



THE ISLAMIC STATE

Policy Report
June 2015

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Executive Summary

The organisation calling itself the “Islamic State” (IS) was brought into the limelight in June 2014 through a series of conquests achieved in Northern and Central Iraqi provinces. The fall of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, exposed the momentum of the group and its proven ability to exploit its opponents’ weaknesses. Territorial gains in Iraq and Syria were followed by the “establishment” of a self-styled “caliphate” led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, presented by IS’s spokesman as “the imam [Muslim religious leader] and khalifah [Caliph] for the Muslims everywhere”.¹ This report draws a comprehensive picture of IS and assesses its potential for development, while examining some of the main challenges associated with the implementation of the counter-strategy detailed by United States (U.S.) President Barack Obama in September 2014.

The first part of this report will explore the genesis, the structure and the resources of IS. Competition between IS and al-Qaeda (AQ) is a key to understanding the major fault line between Jihadist groups who are split over the issues of support and allegiance to render to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The second part of the report will put into perspective the funding and the governance capabilities of IS, the two essential prerequisites for the sustainability of IS’s activities and the prospective normalisation of its rule among communities under its influence and its control. It will also discuss the transnational process leading to the regionalisation and the globalisation of the threat. The final section of the report concludes by exploring stumbling blocks on the road to “defeat”. Forces of the anti-IS coalition face major obstacles, foremost among which are polarisation along religious lines, sectarian hatred and conflicting strategic perspectives.

¹ Sylvia Westwall, “After Iraq Gains, Qaeda Offshoot Claims Islamic ‘Caliphate’”, *Reuters* (29 June 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/29/us-syria-crisis-iraq-idUSKBN0F40SL20140629>

Introduction

Born in the wake of the American-led intervention in Iraq, IS is the last metamorphosis of an organisation that has been active in Iraq for more than a decade. Its recent success have been closely associated with the leadership of Nouri al-Maliki,² Iraq's former Prime Minister, one of the country's current Vice-Presidents and Secretary General of the Shia Islamic Dawa party, whom the U.S. initially supported before holding accountable for increasing tensions with Iraqi Sunnis and the resurgent strength of IS.³ State policies in relation to the Syrian civil war have also been put forward. The Russian and Iranian-backed Syrian regime has been accused of intentionally fuelling the rise of IS.⁴ A convergence of interests between the two has been observed, both fighting common enemies.⁵ Initial support brought to anti-Assad groups by some Sunni regional powers⁶ would have further benefited IS, combined with Western policies of non-intervention in Syria.⁷

Current assessments of the threat are in stark contrast with past appraisals of IS's forerunner, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which American officials described as "strategically defeated"⁸ in 2008. This assessment resulted from the confluence of specific factors, the possible repetition of which stimulates current debates over the anti-IS strategy. Between 2007 and 2008, Sunni tribal groups and fighters collaborated with U.S. forces against AQI, partly motivated by the latter's indiscriminate violent and extremist ideology. Improved border control paid off, coupled with the decision of the then U.S. President George W. Bush to authorise the deployment of more than 20,000 additional troops in Iraq. These developments contributed to a substantial reduction of violence, but such a success was a temporary achievement. Seven years after this major episode, the State Department Spokesperson, Jen Psaki, referred to IS as "not only a threat to the stability of Iraq, but a threat to the entire region".⁹

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- ² Toby Dodge, "PM Who Led the Isis Fightback to Blame for Extremists' Rise", *The Guardian* (22 June 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/22/nouri-al-maliki-iraq-isis> Zaid al-Ali, "How Maliki Ruined Iraq", *Foreign Policy* (19 June 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/19/how-maliki-ruined-iraq/>
 - ³ Tim Arango, Alissa J. Rubin and Michael R. Gordon, "Iraq Nominate Maliki's Successor, Causing Standoff", *The New York Times* (11 August 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/12/world/middleeast/iraq.html?_r=0
 - ⁴ Maria Abi-Habib, "Assad Policies Aided Rise of Islamic State Militant Group", *The Wall Street Journal* (22 August 2014), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/assad-policies-aided-rise-of-islamic-state-militant-group-1408739733>
 - ⁵ Anne Barnard, "Blamed for Rise of ISIS, Syrian Leader is Pushed to Escalate Fight", *The New York Times* (22 August 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/23/world/middleeast/assad-supporters-weigh-benefits-of-us-strikes-in-syria.html>
 - ⁶ Michael Stephens, "Islamic State: Where Does Jihadist Group Get its Support?", *BBC* (1 September 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29004253>
 - ⁷ Tom Whitehead and Ben Farmer, "West to Blame for Rise of Islamic State, Says UK Spy Chief", *The Telegraph* (19 September 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11110288/West-to-blame-for-rise-of-Islamic-State-says-UK-spy-chief.html>
 - ⁸ Martin Chulov, "Baghdad Christian Attacks: 'Strategically Defeated' al-Qaida return", *The Guardian* (10 November 2010), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/10/al-qaida-bagdad-christian-attacks>
 - ⁹ Jen Psaki, Press Statement, *U.S. Department of State* (10 June 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/06/227378.htm>

Origins

The influences of two Islamist militants lie at the heart of IS's genesis. The first is Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,¹⁰ founder of Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (JTWJ). Following the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, this organisation became one of AQ's branches under the name of al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, better known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Al-Zarqawi's failure to attract Sunni support and its systematic targeting of Shia Muslims drew criticism from al-Qaeda's central leadership (AQC).¹¹ Shortly before he was killed in a U.S. targeted killing, al-Zarqawi managed the creation of the Majlis Shura al-Mujahedin (MSM), an AQI-led insurgent coalition that was replaced by the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in October 2006. His successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, pledged allegiance to Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, leader of ISI. Combined with the death of al-Zarqawi, this process formally ended the relationship of subordination that had originally linked AQI to AQ.¹²

