Course Number 338: *The Rise of the Islamic State*

*Course Time: Winter Semester 2016 (January 4-22)*  
*Classroom Location: Online*  
*Office Location: Online*  
*Office Phone Number: 202-256-2667 (cell)*  
*Office Hours: Tuesday 8-10pm or by appointment*

*Lecturer: Jason Blazakis*

This course will provide an in-depth overview into the terrorist group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also known as the Islamic State, the Arabic acronym Daesh, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, in addition to other aliases). The rapid rise of the Islamic State has taken counterterrorism policymakers and foreign policy practitioners by surprise.

This course provides a comprehensive look at the Islamic State. In an effort for students to come to a common understanding of key terms that will be discussed throughout the course, a session will be devoted to understanding key concepts and terms related to Islamic history. In this regard, students should take away from the course a baseline understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, meaning of the caliphate, the five pillars of Islam, and Shar’ia law.

The course will trace the history of the Islamic State’s rise and will examine the leadership figures/personalities behind the group. The course will also examine the Islamic State’s connection and ultimate divorce from al-Qa’ida. The course will all examine how the group finances its operations as well as the rise of its affiliates.

Finally, the course will also explore the group’s use of foreign fighters and social media to further its agenda. Global responses in an effort to counter the Islamic State will also be discussed.

*Learning Objectives*

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the history of the Islamic State from its creation to its current status as a significant power broker primarily operating in Syria and Iraq.
- Understand the key personalities and motivations of leadership figures within the Islamic State as well as methods the group utilizes to accrue wealth, territory, and general support.
- Understand the reasons for the split between the Islamic State and al-Qa’ida as well as the implications of the split to include the development of the Islamic State’s affiliates.
- Comprehend the role of women and foreign fighters within the Islamic State.
- Understand the U.S. and global response focused on countering the Islamic State through the application of soft and hard power.
**Course Materials**
The following books are required for the course:


***All other readings will be available on the course website on ELMS or at the McKeldin Library. In other words, you must buy, find, or borrow above said books.***

**Course Requirements**
Your final grade in this course will be based on:

40% Final Paper  
35% Mid-Term Paper  
15% Class participation  
10% Blog

Your grades for all assignments in the course will be numerical values. Numerical scores correspond to letter grades as follows:
Final Paper

The final paper will be due January 23 at noon. The final paper will constitute 40% of your grade. The final paper should be approximately ten pages, double-spaced, in twelve point font. My rubric for scoring the final papers will be based on: 1) the quality of your ideas and whether you’ve answered the question you are writing about, 2) are your thoughts well organized and coherent, 3) do you provide adequate support for your assertions in way of evidence and footnotes (see notes on plagiarism above), 4) stylistically are you using words precisely and are your sentences varied and well structured, 5) is your paper free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.

For the final paper, you should consult with me as early as possible. You should narrowly focus your topic. For example, it is not realistic to write a ten-page paper on the Islamic State’s recruitment, history, financial operations, and foreign fighter network. Rather, it may make more sense to write a ten-page paper on the flow of foreign fighters form Europe to Iraq/Syria and how the Islamic State’s message may resonate there.

Mid-Term Paper

The mid-term will be due to the instructor by 11:59pm on January 14. The mid-term will consist of a five-page evaluation of an issue of the ISIL magazine named Dabiq. At the start of the semester, students will be assigned one issue out of the eleven issues issued by the Islamic State. Students will be asked to evaluate questions posed by the lecturer related to the Dabiq issue they’ve been assigned. At the beginning of class, the lecturer will provide students their assignment online on the course website’s message board. For example, the 11th issue of Dabiq is entitled “From The Battle of Al-Ahzab to the War of Coalitions.” Student(s) assigned Dabiq issue 11 will be asked to summarize the main themes of that issue and will be expected to answers questions posed by the lecturer, such as “who are the intended audiences of this issue?” Or, “do you think the Islamic State has messaged to the coalition. If so, why and how do you think the message has been received by this audience?” Mid-term papers will be concise and grades will be based on 1) how well the mid-term is written (e.g. punctuation/grammar), 2) Does the paper directly answer the questions posed, 3) has the writer exhibited original thought and analyzed the issue in an informed manner.

