

Military Tactics of ISIS: Components of Science And Arts

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Abstract: This qualitative study starts with the question that whether or not there are scientific and artistic components in the military tactics of ISIS. It looks into the major military tactics of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and identifies the nature of the tactics. In contrast to most of the existing literature on the issue—which emphasizes on the politicoeconomic factors behind the uprising of the phenomenal terrorist organization—this paper intends to illuminate on the argument that rather efficient and effective combination of the scientific and artistic aspects of military tactics and skilled, experienced, and dedicated execution of them have worked for ISIS. The study is conducted in descriptive analysis method and is based on secondary sources of data. The major findings reveal that science of ISIS military tactics includes capabilities and techniques and art of the same includes creative application of capabilities and techniques. Spectrum of fighters of ISIS comprises the local and foreign, experienced and inexperienced, and the armed and unarmed. ISIS arsenal possesses both heavy and light ones like anti-armor, IED (Improvised Explosive Device), suicide water borne IEDs, armored IEDs, SVBIEDs (Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs), and chemical weapons. The study contributes to the understanding of how ISIS actually conducts its military operations and then to the adoption of comprehensive measures to encounter it.

Keywords: ISIS, military tactics, science of tactics, arts of tactics, military operations, terrorist organization, military weapons.

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I. INTRODUCTION:BACKGROUND OF ISIS

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant), is a Sunni jihadist militant group that claims to follow the Wahhabi or Salafi doctrine of Islam. It gained prominence in the early of 2014 by driving out forces of the Iraqi government from key cities and particularly by capturing Mosul. The group claimed the restoration of Caliphate on 29 June 2014 through declaration by the official ISIS spokesman, Abu Muhammad alAdnani.¹ It had taken control of the vast landlocked territories in western Iraq and eastern Syria by December 2015, with the goal to establish caliphate based on radical Islamist appeal. The ISIS version of Caliphate would be governed by the sharia law and ruled by a caliph.²

Earlier, al-Qaeda in Iraq joined short lived Sunni insurgent groups name Mujahideen Shura Council which was created by the six Sunni Islamic groups. Insurgent groups of Mujahideen Shura Council established the Islamic State of Iraq by merging themselves in October 2006 after the killing of Zarqawi.³ Islamic State of Iraq was established under the leadership of Hamid Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi commonly known as Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri.⁴ Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the leader of ISI (Islamic State of Iraq) after the killing Abu Omar al Baghdadi and Abu Ayyub al-Masri in April 2010.⁵

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¹ C. Tucker, 'The Islamic State: Origins, Goals, and Future Implications', *The Eurasia Center*, 2014, https://eurasiacenter.org/publications/ISIS_Briefing_Colin_Tucker.pdf, (accessed 2 August 2016).

² *ibid.*

³ A. S. Hashim, 'The Islamic State: From al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate', *Middle East Policy Council*, vol. XXI, no. 4, Winter 2014, <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/islamic-state-al-qaeda-affiliate-caliphate?print>, (accessed 20 July 2016).

⁴ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

⁵ A. S. Hashim, *op. cit.*

In 2011, ISI (Islamic State of Iraq) saw an opportunity to expand into Syria following the Syrian civil War. For that reason, Jabhat al-Nusra Front was merged into ISI in April 2013. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared ISI as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) on 9 April 2013.⁶In early 2014, the al-Qaeda central leadership rejected ISIL. Therefore, it was renamed as the 'Islamic State' after gaining significant success in both Syria and Iraq to restore worldwide caliphate.⁷Leader of ISIL, al Baghdadi, then changed his name to Caliph Ibrahim and demanded the Muslim world recognize him as the leader of the world-wide Islamic caliphate.⁸He is the chief and under the his leadership, there are two deputies- Abu Muslim al-Turkmani in Iraq and Abu Ali al-anbari in Syria. Twelve governors belong under each two deputies. There are eight councils under each governor in Iraq and Syria such as military, leadership, financial, judicial, security, intelligence, legal and foreign fighter's council. Each council is headed by one person.⁹

Military council is the most important council. Abu Ahmad al Alawani is the head of military council of IS. Majority members of the military council are former military officers of Saddam Hussein. The members of military council are appointed by Baghdadi himself. The task of military council is to plan and supervise the military commanders and the actual operations in the field.¹⁰Military council conducts the military operations. During operations, ISIS applies different military tactics. Although ISIS is a militant group but it operates like a state and the fighters of ISIS fight like a state military force.

II. OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

In modern military science, warfare can be categorized into three levels of planning- strategic, operational and tactical. Tactics are the lowest level of planning of war.¹¹This three level division had come from the great wars of the 19th century, especially Napoleonic and American civil wars.¹²These three levels apply to all types of military operations. Strategy is the broad objective of the war and translation of forces into political objectives bridging the means and ends of war. On the other hand, an operation is the dealing of formation of units.¹³

2.1 Military Tactics

Scott Nicholas Romaniuk defines tactics as a decision-making process, the confluence of which renders advantageous conditions for realizing operational and strategic interpretations of success.¹⁴Sun Tzu defined "Tactics are particular modes of conquering within the battle-sphere of war".¹⁵ According to MCDP (Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication) 1-3 Tactics of USA Marine Corps,

Tactics is the application of combat power to defeat the enemy in engagements and battles. Combat power is the total destructive force we can bring to bear against the enemy; it is a unique product of a variety of physical, moral, and mental factors.¹⁶

MCDP 1 defines,

⁶ C. Tucker, op. cit.

