of idols appeared on banknotes. Queen Zenobia and Salah al Din were established by the regime as important historical figures of the past, but Sharia law prohibits the celebration of individuals using images. The Goddess of Spring is literally an image of a false god, and the Temple of Ba'al is a temple of a false god. Cherishing these images can easily be interpreted as idol worshipping, regardless of their archaeological value. Fourth, the aim of using modern images shifted from economic and industrial purposes to those involving politics and centralized power. From 1970 to 1997, modern images were limited to portrayal of workers in important industries using computer

numeric control (CNC) and textile machines. However, in 1998, patriotic symbols such as the Shrine of Unknown Soldiers and large modern buildings such as the Central Bank of Syria, the Parliament, and the al-Assad Library have appeared to reinforce the image of centralized power and authority.

In summary, the Assad regimes' adherence to pan-Syrianism, or Syrian nationalism, is abundantly clear in the currencies they produced. This intentional use of archaeology for political purposes traces back to one major hurdle the regimes faced. Al-Assad, who was a member of an ethnic minority, and the Ba'athist Party, which failed to promote pan-Arabism, had to create a new identity that brought everyone together. This led to the creation of pan-Syrianism, or Syrian nationalism, which emphasized expansionist heritage from the past to weaken the influence of two major dividing factors: ethnicity and religion. The stress on heritage took the form of glorification and sanctification of artifacts and history as symbols of Syrian identity and vision regardless of the artifacts' irreligious and even heretical nature from an Islamist perspective. As a result, civil society in Syria was generally aware of the relationship between archaeological projects and antiquities and the state's political purposes (de Cesari, 2015). However, the degree of success of this agenda is unclear. The general population outside the influence of the tourist economy refused to acknowledge a national heritage or stayed indifferent to preservation of such sites (Gillot, 2010). Also, despite the

regimes' efforts, pan-Syrianism crumbled like quicksand following the Arab Spring.

## 4.2. Daesh's Caliphate and Political Iconoclasm

Similar to al-Assad and the Ba'athist Party, Daesh suffered from a major complex. Demographically, while members of Daesh belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, which makes up the majority of Syria's population, it still suffers from the constraints of minoritarian rule. Daesh originally began as a splinter group of a terrorist organization with regional influence, known as *Al-Qaeda*. Then, upon entering Syria, it had to compete with the regular armed forces of the Syrian Republic, a civilian force strong enough to shake the country, other religious extremist groups, and foreign influences. Territories that were designated as part of the newly established caliphate one day could not be guaranteed the next. To succeed, Daesh had to not only establish coercive power at battlegrounds, but also bring its occupants together under one unifying identity. To accomplish the latter, it mimicked what the Assad regime had done to establish its national identity: It used archaeology for political purposes. However, because Daesh could only operate within what Sharia law allowed, it chose to show its dedication to extreme Islamist ideology and refrained from making an idol for people to admire. Instead, as a symbol of its belief and vision, Daesh chose to break

previously treasured icons and utilize this act in a manner similar to al-Assad's use of icons.

The beginning of the Arab Spring marked a temporary end to Bashar al-Assad's rule in Syria. A wave of desire for democracy that began in Tunisia overflowed to Syria on March 15, 2011. The temporary power vacuum in Syria paved the way for multiple groups to compete for power in the region. While the Free Syrian Army (comprised of former Syrian military officers who opposed al-Bashar) and the Syrian Armed Forces fought for dominance over the area, a small group of militant extremists that called itself *Jabhat al-Nusra li Ahl as-Sham* formed on January 23, 2013. The group, which is more commonly known as the *Al-Nusra Front*, attracted public interest and support by attacking the Syrian Armed Forces, claiming that it aimed to avenge Sunnis who had been murdered by the al-Bashar regime (Tovrov, 2012). Just a few months later, the Islamic State of Iraq announced a merger with the Al-Nusra Front and formed the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, which is known to western media as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Due to confusion from the power vacuum and a crowd of disgruntled citizens who were on edge, it was only a matter of time before extremist Sunni Muslims supported ISIL for an Islamic restoration.

The need for restoration of order and prosperity is exactly what the Al-Nusra Front and ISIL detected. Strategically, the group's response to the popular calling for restoration is iterated in Daesh's declaration of statehood.

In July 2014, Daesh published a document titled, "This is the Promise of Allah," which lays out the theological meaning and justification of caliphism. Referring to the condition of the Middle Eastern region before Islamification, Daesh's spokesperson, Mohammed Al-Adnani, defines Islam as an institution which brings order and prosperity. This assertion is scripturally backed by the following passage:

And brought together their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have brought their hearts together; but Allah brought them together. Indeed, He is Exalted in Might and Wise. (The Quran 8 : 63).

