



The Challenge of the Islamic State

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab state system that evolved during the second half of the 20th century has collapsed in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia, with potential for Lebanon and Jordan to follow suit. Like Lewis Carol's "Humpty Dumpty", the countries that have already imploded cannot be put together again without significant investment of political, economic, and/or military capital, which is not available under the circumstances. The breakdown of the nation state and of borders in the Middle East has precipitated a regression to fundamental religious-sectarian and tribal identities. These identities were always present and latent but have now become the primary frame of reference for a large portion of the populace in the region.

The main forces in this new "regional disorder" are – and will be for the foreseeable future – the Islamic forces – the "Islamic State" (ISIS) and other Islamist movements. These will compete among themselves for predominance on all levels – religious-ideological, economic, military, and in terrorist attacks against their perceived enemies – the failed regimes, Israel, the pro-Western conservative Arab states and the West. They will also escalate their efforts to acquire advanced weapons, chemical weapons, and cyber capabilities, and to use them against those enemies. The threat, therefore, is not merely a territorially defined "Islamic State", but rather the emergence of a plethora of local but networked "Jihadists" in various parts of the region and their spillover to other countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, and Europe.

In this context, the rise of the "Islamic State" ("*al-dawlah al-islamiyah*") is a watershed event for the Middle East and the regions affected by it. The political and military revival of the idea of a "Caliphate" impacts on radical Islamic movements and communities across the Muslim world. Muslim communities, organizations, leaders, and ideological movements cannot be aloof to its existence; they may either oppose it as an illegitimate claimant to the title of Caliphate, or acknowledge its claim to exclusivity and pledge their allegiance to the Caliph. While the Arab states that are directly threatened by the "Islamic State" reject its legitimacy, the social media reflection of massive refugee movements and the image of success of the "Islamic State" contribute to the eschatological appeal of the "Caliphate" and fan the flames of radicalization among Muslims in the West, encouraging them to both embark to the region as foreign fighters and to fight against the "infidels" in the West as well.

The current level of effort to defeat the "Islamic State" has not degraded the organisation severely, and has even enhanced its status in the eyes of its supporters as a Muslim entity that stands up to the military might of the "infidel" superpowers. Russian intervention adds fuel to the fire of radicalization, evoking memories of Afghanistan and further encouraging young Muslims to join the Jihad. The refugee crisis resulting from the Syrian civil war has also precipitated the far-reaching demographic changes in Syria's neighbouring countries that threaten their stability and even their integrity as states. The potential for further state disintegration in the region remains high, as does the potential for deleterious impact on the region's European neighbours.

This paper will examine the sources of the appeal of the "Islamic State", the prospects for its military and ideological defeat, it will also address the question in what manner and with what means can the international community in general and the EU in particular meet the challenge: what can be done to contain the spillover of these developments, how can the social and security impact on the West be mitigated, and what can be done to bolster the security of the "front line" countries in the region that are willing to cooperate in coping with this challenge.

What is the “Islamic State”?

The ideological Weltanschauung behind the “Islamic State” Caliphate is far more confrontational, outward looking and violence-prone than any previous experiment at establishing an Islamic regime. It is based on an eschatological view of the current stage of Islamic history, according to which the time is now ripe for the restoration of one Islamic State under a Caliph¹ for the entire Muslim world and for the reinstatement of the Jihad against the infidel world to “make the Word of Allah supreme in the World”. While the ideologues of the “Islamic State” purport to emulate the regimes of the Four Righteous Caliphs, the real model, it seems, is the regime of the Prophet himself, who waged Jihad against the “polytheists”, offering them the choice of “Islam or the Sword”, eliminated “paganism” and “heresy” in the Arabian Peninsula and subjugated or massacred entire populations of those who opposed him. Therefore, unlike most previous Caliphates for whom jihad against the non-Muslim world was not central, it is the core *raison d’être* of the “Islamic State”. Notwithstanding, the “conquest of Rome” cannot be achieved without first ridding the heartland of the Middle East from Muslim “apostates” – Shiites, Yazidis, Kurds and Alawites. For the “Islamic State”, the Alawite regime in Syria and the Shiite regime of Iraq remain to be the “near enemy”².