⁷ TRISA and CITD., op. cit.

⁸ S. Joshi, 'Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: The world's most wanted man', *The Telegraph*, 1 July 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/10935790/Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi-The-worlds-most-wanted-man.html>, (accessed 4 July 2016).

⁹The Soufan Group, *The Islamic State*, [website], 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>, (accessed 3 July 2016).

¹⁰ibid.

¹¹ M. D. Krause (ed.), *Historical Perspectives on the Operational Art*. Washington DC, Center of Military History United States Army, 2005.

¹²ibid.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴ S. N. Romaniuk, 'US Military Doctrine: Strategy, Tactics, and the Operational Art', [website], 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288507831_US_Military_Doctrine_Strategy_Tactics_and_the_Operational_Art, (accessed 6 August 2016).

¹⁵ S. Tzu, *The Art of War*, Trans, L. Giles, 2009.

¹⁶ Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-3: Tactics*, Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997, p.3.

Warfighting tactics is the art and science of winning engagements and battles. It includes the use of firepower and maneuver, the integration of different arms and the immediate exploitation of success to defeat the enemy as well as the sustainment of forces during combat.¹⁷

Clausewitz defined “Military tactics are the science and art of organizing a military force, and the techniques for combining and using weapons and military units to engage and defeat an enemy in battle”.¹⁸

Tactics include the use of firepower and maneuver, the integration of different arms and the immediate exploitation of success to defeat the enemy. It also “includes the technical application of combat power, which consists of those techniques and procedures for accomplishing specific tasks within a tactical action”.¹⁹

Therefore tactics is a combination of art and science to gain victory against the enemy. Here, two complementary aspects are interconnected in the definition of tactics such as art and science. Some say that these two are opposite, but they are actually inseparable in tactics.²⁰

2.2 Science of Tactics

The science of tactics is the technical application of combat power. In tactics, science includes the understanding of those military aspects of tactics—capabilities, techniques, and procedures—that can be measured and codified.²¹ So, scientific aspect of tactics includes the following three concepts:

- Capabilities
- Techniques and
- Procedures

Capabilities mean the physical capabilities of organizations and systems such as determining how long it takes a division to move a certain distance.²² It also includes techniques and procedures that are used to accomplish specific tasks. Techniques are the methods of how to use the equipment and personnel. Techniques are also the general and detailed methods used by troops and commanders to perform assigned missions and functions. Procedures are standard and detailed courses of action that describe how to perform tasks. Techniques and procedures are the employing of various elements of the combined arms team to achieve greater effects.²³

2.3 Art of Tactics

Another aspect of tactics is the art. The art of tactics is a creative method for how to form and apply military the force in a given situation.²⁴ The art of war is related to creativity of formation and application of military forces in a situation. It requires exercising intuitive knowledge in the battlefield, which can be learned by not only study but also personal experience from different circumstances.²⁵ A tactician must temper his study and evolve his skills through a variety of relevant practical experiences. The more experience a tactician gains from practice under a variety of circumstances, the greater is his mastery of the art of tactics.²⁶ The art of tactics give answers of the following questions:

- 1 When to flank and ambush the enemy?
- 2 When to attack and infiltrate?
- 3 How do fighters use speed and momentum to achieve a decisive advantage?

Therefore, art of tactics is the combination of following three interrelated aspects²⁷:

- 1 Creative and flexible array or formation of forces and equipment to accomplish assigned missions
- 2 Decision-making under conditions of uncertainty when faced with an intelligent enemy, and

¹⁷ Department of the Navy, Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1: Warfighting*, Washington DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997, p.3.

¹⁸ Military Tactics, [website], <https://www.revolvvy.com/main/index.php?s=Military%20tactics>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Department of the Army, Washington DC, *Field Manual 3-90 Tactics*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2001, p.2.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Department of the Army, Washington DC, *Field Manual 3-90 Tactics*, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2001, p.2.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Department of the Army, Washington DC, *op. cit.*

Understanding The Human Dimension—The Effects Of Combat On Soldiers

These three aspects of art define a competent tactic. The first aspect is the creative and flexible application of the tools by commander which are available to him such as doctrines, tactics, techniques, procedures, training, organizations, materiel, and soldiers in an attempt to render the enemy’s situational tactics ineffective.²⁸The main concept of the first aspect is formation and implementation of forces and other tools creatively. Creativity is the main concern in art of tactics. The tactician must have to understand how to train, form, and employ his forces in full operations. The tactician also has to consider factors of mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, time available, and civil considerations in the time of operations.²⁹Finally, tactician has to know how to change and apply new tactics to adopt various circumstances to win in the battle. The second aspect of art of tactics is to take decision immediately under conditions of uncertainty in a time-constrained environment. In the time of violent struggle between two groups, each tactician wants to impose his will on his opponent, defeat his opponent’s plans, and destroy his opponent’s forces.³⁰Every tactician wants to accomplish his operation by preventing others from taking the same tactics. That’s why tacticians must immediately apply tactics, sometimes before getting common operational picture from sources.³¹They use the latest intelligence information to facilitate visualization of the enemy and the environment to perform operation.³² However, in the third and final aspect of art of war, comes understanding the human dimension, which means the effects of war on soldiers.³³

III. CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE

There is no established theory to academically explain military tactics exercised in terrorist organizations. The study offers the following outline in this respect.

