

The Islamic State's Territorial Methodology

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Gloria and Ken Levy Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



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In this new study, jihadi expert Aaron Y. Zelin provides a framework for understanding how the Islamic State goes from no control to full consolidation of control in a particular area. Three case studies show how this framework plays out ...

Since June 2014, when the Islamic State proclaimed itself a caliphate, a pattern has emerged in the way IS expands into new territories and consolidates its control. In this new study, jihadi expert Aaron Y. Zelin provides a framework for understanding how the Islamic State goes from no control to full consolidation of control in a particular area. Three case studies show how this framework plays out: the Islamic State's success in Wilayat Tarabulus in Libya, its failure in Wilayat Idlib in Syria, and its ongoing building process in various self-proclaimed provinces in Yemen. This framework is unique in providing tools to analyze IS's position with regard to expansion or recession irrespective of the locus of IS provinces. This paper thus provides important insights into IS's state-building project and how it hopes to export its model to its constellation of provinces.

Once the Islamic State has a stranglehold on an area, challenge from within is highly unlikely to succeed, so it is imperative that regional and global actors make IS containment a top priority. Otherwise, the grim reality is that the Islamic State will become further entrenched within the region and beyond.

The Author

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on jihadi group governance in the Levant and North Africa. In addition, he is a PhD candidate at King's College of London and a fellow of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. ❖

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