The essence of the Caliphate is not the regime per se but the persona of the Caliph as “the substitute of the Messenger of Allah” (“*khalifat rusul allah*”)³. This title conjures up the following political characteristics:

- Full authority of the Caliph in both religious and temporal affairs, implying the unacceptability of Muslim religious pluralism within the Caliphate.
- Universality of the Caliphate and the need for physical unification of all parts of “*dar al-islam*” under the Caliphate, hence the unacceptability of equally legitimate competing “Caliphates” and the implicit inadmissibility of a “Westphalian order” among Muslim states.
- Subjugation of the “People of the Book” (Jews, Christians and Zoroastrianists) to the “Pact of Omar” that imposes on them a communal head tax and restrictions as for second-class citizens.
- Renewal of the “Offensive Jihad” (*Jihad al-talab wal-ibtida’*) resulting in a belligerent relationship vis-à-vis “*Dar al-Harb*” (the Abode of War).
- The duty to acquire – or even use in the Jihad against the infidels – nuclear weapons, according to the Quranic injunction (8:60) “And prepare against them whatever you are able of power ...by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy ...”⁴

Perhaps in light of the above, contemporary Islamic regimes eschewed the “Caliphate” paradigm and preferred to define themselves as “Emirates”, “Islamic Republics” or “Kingdoms”. Indeed, few Islamic movements had made any serious attempt to define a modern concept of how a Caliphate would be structured⁵; even al-Qaeda did not see the establishment of a Caliphate as an immediate goal, but one that was to be reached gradually⁶.

An important question is the “etiology” of the phenomenon that the “Islamic State” represents today. This is not a new phenomenon; it manifested itself in the wake of 9/11 in the popularity of al-Qaeda among Muslims across

1 “*khilafah*” – this model is based on the appointment of a leader. The idea behind the title is that it describes the ruler and not a regime, constitution or clearly defined political structure per se. The full title of the Caliph is “*Khalifat Rasul-Allah*” (the substitute of the Messenger of God). Sunni tradition stipulates that he is not appointed by the previous Caliph or by some supernatural divine sign, but by the “group that unbinds and binds” (*ahl al-hal wa al-‘aqd*) and his authority from that stage on is cemented through an “oath of allegiance” (*ba‘ya*).

2 The obsession of the “Islamic State” – and its predecessor, the Abu Mus‘ab al-Zarqawi group – with Shiites has been a bone of contention between them and the “old guard” of the Jihadi-Salafi movement. The leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri distinguishes between the leaders of the Shia and the “common folk”. The former are apostates of Islam. The latter have simply been misled ideologically and, therefore, are to be forgiven due to their ignorance.

3 The appellations of the Caliph include the “Commander of the Believers” (“*amir al-mu‘minin*”) and “He Who Must Be Obeyed” (“*wali al-amr*”).

4 This follows mainstream Islamic discussions of nuclear weapons that justify or even oblige acquisition of nuclear weapons and even their use against “infidels”. See: Shmuel Bar, Warrant for Terror, Rowman and Littlefield, 2006, pp. 70-73

5 *Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Liberation Party) and its spinoffs such as “*al-Muhajirun*” <http://www.pal-tahrir.info/memorial93/7203-2014-05-19-16-41-19.html>. Also see the Muhajirun version: <http://khilafah.net/main/index.php/ajhisa/alkhalifah/C9>

6 See: <http://www.hudson.org/research/9901-the-zawahiri-letter-and-the-strategy-of-al-qaeda>

the globe. Attempts to uncover the fundamental causes of the visceral hostility that “radical Islam” demonstrates towards the West have identified a long list of “underlying causes” or “driving factors”: poverty (or inequality of distribution of wealth), alienation, absence of democracy and oppressive autocratic regimes, national or cultural humiliation, colonialism, military defeat, social and economic encroachment of the West as well as political issues such as the Palestinian issue, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and more. However, not one of these causes on its own nor any combination of them can be said to give rise to wide-scale terrorism. Many of them are common to the “third world” in general while some political grievances are distinctive in the Muslim or Arab world, but none of them stand alone as incomparable grievances that no other nation has endured⁷. However, while in other societies these grievances have given birth to local terrorist movements, only in the Muslim world we have been witnesses to movements that encompass co-religionists or ethnic relations from different areas, and that identify the entire Western world (or any other civilizational bloc) as its nemesis, and have attacked targets outside of their home countries. Therefore, the “Islamic State” phenomenon cannot be explained as the result of political and socio-economic factors alone. Cultural-dependent factors such as religious mores, attitudes towards violence in general, traditions of tolerance or intolerance towards the “other” must also be taken into account.