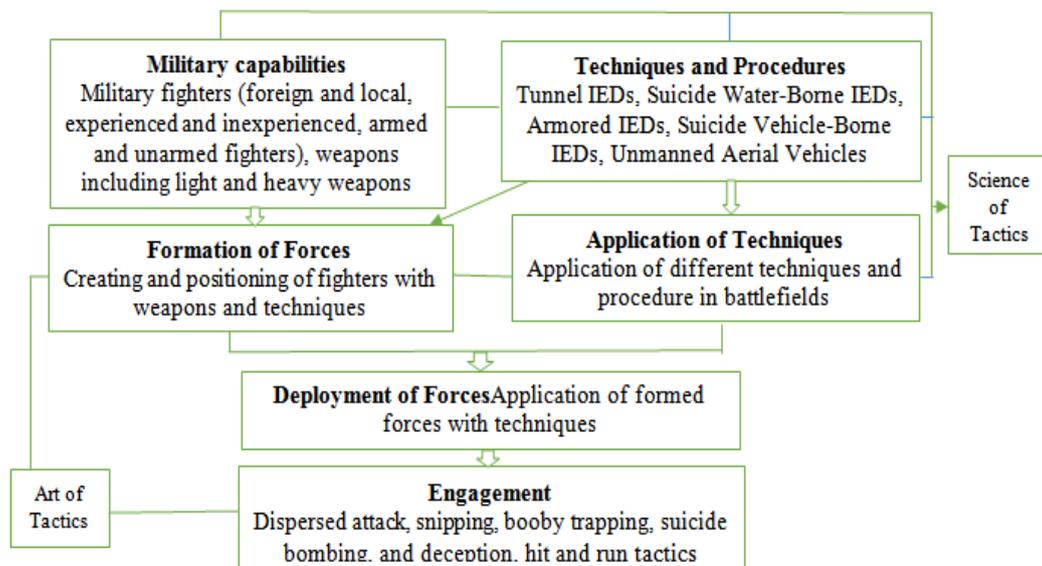


Figure 1: Military Tactics

Science of tactics includes military capabilities, techniques, and procedures. Military capabilities refer to physical ability of organization. It includes total number and types of military fighters and weapons, and their strength. Fighters include both armed and unarmed ones. Military weapons mean both light and heavy ones. Islamic State has appeared as a strong militant terrorist group which has strong military capabilities including experienced military forces and modern military weapons. It is more than a terrorist group, which acts as a state because ISIS controls a certain territory and owns a strong military forces and weapon like a state military. Techniques and procedures are the second and third aspects of tactics which are related to science. Techniques are the general and detailed methods used by troops and commanders to perform assigned missions and functions. Procedures are standard and detailed courses of action that describe how to perform the tasks.

²⁸ibid.
²⁹ibid.
³⁰ibid.
³¹ibid., p.5.
³²ibid.
³³ibid.

Techniques and procedures are the employing of various elements of the combined armed teams to achieve greater effects. According to TRISA (TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity), ISIS has adopted anti-armor, IED (Improvised Explosive Device), suicide water borne IEDs, armored IEDs, SVBIEDs (Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs), chemical weapons, deception, snipers, social media (Facebook, Twitter, videos etc.) as techniques. Application of techniques is the implementation of science of tactics and answers how to apply military weapons and techniques in battlefields. Organizations like ISIS form forces with military capabilities and techniques creatively and develop various types of commanding structure for operations. Commanding structure may be centralized or decentralized. Forces of ISIS are employed by the Command and Control Unit. For success in operations, ISIS developed decentralized organizational structure. Command of operational forces is also decentralized. Snipers and bombers independently operate with detailed instruction. As a terrorist organization, ISIS engages in tactics like suicide bombing, sniping, car bombing, booby trapping, and hit and run etc. Forces of ISIS engage in operations with their strength and by the combination of art and science of tactics.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS ON THE SCIENCE OF TACTICS

Military capabilities are the scientific part of military tactics which includes the physical aspects, fighters and weapons. Military capabilities are most important for any terrorist organization because success of their operation, which is to gain political goals, depends on them in large part.

4.1 ISIS Military Fighters

There are many controversies about the total number of ISIS fighters even within the different agencies of the USA. The estimate of CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) is between 20,000 and 31,000.³⁴ Assessment of the French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian provided similar estimates that the number of ISIS fighters is between 20,000 and 30,000.³⁵ As many as 10,000 fighters of ISIS are prisoners who were freed by ISIS from prisons and Sunni loyalists.³⁶ More than 15,000 fighters of ISIS are foreigners from more than 80 countries and 2000 fighters are from western countries.³⁷ General Lloyd Austin, commander of the head of the United States' Central Command (Centcom) provided a numbers that ISIS have 9,000 to 17,000 fighters.³⁸ In February 2015 testimony, Director of National Intelligence General James Clapper to congress estimated the ISIS's fighting force between 20,000 and 30,000.³⁹ The Pentagon reported that the number is 17,000.⁴⁰ On the other hand, senior Kurdish officials dismissed those lower numbers provided by the western countries, and claim that the number

³⁴ J. Scitutto, J. Crawford and C. J. Carter, 'ISIS can 'muster' between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters, CIA says', *CNN*, 12 September 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/09/11/world/meast/isis-syria-iraq/>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