The second militant, current leader of IS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi or "Caliph Ibrahim", took command of ISI at an auspicious time. Alongside al-Zarqawi's activities, Abu Bakr

al-Baghdadi was involved in the creation of Jamaat Jaysh Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamaah (JJASJ), which became part of ISI in 2006. His activities gained prominence with the killing of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi in April 2010, propelling him to leadership.¹³ This transition happened when ISI was regaining strength from the counter-insurgency campaign led against the group between 2007 and 2009.¹⁴ Concomitant with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, the Syrian civil war provided new opportunities for the development of the organisation. In August 2011, Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, one of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's regional commanders, was sent to Eastern Syria to oversee the expansion of ISI.¹⁵ The provision of money and experts led to the creation of the Syrian offshoot Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), whose fight against the Syrian regime gained credibility and popularity among local populations and armed forces opposed to the regime of Bashar al-Assad.¹⁶

The rivalry between IS and AQ is the epicentre of a schism within Jihadist movements. In April 2013 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the evolution of ISI into the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS),¹⁷ often translated

¹⁰ Biographical information related to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are drawn from Aaron Y. Zelin's articles, "The War Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (June 2014), accessed 11 January 2015, available online at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf and "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Islamic State's Driving Force", *BBC* (31 July 2014), accessed 11 January 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28560449>

¹¹ See the English translation of a letter wrote by Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi in 2005, accessed 11 January 2015, *Combating Terrorism Center*, available online at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Translation.pdf>

¹² The two organisations kept close links. See Aaron Zelin, "The War Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (June 2014), accessed 11 January 2015, available online at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf

¹³ Abu Ayyub al-Masri was also killed in this joint US-Iraqi operation. See "Senior Iraqi al-Qaeda Leaders 'Killed'", *BBC* (19 April 2010), accessed 11 January 2015, available online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8630213.stm>

¹⁴ Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State", *Brookings Institution* (20 October 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20list/en_web_listener.pdf

¹⁵ Mariam Karouny, "Iraqi Islamists' Gains Pose Challenge to al Qaeda Leader", *Reuters* (17 June 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/17/us-syria-iraq-alqaeda-insight-idUSKBN0ES1KN20140617>

¹⁶ "The Rise of Jabhat al-Nusra: A Conversation with Lina Khatib", *Syria Deeply* (7 April 2015), accessed 18 April 2015, available online at <http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2015/04/7062/rise-jabhat-al-nusra-conversation-lina-khatib/>

¹⁷ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Qaeda Announces an Islamic State in Syria", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (9 April 2013), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-announces-an-islamic-state-in-syria>

as the Levant (ISIL).¹⁸ This geographical reference includes Syria and encompasses neighbouring countries and territories.¹⁹ The creation of ISIS was based on a declaration of unity between ISI and JN, but the move was rejected by al-Joulani who pledged allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri, successor of Osama bin Laden and current leader of AQ.²⁰ The latter condemned al-Baghdadi's actions, who nevertheless refused to renounce his claims over JN.²¹ Al-Baghdadi's will to reassert his authority over al-Joulani provides a partial explanation of the break, as competition with the parent organisation of global jihad appears to have played a key role. It has thus been argued that al-Baghdadi "was preparing to split from al-Qaeda"²² before 2011, at a time when ISI was already regaining strength in Iraq. Additionally, local power relationships were most probably involved. Fierce fighting between ISIS and Syrian armed factions were said to have influenced the final decision of AQ's leaders to deny any remaining ties with

ISIS,²³ the name of which was changed into the Islamic State at the end of June 2014.²⁴

The Islamic State and Al-Qaeda

IS and AQC remain deeply divided, since both organisations consider each other's leadership to be unfounded. Whereas the IS's spokesman stated in April 2014 that AQ "today is no longer the [base] of Jihad",²⁵ AQ claims that al-Baghdadi broke an oath of allegiance he is said to have made in private to al-Zawahiri.²⁶ Moreover, the strategic visions of the two movements differ markedly, in addition to a significant generational gap.²⁷ Created in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the organisation founded by Osama bin Laden was historically focused on the struggle against the United States and its Western allies.²⁸ By contrast, IS thrived during the 2003-2011 Iraq war. Its fight is primarily oriented against rival and enemy groups;²⁹ dissenting Sunni Muslims, ethnic

¹⁸ Patrick J. Lyons and Mona el-Naggar, "What to call Iraq Fighters? Experts Vary on S's and L's", *The New York Times* (18 June 2014), accessed 7 January 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/world/middleeast/islamic-state-in-iraq-and-syria-or-islamic-state-in-iraq-and-the-levant.html?_r=1

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Agence France-Presse in Beirut, edited by Sarah Titterton, "Syria's al-Nusra Pledges Allegiance to al-Qaeda", *The Telegraph* (10 April 2013), accessed 26 January 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9984444/Syria-al-Nusra-pledges-allegiance-to-al-Qaeda.html>

²¹ Associated Press, "Al-Qaeda's Leader in Iraq Defies Boss over Syria Fight", *The Washington Post* (15 June 2013), accessed 26 January 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/al-Qaedas-leader-in-iraq-defies-boss-over-syria-fight/2013/06/15/05a92b92-d5e8-11e2-8cbe-1bcbee06f8f8_story.html

²² Tim Arango and Eric Shmitt, "U.S. actions in Iraq fueled rise of a rebel", *The New York Times* (10 August 2014), accessed 29 January 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/world/middleeast/us-actions-in-iraq-fueled-rise-of-a-rebel.html>

²³ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (4 February 2014), accessed 29 January 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-disaffiliates-with-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham>

²⁴ "Isis Rebels Declare 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria", *BBC* (30 June 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28082962>

²⁵ Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami, "This Is Not Our Methodology, nor Will it Ever Be", *al-Furqan Media Foundation* (18 April 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://justpaste.it/adn3>

²⁶ Aaron Zelin, "The War Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (June 2014), accessed 11 January 2015, available online at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See the English translation of the World Islamic Front statement, *Federation of American Scientists* (23 February 1998), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>

²⁹ Borzou Daragahi, "Syria: A Gathering Force", *Financial Times* (12 February 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/cae1bf48-9341-11e3-b07c-00144feab7de.html#axzz3SH1twAZZ> Cale Salih and Mutlu Civiroglu, "Analysis: Could Support for the 'Other' Kurds Stall Islamic State?", *BBC* (25 August 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28925179>

and religious minorities,³⁰ and forces of the anti-IS international coalition.³¹ The local and sectarian nature of some of these targets is a distinctive feature of the latter.