There is a tendency in the West to declare the phenomenon of the “Islamic State” “irrational”. However, to quote Polonius (Hamlet) “T’is madness but there is a method in it”. There is nothing irrational in establishing a reign of terror to achieve political domination (Robespierre, Hitler, Stalin), leveraging religious or nationalistic fervour to achieve these goals or setting free the most atavistic drives of human beings to satisfy a constituency. In the pre-“Islamic State” Syrian or Iraqi societies, as repressive as they were, a man could not just buy a sex-slave, rape a woman at will or slit throats at will. Under the “Islamic State” any man can purchase slave girls (albeit only Kurds, Yazidis and other “untermenschen”) and rape whomever “his right hand (e.g. his sword hand) possesses”. In a Hobbesian world, this is “natural”. The “Islamic State” is rational – it uses the means that achieve the goal they desire. However, it is not “reasonable” by our standards.

The other side of the coin is the tendency to find a “rational” economic explanation for the emergence and behaviour of the “Islamic State”. This too is problematic; no rational or reasonable economic analysis would suggest that a state that postures itself as the existential enemy of all its neighbours would benefit economically. An extrapolation of this school is the analogy drawn by some western pundits between the “Islamic State” and organized crime. Indeed, there has been for some time a nexus between terrorism and organized crime. This has been revealed in the case of Hezbollah links with the drug trade in Afghanistan and Latin America. Al-Qaeda members were encouraged to use criminal activities as a source of self-funding for operations, with the religious-legal dispensation that crimes against infidels do not contradict Islam. The “Islamic State” as well already promotes its cause in this way. Furthermore, the violent nature of the “Islamic State” ideology and the “carte blanche” for violence against non-Muslims and women appeal to many criminals who find a convenient home in the ideology of radical Islam that gives them social justification for brutality and crime that would not be acceptable by the norms of the societies they lived in. Indeed, many radical Islamists (Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, Richard Read inter alia) started their career as criminals. This however, is a marginal aspect and certainly not a key feature in the ethology of the phenomenon.

Whither the “Islamic State”?

Since its initial victories in July 2014, the “Islamic State” has established its rule in the areas under its sway in Iraq and Syria, setting up local governments, trade and economies and a semblance of “rule of law” – albeit brutal and discriminatory. Today, it is a far more formidable force and it is clear that in order to “degrade, defeat and dismantle” it (in the words of President Obama) there is need for military power that far exceeds the current effort of the coalition.

The Western and Arab military campaigns against the “Islamic State” in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen have not yielded any substantial victories and, barring a fundamental change in strategy, will not do so for the following reasons:

- The scale of the bombing campaign is negligible in relation to the size of the theatre of operations as is the

⁷ Tibet is occupied and colonized as is the province of Xinjiang in China; many Basques and North Ireland Catholics see themselves in that status as do Sikhs in India, Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Chiapas in Mexico and many other ethnic groups around the world.

number of the “Islamic State” militants killed by these attacks in relation to the size of the “Islamic State” fighting force.

- The efforts to mobilize pro-Western forces to fight the “Islamic State” have failed in spite of significant funding.
- The only forces actively fighting the “Islamic State” on the ground now are, therefore, its Jihadi rivals – *Jabhat al-Nusra* and other al-Qaeda affiliates along with a few Saudi and Qatari supported forces. These forces do not have the wherewithal to build a military force that would be a match for the “Islamic State”. Furthermore, even if they were to achieve local victories, these would not create a more positive environment for Western interests.

The Russian military deployment and operations in Syria echo the new regional balance of power. It reflects a Russian-Iranian strategic calculus that:

- The danger to the Assad regime has grown significantly;
- The Assad regime cannot regain control over even most of the former territory of Syria;
- The downfall of the Syrian regime would be a strategic blow to both Russia and Iran;
- The West – and particularly the US – will avoid any confrontation with Russia or Iran at least until 20 January 2017.