Daesh's diagnosis of the current state as incomplete, incapable, and insufficient in bringing order and prosperity to *Umma* (the community, or world) appeals to a revivalist sentiment for an ancient empire that is believed to be the deliverer of the golden age of Islam. Thus, Daesh attempted to become a sovereign and leading body in the jihadist movement against the West. Another passage that is central in a declaration of statehood is the following:

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a *Khilafah*" They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." (The Quran 2 : 30)

There are dozens of different interpretations of this passage. However, Daesh first established that those who do not agree with its interpretation are “deaf.” Then, it declared establishment of the *Khilafah*, a successive authority to Prophet Mohammad and a leader of the caliphate, to be an obligation and delaying or neglecting to contribute to its establishment to be a sin.

Daesh quickly jumped into action in 2014 based on its roadmap introduced in Figure 2. Although it is difficult to argue that iconoclastic terrorism comprises the entirety of Daesh’s activities, it is a significant part of their campaign. As Daesh laid out in *Dabiq*, the roadmap toward *Khilafah* begins with migration to a new settlement, which inevitably involves violence with the locals and rival extremist groups. Once it holds a territory under its control, Daesh begins to engage in iconoclastic terrorism. Photos of this take up a significant portion of the group’s magazine, *Dabiq*. Then, Daesh consolidates its position as a dominant force in the region and demonstrates this to domestic occupants and outside viewers by eliminating *Taghut*. Analysis of the circumstances in which Daesh developed explains why it settled on caliphism as its grand vision. However, it does not explain why iconoclastic activities were a necessary part of its efforts. While Abrahamic religions undeniably require monotheism, abstaining from idolatry does not strictly require physical destruction of objects recognized as antiquities. Investigation of what Daesh faced in competing for power in the Levant reveals why iconoclasm became an integral part of its action plan.

Daesh's vision of caliphism required the achievement of core tasks to succeed. Locally, this migration inevitably defined Daesh fighters and settlers as minority intruders. Until it had the popular support of locals, Daesh had to retain a minoritarian rule. This minoritarian rule compelled it to create an infrastructure to provide aid and services to locals (Revkin & McCants, 2015). However, at a larger scale, Daesh had to compete with other militant groups, including al-Bashar's army and rival extremist organizations.

Scholars who look below the surface often point to the traditional and historical conflict between the Shiites and the Sunnis and see the rise of Daesh as evidence of the growing hostility between two types of Muslims (Isakhan and Zarandona, 2018). Quilliam (2014, p. 9), a counter-extremism thinktank, stated in its report that "[The Islamic State] was able to accelerate its rise to power in light of the Syrian war." Also, Quilliam analyzed key ideological differences between the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda which hinted at an ideological clash within the Muslim community. Journalistic recollections of the Islamic State paint a similar picture. In an historical analysis, Gerges (2016) analyzes Daesh as a "symptom of the breakdown of state institutions in the heart of the Arab world and a clash of identities between Sunni and Shia Muslims" (p. 260).

However, this was a multifaceted conflict where old divisions did not merely separate Shiites from Sunnis. As previously discussed, unfinished political reformation and economic devastation following the Arab Spring

created a fertile ground for ideological extremism and violence. Given this, Daesh's biggest competitors were Bashar al-Assad's Syrian Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army. The former was the established power that Daesh attempted to challenge. The latter was a growing force that it stood level with in a fight against the Syrian Armed Forces. The initial force powering the Arab Spring was popular grievances against authoritarian regimes. In the case of Syria, Hafiz al-Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad, had been ruling the country as dictators for the past 40 years leading up to the Arab Spring. To the Syrians who supported the popular movement, it was a crusade toward restoration and prosperity, regardless of people's differing ideas concerning what these terms meant. The militant forces, one comprised of experienced armed soldiers and the other of militia, were equally threatening competitors that Daesh had to defeat to reach its caliphate. Although they differed in nature, Daesh treated them with the same strategy outlined above. In the eyes of Daesh fighters, both competitors were apostate forces that it had to defeat through military strength in the Levant region.

Another challenge that most scholars and media outlets did not see was the discontent toward the region's most notorious terrorist groups that had existed before the founding of ISIL. One of those groups was the Taliban. Although the physical space where the Taliban and Daesh fought each other was mainly in Afghanistan, Daesh was keenly aware of the Taliban's legacy as a group spearheading the fight against Western intruders. If Daesh was to

stand as the sole ruler of the region, it had to win the support of the extremist Sunni Muslims who found no reason to abandon their allegiance to the Taliban.

Therefore, Daesh's vision of a caliphate was to side with the Sunni Muslims on core issues, oppose al-Assad's pan-Syrianism, and compete with other extremist groups that the extremist Sunni population found inadequate. For this reason, Daesh's interpretation of caliphism necessitated a new identity that transcended national, ethnic, and religious factions while adhering to fundamentalist Islamic teachings. This detailed objective came with a list of limitations that curtailed Daesh from engaging in certain activities. Since Sharia law prohibits faithful followers from making an idol in the image of the Prophet Mohammad, positive utilization of history as a foundation of identity was not an option. Therefore, Daesh first turned to destroying examples of heritage that had been previously used as icons of pan-Syrianism. Then, it began to use the act of breaking an icon as a symbol of its commitment to Sharia law and as a delineating factor that separated it from other extremist groups.

