Expert Comment

The Islamic Caliphate: Undrawn conclusions

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The primary and exclusive achievement of Islamist extremism was the emergence of the Islamic State in the beginning of the 21st century, which adopted the name of the World Caliphate in 2014. As Lebanese researcher Lina Khatib (2015) argued, its formation heralded the beginning of a 'new era of jihadism'.

In a certain sense, she was correct; the Islamic State (or 'World Caliphate') was an important development in the history of modern Islamism. Only the future (i.e., the 21st century) will reveal the extent to which it marked the beginning of a 'new era'.

Attempts to create an Islamic state will be surely repeated in different parts of the Muslim world. The next Islamic states will differ in their creation, although it is not out of the question that there will be analogues to ISIS with comparable cruelty. 'Creeping Islamisation' will continue, as will the adoption of religious behavioural norms, prohibitions based on Sharia, and the incorporation of Islamic law and corresponding norms into state constitutions and into the structure of the state. At the same time, a coordinated, united Muslim movement for some kind of worldwide Islamic state will not materialise. Each subsequent Islamic state, despite positioning itself as a universal state, will address problems on the national (and in some cases regional) level. We can venture a guess as to which countries may host its next iterations; possibilities include Nigeria or some neighbouring African countries (e.g., Libya, Somalia or Yemen). I would not rule out Pakistan, in which elements of a potential Islamic state have existed for some time. The desire for an Islamic state will be collectively determined by internal and external causes according to the state of the Muslim world. The

primary driver, however, remains the demand for an Islamic alternative, which has not disappeared.

Before ISIS

Prior to the rise of ISIS, the most powerful Islamist organisation with an extremist orientation was al-Qaeda. Many other movements exhibited a similar ideological slant, with parties on a regional and national scale: The Afghan Taliban; the Islamic Liberation Movement of Palestine (Hamas); the Nigerian Boko Haram group (translated as 'Western education is forbidden'); Somali Hizb ul Shabab (Party of the Youth); the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan; and hundreds of lesser-known groups and cells, which include the words 'jihad', 'Sharia', 'caliphate', or 'emirate'. Al-Qaeda did not task itself with building an Islamic state; its main strategic goal was to showcase its strength to the rest of the world, take revenge on 'enemies of Islam', and lead a global jihad in the name of vengeance. American analyst and journalist Alan Cullison (2004) compared al-Qaeda to the "early Russian anarchists" who "wrote some of the most persuasive tracts on the uses of terror", noting that "Al-Qaeda understood that its attacks would not lead to a quick collapse of the great power. Rather, its aim was to tempt the powers to strike back ..." (para. 18).

In 2004, the number of jihadists or 'Islamist fanatics' who supported al-Qaeda comprised no more than 0.1% of all Muslims according to experts – yet this figure still equalled 1.2–1.5 million people. Another 10 to 15 million 'sympathised' with al-Qaeda. As Bauer and Raufer (2005) pointed out, "If we take into account those who, due to the events in Iraq and Palestine, trusted bin Laden more than George Bush, their number exceeded 200 million people" (p. 26). The question of how many Muslims sympathised with ISIS is discussed herein.

Al-Qaeda was geared entirely towards destruction. Its structure (and more precisely, the absence of one) was designed for guerrilla warfare in enemy territory. Al-Qaeda has

been compared to the random movement of celestial bodies, or a solar system, where each planet rotates in its own orbit. It did not set out to seize power in any Muslim country, nor did the organisation require a specific geographical springboard to implement its plans. By contrast, ISIS's goal was qualitatively different, namely the creation of a transnational Islamic space across multiple borders and, following that, an Islamic state. Historically, such a state can be compared with the Ottoman Empire, which, until the beginning of the 20th century, could be considered the successor of the United Caliphate. Yet which borders did they hope to cross and overcome? The borders in question were drawn in the Middle East as a result of the Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 and then finalised after the end of the First and Second World Wars.

The Sykes–Picot Agreement can be likened to the Yalta Conference of 1945, a treaty between victorious powers on the division of the world after the Second World War. Incidentally, some previous agreements on the division of the world were implicitly recognised in Yalta, although in an altered form. The borders that passed 'along the outlines' of the former Ottoman Empire proved to be artificial. The artificiality of Middle Eastern borders can be likened to that of post-Soviet borders, including those in Central Asia. Such borders are also apt to shift in the Central Asian region, which could stimulate the growth of the Islamic State's popularity vis-à-vis the consolidation of Muslims. One must admit, however, that the danger of Central Asian borders being redrawn has declined in the second decade of the 21st century. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, all state borders seemed eternal – although the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century has shown that such prolonged stability in state borders is impossible. One way or another, ISIS brought into doubt the existence of 'old borders', and its actions may be considered an Islamic protest against a long-term and habitual 'colonial' division of the world.