³⁵ ITIC, *ISIS's Financial and Military Capabilities*, [website], 2014, <http://www.crethiplethi.com/isis-s-financial-and-military-capabilities/islamic-countries/syria-islamic-countries/2015/>, (accessed 9 September 2016),

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Global Terror Threats, [online video], 2015, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?324556-1/director-national-intelligence-james-clapper-testimony-worldwide-threats>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴⁰ R. Windrem, 'ISIS by the Numbers: Foreign Fighter Total Keeps Growing', *NBC*, 28 February 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-numbers-foreign-fighter-total-keeps-growing-n314731>, (accessed 9 September 2106).

to be 200,000!⁴¹ James Fromson and Steven Simon argued about the reliability of both the lower and higher numbers of fighters of ISIS. The inflated numbers are result of sloppy research.⁴²

4.1.1 Foreign Fighters

According to US intelligence community number of foreign fighters of ISIS is approximately 20,000.⁴³ According to ‘The Soufan Group’, there are approximately 12,000 foreign fighters from 81 countries in June 2014.⁴⁴ The number of foreign fighters has more than doubled eighteen months later in September 2015. ‘The Soufan Group’ has estimated on the basis of investigation that between 27,000 and 31,000 people have traveled from at least 86 countries to Syria and Iraq respectively to join ISIS.⁴⁵ More foreign fighters joined ISIS in its early days. But during 2016, recruitment of foreign fighters slowed because of air attacks led by USA and financial hardship faced by the fighters.⁴⁶ The flow of foreign fighters slowed more than 90% between 2015 and 2016. In 2015, 2000 foreign fighters joined ISIS per month. But, this rate extremely decreased later and only 200 foreign fighters join per month to ISIS in 2016.⁴⁷ After all, still a significant number of foreign fighters remain in ISIS. Following table represents the number of foreign fighters of ISIS on the continent basis.

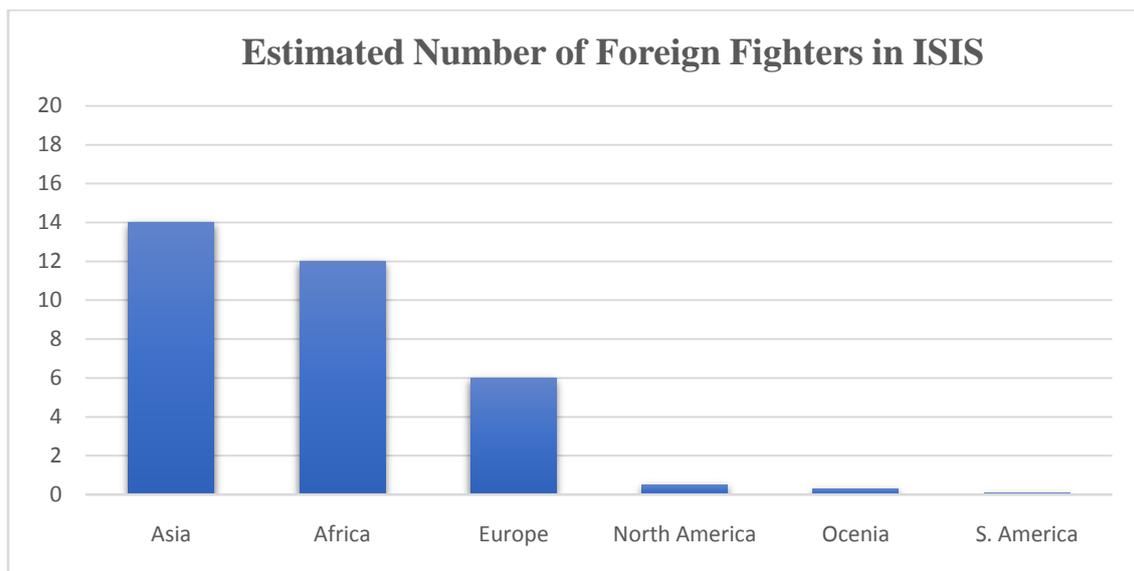


Figure 2: Foreign Fighters in ISIS

⁴¹ P. Cockburn, ‘War With ISIS: Islamic Militants Have Army of 200,000, Claims Senior Kurdish Leader’, *Independent*, 16 November 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/war-with-isis-islamic-militants-have-army-of-200000-claims-kurdish-leader-9863418.html>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴² D. G. Ross, ‘How Many Fighters Does the Islamic State Really Have?’, *War on the Rocks*, 9 February 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/how-many-fighters-does-the-islamic-state-really-have/>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴³ R. Windrem, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ R. Barrett, *Foreign Fighter in Syria*, New York, TheSoufan Group, 2014, p.6.

⁴⁵ The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, [website], 2015, http://soufangroup.com/wpcontent/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴⁶ Jewish Virtual Library, *The Islamic State: Foreign Fighters*, [website], 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Terrorism/ISISff.html>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

Nearly 6000 people joined ISIS from Europe.⁴⁸ Most of them are from France, Germany and the UK. The UK has seen an estimated 760 jihadists travel to Syria and Iraq. Some estimates say that half of these have returned to the UK, while more than 50 are reported to have died.⁴⁹ More than 14,000 people joined ISIS from different countries of Asia.⁵⁰ In Asia, most of the fighters are from Saudi Arabia and Russia. More than 12,000 African fighters, 6,500 from Tunisia alone, are reported to be fighting in Iraq and Syria. A further 5,000 Tunisians have been stopped from leaving the country.⁵¹ Whereas less than 1,000 fighters joined from Oceania and the Americas.