The key goals of the Russian intervention on the tactical-military level therefore, are not to defeat the “Islamic State”, but rather to secure a viable “Alawistan” along the predominantly Alawite coast of Northern Syria including predominantly Sunni areas along the coast and to dislodge the (Western, Arab and Turkish supported) rebel forces from their strategic positions in Aleppo and Hama. In doing so, Russia seeks to create a new status quo, which will convince the West, the Sunni Arab states and Turkey to come to terms with the continued rule of Assad and the Russian hegemony in the region.

From Russia’s point of view a viable Russian and Iranian backed Alawistan would provide many of the advantages of the proxy relationship with the defunct Syrian state: a formidable military presence on the Eastern Mediterranean, underlining the withdrawal of the United States from the region and replacing the US as a mediator and broker between Israel and Syria/Iran/Hezbollah in the Syrian-Lebanese theatres, and accruing assets that can be leveraged in other dealings with the US in areas of vital interests to Moscow. Furthermore, Russia sees all forms of radical Islam as “Wahhabi”, not only originating in Saudi Arabia but guided by the Saudis – with the tacit agreement of the Americans – in order to destabilize the Russian Muslim republics. In fighting this ideology, Russia has traditionally allied itself with Iran.

The hope that decapitation of the ISIS leadership will lead to its demise has little to rely on. Formally, the leadership of the “Islamic State” will probably adopt the succession paradigm of the first four Caliphs in which the community leaders (*Ahl al-hal wal ‘aqd* – those who bind and untie) elected the new Caliph and then gave him the oath of allegiance (*bay‘a*). If Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were to be killed, the “Islamic State” would probably field others from his extended tribe to fill the role. It is unlikely that al-Baghdadi’s current deputies – many of them non-Arabs – would be able to step into his shoes⁸. If al-Baghdadi is killed, but his death cannot be confirmed, the organization may even allow him to remain virtually “alive” for a period of time. This would not be exceptional; Osama bin Laden was out of the public eye for many years before he was killed by American forces in Pakistan and this fact did not detract from his legitimacy as a leader of al-Qaeda. In any case, the “Islamic State” is not, at this stage, a “one bullet regime”.

Spread of the ISIS Caliphate – “Caliphate Archipelagos”

The global aspirations of the “Islamic State” were expressed in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s call to the Muslims who are oppressed in “China, India, Palestine, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, Sham (the Levant), Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz, Iran the Rafida (Shiite), Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, in the East and in the West” and vow to “conquer Rome (i.e. the ‘Christendom’) and own the world”.

This call resonates among Muslim communities in the Middle East on one hand, and in the Muslim Diaspora in

8 Such as Omar al-Shesheni (a Georgian-Chechen, born as Tarkhan Tagumurazovich Batirashvili), and the Turkmen Fadil Ahmad Abdallah al Hayyali (Abu Muslim al Turkmani), who supervises the State in Iraq and Abu Ali al Anbari, who oversees “Islamic State” operations in Syria.

the West and in non-Arab countries on the other. For the former, the appeal of the “Islamic State” is linked to an atmosphere of impending Sunni-Shiite Armageddon, spawned by a widespread Sunni perception of Shiite advances in Syria, Iraq and Yemen and Iranian progress towards a military nuclear capability. In these circumstances, the “Islamic State” is the “strong horse” of the Sunnis. The image of “invincibility” of the “Islamic State” is reinforced by the impunity with which it beheads Americans and other “infidels” and the relatively minor results of the bombing campaign. In the eyes of potential recruits to the camp of the “Islamic State”, it is measured in relation to its enemy: the very fact that ISIS is pitted against the greatest superpower in the world and that superpower cannot overcome it strengthens it.

For non-Arab Muslims and Muslims in the West on the other hand, there is a tendency to accept the predominance of ideologies imported from the Arab world and to be attracted to the idea of a Caliphate that is ostensibly ruled by a descendent of the Prophet’s tribe and is controlling the land of the early Caliphates – Iraq and Syria. In any case, Muslim communities, organizations, and ideological movements cannot be aloof to the claims of the “Caliphate” – they may either acknowledge its claim to exclusivity and vow their allegiance or oppose it and become – in its own eyes – allies with the infidels and rebels against the legitimate “Commander of the Believers”.