Sunni Islam is embraced by 85 to 90 per cent of Muslims, as opposed to the Shia sect, which is a minority in the Muslim world but is, nonetheless, a numerical and politically dominant force in Iran and Iraq.³² Both have different branches and doctrines. For Sunni Islam, the Salafi movement has been defined by Jacob Olidort, adjunct fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, as “a literalist Sunni theological and legal orientation”. The supporters of which “seek to adhere to the reports of Muhammad’s words and deeds (sunna) and to avoid innovation (bid’a)”.³³ Salafists are traditionally divided between Quietists and Jihadists, the latter faction referring to “those supporting the

use of violence to establish Islamic States”, according to scholar Quintan Wiktorowicz.³⁴ AQ and IS share Salafi-Jihadism as a common religious ideology,³⁵ however, three stumbling blocks mark a rupture. The first divergence is related to the foundations of the caliphate. While AQ and JN’s leaders favour a progressive approach,³⁶ al-Baghdadi and his followers believe in its immediate implementation by violent means.³⁷ The second variation is an intransigence of religious and political beliefs, which makes IS hostile to any form of compromise. Excommunication or “takfirism” has thus been extensively used by IS to justify attacks on its enemies.³⁸ Refusal of other groups to consider the organisation as a full-fledged state is an equally important cause.³⁹ The third difference lies in the intense anti-Shia violence led by IS, both against local populations and governments. AQ does not

³⁰ “Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July – 10 September 2014”, *Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Human Rights Office*, accessed 28 January 2015, available online at http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC_Report_FINAL_6July_10September2014.pdf

³¹ “Jordan Pilot Murder: Islamic State Deploys Asymmetry of Fear”, *BBC* (4 February 2015), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31129416>

³² “Sunnis and Shia: Islam’s Ancient Schism”, *BBC* (20 June 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-16047709> Michael Lipka, “The Sunni-Shia Divide: Where They Live, What They Believe and How They View Each Other”, *Pew Research Center* (18 June 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/18/the-sunni-shia-divide-where-they-live-what-they-believe-and-how-they-view-each-other/>

³³ Jacob Olidort, “The Politics of ‘Quietist’ Salafism”, *Brookings Institution* (February 2015), accessed 1 April 2015, available online at <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/02/salafism-quietist-politics-olidort/Olidort-Final-Web-Version.pdf?la=en>

³⁴ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, Issue 3 (19 August 2006), accessed 1 April 2015, p. 225, available online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10576100500497004>

³⁵ Margaret Coker, “The New Jihad”, *The Wall Street Journal* (11 July 2014), accessed 2 February 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-new-jihadists-in-iraq-and-syria-see-al-qaeda-as-too-passive-1405096590> The expression of “religious ideology” is borrowed from Assaf Moghadam’s article, “The Salafi-Jihad as a Religious Ideology”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 1, Issue 3 (February 2008), accessed 2 February 2015, available online at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Vol1Iss3-Art5.pdf>

³⁶ Charles Lister, interview conducted by Samiha Shafy in “Dueling Jihadists: Is the Islamic State Beating Al-Qaida?”, *Spiegel Online* (23 August 2014), accessed 10 February 2015, available online at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/brookings-scholar-explains-the-disturbing-rise-of-the-islamic-state-a-987294.html>

³⁷ Margaret Coker, “The New Jihad”, *The Wall Street Journal* (11 July 2014), accessed 2 February 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/why-the-new-jihadists-in-iraq-and-syria-see-al-qaeda-as-too-passive-1405096590>

³⁸ Aaron Y. Zelin, “Al-Qaeda Disaffiliates with the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham”, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (4 February 2014), accessed 30 January 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/al-qaeda-disaffiliates-with-the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-al-sham> This does not exclude cases of tactical cooperation with rival groups, on a *ad hoc* basis.

³⁹ Azeem Ibrahim, “The Resurgence of Al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq”, *United States Army War College* (May 2014), accessed 1 February 2015, available online at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1210.pdf>

endorse systematic killings of Shia Muslims, although the organisation deems them to be guilty of “treason” against Islam.⁴⁰

Structure

The structure of IS⁴¹ is the product of AQL’s pyramidal organisation⁴² and al-Baghdadi’s leadership. In the early 2000s the shared experience of being imprisoned helped build personal connections between Islamist and Baathist insurgent networks.⁴³ This was relevant at Camp Bucca, an American-led detention facility where al-Baghdadi was detained alongside some of his future lieutenants in 2004.⁴⁴ Built on pragmatic and ideological reasons, the alliance between these two factions is a key factor of IS’s success. Senior leaders were chosen for their unswerving loyalty to al-Baghdadi, whose authority is drawn from his alleged religious education and affiliation to the Prophet Muhammad’s Quraysh tribe.⁴⁵ This

illustrates a dual process of concentration and delegation of power, restricted to approximately twenty trusted individuals. Major decisions are undertaken by the Sharia Council, in charge of issues related to power succession, legislation, justice, ideology and religion. Administratively, 18 Iraqi and Syrian “provinces” have been delineated and divided into sectors and localities. These territorial units are headed by “governors” and officials along with delegates of key councils.

