

1-17-2016

The Mysterious Case of the Islamic State Organization (iso) Smiling Martyr--Solved

Paul Kamolnick

East Tennessee State University, kamolnp@etsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.etsu.edu/etsu-works>

 Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#), [Terrorism Studies Commons](#), and the [Theory, Knowledge and Science Commons](#)

Citation Information

Kamolnick, Paul. 2016. The Mysterious Case of the Islamic State Organization (iso) Smiling Martyr--Solved. *Small Wars Journal*. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-mysterious-case-of-the-islamic-state-organization-iso-smiling-martyr-solved>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Works at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETSU Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

The Mysterious Case of the Islamic State Organization (iso) Smiling Martyr--Solved

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/).



SMALL WARS

JOURNAL

The Mysterious Case of the Islamic State Organization (ISO) Smiling Martyr--Solved

By [Paul Kamolnick](#)

Journal Article | Jan 17 2016 - 5:11pm

The Mysterious Case of the Islamic State Organization (ISO) Smiling Martyr--Solved

Paul Kamolnick

Introduction

For a mere Muslim mortal, Allah's granting of martyrdom (*Shahada*) is the pinnacle of spiritual achievement. The martyr (*Shahid*) is granted unique privileges among which are the right to bypass the moral interrogation meted out to determine after death whether one is spiritually fit; the complete freedom from all anguish, pain, and suffering caused by one's wounds as one immediately traverses into the highest of seven heavens; the right to intercede and request divine favors on behalf of seventy of one's loved one's; the enjoyment of exclusive sexual privileges with seventy-two virgins; and finally, the right to exist within the proximity of the All Mighty Allah and an eternity spent in enjoyment of the sumptuous delights of a blessed paradise.

Assuming Allah exists. Assuming Islam and its Divine Commandments are the Truth. Assuming that living by and dying to uphold this Truth in a state of absolute surrender, i.e. Islam, and as an absolute surrenderer, i.e. a Muslim, is enjoined in this life as the exclusive path to attaining martyrdom. Assuming that if one's life *is* actually exemplified by righteous intentions and noble moral deeds, that Allah may then strongly consider one as worthy of sharing His Eternal Abode; then, it is obvious why martyrdom should be considered the very highest of highest ideals for which an observant Muslim could wish. If one assumes all of the above, only one question remains: *Which* human intentions and moral actions are most likely to elicit Allah's Divine Favor?

Let us also for the sake of argument grant the "jihadist" premise that Allah regards as highest and best those (*Mujahidin*) who give their lives in the process of taking the lives of others as one fights in the path of Allah to elevate Allah's Word. This "jihadi covenant" is aptly summarized in the penultimate quranic 9th Surah (*Al-Tawbah*; The Disavowal, or Repentance), verse 111:

Allah has purchased of the Believers their persons and their goods; for theirs in return is the Garden of Paradise: They fight in His Cause, and slay and are slain: A promise binding on Him in Truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: And who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: That is the achievement supreme.

Let us presume then that the above are undeniable, non-negotiable premises, and that one fully desires a life in complete and utter devotion to Allah's Word and Allah's True Religion. And finally, let us assume that based on its professed commitment to the above, one has made the decision to join the ISO and pledge loyalty (*baya'a*) to Caliph Ibrahim.

ISO's "Evidence" of Blessed Martyrdom

ISO emphatically asserts that to secure and indeed ensure a blessed martyrdom all observant Muslims must first pledge absolute loyalty (*baya'a*) to the self-professed Caliph Ibrahim, and then partake in ISO 'jihadist' operations designed to destroy all alleged enemies of Allah's Word. ISO messaging, messengers, and media rampantly promote the notion that this is the exclusive path by which one may seek Allah's Divine favor and be granted the status of a *Shahid* (a blessed martyr). Moreover, actual photographs of smiling, fear-free, pain-free, slain ISO fighters seem to present the most decisive and irrefutable evidence that exaltation and not repudiation has been attained by this slain soul. These photographs are also often accompanied by vivid description of the slain's scent as one of perfumed musk, i.e. the scent most often described as characterizing the privileged 'jihadi' warrior in paradise. Finally, these photographs are represented by ISO as the authentic, trustworthy, unadulterated facts and as the most certain of certain proof that ISO fights in the correct way, for the correct goals, and that all potential doubts regarding its terrorist modus operandi are therefore decisively refuted.

Problems in Paradise: Exposing the ISO's Fraudulent Evidence

Three chief reasons exist that cast extreme doubt on the ISO's photographic evidence offered in proof of assured blessed martyrdom of ISO's slain 'jihadis'. The first is anecdotal. The present author two years ago had the privilege of sharing the final moments of his beloved mother's life. Her fifteen year battle with emphysema had finally culminated in her last bout with pneumonia. Life from that point forward meant either she would have to remain forever immobile attached to an oxygen tank, or exercise her right to refuse life-sustaining intervention. The latter option was the only one this dignified woman would consider. It was only eighteen hours after her hospice care began that the combination of low-dose morphine and low-dose oxygen culminated in her taking her final breath.