As discussed, the Assad regimes printed images of false gods, a temple of a false god, rulers, and historical figures. Celebration of a false religion directly opposes the monotheistic nature of Islam. Portrayal of individuals using humanlike images is also prohibited because it carries the risk of becoming an idol for Muslims. Adherence to this belief is shown in Daesh's

version of currency, depicted in *Dabiq* 5(19). Following an announcement regarding the release of coins made for Daesh's caliphate, Daesh revealed a picture of three coins they intended to circulate within controlled territories and sell to supporters outside to secure funding for their operations. There is no doubt that political adulation of pre-Islamic artifacts by Assad and his pan-Syrian supporters caused an increasing amount of reluctance and a sense of heresy among the Sunni Muslim population, who make up around 70% percent of the population.<sup>①</sup> Adding to this, the Assad regimes promoted pan-Syrianism based on pre-Islamic history by using artifacts from those eras as symbols of Syrian identity. To Daesh, this, too, was heretical.

In discussing politically motivated use of artifacts, especially those from pre-Islamic eras, Daesh clearly recognizes the apostate's intent and condemns it in the following quote from the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of its magazine:

The kuffār (non-believers) had unearthed these statues and ruins in recent generations and attempted to portray them as part of a cultural heritage and identity that the Muslims of Iraq should embrace and be proud of. Yet this opposes the guidance of Allah and His Messenger and only serves a nationalist agenda. (p. 45)

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<sup>①</sup> Although Syria has not conducted a census on religion since the 1960s, Alasdair Drysdale and R.A. Hinnebusch (1991) estimate around 85% of Syrians to be Arabic-speaking Muslims. While 70% of Syrians are believed to be Sunni Muslims, Arabic-speaking Muslims make up around 60% of all Syrians (p. 222).

Daesh not only frames government authorities who are Muslims as non-believers, but also condemns their use of cultural heritage as a basis of national identity. The quote itself may only mention the case in Iraq. However, it is difficult to assume that Daesh regarded the Assad regimes and their nationalist archaeological projects any differently. In fact, internal Daesh documents released by Aaron Zelin on his website *Jihadology.net* show that Daesh perceived Palmyrene artifacts and al-Assad's nationalist archaeology as "the doctrine of shirk (polytheism) that the Nusayri (a pejorative term for Alawite) regime cultivated in the souls of the people of the town" (Al-Tamimi, 2015). One example of Daesh's attack on cultural heritage in Syria is its attack on the National Museum of Aleppo.

Before the Arab Spring and the subsequent civil war, Aleppo was the second largest city in Syria and one of the oldest cities in the world. More importantly for this research, Aleppo was home to a provincial museum that had made significant contributions toward building Syrian identity.

The National Museum of Aleppo was established in 1931 under the French Mandate's *Service des Antiquites*. Although institutionalization of the museum network required that many of the National Museum of Aleppo's exhibits be transported to a museum in Damascus, it still retained its characteristics as a provincial museum focusing on prehistoric artifacts (Zobler, 2011). Unmistakable evidence of the museum's focus on a prehistoric, autonomous identity separate from Islamic teaching was displayed at its front

entrance. The façade replicated a temple gateway from Tell Halaf. Tell Halaf is an archaeological site in the northeastern region of Syria where evidence of Neolithic culture dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE has been found. It is believed to have been under Hittite rule and later absorbed by the Assyrian empire in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Politically, it also dates from a period emphasized by the Assad regime, as evidenced by the appearance of Hittite artifacts on banknotes.

In December 2016, the Director-General of Antiquities and Museums (DGAM) reported that armed extremist gangs fired a large number of missiles and explosive bombs, which fortunately led to only moderate destruction of the museum's structure ("Huge Damages in the National," 2016). Although the report by DGAM did not specifically outline that behaviors associated with Daesh's deliberate destruction of cultural heritage were a part of *takfir* (excommunication), it is telling that the bombing was intended for a museum whose destruction would serve little strategic military purpose. The action also fails to yield profit to the attackers that is typically associated with looting. Hence, it is only logical to conclude that it had a political purpose—one that aimed to undermine the identity of the ethnically and religiously diverse region.