According to figures provided by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in September 2014, between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters were then involved on the ground.⁴⁶ These individuals were trained, well-armed and reportedly paid.⁴⁷ Their ideological commitment contrasts with the level of motivation of the Iraqi army which a U.S. official described in June 2014 as being in a state of “psychological collapse”.⁴⁸ The resources of the group have a decisive impact on the building of alliances

⁴⁰ See supra, note 11. Daniel L. Byman and Jennifer R. Williams, “ISIL vs. Al Qaeda: Jihadism’s Global Civil War”, *Brookings Institution* (24 February 2015), accessed 1 April 2015, available online at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2015/02/24-byman-williams-isis-war-with-al-qaeda>

⁴¹ Information related to the composition of IS is difficult to verify and might be outdated. Organisational elements presented in this paper are drawn from Richard Barrett, “The Islamic State”, *The Soufan Group* (November 2014), accessed 3 February 2015, available online at <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf> Charles Lister, “Islamic State Senior Leadership: Who’s Who” (20 October 2014), accessed 3 February 2015, *Brookings Institution*, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling-islamic-state-lister/en_whos_who.pdf?la=en

⁴² Siobhan Gorman, Nour Malas and Matt Bradley, “Brutal Efficiency: the Secret to Islamic State’s Success”, *The Wall Street Journal* (3 September 2014), accessed 1 February 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-secret-to-the-success-of-islamic-state-1409709762>

⁴³ Terrence McCoy, “How the Islamic State Evolved in an American Prison”, *The Washington Post* (4 November 2014), accessed 3 February 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/11/04/how-an-american-prison-helped-ignite-the-islamic-state/>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Charles Lister, interview conducted by Samiha Shafy in “Dueling Jihadists: Is the Islamic State Beating Al-Qaida?”, *Spiegel Online* (23 August 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/brookings-scholar-explains-the-disturbing-rise-of-the-islamic-state-a-987294.html> Aaron Y. Zelin, “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Islamic State’s Driving Force”, *BBC* (31 July 2014), accessed 11 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28560449>

⁴⁶ Rosa Prince (ed.), “CIA says number of Islamic State Fighters in Iraq and Syria has Swelled to Between 20,000 and 31,500”, *The Telegraph* (12 September 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/11091190/CIA-says-number-of-Islamic-State-fighters-in-Iraq-and-Syria-has-swelled-to-between-20000-and-31500.html>

⁴⁷ Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State”, *Brookings Institution* (20 October 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20listr/en_web_listr.pdf Gopal Ratnam, John Hudson, “Kerry: Assad and ISIS have ‘Symbiotic’ Relationship”, *Foreign Policy* (17 November 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/17/kerry-assad-and-isis-have-symbiotic-relationship/>

⁴⁸ Loveday Morris and Karen DeYoung, “Iraqi Military Facing ‘psychological collapse’ after losses, desertions”, *The Washington Post* (22 June 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/iraqi-military-facing-psychological-collapse-after-losses-desertions/2014/06/22/88ed659a-fa4a-11e3-8176-f2c941cf35f1_story.html

with key local allies such as tribal groups and Sunni insurgent factions. Territorial conquest and the establishment of the caliphate have increased the flow of volunteers,⁴⁹ favoured by a policy of large-scale recruitment.⁵⁰ The ideological appeal of IS is based on a set of religious references conveying the illusion of an “Islamic’ utopia”⁵¹ where any Muslim can bring his/her own contribution.⁵² This is coupled with an apocalyptic narrative according to which the Syrian town of Dabiq would be the epicentre of the final battle against the enemies of Islam.⁵³

Paramilitary Expertise

Elements of “surprise, mobility and shock”⁵⁴ have been referred to as central features of armed operations led by IS in Iraq. Terrorist, insurgent and conventional tactics have been converged through the exclusive or concomitant use of suicide attacks, infiltration of urban centres and group offensives.⁵⁵ Charles Lister, visiting fellow at the Brookings

Doha Center, has thus distinguished between “mass casualty urban attacks” and “concerted campaign of attrition against military opponents’ capabilities and morale”.⁵⁶ IS has shown strong capacities to establish itself as a key player among competing factions,⁵⁷ to manage simultaneously different fronts⁵⁸ and to adapt to a changing security environment.⁵⁹ The transfer of human and material resources on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border has allowed the group to tighten its grip on the two countries.⁶⁰ However, defending extended territories against a wide array of opponents is a challenging task. Counter-offensives are likely to benefit from the fragmentation of IS forces.⁶¹ By the same token, means of conventional warfare are easier to spot and to strike than the clandestine infrastructures of terrorist and insurgent organisations. Newly-acquired visibility has propelled IS to the forefront of the international Jihadist movement, but it has also made the organisation a more identifiable target for its enemies.

⁴⁹ “Islamic State: Can its Savagery be Explained?”, *BBC* (9 September 2014), accessed 8 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29123528>

⁵⁰ Ruth Sherlock, “Islamic State Relaxes Vetting of Foreign Jihadists in a Bid to Boost Recruits”, *The Telegraph* (24 November 2014), accessed 8 February 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11251608/Islamic-State-relaxes-vetting-of-foreign-jihadists-in-a-bid-to-boost-recruits.html>

⁵¹ Charlie Winter, “The ISIS Caliphate’s Frightening First Month”, *The Daily Beast* (29 July 2014), accessed 7 February 2015, available online at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/29/putting-the-isis-caliphate-in-focus.html>

⁵²² “Islamic State Leader bu Bakr al-Baghdadi Encourages Emigration, Worldwide Action”, *SITE* (1 July 2014), accessed 8 February 2015, available online at <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/islamic-state-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-encourages-emigration-worldwide-action.html>

⁵³ “Why Islamic State Chose Town of Dabiq for Propaganda”, *BBC* (17 November 2014), accessed 8 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30083303>

⁵⁴ Michael Knights, “ISIL’s Political-Military Power in Iraq”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, Issue 8, p. 3 (August 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CTCSentinel-Vol7Iss81.pdf>

⁵⁵ Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State”, *Brookings Institution* (20 October 2014), accessed 28 January 2015, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Richard Barrett, “The Islamic State”, *The Soufan Group* (November 2014), accessed 19 February 2015, available online at <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>

⁵⁸ Gerald Seib, “Islamic State’s Distinct Battle Fronts Alarm Washington”, *WSJ Blogs* (14 October 2014), accessed 12 February 2015, available online at <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2014/10/14/islamic-states-distinct-battle-fronts-alarm-washington/>

