Needless Collateral Damage

Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS)

September 2, 2014

In recent months, many media organizations and nongovernmental organizations have used the acronym ISIS as a shortening for the name of the jihadist terrorist group named, in transliterated Arabic, the Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham. The group announced in June that it was changing its name to the "Islamic State." But the widespread, persistent use of the acronym ISIS to refer to this terrorist organization continues to cause considerable confusion and is causing reputational harm to the many organizations and entities that also use this acronym. The Institute for Science and International Security, a non-profit institution which has used the acronym ISIS since 1993, would like to urge media and foreign policy analysts to no longer refer to Al-Dawla Al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham by the name "ISIS" but to choose another alternative.

The translation of the group's name as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has been subject to considerable debate itself, as the term "al-Sham" is difficult to translate into English and there is no agreement among experts as to its geographical scope. However, both U.S. and U.N. officials have consistently referred to the group using the alternate translation, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is by this name that the group was sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council, and it is the alias that has supplanted "al-Qa'ida in Iraq" on the State Department's Foreign Terrorist Organization list. This list also contains alternate names of the organization: ad-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi al-'Iraq wa-sh-Sham, Dawla al Islamiya, or Daesh. The last name is also transliterated in English as Daaish. As noted above, the group itself announced that it was changing its name to the "Islamic State" or "IS."

While consistent reporting and due diligence are largely a matter of editorial decisions, it is the clarity of the public debate in regard to other issues with which the Institute for Science and International Security is concerned. As a non-profit, non-partisan institution dedicated to informing the public about science and policy issues affecting international security, we are worried that the confusion surrounding the acronym "ISIS" can have detrimental effects on the public discourse surrounding our primary area of focus - nuclear non-proliferation. However, as

media headlines describe the atrocities committed by the Islamic State using the acronym "ISIS", our and others' credibility is undermined among the public that is also uninformed about our and others' organizations. It is not only the Institute for Science and International Security that has felt the impact of recent headlines. A cursory search using the term ISIS revealed 65 organizations and companies that also use "ISIS" in their name (see appendix).

The use of ISIS to describe a murderous anti-feminine terrorist organization is incongruous when considering that Isis is an Egyptian goddess, whose mythology includes motherhood and bringing life from death. In fact, it was this latter Isis myth that motivated the founders of this ISIS to select the name for an organization centered on preventing nuclear war, stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, and eventually achieving nuclear disarmament.

Some have suggested that we should change our name and no longer use ISIS. In July, a company which created a mobile wallet app announced that it was changing its name because of the inadvertent confusion with the terrorist organization. We recognize that each group needs to make decisions protecting its goals. However, we reject the notion that changing our name is the solution to the problem. Given the many organizations and companies that also use the name ISIS, is it reasonable that we suffer harm because media organizations and NGOs have made an unfortunate choice, one not made by the U.S. government, the United Nations, and many others?

The confusion over the use of the acronym ISIS for a terrorist organization, and its unintended consequences, is avoidable. For this reason, we urge the media and other NGOs to stop using ISIS to refer to a terrorist group and hasten the transition to using the group's current name, the Islamic State (IS), or any of the alternate names mentioned above.

Appendix: Organizations using the acronym ISIS

NGOs
ISIS - the International Species Information System - world's most current, comprehensive and reliable source of knowledge on intensively managed species and their environments for zoos, aquariums and related organizations
Institute of Science in Society - Co-founded in 1999 by scientists Mae-Wan Ho and Peter Saunders to provide critical yet accessible and reliable information to the public and policy makers.
Institute for the Study of Interdisciplinary Sciences - Was a British educational charity
Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society - organization of writers that promotes the ideas of secularism, democracy and human rights within Islamic society
ISIS Foundation
The ISIS Group - A partnership between an international development organisation (The ISIS Foundation) and a corporate advisory business (ISIS Asia Pacific). The objective of ISIS Asia Pacific is to fund the core support costs of The ISIS Foundation.
International Spine Intervention Society
International Society on Infant Studies
ISIS Europe
ISIS International - feminist advocacy organisation
Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) - an association of dedicated professionals, who willingly devote their capabilities in a ethical way for the betterment of our local communities and the society in general
Immigrant Settlement & Integration Services - welcomes immigrants to Nova Scotia
ISIS Academy - sustainable development
Infant Sleep Information Source - ISIS is a collaboration between Durham University Parent-Infant Sleep Lab, La Leche League, NCT, and UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative, funded by a grant from the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)
ISIS Arts - Working internationally with artists to produce and present contemporary art, film and new media
Isis - Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange
ISIS - The Eating Issues Center

For-profit companies
Isis Wallet - mobile payment app
ISIS - Institute of Studies for the Integration of Systems - Italian private research and consulting firm on energy, environment, etc.
ISIS - Innovative Solutions In Space - small satellite company
ISIS Pharmaceutical
ISIS Papyrus - Swiss-based commercial software development group
ISIS Asia Pacific
ISIS Equity Partners
ISIS - has been developing world-class asset-tracking software from it's headquarters in London, UK since 1996.
ISIS Waterside Regeneration
ISIS Schools - language schools
ISIS Restaurant in Asheville
ISIS Group - bicycle parts
ISIS Publishing
ISIS Ex - developing class-leading specialist hazardous area computer hardware
ISIS - Insurance Companies Worldwide
ISIS Chocolate
ISIS Hotel, Cairo
ISIS Education - study travels
ISIS Gear - design-driven laptop protection
ISIS Clothing - outdoor women's clothing
ISIS Inc - health and wellness, changed their name
The ISIS Press
ISIS Bungalows, Philippines
ISIS Power - designs and manufactures advanced vehicle electrical power distribution systems
ISIS - Fitout and refurbishment specialists
ISIS Concepts - learning spaces
ISIS - Hotel and Spa, Turkey
ISIS Biopolymer

For-profit companies
ISIS Ayurveda Retreat
ISIS Cove Retreat
Isis Inc - solutions for business

University-affiliated organizations	6	P a g e

Isis - University of Chicago Press journal

ISIS is a world-leading centre for research in the physical and life sciences at the STFC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory near Oxford in the United Kingdom.

Institute for Software Integrated Systems, a research organization of the School of Engineering at Vanderbilt University.

ISIS - Institut de Science et d'Ingénierie Supramoléculaires - Institute at the University of Strasbourg

Isis Innovation - a wholly-owned subsidary of the University of Oxford, managing technology transfer and academic consulting for Oxford, and providing consulting advice to clients around the world

ISIS - Integrated Student Information System (many universities)

ISIS - The Isis Magazine - Established at Oxford University in 1892.

Information Science + Information Studies at Duke University - Began in 2001 as part of a University effort to consider the ways in which the digital revolution is transforming teaching and learning and society at large

Institute for Simulation and Interprofessional Studies - University of Washington Medicine

ISIS at Sauder School of Business

ISIS Laboratory at NYU Poly

The ISIS Project at Cornell University

Integrated Study Information System of University of Economics, Prague

ISIS at Brown University - identifying, collecting, organizing, providing access to and preserving information resources from and about the Iberian Peninsula in support of education and research

ISIS - Master - Euro-Mediterranean Master Program in Neuroscience & Biotechnology

ISIS Canada Resource Centre - provides an equipment pool and expertise for SHM and Civionics Technologies for field applications across Canada.

Information Sciences in Imaging at Stanford