Another important factor that drove Daesh to engage in iconoclastic terrorism was its rivalry with regional extremist groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and iconoclasm was one act that Daesh could display to

differentiate itself with its rivals. One of the challenges Daesh faced concerned general fatigue among potential supporters regarding jihadism. While Islamic terrorism has been a headline in international news since the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States, little to none of the terrorist groups made headlines in their efforts to start a brand new state which would they control. To Daesh, actual terrorists who have been warring with the West and kill thousands of innocent civilians worldwide are weak-hearted heretics who are too afraid to take “the next step”. Eventually, potential Islamist extremists grew tired of repetition of failure by extremist groups in providing anything more than emotional satisfaction of seeing brutally murdered bodies of enemy. It is precisely one of the reasons why Daesh’s vision of caliphate was so attractive to the potential supporters in the first place. But Daesh had to prove that it is better than past jihadist groups in a way that exhibits boldness and delegitimizes the rivals. To Daesh, iconoclasm was the most vivid expression of its adherence to Sharia law, something other terrorist groups were too reluctant to fully commit to showing.

The most crucial weakness of the competitions according to Daesh was their lack of confidence and capacity to begin a new state and it has been a cause of growing grievances among extremist Muslims who saw such lacking as *Irja*. *Irja* literally translates to postponement. But in the context of ancient Islam, it refers to the postponement of the judgement on whether Shiite or Sunni Muslim are true Muslims until death (Akyol, 2015). But to

Daesh, *Irja* refers to reluctance to fulfill the duties of Islam and create a new state. In explaining this, one of the articles in the first edition of *Dabiq*, “From Hijra to Khilafah” states the following:

“The weak-hearted methodology of *irja*’ is one that can never fuel the jihad caravan on its path to Khilafah, rather it only brings indecision and fear, thus ruining the caravan’s ability to persist, and naively filling the road with obstacles that only serve the *tawaghit*” (p. 39).

This quote illustrates the condition of the Arab world, as described by Daesh in the beginning of the group’s depiction of its history. Daesh represents previous jihadist organizations as being stuck in a phase of harming western apostates while remaining hesitant to take charge and fill the vacuum of power by claiming leadership of *Umma* (community; the world).

In addition to framing rival groups as incompetent and indecisive, Daesh directly compares its vision of caliphism to the actions of others in convincing viewers of its rivals’ lack of faith. From the beginning, Taliban have been the prime subject of rivalry for Daesh. The Taliban had the highest “brand value” as an extremist group in the region after its 9/11 attack. Although the Taliban has not been directly involved in the Syrian Civil War, it is worthy of analysis because Daesh is not simply attempting to gain control in Syria or Iraq. In fact, Daesh aims to create a caliphate that stands as the one and only state of the entire Ummah, and this goal requires gaining support from viewers outside of the Levant region. Furthermore, Daesh is directly

competing with the Taliban in drawing international support from extremist followers from all over the world including predominantly Muslim countries like Indonesia. Therefore, Daesh's rivalry with the Taliban handsomely fits into the scope of this research although their areas of influence do not overlap exactly. *Dabiq* 13 (pp. 33~45) carries an interview with the governor of Wilayat Khurasan, which pertains to the northeast region of Afghanistan. In this interview, the Governor (the *Wali*) calls the Taliban "the nationalist Taliban" every time he mentions the rival group. He claims that "the nationalist Taliban movement" not only fails in fulfilling the vision of an integrated, world-encompassing Ummah by controlling only a part of Afghanistan, but also rules the apostate by tribal customs rather than Sharia law. Also, he notes that the nationalist Taliban condemned Daesh's attack on Shiite Muslims, which Daesh defends as attack on Rafidah (the rejectionist), on two occasions.

These checks on the Taliban reveal Daesh's view of its rivals. First, it deems the Taliban and other rival extremist groups as nationalist forces that ignore the Quran's call to unite *Ummah* under one caliphate. Second, it criticizes the Taliban's rule as secular and deviant from Sharia law, contrary to the Quran's demand. Third, it criticizes the Taliban for condemning Daesh's attack on Shiite Muslims and defending rejectionists. All these points of criticism are manifestations of Daesh's portrayal of the Taliban and other extremist groups. To Daesh, they are secularized Muslim pretenders who side

with false Muslim groups. These judgments are fundamentally religious, and they reveal that Daesh wishes to compete with rival groups on the basis of religious fundamentalism rather than military capacity, ability to provide public services, or any other areas that may normally be grounds for competition among groups of a different nature. To separate itself from other competitors on the basis of religion, Daesh had to engage in an activity that clearly demonstrated its fundamentalist beliefs. In this context, Iconoclasm was the obvious choice of action. Iconoclasm is an excellent source of global publicity. Although there has not been substantive evidence to suggest that Daesh funds its operations by accepting donations from its supporters overseas, The U.S. undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence David S. Cohen openly suggested wealthy donors of the region were funding Daesh. Reports suggests wealthy individuals were channeling funds to Daesh from Kuwait and Qatar (Lister 2014). Much like any other charity groups, terrorist groups compete for donations. In this case, Daesh competed with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda for funds from sympathizing wealthy donors from the region. To outstand as a frontrunner among the extremist groups, iconoclasm functioned as an instrumental tool.