4.1.2 Local Fighters

Metin Gurcan argues that two thirds of 20,000 - 30,000 ISIS fighters are local including Sunni Iraqis and tribal.⁵² Most of local fighters of ISIS are the former members of Baathist Party and ex-officers of Baathist party are the commanding officer of ISIS.⁵³ Four out of seven members of the Shura council of ISIS are former Baathist military commanders including Abu Muslim al Afari al Turkmani, the present second in command of ISIS.⁵⁴

4.1.3 Armed Fighters

Among 10,000 armed fighters, one third are skilled and experienced who are ex-Baathist military cadres, local Sunni tribal, local criminals, or Salafi jihadists.⁵⁵ Among 10,000 skilled fighters, 2,000 are foreigners including 1000 Europeans.⁵⁶

4.2 ISIS Military Weapons

Recent military operations of ISIS prove that it has both light and heavy weapons, and also chemical weapons.⁵⁷ Light arms of ISIS include different types of rocket launchers, mortars, anti-tank missile and launchers, and anti-aircraft weapons. It possesses different types of heavy weapons too.⁵⁸ It has tanks, other types of artillery, different types of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles, one or more Scud missiles and MIG-21s, air-to-surface missiles and different types of armored vehicles. It also has anti-tank missiles. Chemical weapons of ISIS include chlorine and mustard gases.⁵⁹

Light, heavy and chemical weapons of ISIS come from different sources. Large quantities of weapons fell into the hands of ISIS when ISIS captured Mosul in June 2014.⁶⁰ It also buys arms from illegal markets.⁶¹ It collects weapons by capturing rebel groups in Syria too. According to 'Conflict Armament Research', captured weapons by Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria indicate that ISIS uses even American manufactured weapons and ammunition.⁶² Study of 'Conflict Armament Research' found that America delivered these weapons to Free

⁴⁸ A. Krik, 'Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isil?', *The Telegraph*, 24 March 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² M. Gurcan, *ISIS Military Strategy*, [website], http://www.academia.edu/7632564/ISIS_MILITARY_STRATEGY, (accessed 9 September 2016).

⁵³ J. Lou and P. O. Conner, 'Why ISIS is Winning in Iraq', *Small Wars Journal*, 19 October 2015, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/why-isis-is-winning-in-iraq>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ ITIC., *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Invisible Dog, *The ISIS and its Military Tactics*, [website], 2014, http://www.invisible-dog.com/isis_tactics_eng.html, (accessed 6 July 2016).

⁶² Conflict Armament Research, UK., *Dispatch from the Field: Islamic State Weapon in Iraq and Syria*, London, Conflict Armament Research Ltd., 2014, p. 13.

Syrian Army by Saudi Arabia in 2013.⁶³The study also found that ISIS has Iranian manufactured arms too, which are collected between 2006 and 2013 from Syrian army and its supporters, such as Hezbollah.⁶⁴Moreover, some weapons of ISIS have been identified Chinese.⁶⁵

4.2.1 Light Weapons

Light weapons of ISIS include rocket launchers, mortars, anti-tank missile and launchers, different types of shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles. It has AK-47, 82 mm B-10 recoilless rifles, 105 mm M40 recoilless rifle, M79 Osa rocket launchers, RBG-6 grenade launchers, RPG-7s, FIM-92 stinger MANPADS, SA-16 MANPADS, 9K32 Strela-2 MANPADS.⁶⁶

For its low cost, durability, availability, and ease of using, AK-47 became the ISIS assault rifle.⁶⁷ It looted B-10 recoilless rifle from different military bases of Iraq. It is an old Soviet gun, which fires modified artillery shells that function well against tanks and other varieties of armored vehicles.⁶⁸ ISIS has one M-40 recoilless rifle that is a lightweight anti-tank weapon made by USA. USA provided the M-40 recoilless rifle to rebel groups in Syria and ISIS collected it by capturing those groups.⁶⁹

The M-79 Osa rocket launcher fires 90 mm shell. It is highly effective against tanks. This light weapon was smuggled by Saudi Arabia to Syrian rebel groups. ISIS used this rocket against the Iraqi Security Forces and caused devastating effect.⁷⁰

In Iraq, ISIS has been found using Croatian RGB-6 grenade launchers. Saudi Arabia smuggled these launchers to Syria.⁷¹ RPG-7S is a portable shoulder-launched rocket propelled grenade that can reach up to 920 meters to destroy tanks.⁷²

From Iraqi military bases, ISIS has collected FIM-92 Stinger MANPADS made by USA. FIM-92 Stinger MANPAD can take down helicopters and aircrafts effectively. It requires specialized maintenance and care.⁷³ ISIS looted SA-16 MANPADs anti-aircraft missile system from Taqaba air base in Syria in 24 August 2014. It can hit aircraft at up to 16,000 feet and endanger helicopters and low-flying fighter jets. ISIS use SA-16 MANPADs in air campaign against them.⁷⁴ ISIS also plundered 9K32 Strela-2 MANPAD, a first-generation shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile system of the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ ISIS also looted DShK 1938, a Soviet-made heavy machinegun. It is an anti-aircraft and a heavy infantry support weapon. It fires 600 rounds per minute.⁷⁶

4.2.2 Heavy Weapons

Islamic State collected different types of heavy weapons from Iraqi military forces and military bases, rebel groups of Syria, and military forces of Syrian government. ISIS looted different types of tank, missile, armored vehicle, artillery, howitzer, and infantry fighting vehicle.