To date, approximately 60 jihadist groups in 30 countries have pledged allegiance or support to the “Islamic State”. Many of these groups were previously affiliated with al-Qaeda, indicating a shift in global jihadist leadership toward the “Islamic State”. The main theatres that will give rise to branches of the “Islamic State” include: the other countries of “al-Sham” – Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, North Africa, Western Africa, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, The Philippines/Mindanao, and Central Asia. The potential in each of these theatres differs according to the level of regime control or chaos in each respective country, the political dynamics of the homegrown Islamist movements, the status of local Islamic elites, ease of movement to the Iraqi-Syrian theatre, and checks and balances of local Islamic ideology.

In many Muslim countries where the traditional elites oppose the “Islamic State”, tribal, political, and ideological adversaries of those elites may see the potential of linking up with the Caliphate to transform them from individual local movements to part of a larger and stronger entity. In this framework, leaders of small local movements with some territorial control may submit their *bay’a* to the Caliph and receive, in return, their appointment as the local “Amir” (Commander/Prince) and access to resources that the network of the Caliphate can provide. Such sporadic and separate metastasis of the Caliphate may create a new reality of a “Caliphate archipelagos” that will pose a strategic and operational challenge to the struggle against the core of the “Islamic State” in the main theatres of Syria and Iraq. This was true to an extent even during the heyday of “core al-Qaeda”; any action against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan had to take into account sleeper cells, activists and just “lone wolves” who identified ideologically with al-Qaeda. However, it is assessed that the scope and threat of such widespread support systems will now grow.

The “Islamic State” is already making extensive use of the Internet for recruitment and command and control. From the point of view of its recruits outside of the theatre, it represents a model of “virtual leadership⁹” and “virtual command and control”. The virtual oath of allegiance (*bay’a*) to the Caliph is executed without the new follower ever having seen the leader to whom he is giving his *bay’a*. As opposed to the traditional *bay’a* that limited the number of people pledging their allegiance to those who could reach physical contact with the leader, now any number of Muslims can sign a form on the Internet stating their allegiance. This may be the Achilles heel of the organization’s global outreach, if wisely leveraged and disrupted.

While movements with authentic territorial and ideological roots in the Arab world may view the “Caliphate” as a usurper that must be challenged¹⁰, the very revival of the idea of the Caliphate has the potential of galvanizing

9 Virtual leadership can be defined as leadership by a person who the follower has never met directly or even viewed through the traditional mass media, however, he commands the loyalty of the follower.

10 In the wake of the triumphs of the “Islamic State” in the latter half of 2014, the “old guard” of the Salafi-Jihadi movement united against Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s presumption to declare himself Caliph. Senior Jihadi-Salafi Sheikhs issued fatwas calling on Muslims to fight ISIS, likening them to the “Kharijites” and declaring them “extremists” and “deviants”. The sudden rise of the “Islamic State” and the audacity of al-Baghdadi has even given birth to suspicions in the Islamist social media that he does not intend to stop at the “Caliphate” but will eventually declare himself the “expected Mahdi” (*al-mahdi al-muntazar*) who, in Sunni eschatological thought will appear at the end of days. Many of his opponents have not waited for such a declaration and already call him the “false Mahdi”.

dormant Islamist movements in other regions to declare their own other self-proclaimed Caliphates. Such "Caliphate Fever" may result in local movements carving out areas that are nominally part of a recognized state (in Pakistan, Malaysia, or even inner cities in Europe) as self-declared "Caliphates". Such a development opens the possibility of competing "Caliphates". Few of these will be open to alliances with the West (the Quran clearly condemns "taking the Jews and Christians as allies") and they may naturally engage in a contest of "one-upmanship" in waging jihad against the infidels in order to strengthen their Islamist credentials.