### 4.3. Breaking Down Daesh's Behaviors: Palmyra

How, then, does Daesh's iconoclastic terrorism fit into the model that this research suggests? How does iconoclastic terrorism contribute toward state-building efforts? An examination of Daesh's iconoclastic terrorism in Palmyra provides important insights regarding the characteristics of its behavior. The group's decision to attack Palmyra, to destroy artifacts in a certain manner, and to spare some artifacts over others reveal their selective, bombastic, and cautious character, which contributes to the group's state-building efforts.

An examination of an example of Daesh's iconoclastic terrorism is helpful in explaining the results of its actions. Palmyra is a case that is particularly beneficial for this study. It was once occupied by Daesh forces, and multiple reports called for the international community to take immediate action to protect its artifacts. Fortunately, Palmyra is now free from Daesh rule, and allied forces have let archeologists thoroughly investigate the area to assess the degree of damage that the organization inflicted in the region.

Palmyra has been a major battleground for al-Assad's army and Daesh since 2015. From May 2015 to January 2017, Palmyra was the subject of four major offenses by Daesh and al-Assad's Syrian Armed Forces, who fought in an effort to win back the ancient city. Each offense caused both collateral and intended damage to cultural heritage. Considering Daesh's history of looting and destroying artifacts in Mosul, archaeologists all over

the world voiced their concerns. Famously known as the “Monuments Man of Syria,” Professor Maamoun Abdulkarim, Director–General of Antiquities and Museums for Syria, warned of the complete destruction of Palmyra. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)’s Director General, Irina Bokova, warned that “Palmyra has been insufficiently protected and has experienced indescribable horror and destruction” under Daesh’s control (“Syrian troops looting,” 2016).

Since then, reports of destroyed artifacts and monuments flooded the international news cycle. The Temple of Bel (“GTD ID: 201508300052,” 2015), the Lion God Statue (“Isis militants destroy,” 2015), the Monumental Arch (“GTD ID: 201510040053,” 2015), the Temple of Ba’al (GTD ID: 201508230061, 2015), and dozens of mosques faced the possibility of ruin. Roman artifacts in Bosra were also targeted. A university professor and the former general manager for antiquities and museums in Palmyra, Khaled al–Assad, was publicly decapitated for not revealing locations of archaeological treasures that Daesh believed to be in Palmyra (Melvin, Ellis & Abdelaziz, 2015). It is even reported that all six of Syria’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites have been destroyed or damaged as a result of the civil war. Daesh did not hesitate to let the world know what it had done, similar to its conduct after the destruction of artifacts at the Mosul Museum in Iraq (Shaheen, 2015a). Although Daesh did not document and release details regarding all of its destructive acts, the devastation of the

Temple of Ba'al was captured and revealed on Twitter ("Harrowing images show," 2015). Images of men carrying barrels of what seemed to contain explosives, barrels tied to columns, and explosions appeared online, and the world replied in outrage. In fact, nine of the fifteen issues of *Dabiq* feature at least one image of broken artifacts or Daesh militants breaking an artifact<sup>②</sup>. Violent destruction and reports online and through official media outlets have been used as proof of their adherence to Sharia law and have functioned as a foundation of the identity that Daesh aims to construct.

Although Daesh made a pledge to only destroy artifacts it deemed blasphemous and to leave much of the city's ancient buildings intact (Shaheen, 2015b), this promise was far from reassuring. Fortunately, in March 2016, Syrian forces took control of Palmyra with the help of a Russian airstrike. Quickly, archaeologists flew to the scene to assess the damage done to artifacts in Syria. What they found was pleasantly surprising. Contrary to their initial expectations, Palmyra's ruins were mostly intact. Abdulkarim, who once called himself "The saddest museum director in the world," was elated to find that many of the most important ruins such as the Roman theater, the Great Colonnade, and the Citadel remained untouched by Daesh (Hamlo, 2016).

The destruction of artifacts provides few insights. First, Daesh was

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<sup>②</sup> *Dabiq 1*, p. 17; *Dabiq 2*, pp. 14–17; *Dabiq 3*, p. 13; *Dabiq 8*, pp. 22–24; *Dabiq 10*, pp. 3, 54; *Dabiq 11*, pp. 32–33, 62–63; *Dabiq 12*, p. 41; *Dabiq 13*, p. 41; *Dabiq 15*, pp. 1, 46, 82