The emergence of ISIS was not accidental. First, it was a culmination of social and political protest, the total constant strengthening of the Islamist trend. Second, it was born

of chronic instability in the Middle East and the Muslim world as a whole. Third, it is a consequence of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries. A widespread opinion in Russia and several countries in the post-Soviet space suggests that the West brought on the emergence of ISIS – something for which the Americans are given primary credit. Such an opinion is also shared, for example, by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov among others. It is unlikely, however, that Washington truly was intentionally involved in the formation of ISIS, whose successes largely devalued the Americans' defeat of Saddam Hussein. American intelligence agencies observed the process of ISIS's creation and were in communication with its representatives. They calculated the use of ISIS, for instance, in undermining Assad's regime. However, neither the Americans nor anyone else took the scope of ISIS's advancement into account, nor its real potential, particularly as a military and terrorist force. ISIS was perceived instead as an artificial phenomenon, and its potential was underestimated (Liptak, 2016).

The decisive pretext for the appearance of the 'Great Caliphate' was the 'Arab Spring', which began in 2011 and led to the collapse of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libyan Jamahiriya along with the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. The alignment of forces in Arab-Muslim society has changed, which has actualised the idea of an Islamic alternative. All this could have been foreseen, considering the degradation of local elites and the explosive growth of social protest; ISIS was only the most extreme form of its expression. From the beginning of the Arab Spring, the experts began – if only cautiously – to discuss the fate of the monarchies in the Persian Gulf. The Islamist opposition strengthened its positions throughout the region and became a legitimate part of the political landscape. The emergence of an Islamic state was inevitable, or nearly so; the real question was where, when, and how it would take place. It happened to manifest on the territory of Iraq and Syria.

It is worth mentioning that the hopes the Arab Spring inspired in Western politicians have proved untenable – specifically the hope that a cataclysm in the Middle East would lead to democratisation and serve as an impetus for the development of civil society. ISIS did not fight for survival in the initial stages of its existence, unlike the Afghan Taliban or Chechen separatists. It did not have a strong adversary comparable to the army of the Kabul government or to Russian troops in Chechnya. It was not a 'movement of resistance'; rather, it led offensive actions of its own, bringing the territory it seized under its control.

After ISIS's widescale offensive in Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2014, the area under its control covered 100,000–110,000 km^2, although other data have estimated 40,000–90,000 km^2. This area was reduced over the following year but had begun to grow again by the end of 2015. In October 2017, following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement regarding the end of Russian operations in Syria, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu announced the liberation of 503,233 km^2 from terrorist control (Polovinko, 2017). Given that the entire territory of Syria covers 181,000 km^2, this statement appeared somewhat strange and suggested that many territories had to be 'liberated' several times.

Note, too, that we are discussing ISIS-captured territories in Syria and Iraq. If we consider that ISIS deemed sites controlled by its supporters in Libya and Nigeria to be its own, then its total area may appear even more impressive. However, ISIS's tens of thousands of kilometres in territory are relative, as much of this is uninhabited desert. Borders for such territories exist according to the mutual agreement of neighbouring states, an impossibility in the case of ISIS. There are not borders between Syria and ISIS or between ISIS and Iraq, nor could there be – hence the mosaic quality of its maps, whose authors sought to capture ISIS's constantly changing boundaries. ISIS established control over populated areas as well as over infrastructure. The greatest success in the first stages of ISIS's formation was thus its domination over the roads leading to cities in Syria (e.g., Rakka and Deir ez-Zor) and Iraq (e.g., Mosul Samarra).

A few words about the demography of ISIS: initially, its population was around 1–2 million and then increased to 6–9 million – possibly even 10 million – people (Malashenko, 2017). Sources estimated the population to have reached 8–12 million by the end of 2014 (Birke, 2014). In terms of territorial and demographic parameters, ISIS fit perfectly into the Muslim world, although it may have indeed been in the lower half of the 'list' in terms of quantitative indicators. Yet the Islamic State claimed, not without justification, to be a Muslim state.

ISIS received internal support from the local population and a wide range of social strata. Thus, why did no one risk starting a kind of 'liberation movement' against ISIS? After all, the Sharia law imposed on the population, as well as ISIS's cruelty in dealing with the population, should have provoked at least some negative reaction – yet there was practically none. It turns out that ISIS suited local Muslims to a greater extent than those regimes under which they had lived before the Islamists' arrival. It is appropriate to cite the opinion of the Russian Arabist Kudelin who, in describing the situation in Iraq in 2008–2009, wrote that "there was both an active national movement of Iraqi resistance, which was very diverse in its ethnic and religious composition, as well as terrorist organisations composed of foreign volunteers and representatives of numerous Iraqi ethnic groups, not to mention various Arab tribes" (Kudelev, 2009, p. 5). This also coincided with the period of al-Qaeda's offensive campaign in Iraq; its social, religious, and political basis later became ISIS's foundation as well.

'**The Great Caliphate**'

ISIS's official self-designation, 'The Great Caliphate', attests first of all to its global political ambitions and secondly emphasises the continuity of the Islamic tradition and the political culture that developed from it. Historically, there is nothing original in this: for centuries, dozens of caliphs emerged and disintegrated in the Muslim world from the Atlantic Ocean

to Hindustan, whose caliphs positioned themselves as pan-Muslim rulers although they actually only ruled in specific regions.[1] The last caliphate was the Ottoman Empire, from which the republic of Turkey formed.