CONCLUSION

The current efforts to "degrade" the "Islamic State" by limited military force or to delegitimize it by declaring it "not Islamic" are not likely to bear fruit in the near future. A credible military option to defeat the "Islamic State" would call for decisive military capability that neither the Syrian nor the Iraqi regime possess, and the Arab coalition against the "Islamic State" will not invest while the United States "lead from behind". The expectation that the Sunni tribes in Iraq and Syria will fight the "Islamic State" as they had done against al-Qaeda in the "Anbar Sunni Awakening" in 2006-2007 is a chimera. The assessment that the "Islamic State" may be a "one bullet regime" and that targeted killing of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would topple it is also flawed. It has already reached a point where the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would not cause its collapse and it would be able to put forth a successor. Even if the West were to intervene with "boots on the ground", the disintegration of Syria and Iraq (not to mention Libya and Yemen) has reached the point of no return and there would be no accepted "regime" to hand those countries back to. The Russian interest is not to defeat the "Islamic State" but rather to preserve the Syrian regime. For this, the continued existence of the threat of the "Islamic State" is crucial as justification for the Russian presence. However, the continued existence of the Assad regime and the Russian presence are, themselves, key factors in the rising popularity of the "Islamic State".

The Sunni-Shiite conflict will continue to feed off the civil strife in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. In the latter, the presence of 1.4 million Sunni Syrian refugees in a country of 4 million has precipitated a demographic and political shift that will probably result in challenge to the hegemony of the Shiite Hezbollah that is identified as supporting the Syrian regime. Communal and sectarian identity will determine enmity and alliances within the region. External forces (e.g. the US and the West and even Israel) will be judged according to their perceived support by one or another side and, for the time being, in the light of the American policy vis-à-vis Syria, Iraq and Iran, the conventional wisdom in the region is that the US has adopted a pro-Shiite pro-Iranian stance. Mass massacres and "ethnic cleansing" will be commonplace. Massacres of minorities will increase and dominate the international agenda vis-à-vis the region. The spillover into Europe will exacerbate further as waves of refugees fleeing from massacres and state collapse and lacking asylum behind the closed doors of the still-functional Arab states will knock on the doors of Europe. The "Islamic State" has succeeded in leveraging the Sunni-Shiite conflict to its advantage and is viewed by many Sunnis as the champion of the Sunnis against the impending Shiite threat. A conservative assessment of the number of foreign fighters from the West stands at about 5-7 thousand. Many of them are already returning imbued with a mission of jihad in their home countries. More importantly, they enjoy in the Muslim communities in the West a sufficient degree of social support. Public opinion polls among Muslims in the Muslim world and the West show a high level of sympathy for the "Islamic State" or at least an unwillingness to join the Western chorus of declaring it "un-Islamic".

The unwillingness of the international community to come to terms with the demise of the Arab states and to allow the rise of alternative viable state entities where it is possible will only exacerbate chaos and suffering and encumber the efforts to contain the threat of the emerging "Jihadists" in the region. A prime example is the political denial in the West that Iraq and Syria are defunct countries, thus placing an obstacle in the face of the formal creation of a viable and pro-Western Kurdistan. A Kurdish political entity would probably align itself with the West, both for strategic reasons and because of their cultural self-image as ethnically distinct from the Arabs, the relatively low influence of radical Islam in their ranks, their economic interests, and their social values (including a high degree of equality of women). The anti-Kurdish policies of the Erdogan regime in Turkey and Turkish indifference towards the massacre of Kurds by ISIS in Syria have strengthened Kurdish irredentism and self-confidence among the Kurds of Turkey who will become more than half of the population of Turkey by 2025. The results of the parliamentary elections in Turkey were the evidence of this sentiment. The longer the international community remains captive to the chimera of restoring the Arab nation states of the 20th century, the lower the chances of setting up such a viable Kurdistan will be.

At the same time, the implications of spillover into additional countries that have not yet disintegrated are not fully

appreciated. If Lebanon were to buckle under the weight of Sunni Syrian refugees – many of whom would naturally identify with the “Islamic State” as the main force fighting the Assad regime – the spread of the “Islamic State” to the shores of the Mediterranean would have far reaching implications for security (including gas/energy security) in the Eastern Mediterranean. Destabilization of the Kingdom of Jordan would rapidly spill over into the Palestinian theatre and draw Israel into the fray. It is, therefore, a prime interest of the West to bolster these countries.