⁵⁹ Anthony Capaccio, “Islamic State Dispersing Makes U.S Adapt Targets”, *Bloomberg Business* (1 October 2014), accessed 12 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-09-30/islamic-state-dispersing-compels-u-s-to-adapt-airstrikes>

⁶⁰ Tim Lister, “ISIS: The First Terror Group to Build an Islamic State?”, *CNN* (13 June 2014), accessed 23 February 2015, available online at <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/12/world/meast/who-is-the-isis/>

⁶¹ Jessica D. Lewis, “The Islamic State: A Counter-Strategy for a Counter-State”, *Institute for the Study of War* (July 2014), accessed 13 February 2015, available online at <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Lewis-Center%20of%20gravity.pdf>

Media

The potential of online information sharing has been extensively harnessed by IS's leaders, fighters, supporters and sympathisers for propaganda and recruitment purposes, as well as the coordination of paramilitary activities.⁶² IS's communication strategy is based on the intensive and simultaneous exploitation of mainstream and smaller social media platforms. The microblogging service Twitter holds a leading position, with 46,000 pro-IS Twitter accounts identified in the last months of 2014.⁶³ Hashtags in relation to IS are skilfully utilised by Twitter users who express affinity with the organisation, thousands of whom have been mobilised in massive campaigns of retweets.⁶⁴ As most prominent pro-IS accounts are regularly shut down, the organisation has been led to protect the Tweets of its primary accounts while relying on a dynamic and resilient network of low-level accounts.⁶⁵

Various online contents include news and updates, PDF-format magazines as well as multilingual and high-quality propaganda videos.⁶⁶ The elaborate staging of extreme brutality is a recurring feature, either fully shown or merely suggested.⁶⁷ While pictures and videos of selective and indiscriminate killings allow IS to convey fear and resolve,⁶⁸ violence tends to be removed from the portrait of daily life within the caliphate, in a clear effort to promote an attractive vision.⁶⁹

Fundings

Daily profits generated by oil sales, extortion, taxes and smuggling were reported to exceed USD 2 million in August 2014.⁷⁰ The figure of USD 2 billion was mentioned at the same date to refer to the assumed value of IS's cash and assets.⁷¹ Among a variety of income streams ranging from the sale of antiquities, government property/equipment

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- ⁶² Sam Jones and Murad Ahmed, "Tech Groups Aid Terror, Says UK Spy Chief", *Financial Times* (3 November 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/4a35c0b2-636e-11e4-9a79-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Rht8hMWE> Shane Harris, "United States Counterterrorism Chief Says Islamic State Is Not Planning an Attack on the U.S.", *Foreign Policy* (3 September 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/03/united-states-counterterrorism-chief-says-islamic-state-is-not-planning-an-attack-on-the-u-s/>
- ⁶³ "Nearly 50,000' pro-Islamic State Twitter Accounts", *BBC* (6 March 2015), accessed 30 May 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-31760126>
- ⁶⁴ Mathieu Slama, "Djihad 2.0: la stratégie de communication de l'Etat Islamique et d'Al-Qaida sur Internet", *Le Figaro* (21 November 2014), accessed 30 May 2015, available online at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/2014/11/21/31002-20141121ARTFIG00121-djihad-20-la-strategie-de-communication-de-l-etat-islamique-et-d-al-qaida-sur-internet.php>
- ⁶⁵ William Audureau and Madjid Zerrouki, "Comment l'Etat islamique a réorganisé son armée numérique sur Twitter", *Le Monde* (28 Mars 2015), accessed 30 May 2015, available online at http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2015/03/28/comment-l-etat-islamique-a-reorganise-son-armee-numerique-sur-twitter_4602551_4408996.html
- ⁶⁶ Mustapha Ajbaili, "How ISIS Conquered Social Media", *Al Arabiya News* (24 June 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/media/digital/2014/06/24/How-has-ISIS-conquered-social-media-.html>
- ⁶⁷ Robert Hannigan, "The Web is a Terrorist's Command-and-Control Network of Choice", *Financial Times* (3 November 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/c89b6c58-6342-11e4-8a63-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3Rt6PgLj>
- ⁶⁸ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Logic of Violence in the Islamic State's War", *The Washington Post* (7 July 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/07/the-logic-of-violence-in-islamic-states-war/>
- ⁶⁹ Press Association, "ISIS Posts Eighth Propaganda Video of John Cantlie", *The Guardian* (3 January 2015), accessed 15 February 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/03/john-cantlie-isis-eighth-video> Natalie Andrews and Felicia Schwartz, "Islamic State Pushes Social-Media Battle With West", *The Wall Street Journal* (22 August 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-pushes-social-media-battle-with-west-1408725614>
- ⁷⁰ Indira Lakshmanan, "Islamic State Now Resembles the Taliban With Oil Fields", *Bloomberg* (26 August 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-08-25/islamic-state-now-resembles-the-taliban-with-oil-fields>
- ⁷¹ "Syria Iraq: The Islamic State Militant Group", *BBC* (2 August 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24179084>

to kidnapping and human trafficking,⁷² IS is leading a profitable oil-smuggling business, which used to be fed by an estimated production of 80,000 barrels/day during the summer of 2014.⁷³ Targeted airstrikes and falling oil prices have gradually altered this successful business model,⁷⁴ in addition to Turkish and Kurdish counter-offensives.⁷⁵ However, with a daily production ranging around 20,000 barrels in February 2015,⁷⁶ oil-smuggling operations retain substantial value, compounded by a widespread system of forced contributions applying to local businesses, farms, public transports and road traffic.⁷⁷ Despite the uninterrupted provision of salaries by the Iraqi central government to civil servants who work in areas under IS's control,⁷⁸ leaders of the caliphate are confronted with challenging equations of self-sustainability and effective management. The organisation is caught between the costs of a substantial paramilitary apparatus and the administration of a disparate network of territories populated by approximately eight millions people.