Class Participation
In-class participation is a critical component of the course. In order to facilitate discussion, it is essential that you keep pace with the assigned readings; stay abreast of current events related to the Islamic State; and follow the threads of the class blog. Class participation will represent \textbf{15\%} of your grade.

**Class Blog:**
Students are required to participate in the class blog by offering thoughtful analysis on topics for discussion. The instructor will moderate discussions and will propose topics based on current events or required readings. Each student will be required to present a short video or audio clip on a topic related to the Islamic State. The blog will be opinion-oriented but should be well-informed and well-reasoned. If students are unable to provide an audio/video blog they will be expected to provide a blog over the course of the semester in writing in a dedicated online area on the course website.

Blog Participation will represent \textbf{10\%} of your grade.
**CLASS POLICIES:**

*Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.* Students are expected to adhere to the University of Maryland’s Code of Student Conduct and to treat each other with respect. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Students who are unable to demonstrate civility with one another or with the instructor or teaching assistants, will be subject to referral to the Office of Student Conduct or to the Campus Police. The Code of Student Conduct is available online: http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/docs/v100b.pdf.

Students are also expected to adhere to the University of Maryland’s Code of Academic Integrity and to refrain from acts of academic dishonesty. All students must write the Student Honor Pledge on all assignments:

*I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this examination.*

Any student committing an apparent act of academic dishonesty will be subject to referral to the Student Honor Council. The Code of Academic Integrity is available online: http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/docs/III-100A.pdf.

*Plagiarism.* I will not tolerate plagiarism. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will receive an “F” on the assignment, and you may be referred to the University of Maryland’s Honor Council. The following text on what constitutes plagiarism comes from the website, http://www.plagiarism.org/, which is a useful resource if you would like more information on the topic:

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another individual’s work or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like “copying” and “borrowing” can disguise the seriousness of the offense. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following practices are acts of plagiarism:

“The Forgotten Footnote”

The writer mentions an author's name for a source but neglects to include specific information on the location of the material referenced. This practice often masks other forms of plagiarism by obscuring source locations.
“The Misinformer”
The writer provides inaccurate information regarding the sources, making it impossible to find them.

“The Too-Perfect Paraphrase”
The writer properly cites a source but neglects to place quotation marks around text that has been copied word-for-word (or close to it). Although attributing the basic ideas to the source, the writer is falsely claiming original presentation and interpretation of the information.

“The Resourceful Citer”
The writer properly cites all sources, paraphrasing and using quotations appropriately. The catch? The paper contains almost no original work!

“The Perfect Crime”
In this case, the writer properly quotes and cites sources in some places, but goes on to paraphrase other arguments from those sources without citation. This way, the writer tries to pass off the paraphrased material as his or her own analysis of the cited material.

“I Thought We Didn't Have to Quote Facts”
Because the Internet makes information so readily available, students may find it difficult to tell the difference between “common knowledge” they are free to use, and original ideas which are the intellectual property of others. When in doubt, cite sources.

“Confusion about Expectations”
Students may not be aware of what proper research requires. They may think they are being asked simply to report critical commentary, or to “borrow” from a number of sources to show that they have “done their homework.” In either case, it becomes a problem if what they submit is predominantly comprised of the work of other scholars and/or analysts. One of the most common sources of confusion is the ambiguity of terms such as “analyze” and “discuss.” These words have specific meanings in academic discourse, and they imply a degree of original thought that goes beyond mere “reporting.” (Plagiarism.org)
Course schedule

Lecture 1
Key terms in Islamic history as they apply to our future discussions about the Islamic State
During this session students will develop a baseline understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, meaning of the caliphate, the five pillars of Islam, and Shar’ia law. How do these terms in Islamic history apply towards the discussions we will have over the course of the semester on the Islamic State.