The implications of the emergence of the Caliphate idea for the challenge of terrorism extend from the potential of local “Caliphate branches” or what was called above “Caliphate archipelagos”. The potential for cooperation between Caliphate oriented entities in different theatres is greater than that which existed between like-minded movements with different leaderships and natural suspicion of outsiders. The foreign fighter phenomenon will grow as long as the affected countries do not take steps for criminalization of the very act of joining the “Caliphate”. On the other hand, the more brutal and vicious the attacks affiliated with the “Caliphate” are, the greater the dilemma of the silent majority of Muslims in the West. Left without the active security support of the states, they will hedge their interests by nominal support of the Caliphate. To confront this social and political domestic problem and reduce the leverage of the Caliphate, the Western countries will have to enter into the realm of active “human influence” operations in their own territories. This presents a legal, political and mindset challenge to Western societies.

The chances of a massive terrorist attack in Europe or the US linked to an entity in the region are high. Areas under Jihadi-Salafi control will become a magnet for foreign Jihadists who, as they return to their countries of origin with the ideology, training, and motivation that they acquired, will be highly motivated to launch such attacks. Counter-terrorism strategy will be complicated by the multiplicity of terrorist groups and the weakness of neighbouring states that could play a role in monitoring and countering terrorism. Such attacks, if they result in large numbers of casualties against Western targets, have the potential of galvanizing the West – including the United States – to intervene in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to emphasize that the threat should not be defined in terms of a specific organisation or a military force – the “Islamic State”, but rather in terms of an ideological movement with varying levels of influence over large populations. Restricting the scope to the “Islamic State” alone will not meet the challenge adequately. It must be viewed as a long-term struggle not only against the specific manifestation of violent radical Islamism but also against the Weltanschauung that gave birth to it. This calls for a paradigm shift in Europe regarding the threat assessment and the allocation of resources for dealing with the threat.

Furthermore, the urgency of the crisis calls for emphasizing short-term measures. However, much of the present spread of radical Islam was due to short term policies; the belief of Arab regimes that they could cultivate the Islamists as a counter-balance to leftist opposition; support by the US and the UK of the Mujahidin movement in the conflict with Russia in Afghanistan, leverage by Pakistan of the Mujahidin and later the Taliban in Kashmir and Afghanistan’s and even Israel’s turning a blind eye to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, and allowing free rein to Hamas as a counterbalance to other terrorist organisations. Hence, any short-term policy should be assessed in the light of its potential effects on long-term policy as well.

In the light of the above, the following taxonomy of the primary vs. contributing causes and long-term vs. variable causes of radicalization in the Muslim world can offer a matrix of the following distinctions:

	Primary Causes (necessary conditions)	Secondary Causes (contributing conditions)
Invariable or Long-term Causes	Basic Islamic texts and textual basis for <i>jihad</i> Self images and Arab culture Wahhabi-Salafi interpretations Absence of “firewalls” between radicals and mainstream	Social structure of Muslim society Structural and economic factors
Variable Causes	Charismatic radical leadership Tribal coalitions coalescing around ideological movements Crisis of religious and secular authority	Political Conflicts State support and tolerance of radicalism Weakness of moderate regimes Weakness of military response

Policy recommendations should give priority in addressing the dark shaded area (variable primary and secondary causes) and then the light shaded area (long term secondary causes). This cannot be done by political, economic or military means alone; in order to deal with cultural and religious elements it is necessary to employ cultural and religious tools. The need to make use of these tools though seems both foreign to Western strategic thought. The “religious” arsenal available to the West is limited.

In the absence of a military option or political willpower to wield it, the best strategy vis-à-vis the “Islamic State” may be one of containment. This entails:

In the short term:

- Creating a robust coalition of countries or political entities bordering on the heartland of the “Islamic State”, including Jordan, Turkey, Kurdistan, parts of Lebanon and Israel.
- Offering these countries – particularly Jordan and Lebanon – military, political and economic support. This should include massive support in dealing with the refugees in those countries.
- Expecting/demanding in return active support of those countries of military operations against the “Islamic State” from their territory and a clear and active policy to deny the “Islamic State” passage or economic activity. Jordan, the Kurds, and Israel are natural allies in this regard. However, Turkey’s ambivalent attitude, allowing free passage of foreign fighters and of oil must be changed in order to shore up the northern tier of the coalition.
- Refraining from any policy that will seem to the Sunni Arabs as promoting Iranian/Shiite hegemony in the region. A strategy that relies on Iran to deal with the “Islamic State” will only exacerbate the perception of Western and Russian support of Iran as a regional hegemon and fan the flames of support of the “Islamic State”.