Governance and the 'state'

Methods of governance implemented within the caliphate are both an attempt to turn IS's political and socio-economic ambitions into concrete reality and a prerequisite for its long-term implantation. According to Charlie C. Caris and Samuel Reynolds from the Institute for the Study of War, various initiatives include "religious, educational, judicial, security, humanitarian, and infrastructure projects".⁷⁹ Ideological "guidance" and material needs are covered by a wide range of administrative and public services relying on the pragmatic use of pre-existing structures of management.⁸⁰ This comprehensive approach tends to provide Sunni populations – faced with local governments they widely regard to be repressive and sectarian – with a seemingly stable environment.⁸¹ The perceived legitimacy and the credibility of IS as a ruling entity is nevertheless fragile. Monopoly over resources and control exerted by force in war-torn areas are not sufficient to create a structured state entity, despite the provision

⁷² Nour Malas and Maria Abi-Habib, "Islamic State Economy Runs on Extortion, Oil Piracy in Syria, Iraq", *The Wall Street Journal* (28 August 2014), accessed 16 February 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-fills-coffers-from-illicit-economy-in-syria-iraq-1409175458> Juan C. Zarate and Thomas M. Sanderson, "How the Terrorists Got Rich", *The New York Times* (28 June 2014), accessed 16 February 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/29/opinion/sunday/in-iraq-and-syria-isis-militants-are-flush-with-funds.html> Ken Dilanian, "Islamic State Group's War Chest is Growing Daily", *Associated Press* (15 September 2014), accessed 14 February 2015, available online at <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/islamic-state-groups-war-chest-growing-daily-0>

⁷³ Kate Brannen, "Pentagon: Oil No Longer the Islamic State's Main Source of Revenue", *Foreign Policy* (3 February 2015), accessed 17 February 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/03/pentagon-oil-no-longer-the-islamic-states-main-source-of-revenue/>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Matthew Philips, "Islamic State Loses Its Oil Business", *Bloomberg Business* (14 October 2014), accessed 17 February 2015, available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-10-14/u-dot-s-dot-air-strikes-cut-isis-oil-production-by-70-percent>

⁷⁶ Kate Brannen, "Pentagon: Oil No Longer the Islamic State's Main Source of Revenue", *Foreign Policy* (3 February 2015), accessed 17 February 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/03/pentagon-oil-no-longer-the-islamic-states-main-source-of-revenue/>

⁷⁷ Nour Malas and Maria Abi-Habib, "Islamic State Economy Runs on Extortion, Oil Piracy in Syria, Iraq", *The Wall Street Journal* (28 August 2014), accessed 19 February 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-fills-coffers-from-illicit-economy-in-syria-iraq-1409175458> Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State", *The Soufan Group* (November 2014), accessed 19 February 2015, available online at <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>

⁷⁸ Aki Peritz, "How Iraq Subsidizes Islamic State", *The New York Times* (4 February 2015), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/opinion/how-iraq-subsidizes-islamic-state.html?_r=0

⁷⁹ Charles C. Caris and Samuel Reynolds, "ISIS Governance in Syria", *Institute for the Study of War* (July 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS_Governance.pdf

⁸⁰ Mariam Karouny, "In Northeast Syria, Islamic State Builds a Government", *Reuters* (4 September 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/04/us-syria-crisis-raqqa-insight-idUSKBN0GZ0D120140904>

⁸¹ Charles Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State", *Brookings Institution* (20 October 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf

of daily order and assistance. Glaring flaws include a shortage of skilled labour⁸² as well as deteriorating conditions for the supply of basic products and services.⁸³ As noted by Dr Andrew Phillips, the consolidation of IS's authority within territories that make up the caliphate is likely to be based on the development of fiscal and administrative structures, as well as the building of alliances

with local power-holders.⁸⁴ The organisation is thus compelled to increase its civilian presence, while sustaining its war efforts and avoiding the vicious circle of systematic and widespread repression. In spite of resilient political structures, such challenges will make it all the more difficult for the 'caliphate project'⁸⁵ to stand the test of time.

⁸² "Islamic State Leader bu Bakr al-Baghdadi Encourages Emigration, Worldwide Action", *SITE* (1 July 2014), accessed 8 February 2015, available online at <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/islamic-state-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-encourages-emigration-worldwide-action.html>

⁸³ Liz Sly, "The Islamic State is Failing at Being a State", *The Washington Post* (25 December 2014), accessed 20 February 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-islamic-state-is-failing-at-being-a-state/2014/12/24/bfbf8962-8092-11e4-b936-f3afab0155a7_story.html

⁸⁴ Andrew Phillips, "The Islamic State's Challenge to International Order", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 68, Issue 5, pp. 495-498 (2014), accessed 21 February 2015, available online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10357718.2014.947355>

⁸⁵ This expression is drawn from Aaron Zelin's article, "Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi: Islamic State's Driving Force", BBC (31 July 2014), accessed 30 May 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28560449>

Regional and global expansion

The struggle for the defence of territorial gains and/or the control of new localities is originally rooted in Iraq and in Syria, where IS benefited from the convergence of situations of a power vacuum, political distrust and civil war.⁸⁶ This does not preclude direct and proxy offensives in states of the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The establishment of “provinces” in Libya and in the Sinai Peninsula⁸⁷ as well as attacks led against Shia minorities in neighbouring countries are prominent examples of attempts at regional destabilization. Disparate Jihadist militants have expressed pledges of allegiance and obedience to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, many of whom have been accepted by the latter.⁸⁸ These include defectors from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP); representatives of Libya and Sinai-based organisations; Nigeria’s Boko Haram leader;⁸⁹ Pakistani and Afghan militants.⁹⁰ The same goes for isolated individuals attempting to carry out

acts of terrorism within their own national environments.⁹¹ Ideological affinities and/or publicity stunts do not imply organisational and operational links between IS and some of these groups, cells and individuals. Opportunism may dictate reference to the IS brand in a bid to attract resources, media attention and Jihadist credibility.⁹² Likewise, AQ is confronted with an increasing risk of internal division since the establishment of the caliphate, but dissidence have remained limited while sympathy for IS’s success has been expressed by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), AQ’s most active affiliate, without public allegiance being made.⁹³