ISIS is usually called a 'group', which is designed to belittle its regional or even global significance and to put it on par with 'ordinary' terrorist entities. Politicians have generally decided not to refer to the 'official name' of ISIS as 'The Great Caliphate' and to use its Arabic abbreviation instead. This proposal was made by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and supported by the head of the French Foreign Ministry, Laurent Fabius, the deputies of the House of Commons of Great Britain, and others. Therefore, the term 'DAESH' (*Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil'Iraq wa-sh-Sham*,[1] translated as 'The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria') came into use. Since February 2016, this term has also been used by Russian media. The use of the abbreviation DAESH[1] was supported by Russian spiritual authorities, including the head of the Council of Russian Muftis, Ravil Gainutdin.

Serious importance was attached to the question of what to call ISIS in the Muslim world. Here, the terminological question acquired a religious background. With one of its names – the 'Islamic State' – ISIS compromised Islam and simultaneously cast doubt on the religious identity of other leaders and rulers. ISIS ideologists accused Muslims who did not agree with them of *takfir* (i.e., apostasy). The Muslim political elite and clergy could not allow this. Opponents of ISIS denied its affiliation with Islam. Russian Muslim politicians and muftis were resolute, proposing calling ISIS 'The State of the Devil' (*Dawlah Iblis* in Arabic). This is how the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, defined it in 2015.

All this can be considered a kind of struggle for control of Islam, yet it is still legitimate to consider ISIS an Islamic state, albeit not a successful one – indeed, one to which we can apply the term 'failed state'. A novel approach was proposed by Harvard analyst Stephen Walt (2015), who believes that "despite its religious character, IS stands in a long line of revolutionaries engaged in state-building" (Global Affairs). According to Walt, the revolutions

in France, Russia, China, Cuba, and Cambodia belong to the same series. Russian analyst Andrei Bystritsky wrote that, for some Muslims, ISIS is similar to the Spanish Republic of the 1930s for communists (Kryuchkov, 2016).

We can grant that the Islamic State forces are indeed revolutionaries, albeit religious ones. Comparing them with other revolutionaries, however, somehow reduces the degree of their peculiar originality. All the above-named revolutions were successful (some for a short time, some for longer), and the surrounding world had to reckon with the winners and even sometimes recognise them officially. Although the following analogy may seem strained, the destruction of other forms of belief and any opposition within ISIS is comparable to the destruction of religion and priests by the Bolsheviks or to the tortures inflicted under Pol Pot. The perpetrators of the French Revolution, as well as of the Great October Revolution, were no less bloodthirsty Islamic extremists and often even more so. The fanaticism of the French revolutionaries of the 18th century is comparable to the fanaticism of Islamic extremists in the 21st. Considering the 'toolkit' they use, ISIS is the heir, even the successor, to revolutionary traditions – whether secular or religious. All of them fought for a 'brighter future', and ISIS has turned out to be nothing more than an individual example of this fight.

ISIS can be compared to revolutionaries as well as to the Catholic Inquisition, which likewise fought for the purity of the faith and was prepared to use any means necessary to promote this cause. The founders and activists of both movements were merciless towards their opponents, their righteousness required no proof, and they acted in the name of the Almighty. Both ISIS and the Inquisition built their own supranational institutions while seeking legitimisation. Incidentally, the struggle for the one true faith was perfectly compatible with the mercantilism of the fighters themselves; the inquisitors confiscated property from hundreds of thousands of suspected heretics, just as ISIS 'nationalised' the

businesses, property, and museum holdings they expropriated. The Inquisition was a product of its time; ISIS is a product of our own.

ISIS and state building

Over the course of its existence, ISIS established itself on the territories it controlled and developed a very real state-building programme. This experiment in state building represents a particularly interesting case for study. On one hand, if not for the pressure exerted on it from without, it might have been considered a relatively successful project; on the other, if we assume that ISIS will not be the last attempt to create an Islamic government, then its experience may be of use to its successors. ISIS had its own state system that established principles consistent with a historical caliphate. At the head of the state was the Caliph, working alongside an advisory body called the *ash-Shura* ('council'). The Caliph himself was responsible for choosing council members, making his power absolute. At the same time, according to Koranic tradition, the Caliph must himself be elected by the Shura.

ISIS declared Sharia law. To monitor compliance, a special Legal (or Religious) Council was formed, consisting of three authoritative muftis and a 'Sharia Commission'. The Council was vested with extensive powers, including that of conducting propaganda abroad and recruiting Mujahideen. An Administrative Council handled the drafting of legislation based on Sharia. Economic issues were resolved by a number of officials, together representing a sort of government consisting of eight to ten ministers. A Military Council supervised the state of the army and its training and armament. An Intelligence Council was responsible for the work of ISIS's intelligence services.

The central bureaucracy had 25,000 employees in 2015 (Malashenko, 2016). Actually, ISIS developed its own bureaucracy relatively quickly, one which I would not venture to call 'Islamic'. ISIS administrators included thousands of civil servants who had previously worked for the administrative structures of Syria and Iraq, including many

Baathists, some of whom were former Iraqi officers. It is impossible to say how sincerely these officials believed in the ideology of ISIS or how ready they were to lead a life according to Sharia. But, one way or another, this newly born officialdom helped to strengthen ISIS through its work. After ISIS's defeat in 2017, many of its functionaries continued to work for the victors as confirmed by many participants and eyewitnesses.