perceptive in choosing its targets of iconoclastic terrorism. It selectively chose the ruins of Palmyra, a UNESCO-acknowledged World Heritage Site, as a hostage against friendly and hostile observers. In addition to finding the strategic benefit of controlling a habitable city near a large oil reserve appealing, Daesh also found Palmyra to be a desirable site because news of its occupation by the terrorist organization was certainly destined to draw the attention of the entire world. Also, Palmyra was a site that had been used by the al-Assad establishment as a focal point of national identity despite the kingdom's non-Islamic background. Therefore, the attacks on the cultural heritage of Palmyra were not only destined to be reported to everyone, but would also display Daesh's dedication to Islamic fundamentalism by undermining a heritage that al-Assad used as a national icon and that no other jihadists dared to destroy. Daesh's repeated attempts to reclaim the city after losing it to the Russian-backed Syrian Armed Forces are obvious evidence of its importance. Just three months after the group's formation, Daesh attempted to gain control of the city (Holmes, 2013). In May 2015, Daesh launched one of its largest and most successful military operations to advance to Palmyra. When Daesh lost control of the city following a two-month-long offensive in July 2015 and a two-week-long offensive in March 2016 by the Syrian Armed Forces, it attempted to recapture the city in December 2016, only to lose it again to the Syrian Armed Forces a month later. This back-and-forth by Daesh and the Syrian Armed Forces over

Palmyra reveals how important the city was to them. To al-Assad, Palmyra was the location where Queen Zenobia ruled her kingdom and led a resistance against the Roman invaders, an image that Hafez al-Assad frequently used when portraying himself. Bashar Al-Assad enthusiastically followed by erecting a statue of Queen Zenobia in Umayyad Square, even in the midst of the Syrian Civil War in 2015 (Isaacs, 2015). To Daesh, gaining control of the city was as important as it was to al-Assad.

Second, icons were not just demolished for the purpose of destroying a false god or rejecting sanctification of idols; rather, they were destroyed in a way that allowed observers to learn about Daesh's policy on idols. According to reports, Daesh demolished the Temple of Bel with 30 tons of explosives, blowing it up into pieces ("ISIL blows up," 2015). Given the resource constraints that Daesh had to manage, its use of large quantities of military resources reveals that Daesh aimed to display its destruction for observers to see. Also, decapitating the 82-year-old guardian of cultural heritage in a community square and leaving the remains in public was clearly done to make a statement regarding the group's authority over the city as well as its stance on artifacts.

Finally, the artifacts confirmed to have been spared by Daesh reveal how the organization viewed residents of occupied territories. In discussing the possible reasons behind the relatively undamaged condition of Palmyra after Daesh's occupation, Abdulkarim stated, "I think Daesh understood very

strongly that if they continued to destroy buildings, they would be attacked by the local community” (Fahim 2016). Artifacts of Palmyra, and any other artifacts for that matter, are central to the identities of the Syrian people. Destruction of cultural heritage is humiliating to local communities and defies common agreement regarding its value (Harmanşah, 2015). Clearly, the destruction of cultural heritage infuriated locals while invigorating those who agreed with Daesh’s view. However, destruction of all cultural heritage, including that which Daesh could not justify demolishing, could backfire with respect to the local people. Instead of blindly bulldozing all ancient buildings, Daesh attempted to educate the residents of Tadmur, a modern name for Palmyra, about the dangers of *shirk* (polytheism). An internal Daesh document written by the Department of Education to Wilayat Homs, an area associated with Tadmur, orders Daesh officials to educate children about the following rules:

- . Cancel the doctrine of shirk that the Nusayri regime cultivated in the souls of the people of the town.
- . Establish correct Islamic doctrine free of shirk, apostasy, and sanctifying of idols.
- . [Make] the Muslim populace aware that the land of the Caliphate encompasses all the Muslims except whoever comes upon shirk and apostasy.
- . [Warn] of the consequences for dealing in idolatrous antiquities and

ephemeral statues.

. [Make] children aware that one remains for God alone without the mushrikeen and their idols/stones. (Al-Tamimi, 2015)

Although the date of this document's issuance is unknown, it is clear that Daesh's central governing body is aware of the significance of historical artifacts in Palmyra and encourages occupants to internalize the group's interpretation regarding the objects they treasure. More importantly, it seems to have realized that the destruction of cultural heritage, especially that which has a high profile such as the ancient ruins of Palmyra, can ultimately be deleterious to its cause as it will inspire worldwide outrage. As briefly mentioned, on May 28, 2015, a man identifying himself as Abu Laith al-Saoudi spoke to Syria's Alwan Radio and claimed that Daesh would only "pulverize statues that the miscreants used to pray for" and added "as for the historical monuments, we will not touch [them] with our bulldozers as some tend to believe" (Radio Alwan, 2015). This statement contradicts the destruction of the Monumental Arch in Palmyra or the Bashtabiya Castle in Iraq ("ISIS destroy ancient Bashtabiya," 2015), which had no religious ties. The reasoning behind al-Saoudi's unusual remarks, assuming that the speaker was indeed al-Saoudi, is Daesh's concern over the growing international grudge regarding Daesh's iconoclastic terrorism. Addressing the international community's concern over the group's destruction of cultural heritage and stating that "some tend to believe" indicates that Daesh is well aware of the

sentiments and that they can be detrimental to their efforts in achieving their goal of state-building.