Different types of tank of ISIS include T-55, T-62, T-72 tanks, and BRDM-2 and MT-LB armored vehicles, BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, 122 mm 2S1 artillery, Humvees, M198 Howitzer, Type 59-1 field Gun, D-30 howitzer, anti-aircraft Guns, 23 mm ZSU-23-4 self-propelled anti-aircraft guns.⁷⁷

The T-55 tank series was produced by the Soviet Union. The T-55 is heavy armor, along with a 100-mm rifled gun and a secondary 7.62-mm machine gun. ISIS has 30 T-55 tanks. The T-62 is the Soviet main

⁶³ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁴ibid.

⁶⁵ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁶J. Wilson, A. Rosen and J. Bender, *These are the weapons Islamic State fighters are using to terrify the Middle East*, [website], 2016, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/isis-military-equipment-arsenal-2016/#t-55-tanks-1>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

⁶⁷ibid.

⁶⁸ibid.

⁶⁹ibid.

⁷⁰ibid.

⁷¹ibid.

⁷²J. Wilson, A. Rosen and J. Bender, *These are the weapons Islamic State fighters are using to terrify the Middle East*, [website], 2016, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/isis-military-equipment-arsenal-2016/#t-55-tanks-1>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴ibid.

⁷⁵ibid.

⁷⁶ibid.

⁷⁷ibid.

battle tank that was replaced to T-55.⁷⁸ It is estimated that ISIS has 15 T-62 model tanks. T-55 tank was used extensively by the Iraqi military forces to success in Iran-Iraq war. T-62 is heavily armored, and is armed with a 115-mm tank gun along with two secondary machine guns.⁷⁹ ISIS has 5 to 10 T-72 tanks. The T-72 tank is the second-generation Soviet battle tank. The T-72 is heavily armored and has a 125-mm main gun. It has a secondary machine gun and an anti-aircraft gun.⁸⁰

The BRDM-2 is an amphibious armored patrol car that was manufactured by the Soviet Union in the 1960s. ISIS has six BRDM-2 armored vehicles. The vehicle has a 14.5mm heavy machinegun as the main armament. It also has a 7.62mm secondary general-purpose machine gun.⁸¹ ISIS has two MT-LBs too. It is a Soviet amphibious auxiliary armored vehicle. It was introduced in the late 1960s at first and is still operated. It has 7.62mm machine gun.⁸² ISIS has got 20 BMP-1 Soviet amphibious tracked infantry fighting vehicles, which has a 73 mm semiautomatic gun with a 7.62mm secondary machine gun.⁸³ ISIS has three 122MM 2S1 Gvozdika self-propelled artilleries manufactured by Soviet. It fires 122mm shells at a semiautomatic pace. It has a conventional range of 9.5 miles.⁸⁴ ISIS accessed a fleet of Humvees produced by USA when capturing Mosul. USA provided these Humvees to Iraqi Army. Humvees are used to quick and effective movement across rough terrain.⁸⁵ ISIS also has two ZSU-23-4s self-propelled anti-aircraft guns.⁸⁶ ISIS captured MiG-21B air fighters Taqaba. It is highly doubtful if ISIS has the capability to fly the MiG.⁸⁷

4.3 Financial Capabilities

It is considered that ISIS is the wealthiest terrorist organization ever.⁸⁸ It has established strong financial capacity by developing different sources of revenues. ISIS captured most of the oil and gas fields (6-8 oilfields) in Syria and some in Iraq.⁸⁹ Captured oil and gas fields have allowed ISIS to create steady revenue streams by marketing petroleum products.⁹⁰ It is estimated that ISIS earn 1 to 2 million USA Dollar per day.⁹¹ ISIS also collect revenues from the other sources including different criminal activities, collecting tax from local population, and demanding headed taxes from non-Muslims.⁹²

4.4 Techniques and Procedures

Military techniques of ISIS include anti-armor, IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), suicide water borne IEDs, armored IEDs, SVBIEDs (Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs), deception, sniping, and also social media (Facebook, Twitter, videos etc.). However, Improvised Explosive device is a bomb that is the part of military weapon. The method of using IEDs is the techniques that are a part of tactics. ISIS uses tunnels, suicide-attackers, and armored methods for IEDs.

4.4.1 Tunnel IEDs

Using tunnel networks for communication and safety is famous in ISIS particularly in Raqqa province against the superiority of Syrian Air Force in conducting airstrike against them. According to report of TRISA and CITD, ISIS has already achieved ability to attack by IEDs by using tunnels.⁹³ ISIS gained skills in constructing tunnel and can execute IED attacks by using constructed tunnel. For urban infrastructure, ISIS has constructed tunnel for communication, safety, and IEDs attacks against government security forces in Aleppo.

⁷⁸ ibid.

⁷⁹ ibid.

⁸⁰ ibid.

⁸¹ J. Wilson, A. Rosen and J. Bender, *These are the weapons Islamic State fighters are using to terrify the Middle East*, [website], 2016, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/isis-military-equipment-arsenal-2016/#t-55-tanks-1>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

⁸² ibid.

⁸³ ibid.