ISIS's development was entangled with the strict and cruel maintenance of Sharia standards and punishment for their violation. Moreover, as ISIS strengthened, the observance of Sharia was transformed into a religious and legal cult to the point of absurdity. At prayer time, business owners were obliged to close their shops and were forbidden from chewing gum or smoking cigarettes. Women were not allowed to appear on the street unaccompanied by male relatives. Legislation established 'Sharia' standards of clothing and, in general, appearance: men were required to wear beards, and women were required to wear veils. Punishment by flagellation was introduced for some violations. Depending on the neighbourhood or area, smoking was punishable by 15 to 80 lashes, and the same punishment awaited any man responsible for a woman's piety if she happened to violate the rules of behaviour.

Significant restrictions were imposed on Christians, who were required to pay a special tax according to wealth: one gold dinar for the poor, two for middle-class Christians, and four for the rich. The first such 'religious tax' was introduced after Arab conquests in the 12th century. The tax was called the *jizya*, and the Christian who paid it guaranteed himself the right to remain in his faith. Under ISIS, Christians were banned from public displays of religious symbolism, especially wearing the cross, reading religious texts aloud, bell ringing, and constructing churches and monasteries, all of which qualified as an 'expression of disrespect to Islam and Muslims'. Valuables confiscated from Christians were redistributed among Muslims.

Those declared infidels (i.e., nonbelievers) according to Islamic State law found themselves in an unbearable situation. Various groups within the population fell into this category: fire-worshipping Yezidis; Shiites, including Syrian Alawites; Sufis; supporters of the ruling regimes in Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq; and supporters of any state that reacted negatively towards ISIS. Among these 'enemies of Islam', men were to be executed and women were destined for slavery. Yet these religious strictures did not so much strengthen the growth of the state as much as they impeded and destabilised it. A paradoxical situation arose in which the hypertrophic Sharia tradition restricted the space for state regulation proper, ultimately hindering the development of an Islamic state.

ISIS' development: Institutional, financial, military, and media

In the three years of ISIS' existence, several attempts were made to create an education system. None of these attempts were successful; indeed, they have been nearly impossible to accomplish in a state of constant war. Nevertheless, the very fact that ISIS's leadership considered this notion shows that it was making long-term plans and hoped to educate a new generation of Muslims. Again, a paradoxical situation unfolded: on one hand, the old school system, which had existed in the respective territories of Syria and Iraq before the war, was not suitable for ISIS's purposes; but its structure remained partially intact, and it had the potential to serve as the basis on which to build a new system after reconstruction. This remained purely theoretical, however, as ISIS had neither the appropriate educational materials nor the personnel to satisfy the group's educational goals, which, for that matter, had not been fully determined.

According to stories of the Mujahideen who were bold enough to bring their families with them to the Islamic State, the educational system consisted of schools with separate instruction for boys and girls. The study of Islam and Arabic was emphasised, whereas

ordinary school subjects were taught at a rudimentary level. The instructional process was administered entirely by the clergy. There was no higher education as such.

ISIS authorities directed their attention to the healthcare system as well, which is perfectly understandable given the conditions of constant military operations. After the proclamation of the 'World Caliphate', a Ministry of Health was established with offices in all the *wilayahs* (provinces) of the state. Operational clinics and hospitals were organised as well. In one of the two capitals under ISIS, the Syrian city of Rakka, there was a hospital equipped with modern medical equipment. It had several departments, including surgery and radiology. An 'ambulance service' was also established, which, as far as was possible, attempted to reach and treat wounded fighters. Many qualified doctors from various countries (including Russia and Europe) worked in the ISIS healthcare system, some out of a sincere desire to participate in jihad for the sake of creating an Islamic state, whereas others came for purely financial reasons.

ISIS also formed its own economic system, or at least the prerequisites of one. In November 2014, it announced it would create its own currency. (It would be wrong to call this a 'national' currency, as the idea of an Islamic state rejects the idea of a national identity.) In June 2015, ISIS began minting gold dinars, silver dirhams, and copper fils. The gold dinar was equal to $139 USD. That same year, however, Turkish authorities shut down a mint for the 'Islamic currency' in Gaziantep. ISIS authorities considered it inexpedient to print banknotes. Their dinars, dirhams, and fils never achieved real circulation, despite Syrian pounds being banned and the population being forced to turn them over in exchange for the new currency. Citizens did not take to them and continued to pay for purchases with regular banknotes. ISIS coins quickly turned into a numismatic rarity.

If the 'Islamic currency' remained an exotic novelty, ISIS's budget was nevertheless quite real and amounted to anywhere from $2 billion, $4 billion, and even $7 billion (the last figure corresponds to 2014). Their 2015 GDP was comparable to that of Barbados. In 2014,

income budget items in the aggregate totalled between $910 million and $1,890 million; $1035–$1700 million in 2015; and nearly half ($520–$870 million) in 2016 (Ckorobogatyi, 2017). Income from oil and taxes comprised 50–90% of ISIS's revenue. Darker sources of state income included child trafficking ($30–$35 million in 2014), hostages (up to $45 million in 2014 according to the UN), and the sale of antiques looted from Iraqi museums (Ckorobogatyi, 2017). The financial proceeds of this looting were not significant, nor was external support, even though some media outlets reported that foreign subsidies were perhaps the primary source of ISIS's financial well-being. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar were usually named in this connection, although this information was never confirmed. These states provided financial support to the Syrian opposition, which was hostile to ISIS.