Daesh's discerning, bombastic, and cautious destruction of artifacts in Palmyra shows that its actions are tied to state-building efforts. To Daesh, gaining control of Palmyra was equal to dismantling one of the foundations of al-Assad's pan-Syrianism and pan-Syrianist identity. Once captured, Daesh utilized massive amounts of explosives which could have been used toward militaristic efforts to blow away ancient structures, and also ceremonially murdered an art expert. Daesh committed these acts to symbolize to the West and competing extremist groups who it was and what it believed, and to establish unchallenged authority over the territory. Finally, it refrained from destroying high-value artifacts and publicly announced its decision to the West in hopes of ameliorating the growing discontent which could have ultimately been detrimental to its state-building efforts by giving the West a reason to intervene even more heavily.

All of these behavioral characteristics are tied to Daesh's vision of creating a caliphate. Its decision to target and occupy Palmyra was based on its clear understanding of the importance that al-Assad's regime placed on an ancient ruin in creating Syrian national identity. Daesh's attack was aimed at dismantling the existing Syrian national identity and replacing it with the group's own. The process required ceremonial breaking of images and significant artifacts that was made possible by stretching Sharia law to allow

using the image of demolition as a symbol of the group's vision and beliefs, which made up its new identity. Moreover, the cautious decision to refrain from destroying high-value targets (which could be argued to be blasphemous) hints that the economic and strategic goal of Daesh is its pursuit of a caliphate.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

This research attempted to do the following: Review literature on the rarely explored issue of iconoclastic terrorism; synthesize a theory connecting symbol, identity, and politics; and describe how Daesh's state-building efforts employing icon-breaking are a mimicry of the Assad regime's state-building efforts using icon-making.

Previous attempts to explain Daesh's atrocious destruction of cultural heritage relied on analysis of the conflict based on its most salient features. Financial gain, religious sectarian conflicts, and the theology of Islam have been popular explanations for most of the problems arising in the region. Admittedly, they do have some explanatory power. However, the materials that Daesh produced first-hand suggest that all of its actions point toward establishing a caliphate in its image. Iconoclastic terrorism is also committed within this organization's framework. According to *Dabiq*, a magazine produced by Daesh, destabilizing *Taghut* is one of five steps required for building a caliphate. It is a process of breaking enemies and idols that stand against what Daesh interprets and enforces as the law of the Quran. Next, the research attempted to find the relationship among symbol, identity, and state-building.

Minoritarian rule triggers elites to develop a new national identity based on politically motivated interpretation of archaeology and history. For al-Assad and the Ba'athist Party, the lack of an encompassing identity immediately after gaining independence from the French Mandate, the Ba'athist Party's failed pan-Arabist attempts, and al-Assad's background as an ethnic minority contributed to the desire for invention of a new national identity. The evidence of the Assad regime's politically motivated use of history and heritage is clearly laid out in the banknotes that it produced since taking office in 1970.

Similarly, Daesh exerted minority rule despite the concerning news reports disseminated in the West. The organization had to survive a storm of chaos among powerful actors such as the Syrian Armed Forces, the Free Syrian Army (backed by the United States), and rival extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. To create a new state, it had to compete with the Syrian Armed Forces and the Free Syrian Army by dismantling the pan-Syrian identity through destruction of cultural heritage that had been functioning as a symbol of national identity. However, Daesh also had to face rival extremist groups and exhibit its fundamentalist adherence to Sharia law through acting more violently toward false gods. At the same time, Daesh used the act of breaking idols as a symbol of its beliefs and vision for a caliphate, as evidenced by the group's bombastic display of destruction in videos and magazines.

Daesh's destruction of Palmyra demonstrates the nature of the group's iconoclastic terrorism. It selectively chose Palmyra as an exemplary model of destruction because al-Assad had previously used the city as a cornerstone of national identity. Then, the group destroyed artifacts in a manner that exaggerated their coercive power in an effort to use the image of destruction as a founding symbol of its beliefs. Daesh's decision to spare some objects that could have easily been interpreted as rightful targets of *taghut* reveals that it only destroys artifacts as long as the benefit of demonstrating the group's power will outweigh the cost of the outcry from the world.

Overall, this research aimed to contribute to the general study of terrorism and political science in the following ways. First, it attempted to organize literature on the rarely explored subject of iconoclastic terrorism. Although there have been a few notable incidents of iconoclastic terrorism, the concept has not been deeply explored by political scientists. Beginning with Daesh's systematic and dedicated attacks on cultural heritage, the subject recently became a topic for investigation, and this research provides the most up-to-date guide to the matter. Second, it attempted to test the limit of an approach within terrorism studies that focuses on the strategic nature of terrorism. Although research approaches based on economic and rational choice have been predominant in social sciences, terrorism is one subject where the general population still jumps to conclusions based on the belief that all terrorists are insane or irrational. By laying out the strategic nature of

what seems to be one of the most insane and outrageous acts possible, this research attempted to test how an analytical approach can explain even the most extreme actions. Lastly, this research attempted to study a violent behavior by examining what has been argued as the motive by the perpetrator rather than interpreting the behavior based the context of the observer. Daesh has been claiming statehood as the ultimate object since the beginning of its operation. However, previous literature has been trying to understand Daesh's behavior based on the viewer's incentive structures and scope of reason which are inevitably different from those of the perpetrator. Therefore, this research aimed to first be in the group's shoes and examine how iconoclasm is situated within the world it created.