⁸⁴ ibid.

⁸⁵ ibid.

⁸⁶ ibid.

⁸⁷ ibid.

⁸⁸ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ ITIC., *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

⁹¹ ibid.

⁹² ITIC., *op. cit.*

⁹³ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

4.4.2 Suicide Water-Borne IEDs

Islamic State uses suicide water borne techniques for exploring IEDs in river. Most of the rivers within ISIS-captured territories are with multiple bends. This particular nature of river of Iraq facilitates the terrorist group in attacking by using suicide water borne techniques of IEDs. This technique has been used in the Dhuluiya area north of Baghdad.⁹⁴

4.4.3 Armored IEDs

Among different techniques of ISIS, armored technique is one of the most crucial ones. On 5 August 2013, ISIS attacked on the Menagh Airbase by the help of armored IEDs and captured it. In that case, fighters use outfitted in BMPs loaded with explosives.⁹⁵

4.4.4 Suicide Vehicle-Born IEDs

Battle plans of ISIS include the utilization of SVIEDs since attacks by the suicide vehicle-born IEDs can weaken and seriously damage fortified positions of enemy forces. SVBIEDs weaken the entry position of enemy and open way for assaulting units to enter fortified positions of enemy fighters. ISIS frequently uses SVBIEDs to enter the fortified position of enemy security forces. ISIS used SVBIEDs attack in the Tabqa Airbase and used its suicide bombers and exploitation elements to damage the fortified position in the main gate there.⁹⁶

4.4.5 Social Media

Social media is an interesting technique that is used by ISIS in a sophisticated way to achieve success in operations and to gain goals. Takeover of northern Iraqi cities by the ISIS was matched by the speed of social media as it pushed a message of brutality to enemies. ISIS also sends brutality videos as evidences to its international supporters by social media for potential recruitment. ISIS prefers Twitter, Facebook, Youtube as techniques.⁹⁷ ISIS use Twitter to engage supporters and control the organization. ISIS uses Twitter also for spreading fear.⁹⁸ During entering Mosul, ISIS subsequently tweeted different images. The tweets included images of mass killing. Those images on Twitter were used as a technique to further the operations, to morally weaken the enemies, and to attract support. ISIS also uses Facebook for various reasons such as sharing information and garnering support. It uses Facebook especially for selling various products for funding.⁹⁹

4.4.6 Dams and Barrages

Water infrastructures like dams and barrages are critical for Iraqis, as they provide mobility, integration and of course drinking water. ISIS uses and targets water infrastructures in order to shape the battlefield to win against the enemies.¹⁰⁰

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS ON THE ART OF TACTICS

The study finds out that ISIS mixes general principles of military tactics and uses this mixed principle. ISIS developed decentralized framework of command and control and fighters of ISIS are committed to leadership strongly.¹⁰¹ Fighters of ISIS also have strong dedication to gaining success in battle field. High level of brutality is used by the fighters in operations. ISIS has shown ability to overcome the limitations in manpower and equipment by the combination of unusual tactics.

5.1 Art of Tactics in the Offensive Engagement

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ R. Prince, 'Iraq Crisis: ISIS Takes to Social Media to Spread Fear', *The Telegraph*, 16 January 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10904325/Iraq-crisis-isis-takes-to-social-media-to-spread-fear.html>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

⁹⁹ S. Burke, 'Facebook Looks to Block ISIS Clothing Sales', *CNN*, 25 June 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/24/world/isis-facebook-merchandise>, (accessed 4 August 2016).

¹⁰⁰ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ D. O. Ashour, *Enigma of 'Baqiyawa Tatamadad': The Islamic State Organization's Military Survival*, [website], 2016, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/04/enigma-baqiya-wa-tatamadad-islamic-state-organizations-military-survival-160419081219493.html>, (accessed 9 September 2016).

Islamic State implements unusual and mixed general principle of military tactics.¹⁰² It applies combat power of its own creative form. Tactics of ISIS warfare combine terrorism, guerilla warfare, and conventional warfare. ISIS applies military tactics including snipping, booby trapping, dispersed attack, suicide attack. ISIS applies its art of tactics in both offensive and defensive operations.

5.1.1 Dispersed Attack

In the Masul Operation, ISIS executed dispersed attack.¹⁰³ ISIS positioned its active forces in dispersed form in key areas of the city. Positioned forces facilitated the attack by informing about enemy security forces, their strength, weapons and equipment. They also provided the intimidation of security forces and civilian forces. That is why positioned forces are also called support forces.¹⁰⁴ Mortar and rocket units also joined the attacks. They used support forces to conduct the attack on command of the control headquarters and the cell.¹⁰⁵ Assault forces seized the key areas, isolated the enemy, and caught the enemy by surprise. Finally, exploitation forces entered the sized areas by the help of assault forces and defeated the isolate enemy units to take complete control of Mosul.¹⁰⁶ However, a dispersed attack of ISIS is characterized by the following simulation action.¹⁰⁷

- Isolating enemy combat units.
- Disruption of effective control and command and sustainment.
- Multiple forces (disruption and exploitation forces) attack at same time from different sides.