ISIS exported oil and gas from several of its captured fields, eight of which were in Syria. The largest of them was an oil field near Al-Umar, which yielded up to 10,000 barrels per day and, for natural gas, the reserve in the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor. Phosphates, grains (wheat and barley), and cotton were extracted or gathered and exported, and pre-war cement production was maintained. According to the Federal Drug Control Service of Russia, ISIS earned $1 billion transporting drugs from Afghanistan in 2015, although Viktor Ivanov, then the head of the Russian agency, later corrected this figure, reducing it to $200–500 million (Taas, 2015).

ISIS, despite being unrecognised by any country, managed to establish economic ties with a number of nearby foreign countries in Europe as well as with Turkey, the destination for its exported crude oil and oil products. This trade fell under the category of smuggling. ISIS's enemies, and Russia in particular, repeatedly attacked these convoys, but until 2016, its total export revenue consistently reached $1 billion. Private companies acted as partners in its smuggling business. Although ISIS made insufficient revenue for full-fledged construction of a state, it could pay a small salary of $50 to its state employees. In

addition, husbands received the same sum for each wife (polygamy is legal under Islamic law). There were 'child benefits' as well. Salaries for servicemen (i.e., Mujahideen) ranged from $1,000 to $3,000 before being reduced by half in the winter of 2016 (Warrick, 2016).

ISIS allocated the lion's share of its funds to the war. According to Vitaly Churkin, Russia's permanent representative to the United Nations at the time, ISIS spent more $30 million on the purchase of equipment, military hardware, and ammunition in 2015 (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 2015). The state formed a regular army, although one would be remiss – never mind ridiculous – to call this army a 'group of bandits'. Immediately after the end of the campaign against ISIS, Lieutenant General Alexander Lapin, commander of the Central Military District in charge of the Russian military base in Afghanistan, gave his assessment of ISIS fighters entering the country from the Middle East as representing a "trained, well-equipped and motivated enemy" (Muhkin, 2017). It is worth reiterating that all statistics related to ISIS are approximations, but they do provide a general idea of the organisation's scale and activity.

It is appropriate here to discuss the total number of ISIS fighters, typically referred to as 'militants' or simply 'bandits'. Despite attempts by numerous international organisations, including the UN and intelligence agencies of various countries, to estimate the number of ISIS fighters, a concrete figure remains unknown and will likely continue to elude experts. Between 2014 and 2017, different sources claimed there were anywhere between 30,000, 32,000, 35,000, 40,000, and 50,000 fighters. According to data analysed by the American Soufan Center in 2017, this number was 53,781. The Soufan Center also noted that militants hailed from 146 countries, a figure thought to be 80 in 2014. The countries home to the largest proportions of militants came were Arab: Tunisia, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. Russia successfully vied with them, and even outstripped them, for its own contributions. The Soufan Center (2017) reported that 34,117 Russian citizens had joined ISIS, bypassing its

two main rivals, the kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. The total number of fighters from the former Soviet republics was 8,717.

It is unlikely that anyone who joins ISIS informs authorities in his or her home country of the trip's purpose; theoretically, it is only possible to count the number of Mujehideen once they have arrived. ISIS, however, does not maintain a record of their enlistments, although there are rumours of registers tracking the number of arrivals fighting for the Great Caliphate. To conclude this statistical survey, it is worth recalling the long-standing disparity in estimating the number of Mujehideen in Islamist organisations. For example, the number of foreign fighters in Afghanistan in 2001-2014 ranged from 12,000 to 120,000, and Al-Qaeda had between a few hundred and 18,000 militants in its best years.

The most important trend in ISIS policy was the creation of an official ideology, the primary goal of which was to demonstrate its superiority over similar systems and to attract sympathy of the worldwide Muslim *ummah* or community.[1] The main propaganda centres were the Amaq News Agency, al-Furqan Media, and al-Khayyat Media, which were accompanied by functional regional centres and 41,000 media releases. According to the *New York Times*, ISIS created 2.3 million accounts on social networks. Closed forums were used from 2013 until the proclamation of the Caliphate, followed by Twitter (although foreign intelligence agencies quickly learned how to close ISIS members' accounts) and, since 2014, Telegram. The Russian-language site *Furat Media* was launched in 2015, which had a predecessor in Omar al-Shishani's site 'FiSyria'.

Periodicals also served as propaganda channels for ISIS, the most notable of which were the magazines *Dabiq*, *Rumiyah,* and *Dar al-Islam*. These magazines were published in English and French in addition to Arabic. The magazine *Constantinople* was published in Turkish, whereas *Istok* was a major Russian-language periodical. *Rumiyah* was published in ten languages, including Uighur and Indonesian (*bahasa* Indonesia). The names of all three publications are symbolic. *Dabiq* is named after the city near which, according to

Islamic tradition, Muslims will win a decisive battle over their enemies, precipitating the worldwide victory of Islam. As ISIS weakened and its troops abandoned Dabiq in October 2016, the prophesied battle of Dabiq began to be postponed to more distant dates in ISIS propaganda. *Dabiq* was replaced by *Rumiyah* in September 2016. Its name is also symbolic; *Rumiyah* has several meanings in Arabic, signifying Rome (i.e., the Roman Empire and thus Islam's enemy) as well as 'Christian Europe' more broadly. It is noteworthy that the last issue of *Dabiq* was published with the subtitle 'Break the Cross' and included materials that sharply criticised Christian culture and traditions identified with the hated West. The name of the third periodical, *Dar al-Islam (The Territory of Islam),* speaks for itself.