Required Readings:

Lecture 2
History of the Islamic State
What are the origins of the Islamic State? How has the group evolved since its creation in the late 1990s, under a former name, to where it stands today? What is the vision and long-term objectives of the group?

Required Readings:
- Stern and Berger: Chapters 1 and 2, pages 13-53.

Lecture 3
The Leadership and Key Personalities of the Islamic State (From Zarqawi to al-Baghdadi)
Students will explore the key al-Qa’ida in Iraq/Islamic State (AQI/IS) leadership figures and their personalities. What drives the decision-making of AQI/IS leadership?

Required Readings:

Lecture 4
The Islamic State and al-Qa’ida (AQ): from affiliation to disaffiliation
What is the historical connection between AQ and the Islamic State? What tensions manifested between the two groups when they were affiliated? Why did the groups split from each other?

Required Readings:
- Weiss, Michael and Hassan, Hassan: ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, Regan Arts, 2015. pages 179-199

Lecture 5
The Islamic State’s Financial Operations
How does the Islamic State finance operations? How does the Islamic State move money? What methods does the Islamic State deploy to raise money? What is the relationship between the territory the Islamic State holds and its ability to finance operations? Is the Islamic State the richest terrorist group in history?

Required Readings:

Lecture 6
The Islamic State’s Affiliates
Which groups have pledged bayat to the Islamic State? Why did these groups affiliate with the Islamic State? Are these affiliations meaningful in a practical way or are they merely symbolic. Groups covered in readings/lecture will range from Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (now known ISIL-Sinai Province) to ISIL-Khorasan Province?

Required Readings:
Lecture 7
The Islamic State’s Propaganda Operations and its use of Social Media
How effective is the Islamic State in communicating with adherents? How does it communicate with allies, sympathizers, and enemies? What are the key underlying messages the Islamic State espouses through the use of social media? How are Islamic State’s propaganda operations different from groups like al-Qa’ida? Why does the Islamic State’s rhetoric resonate so much more effectively than past terrorist groups? What is different about its message?

Required Readings:
- Stern and Berger: Chapters 5-7, pages 101-175.

Lecture 8
The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters and the Islamic State
Is the phenomenon of foreign fighters new? Why is the Islamic State so attractive to foreign fighters? How does the Islamic State recruit foreign fighters? Are the Islamic State’s foreign fighters critical component of the group? Why do foreign fighters leave?


Lecture 9
The Role of Women in the Islamic State
What roles do women play in the Islamic State? How does the Islamic State recruit women to its cause? How do women find their way to the Islamic State? Once in the Islamic State what do women do?

Required Readings:

Lecture 10
The Islamic State Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTPs), terrorist operations and management structure
What are the Islamic State’s TTPs? What kind of operations does the Islamic State carry out? What is the operational effectiveness of the Islamic State? How is the Islamic State structured? Are there any differences between how the group is structured today as opposed to how it is structured today?

**Required Readings:**
- Stern and Berger: Chapter 9, pages 199-219.

**Lecture 11**

**Countering the Islamic State: the U.S. response**

How is the United States countering the Islamic State? What are the various strategies being pursued to uproot the Islamic State from the territory it has accrued in Syria and Iraq? What is the role of hard-power in counter the Islamic State? What is the role of soft power in counter the Islamic State? What are the prospects of successfully degrading the Islamic State in the near or long term?

**Required Readings:**
- Byman, Daniel: *Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Global Jihadist Movement*. Oxford University Press, 2015. pages 223-228

**Lecture 12**

**Countering the Islamic State: The Global Response**

What has the global response been to the rise of the Islamic State? What has the group’s rise meant for international peace and stability? Has the international community dealt effectively with the challenges posed by the Islamic State? What mechanisms have been established in an effort to counter the Islamic State’s operations?

**Required Readings:**

**Lecture 13**

**Concluding Lecture**

What are the future prospects of the Islamic State? Is it a transformative terrorist group? Can it be defeated?
Required Reading:
-Stern and Berger: Chapter 10, pages 233-256.

Final Paper: Due on January 23, 2016