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## 국문초록

# 이슬람국가의 성상파괴테러의 기원: 시리아 국가주의, 칼리피즘, 그리고 국가건설을 중심으로

신은재

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이 논문은 이슬람국가(ISIL)의 성상파괴테러를 아사드 정권과의 관계를 분석해 설명하고자 한다. 기존의 설명들이 도굴의 경제적 이익, 시아파-수니파 간의 갈등, 그리고 이슬람의 교리에 집중해 이슬람국가에 의한 문화유산 파괴를 설명하려고 했다면, 이 논문은 이슬람국가가 궁극적인 목표로 천명하는 칼리프 국가 건설의 목적에 성상파괴가 어떻게 작용하는지 분석하여 이를 설명하고자 한다.

이 연구는 아사드정권의 국가건설을 향한 노력과 이에 대해 명확하게 알고있었던 이슬람국가의 국가건설을 향한 노력의 유사점에 중점을 두어 문제에 접근한다. 아사드정권과 이슬람국가는 공통적으로 소수자정권이었으며 새로운 국가를 건설하기 위해서는 새로운 국가정체성을 필요로 했다. 먼저, 하페즈 알 아사드는 소수민족 출신이었으며 그의 당인 바트당은 집권 이전 시리아와 이집트의 합병을 추진했다 실패한 이력을 가지고 있었다. 따라서, 아사드정권은 그들의 소수자적인 특성을 무색케 만드는 새로운 국가 정체성

을 만들어 시리아인들을 통합해야만 했다. 이 필요에 의해 만들어진 국가주의적인 고고학은 종교로서의 이슬람과 시리아 지역의 민족적 단일성이 중요하지 않았던 시대를 선택적으로 찬양했다. 아사드정권의 시리아 국가주의가 강요되면서 시리아의 절대다수를 차지하고 있는 수니파 시리아인들은 비이슬람적인 역사에 대한 강조에 대한 반감을 갖기 시작했다. 결과적으로 이 불만은 시리아내전과 함께 이슬람국가로 하여금 반 정권 정서를 이용할 수 있는 기회를 제공하고 말았다.

한편, 이슬람국가 역시 소수자정권으로서 한계를 극복해야 했다. 이슬람 국가는 시리아지역에서 시작된 알 누스라로부터 시작되었으나 시리아 지역에서 단 한번도 압도적인 힘을 확보하지 못했다. 이슬람국가는 종교적 근본주의에 반대하는 서구열강들은 물론, 아사드정권의 정규군과 시리아 내전에 참가한 시민군과도 군사적으로 대치했다. 또한, 이슬람국가는 탈레반이나 알카에다 같은 지역의 다른 극단주의 테러집단과도 종교적으로 경쟁했다. 그런 이슬람국가에게 있어 성상파괴테러는 국가건설이라는 목표달성을 위한 효과적이고 효율적인 방안이었다. 문화유산의 파괴는 이슬람국가의 군사적인 능력뿐만 아니라 이슬람 종교법에 대한 그들의 강한 충성을 드러내는 방법이며, 결과적으로 군사적이고 종교적인 메시지를 한번에 던질 수 있는 방안이었다. 또한, 아사드정권이 정권이 강요하는 국가정체성의 상징으로 사용해온 유적지를 파괴하는 행위는 이슬람국가가 강요하는 새로운 정체성의 상징으로 사용됐다. 이슬람 종교법이 물리적 상징물의 찬양을 반대하기 때문에 우상파괴를 사상의 기반으로 사용하는 것은 이슬람국가와 지지자들에게 간편하고 매력적인 방법으로 다가왔다.

이슬람국가의 성상파괴테러의 기원에는 이전 정권에 의한 고고학의 정치적인 이용이 있음을 알 수 있다. 문화유산을 인류 전체의 유산으로 아끼고 보호하는 것은 매우 중요한 의무지만, 고고학과 역사가 정치적 목적을 위해 어떻게 이용되어 왔는지 역시 깨달아야 한다. 정부가 역사를 지배를 위한 도구가 아니라 보물로서 귀중히 여길 때 우리는 진정으로 우리의 문화 유산을 보호할 수 있을 것이다.

**주요어** : 이슬람국가, 성상파괴, 소수자정권, 국가정체성, 국가건설

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