In its publications, ISIS was described as an established, successful state, capable of achieving prosperity if not for the threat and fact of external aggression. A vision of peaceful life in its cities was presented in photographs and video clips (*mejatweets*), primarily in the two capitals of Rakka and Mosul, displaying an abundance of goods in shops and markets. The State's care for its citizens was advertised in every conceivable way. Articles touted the high quality of medical care and provision of free medical services. In one issue of *Dabiq,* it was claimed that doctors accepted more than 10,000 patients in just one month (it is, naturally, impossible to confirm this information). ISIS press and video media also included extensive material related to charity, especially in terms of providing the population with food, including photos of Mujahideen distributing food to the populace. There was constant reporting on the care that ISIS gave children, particularly orphans who had lost their parents as a result of attacks from external aggressors. All of this fit perfectly within the framework of banal social advertising.

The coverage of women's place within ISIS's society comprised a separate and important topic in ISIS media. They did not invent anything new – there was talk, as usual, about the high status of women in Islam. What was unique about it, relatively speaking, was the constant call for women to join jihad. Such calls appeared in *Dabiq* beginning in February

2015 and continued in *Rumiyah* and *Dar al-Islam.* These materials were oriented towards Muslim women who were preparing to join ISIS. The texts were illustrated with corresponding photos – smiles on the faces of women who had come to the Islamic State, beautiful landscapes, flowers, and so on. ISIS 'artists' painted a portrait of the ideal friend of a Mujahideen who, while taking part in the holy war, remained a good wife and mother and birthed and raised children. Articles were published about the foundations of polygamy, as well as the idea that the wives of deceased Mujahideens, in accordance with tradition, are obliged to become the wives of their comrades-in-arms.

As ISIS weakened, its propaganda underwent a shift. Its emphasis was increasingly placed not on the success of the Islamic state but on the importance of the struggle for its salvation. In 2017, during the battle for Mosul, 80% of its published media was dedicated to jihad with only 14% related to peaceful activities. Prior to that, articles about constructive or creative activities had comprised 53% of all print space, and only 39% concerned jihad directly (Sokirianskaia, 2017).

Ideology and geographical expansion

As Hassan Hassan (2017), a researcher at the Tahir Institute for Middle East Policy, noted, "ISIS ideology... is a multifaceted phenomenon, and its appearance cannot be explained by the work of any one person, or movement, or even time" (p. 4). It is difficult to disagree with this statement; ISIS's ideology is an eclectic mixture of various religious and ideological trends: Salafism, Wahhabism, fundamentalism, political Islam, jihadism, and more, which, despite mutual differences, are all oriented towards the creation (one could even say the re-creation) of an Islamic order. Hassan (2017) rightly called it a 'hybrid ideology'. This ideology is aggressive insofar as it insists on its own absolute righteousness and an exclusive and 'correct' interpretation of Islam. It is not capable of dialogue with representatives of any other interpretation of Islam; anyone who does not share ISIS's ideological views is accused of

takfir, of betraying the faith, (i.e., apostasy) and deserves punishment, up to and including physical destruction.

The architects of ISIS ideology come from Arab countries, and there are some powerful personalities among them: theologians and religious preachers, secular intellectuals, and philosophers. There is not and never was a clear leader. Several figures could claim this position – Sulaiman ibn Nasir al-Alawan, Ali ibn Khidr al-Khudayr, Abd al-Qadir bin Abd al-Aziz, and, of course, Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi. Al-Maqdisi stands out among the above-named authorities. Born in 1959 into a Jordanian-based Palestinian family, he grew up in Kuwait, was educated in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and is considered the mentor of al-Qaeda's second-in-command al-Zarqawi. Al-Maqdisi is often called a theorist and even a preacher of jihadism.

Al-Maqdisi has written several books, the most famous of which was published in 1985, *Millat Ibrahim*. In it, Al-Maqdisi outlined his conception of the struggle against deviations in Islam and condemned Muslims who refuse to follow Islamic traditions and imitate foreign traditions. The same topic was the subject of another work of his, "The Obvious Proofs of the Apostasy of Saudi Arabia". Al-Maqdisi also considered it an act of apostasy for Muslim countries to accept assistance from the West, as was the cooperation of part of the Syrian opposition with the US. Like his other works, Al-Maqdisi's *Millat Ibrahim* is written in a deeply critical manner and irritated not only the Saudis but other monarchs in the Persian Gulf as well. Moreover, Al-Maqdisi, as an opponent of ISIS's military activity in Syria, was considered unacceptable by Caliphate leadership; his views were called "the source of the tumour of takfir and the ease with which the blood of the people and the participants in the holy war is shed" in an issue of *Dabiq* (Hassan, 2017, p. 17).