Confronted with a persistent and fragmented Jihadist threat, Southeast Asian countries are exposed to the contagion risk. Indonesian and Malaysian nationals fighting with IS were involved in the creation of a Malay-speaking paramilitary unit in August 2014. Filipino militants reportedly left for the Syrian conflict zone⁹⁴,

⁸⁶ Jonathan Freedland, “This Islamic State Nightmare is not a Holy War but an Unholy Mess”, *The Guardian* (8 august 2014), accessed 25 February 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/08/islamic-state-nightmare-not-holy-unholy-mess-iraq> Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, “Fall of Mosul Aided by Iraq’s Political Distrust”, Reuters (13 June 2014), accessed 25 February 2015, available online at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/06/13/uk-iraq-security-stalemate-idUKKBN0EO1Y20140613>

⁸⁷ Eric Shmitt and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Islamic State Sprouting Limbs Beyond Its Base”, *The New York Times* (14 Februray 2015), accessed 25 February 2015), available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/world/middleeast/islamic-state-sprouting-limbs-beyond-mideast.html>

⁸⁸ Barak Mendelsohn, “Islamic State in Yemen: Why IS is Seeking to Expand”, *BBC* (21 March 2015), accessed 22 April 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31998682>

⁸⁹ The Associated press, “Islamic State Group Accepts Boko Haram Pledge of Allegiance”, *The New York Times* (13 March 2015), accessed 22 April 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/03/13/world/middleeast/ap-ml-islamic-state-boko-haram.html>

⁹⁰ Margherita Stancati and Habib Khan Totakhil, “Islamic State Adds to Terror in Afghanistan”, *The Wall Street Journal* (11 January 2015), accessed 2 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-state-adds-to-terror-in-afghanistan-1421008584>

⁹¹ See, for example, Michael Safi, “Sydney Siege Gunman Man Haron Monis Praised in ISIS Publication”, *The Guardian* (30 December 2014), accessed 2 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/30/sydney-siege-gunman-man-haron-monis-praised-in-isis-publication>

⁹² Eric Shmitt and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Islamic State Sprouting Limbs Beyond Its Base”, *The New York Times* (14 Februray 2015), accessed 2 March 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/world/middleeast/islamic-state-sprouting-limbs-beyond-mideast.html> Raja Abdulrahim, “Islamic State Seen as Interloper by Larger Militant Groups”, *Los Angeles Times* (30 November 2014), accessed 2 March 2015, available online at <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-islamic-state-support-20141130-story.html#page=1>

⁹³ Richard Barrett, “The Islamic State”, *The Soufan Group* (November 2014), accessed 25 February 2015, available online at <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>

⁹⁴ “Philippines Militants’ Opposition to Peace Process, Growing Links With the Islamic State Raise Terrorism Risks Within Mindanao”, *IHS Jane’s 360* (27 January 2015), accessed 10 June 2015, available online at <http://www.janes.com/article/48331/philippine-militants-opposition-to-peace-process-growing-links-with-the-islamic-state-raise-terrorism-risks-within-mindanao>

imitated by a “handful” of Singaporeans.⁹⁵ Emerging and prospective issues associated with these individuals are threefold: (i) they could act as a potential focal point for local Jihadist groups and facilitate the resurgence of a regional militant network connected to IS and dedicated to the creation of a Southeast Asian Islamic caliphate, at least rhetorically. Support for IS expressed by Indonesian Jihadist Aman Abdurahman and Abu Bakr Bashir,⁹⁶ two influential and currently imprisoned ideologues, bears witness to the potential reality of this scenario; (ii) IS’s online propaganda, including the staging of Southeast Asian foreign fighters’ “achievements”, is likely to entice new recruits and to convince homeland-based sympathisers and supporters to take immediate action. Two teenagers were arrested in Singapore on terrorism-related charges in April and May 2015,⁹⁷ while twenty-nine individuals suspected to be involved in two IS-related plots were arrested in Malaysia in April 2015 alone;⁹⁸ and (iii) back in their home countries most committed foreign fighters could make full use of their contacts and paramilitary know-

how, assuming they have regularly taken part in combat operations. The ‘prestige’ gained from direct involvement in the Syrian/Iraqi conflicts, combined with the refreshed activism of local Jihadist groups, around 20 of whom have reportedly pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,⁹⁹ increase the risk of terrorist attacks from or linked to returning Southeast Asian militants.

Foreign Fighters

Syria and Iraq have been described by a 2015 report produced by United Nations (UN) experts as a “veritable international finishing school for extremists”,¹⁰⁰ where the number of foreigners who joined Sunni militant groups is estimated by the UN to exceed 25,000 by April 2015.¹⁰¹ Among more than 80 countries,¹⁰² four MENA states (Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco) and two Eurasian countries (Russia and France) stand out, as the high figures of nationals involved number 800 to 3,000 individuals per country.¹⁰³ Recurrent features have been highlighted, including an average age between 18 and 29 years old,¹⁰⁴ “humble

⁹⁵ Tham Yuen-c, “Syrian Conflict a Security Concern, Some S’Poreans Have Joined Fight: DPM Teo”, *The Straits Times* (9 July 2014), accessed 28 February 2015, available online at <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/syrian-conflict-security-concern-some-sporeans-have-joined-fight-dpm-teo>

⁹⁶ Rendi A. Witar, “Abu Bakar Ba’asyir Calls on Followers to Support ISIL”, *The Jakarta Post* (14 July 2014), accessed 28 February 2015, available online at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/07/14/abu-bakar-ba-asyir-calls-followers-support-isil.html> Their positions substantially increased divisions among Indonesian Jihadists.