5.1.2 Sniping

Sniping is a tactics where snipers maintain close contact with enemies and shoot enemies from distant concealed position with high precision sniper rifles with detection capability. ISIS has an eight-man sniper unit. These snipers used long-range Russian-made Dragunov sniper rifles in northern Iraq.¹⁰⁸ According to the US-based jihadi tracking organization, this sniper unit of ISIS is a part of the Ninewa Military Division in northern Iraq.¹⁰⁹ Snipers of ISIS operate in both Iraq and Syria. They killed many Iraqi and Kurdish soldiers. It is considered that the sniper team of ISIS has connection with 'Juba the Sniper', a Sunni insurgent sniper. Juba the Sniper has been operating in Baghdad since 2005 and has killed around 40 Americans.¹¹⁰

5.1.3 Booby Trapping

A booby trapping is a device or setup that is intended to kill, harm, or surprise a person, unknowingly triggered by the presence or actions of the victim. ISIS takes booby trapping tactics for achieving two goals.¹¹¹

1. To bring heavy loss within the ranks of the enemy, and
2. To attack psychological cohesion and morale of the enemy fighters

Booby trapping tactics has brought significant success for ISIS. A senior military Iraqi commander acknowledged that a booby trap fuel tank near al-Mosul Hotel had serious impact on psychology and morale of Iraqi fighters.¹¹²

5.1.4 Suicide Bombing

Terrorist groups like ISIS take suicide bombing tactics for getting immediate success. ISIS executes suicide bombing to attack distant or remote areas outside of the battle field.¹¹³ It sends suicide bombers, driving

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ TRISA and CTID., *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ R. Verkaik, 'Islamic State sniper: ISIS sets up sharp-shooter battalion inspired by infamous Iraqi killer who took out 40 Americans in Baghdad', *the Daily Mail*, 28 January 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2928652/Iraqi-Sniper-ISIS-posts-pictures-sniper-battalion-inspired-Chris-Kyle-s-notorious-insurgent-rival-Juba-killed-40-Americans-Baghdad.html>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ A. A. Lami, 'ISIS' Fighting Doctrine: Sorting Fact from Fiction', *Al-Akhbar English*, 31 October 2016, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/22280>, (accessed 7 August 2016).

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

trucks, or car bombs to instill terror in the ranks of those resisting them. With the suicide bombers, ISIS sends fighters who carry heavy weapons to fight the enemy.¹¹⁴

5.1.5 Car Bombs or VBIEDs

In time of VBIED attacks, vehicles are packed with explosive for bettering rams, or opening holes and gaps into the frontline. Then the infantry operates.

5.1.6 Battlefield Deception

For battlefield deception, ISIS uses radio communication to saturate and confuse the enemy prior to an operation. ISIS also adopts harassment tactics in the frontline to prevent the identification of the precise point of attack. ISIS uses deception in two ways.

- Fighters of ISIS blend in the masses. It makes it difficult then for the government security forces to identify ISIS members during attack. Local Sunni tribal population support the fighters directly or indirectly to move freely and hide in safe areas.¹¹⁵
- ISIS fighters blend in with members of government security forces (particularly in Iraq). In September 2014, Camp Saqlawishin Anbar province was seized by the ISIS fighters. They managed to enter into the camp without proper security check. SVBIED was exploded in the middle of the camp then while two others were detonated on the perimeter. The gate security tried to hold back the rest of the convoy, but was hit with more SVBIEDs.¹¹⁶

5.2 Art of Tactics in the Defensive Engagement

Islamic State has effective defensive capabilities against their enemy fighters and their attack. ISIS established defensive area in Mosul in August 2014. ISIS defense areas have been established for complex battle positions to defend its integrated urban areas, remaining civilian population, and mandated structure.¹¹⁷ ISIS disruption forces range from small tactical cells to larger paramilitary forces with weapon system in defensive areas. ISIS integrates armored vehicles and heavy military weapons in defensive areas for simple and complex battle positions.¹¹⁸ It uses INFOWAR system for defending their captured and protected areas. INFOWAR system creates and sends messages to the enemy fighters that they would be destroyed if they enter the defensive areas.¹¹⁹ Various obstacles and numerous IEDs (Improvise Explosive Devices) intend to slow and stop state and coalition forces' attack in the defensive areas. By arming insurgents with small arms and rocket propelled grenades, ISIS maintains small scale counterattacks and mobile reactions. Insurgents and disruption forces also prepare with heavy armored vehicle and heavy caliber weapons. Disruption and main defensive forces utilize camouflages, covers, concealment, and deception to improve defensive capabilities.¹²⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

Military knowledge of the commanders, dedication and skills of the fighters, and support from considerable portion of general people at home and around the world have made ISIS a phenomenal terrorist organization in the contemporary world history. When it comes to military tactics, ISIS with its strong military forces has been able to prove itself so extremely efficient in assimilating science and art of the business that it has been the phantom tonational militaries in Iraq and Syria, and evento the international coalition forces.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ I. Coles and P. Apps, 'As Islamic State Fighters Begin to Blend n, Defeating Them No Easy Matter', [website], 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-islamicstate-insight-idUSKBN0GV0P620140901>, (accessed 7 September 2016).

¹¹⁶ L. Morris, 'Islamic State attack on Iraqi Base Leaves Hundreds Missing, Show Army weakness, *The Washington Post*, 22 September 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/islamic-state-attack-on-iraqi-base-leaves-hundreds-missing-shows-army-weaknesses/2014/09/22/9a8b9e4d-0fea-4650-8816-5e720dbffd04_story.html, (accessed 7 August 2016).

¹¹⁷ TRISA and CITD., *op. cit.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

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