ISIS ideology had (and continues to enjoy) a relatively high degree of popularity owing to its simplicity and populism. It is familiar to Muslims, especially 'humiliated people' to whom it offers a path to resolve each and every difficulty, thereby achieving justice and improving

their lives quickly. It condemns anyone who violates the laws and norms of the religion, and these violators inevitably turn out to be the ruling elites and wealthy strata of society. This sector of society is no longer able to hide its 'non-Islamic behaviour' given mass access to information.

At the same time, Muslim attitudes towards ISIS are restrained and in some countries are unambiguously negative. For example, in Lebanon, 100% of the population has a negative view of ISIS in addition to 94% in Jordan, 84% in the Palestinian territories, 79% in Indonesia, 73% in Turkey, 66% in Burkina Faso, 64% in Malaysia, 60% in Senegal, and a comparatively small 28% in Pakistan. People from the following countries have expressed a favourable attitude towards ISIS: 14% in Nigeria, 11% in Malaysia, 11% in Senegal, and 8% in Burkina Faso. It is worth noting that 62% of respondents in Pakistan did not qualify their attitude towards the Caliphate at all (Mixednews, 2015). Obviously, this rejection is a result of the methods ISIS used to achieve its goals. There was also a fear that the appearance of an ISIS analogue in another country would, if anything, create more problems for it. One Arab intellectual shared with the author that "The Islamic State is certainly a wonderful and promising model, but my country is still not ripe for it".

Fear of ISIS was fuelled by the fact that ISIS attempted, as much as possible, to expand beyond Syria and Iraq, and the idea of a Great Caliphate was not just an ideological fixation. ISIS has repeatedly and aggressively attempted to penetrate countries and regions separated from it by thousands of kilometres. Some of these attempts were successful. On the map below, the lands of the hypothetical Caliphate are highlighted in black. The land is a huge territory that surpasses even the largest country in the world, the Russian Federation. In addition to the Middle East, it includes half of Africa, Spain, part of eastern and central Europe, South Asia, the Caucasus, and Xinjiang. At a cursory count, the population of this hypothetical Caliphate would be 1 billion people. ISIS gave itself five years to construct this Islamic behemoth. This map aroused fear in some people (namely Europeans, Russians,

Hindus, and many Muslims) but brought others – radical Muslims – a sense of pride. In addition, the map was intended as an indirect reminder that, sooner or later, all inhabitants of the planet would accept Islam and the world would become Muslim.

By some accounts ISIS territory can be divided along historical–potential lines. Even with the propagandistic nature of this administrative division, it does seem logical. Iraq and Syria were divided into 19 *wilayahs*; Libya into three (Barca, Fezzan, and Tarablus; the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia and Yemen) into six (Hijaz, including the sacred sites of Mecca and Medina, followed by Najd, Aden-Abyan, Sana'a, Lahij, and Shabwa). Also considered as ISIS *wilayahs* were the Sinai Peninsula; 'West Africa' (Nigeria); and finally 'al Jazeera' (Algeria), 'Khorasan' (Afghanistan), Tunisia, the Caucasus, and 'Gurgistan' (Georgia), all of which fall into the same 'region'.

ISIS tried (and is still trying) to consolidate itself in many parts of the Muslim world. The first such attempt, not counting Iraq and Syria, was made in Libya in 2014. A group of Mujahideen infiltrated the country and, with the help of local accomplices, seized the town of Dern and then laid siege to the city of Sirte, located in the centre of the coastal strip of the country, and took control of several oil fields. The militants established an order in the occupied areas that was analogous to that of ISIS's Syrian and Iraqi enclaves. In 2016, as ISIS's position weakened in Syria and Iraq, rumours arose that its leadership had decided to move to Libya.

With Libya they opened the road to the south to several African countries: Niger, Chad, Mali, and further to Nigeria where, in 2002, the organisation Boko Haram was established. Boko Haram was known for terrorist attacks against Christians, bombing churches, military raids, and kidnapping, particularly taking 270 schoolgirls in 2014 who, they said, "it [was] time to marry off". In March 2015, Boko Haram took an oath of loyalty to the World Caliphate, after which it became known as the 'West African Province of the

Islamic State' and acted in its name. In 2015, terrorists who were also supposedly acting on behalf of ISIS took 170 hostages in the Radisson Blue hotel in the capital of Mali, Bamako.

ISIS then infiltrated Egypt, where several terrorist attacks were carried out under its initiative and with its participation. It later found its way into Afghanistan, where it managed to establish control over several areas in the eastern part of the country, despite the Taliban's hostile attitude towards it. The Great Caliphate did not penetrate into Central Asia, where it controls no territories and has no armed detachments. There, ISIS is pursuing an ideological expansion, especially since the idea of creating an Islamic state appeared there in the 1990s. This was the project of the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizb al Tahrir Islamii*), which has consolidated support in the Fergana Valley and continued to expand its influence across the region.

Within Russia, ISIS's possibilities initially appeared limited. The formation of 'Islamic territories' did not take place, lacking the support of the 'Islamist International', which had existed during the wars in Chechnya and since fallen apart. It was impossible, first, due to the active presence of Russian special services. Second, the Islamist opposition in the North Caucasus (the core of which was the organisation 'Imarat Kavkaz') did not want to fall completely under ISIS's control.