If one has never actually closely observed a person taking their last breath, it is a moment one can never forget. It is as if time stopped. Absolutely stopped. It is time literally frozen in place. One also observes for the first time what is accurately called the 'death mask'. After death, the human face begins to retract as if frozen into a mask. The boney outlines of the facial skeleton protrude and one begins to see the humanness and softness of one's loved one inevitably transform.

Forensic anthropology supplies a second source of doubt. The present author's colleague is expert in studying human sacrificial rituals, including the use of human body parts as 'trophies' in archaic tribal warfare. Asked pointedly whether he or his colleagues is aware of any instance in which the deceased face exhibited a 'smile,' he answered in the negative. He is unaware of a single instance.

ISO could of course cast doubt on these two sources of evidence. For example, it could be said that the present author's mother was not granted martyrdom as she died the life of an infidel. The same can be said of the forensic anthropological evidence, that is, these are not 'jihadis' that killed and were killed in the path of Allah, but are merely infidels who died with sins unforgiven in a state of spiritual uncleanness.

The third source of evidence cannot be so easily dismissed, however. In an in-depth Washington Post story "Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State's propaganda machine," the following is reported:

Another assignment [for Abu Adullah, a media operative] involved recovering corpses from battle scenes and arranging them to be photographed for propaganda videos exalting their sacrifice. He would *wash away dried blood, lift the corners of dead fighters' mouths into beatific smiles, and raise their index fingers* in a gesture adopted by the Islamic State as a symbol of its cause. (emphases supplied). [1]

Contrary to the ISO assertion then that only those who pledge bay'a to Caliph Ibrahim and fight and die for ISO can become martyrs, and also their own representations in ISO print and photographic media, these ISO fighters did *not* die with smiles on their faces. It is only because of the courage of investigative reporting and moreso the sources upon which this reporting is based--especially seven ISO defectors either in prison or recently released after facing terrorism charges after returning to Syria--that we learn of the reality behind this ISO fraud.

Allah versus the ISO's Fraudulent Martyrdom

In Islam, no person, group, organization, emir, or 'Caliph' can ever promise another Muslim entry into paradise as a *Shahid*. This is *always* the exclusive prerogative of Allah as Divine Judge. The request that one be considered a martyr is in Islam the object of rituals of supplication and prayer; it should only ever be made as a request. It is for this reason that one must attempt to live in a constant state of Allah-fearing piety (*taqwa*). Allah as All-Knowing, All-Hearing is aware of every thought, and even of every pre-thought; there is no hiding and therefore Allah's loftiest and most sought after qualities as All-Compassionate (*Ar-Rahman*) and All-Merciful (*Ar-Rahim*), are most desired by mere mortals aware of their less than stellar moral accomplishments.

The ISO's intentional fraud evidenced above is sinful at many levels. First and foremost, it usurps Allah's divine prerogative of bestowing *Shahada* upon only those deemed exalted and worthy. Second, it is a lie. ISO's evidence is fabricated. Willful deception, particularly involving alleged martyrdom, involves the gravest of matters. Third, one must assume that these slain souls were bloodied, possibly fear-faced or grimacing, or at best wearing the 'death mask'. As mortal beings who in many cases possibly became aware they were perishing, one can only imagine the actual emotions expressed as the certainty of leaving loved one's behind and of life's quick and tragic end faced them. The fact is we can never know the facts behind the fraud except through defectors accounts. Finally, and related to the last point, it is by no means clear that martyrdom is the assured final place of ISO's fighters. At the very least, ISO has furnished the most convincing negative evidence that those slain in its name wear not a smile but something other.

End Note

[1] Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, "Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State's propaganda machine," November 20, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html, accessed on November 23, 2015. This manipulative propagandistic act was merely one "assignment" delegated by what amounts to a major warfighting function. This highly under-reported story is well worth reading in detail.

About the Author



Paul Kamolnick

Paul Kamolnick is professor of sociology at East Tennessee State University. He has published articles and reviews in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Small Wars Journal*. Kamolnick has also authored three monographs through the Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, Carlisle, PA: *De-legitimizing Al-Qaeda: A Jihad-Realist Approach* (April 2012); *Countering Radicalization and Recruitment to Al-Qaeda: Fighting the War of Deeds* (June 2014); and, *The Al-Qaeda Organization (Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad) and the Islamic State Organization (Tanzim al-Dawla al-Islamiyya): History, Doctrine, Modus operandi, and United States Policy to Degrade and Defeat Terrorism in the Name of Sunni Islam (Ahl-us Sunnah)*. (Forthcoming, Spring/Summer 2016).

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-mysterious-case-of-the-islamic-state-organization-iso-smiling-martyr-solved>

Links:

- {1} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/paul-kamolnick>
- {2} http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html
- {3} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/comment/reply/37571#comment-form>

Copyright © 2017, Small Wars Foundation.



Select uses allowed by Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).
Please help us support the [Small Wars Community](#).