- Military and covert activity, including targeted killings of select radical leaders and targets on the basis of analysis of the different options for neutralizing them: targeted killing, capture and detention (with or without publication), public trial, use in disinformation.
- Hold governments (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan) accountable for the behaviour of state funded religious institutions and of clerics who are appointed by the state and on its payroll. The declarations of these institutions should be considered as official no less than declarations of other organs of state. Regimes in Muslim countries have proved that, when it served their own self-interests, they had the means to impose their will on their religious establishments.

In the medium and long term, Europe – and the West in general – must:

- Re-assess its strategy based on the goal of restoring the nation states, which have been devoured by the “Islamic State”. Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia are “Humpty Dumpty states”; having never had the requisite characteristics of unified states, once they have disintegrated, they cannot be reconstructed by political means and there are no sufficient economic or military resources to impose re-unification of those states.
- Build a program for blocking the influence of the “Islamic State” among Muslims in Europe. Counter-radicalization efforts have been severely handicapped by political correctness and an ideologically motivated denial of the religious/Islamic sources of Islamist terrorism. A practical approach to countering Islamic terrorism (or terrorism by Muslims performed by them in the name of Islam) must accept that the real motivation is Islam, as those terrorists perceive it.
- Train European experts who are knowledgeable about the relevant languages, cultures and religious beliefs.
- Develop and field technologies for countering threats of recruitment, incitement and actual cyber attacks in the social media and on the Internet in general.
- Employ programs for “Human Influence Operations” against radical groups in order to disorient them and to discredit their leaderships.
- Deal with radical clerics with ties in the West by drawing a clear “line in the sand” between legitimate religious beliefs and those which will not be countenanced, notwithstanding their valid roots in religious doctrines. This calls for clarifying to Muslim religious establishments and clerics in the West that they can no longer allow themselves to enjoy both worlds: being members in a Western ecumenical society; and providing legitimacy to a terrorist ideology. This implies: 1) legal steps against clerics who declare even conditional or post factum support of acts of terrorism; 2) sanctions against jihad-oriented clerics and those who call for violence; 3) reinterpretation of the boundaries of freedom of religion to include criminalization of incitement or justification of terror and recruitment for radical ideologies, even if based on scriptures; and 4) redefining the principle of personal criminal culpability to cover religious leaders for the acts of their flock as a result of their spiritual influence.
- Rethink the assumption that is rife in Europe, that “moderate Islamist” fundamentalist movements” may serve as a counter-balance to Jihadi radicalism and to encourage them to gain power in their countries. This belief is a chimera; in the West, democracy and liberalism flourished only after politics was liberated from religion. The process of a “revolutionary” movement becoming sedentary and disengaging itself from its “radical” offshoots is usually slow and gradual – if at all. Furthermore, the rise to power of Islamist movements on its own encourages the radical branches of the movement.
- Set and stand behind clear criteria for receipt of funding from the EU, and to automatically cut funding from any institution that allows any form of radical preaching or education.
- Disrupt the flow of funds to radical groups through criminalization of contribution to those movements or institutions affiliated with them should be a prime goal.
- Develop a specific Islamic toolbox for countering Islamic radicalism within Muslim communities in the West. This toolbox must be based on real Islamic perceptions and not a revisionist reading of Islamic history and tenets. This toolbox must include active support of any Muslim leadership that is willing to stand up clearly against all radicalism and “punish” those who do not by denying them access to dialogue with governments. The “toolbox” must include use of radical concepts to “excommunicate” radicals, deny them access to communities and to make collaboration with the authorities in blocking them socially acceptable¹¹.

11 This “tool box” contains means for de-legitimization of acts of terrorism; it includes *takfir* (heretication) and incrimination of the terrorists in offenses of *hiraba* (destruction) and *fasad* (corruption). For every *fatwa* that promises paradise to those who engage in *jihad*, an authoritative counter-*fatwa* is needed that threatens hellfire for those acts. See Shmuel Bar, Warrant for Terror, Rowman and Littlefield, 2006, pp. 97-114.

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