ISIS also failed to realise its ambitions in China, which, in 2017, it promised to 'flood in rivers of blood'. In response, China's president Xi Jinping called for the construction of an 'iron wall' around the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, populated by Muslims. In February 2017, the authorities announced a reward for information, allocating $14.5 million for the programme. Military operations against Islamists were carried out in March in three districts: Kashgar, Khotan, and Aksu (Skryl'nikov, 2017). ISIS's chances of strengthening its position in the People's Republic of China are meagre, if they exist at all.

Additionally, ISIS made itself known in Europe. As early as 2015, more than 4,000 of its militants leaked into the Old Continent, hiding among refugees. It is impossible to say

how many 'citizens of ISIS' settled in Europe. Of course, there is no question of any 'European *wilayah*'; however, an 'Islamic space' is definitely forming, where immigrants from ISIS play quite a significant role.

The defeat of ISIS

The Islamic State was defeated by international forces in 2017 although, in January 2018, up to 1,500 militants continued to wage guerrilla warfare in Syria. Before discussing the reasons for its defeat, we should ask how quickly it would have been defeated, and whether it would have been defeated at all, had it not been opposed by a coalition of forces and if it had fought separately against each state – Iraq, Syria, and Libya. The answer to this question is certainly no.

Several countries have vied for the right to consider themselves the main victor over ISIS, primarily Russia and the United States. Several other countries also fought against it, including Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The Kurds made a significant contribution to the war. Passive participants in the anti-ISIS war should be mentioned as well, especially the participants in Saudi Arabia's 2015 coalition of 34 Muslim countries, even if the project was stillborn and fictitious from the start. The fact that the 'Great Caliphate' was opposed by the entire world is symbolic: ISIS positioned itself as a supranational force, claimed to be a 'hyper state' presenting a universal threat, and therefore the only response to it was collective action. The formation of the 'anti-ISIS alliance' (even if only a formal one) consisting of 62 countries confirmed ISIS's global significance and served as a testament to its potential.

At the same time, when speaking of the anti-Caliphate coalitions, it is important to admit honestly that participants were pursuing their private interests first and foremost. The primary goal for Russia was to save the regime of Bashar al-Assad, thanks to which Russia was able to maintain a presence in Syria. Its more general goal was to preserve its influence

in the region. Over the course of its 2015 military operations, Russia made strikes not only, and at times not so much directly, against ISIS as it did against the Syrian opposition hostile to Assad. Iran was fighting for preservation of the Assad regime with the help of the Lebanese Hezbollah group. Among other factors, Iran was guided by religious considerations, specifically that of supporting Shia Islam. The fact that Iranians assisted their Shia supporters not only in Syria but also in Yemen and some countries in the Persian Gulf speaks to the truth of this supposition. In other words, Shia–Sunni confrontation and Shia solidarity were factors in the Syrian conflict. Turkey also fought not only with the Islamic State but with Assad's troops as well. Ankara expected to simultaneously suppress the Kurdish resistance and prevent the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous zone in Syria.

The Saudis viewed ISIS not only as a potential threat to their own internal stability but also as an enemy of Iran and an obstacle to Shia expansion in the region. Saudi Arabia did not provide support to ISIS, something of which it has occasionally been accused, although it did support Islamist oppositionists in Syria, mainly the radical Sunni group Jabhat al-Nusra, otherwise known as the Al-Nusra Front. The Western campaign against ISIS was lacklustre, especially that of the Americans. This becomes particularly noticeable when comparing the anti-ISIS actions of the US with its 2002–2003 campaign in Iraq. By participating in the war against ISIS, the US was able to achieve its goal of limiting Russia's presence in the region. It is revealing that the true interests of all parties became particularly visible after ISIS's defeat, and the relationship between erstwhile 'allies' has become sharply and clearly strained. Thus, the war against ISIS, often called the 'war against terrorism', was complex and contradictory.

The fight against ISIS did not end with a proclamation of victory. First, tens of thousands of ISIS Mujahideen dispersed around the globe, and not only within the Muslim world. It is not easy to predict how they will behave. Amid military defeats in July 2017, ISIS released a 'Guide for the Lone Wolf', 66 pages of instructions on how to carry out terrorist

attacks. It is quite likely that there will be people who want to follow this guide. As head of the FSB, Nikolai Patrushev, stated, "anyone who has acquired this combat experience and remains religiously and politically charged … can become a very serious security threat in their countries once they return to their permanent places of residence" (Info Islam, 2018).

Second, the notion of an Islamic state has not gone anywhere and is unlikely to disappear for the foreseeable future. It is possible that in the next attempt (and such an attempt is, in our view, inevitable), its creators will act much more cautiously, and a new 'moderate' version will be more successful. ISIS was not recognised by a single Muslim state and turned out to be 'superfluous' in the Muslim world, nor did it serve to consolidate the Muslim world; to the contrary, it scattered and split the Islamic community. At the same time, however, it did not become a total 'outcast'; it received material assistance and, so to speak, 'personnel' support in the form of tens of thousands of combatants. Perhaps the French researcher Pierre Razoux is correct. He believes that, under certain conditions, "the forceful return of political Islam should not be seen as a nightmare, as many do …" (Razoux, 2013, p. 9). 'Caliphates' can take many forms.

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