⁹⁷ Aditya Tejas, “Singapore Arrests 2 Teenagers On Terrorism Charges; 1 Planned Local Attacks”, *International Business Times* (27 May 2015), accessed 8 June 2015, available online at <http://www.ibtimes.com/singapore-arrests-2-teenagers-terrorism-charges-1-planned-local-attacks-1939449>

⁹⁸ Jason Ng, “Malaysian Police Arrest 12 Suspects in Alleged Islamic State Plot”, *The Wall Street Journal* (26 April 2015), accessed 1 June 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysian-police-arrest-12-suspects-in-alleged-islamic-state-plot-1430051500>

⁹⁹ Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh, “ISIS Has Eye on South-East Asia, Says Terror Expert”, *The Straits Times* (5 March 2015), accessed 2 April 2015, available online at <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/isis-has-eye-south-east-asia-says-terror-expert-20150305>

¹⁰⁰ Michelle Nicols, “Syria, Iraq a ‘finishing school’ for foreign fighters: U.N. Report”, *Reuters* (31 March 2015), accessed 2 April 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/31/us-mideast-crisis-islamic-state-un-idUSKBN0MR2NP20150331>

¹⁰¹ “UN Says ‘25,000 Foreign Fighters’ Joined Islamic Militants”, *BBC* (2 April 2015), accessed 10 June 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32156541>

¹⁰² “At High-Level debate, UN, Security Council Renew Pledge to Counter Foreign Terrorist Fighters”, *UN News Centre* (19 November 2014), accessed 6 February 2015, available online at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49381#.VNRgOMaolGg>

¹⁰³ Peter Neumann, “Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s”, *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation* (26 January 2015), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <http://icr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>

¹⁰⁴ Richard Barrett, “Foreign Fighters in Syria”, *The Soufan Group* (June 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>

and unexpected origins”¹⁰⁵ as well as a high proportion of converts among Western foreign fighters.¹⁰⁶ No single profile can be drawn between militants of a same country/region, let alone between individuals coming from different geographic areas. The decision to join the conflict may result from a combination of various push and pull factors ranging from humanitarian concerns to the search for comradeship and adventure. Recruitment processes are equally rooted in the interplay of different incentives which, in the case of Syria and Iraq, have been listed by Charlie Winter, Researcher at the Quilliam Foundation, as “charismatic recruiters coupled with very effective propaganda coupled with peer pressure.”¹⁰⁷ An additional and unprecedented causal element lies in the strong resonance of the caliphate with individuals attracted by the Islamic reference it pretends to institutionalise¹⁰⁸ and the ideal life it claims to offer.¹⁰⁹

Security challenges posed by returning foreign fighters, sympathisers and supporters of AQ/IS have led governments to adopt or to consider the implementation of a wide range of counter-measures. Law enforcement

approaches include: (i) tightened intelligence controls; (ii) temporary confiscation of passports; (iii) suspension of citizenship or denaturalisation of dual citizens; (iv) re-entry ban; and (v) arrest and detention. Special exclusion orders applying to suspected Jihadists have thus been announced in November 2014 by British Prime Minister David Cameron. Restricted to two years, this measure would allow the return of suspects on British national territory only if they would assume the potential legal consequences resulting from their suspicious activities.¹¹⁰ By contrast, the Tunisian government has implemented an amnesty program aimed at “[a]ny Tunisian who does not have blood on his hands”, according to Tunisia’s interior ministry.¹¹¹ Proactive repressive measures will bring required security responses, but it will not deter most determined individuals from joining the Syrian conflict zone and could even turn potential foreign fighters into home-grown terrorist plotters. To address the problem of violent radicalisation upstream, some prevention plans include counter-messaging initiatives¹¹² and assistance brought to people suspected of wanting to join the Syrian conflict zone and their

¹⁰⁵ Evan Kohlmann and Laith Alkhouri, “Profiles of Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq”, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 7, Issue 9 (September 2014), accessed 5 February 2015, available online at <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CTCSentinel-Vol7Iss91.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, “ISIS and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon”, *The Atlantic* (8 March 2015), accessed 1 June 2015, available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/isis-and-the-foreign-fighter-problem/387166/>

¹⁰⁷ Shane Croucher, “When Isis Jihadists Return Home: How to De-radicalise Islamic Extremists”, *International Business Times* (15 November 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/when-isis-jihadists-return-home-how-de-radicalise-islamic-extremists-1474905>

¹⁰⁸ Yaroslav Trofimov, “In Islamic State Stronghold of Raqqa, Foreign Fighters Dominate”, *The Wall Street Journal* (4 February 2015), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-islamic-state-stronghold-of-raqqa-foreign-fighters-dominate-1423087426>

¹⁰⁹ Kevin Sullivan and Karla Adam, “Hoping to Create a New Society, the Islamic State Recruits Entire Families”, *The Washington Post* (24 December 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/hoping-to-create-a-new-homeland-the-islamic-state-recruits-entire-families/2014/12/24/dbffceec-8917-11e4-8ff4-fb93129c9c8b_story.html

¹¹⁰ Patrick Wintour, “Jihadis who Travel to Syria Could be Barred from UK Return for Two Years”, *The Guardian* (14 November 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/nov/13/british-jihadis-syria-bar-from-uk-two-years>

¹¹¹ Aaron Y. Zelin and Jonathan Prohov, “Proactive Measures: Countering the Returnee Threat”, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (18 May 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/proactive-measures-countering-the-returnee-threat>

¹¹² Anne Gearan, “U.S. Attempts to Combat Islamic State Propaganda”, *The Washington Post* (7 September 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-attempts-to-combat-islamic-state-propaganda/2014/09/07/c0283cea-3534-11e4-9fd4-24103cb8b742_story.html

families.¹¹³ Coupled with disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes for returnees, these initiatives address the crucial need for reintegration strategies. However, trusting “former” violent radicals, some of whom could

have been involved in looting, rapes, torture, executions and massacres, is a challenging task, especially in West European societies where stigmatisation of foreign fighters is high.

¹¹³ Chine Labbé and Nicholas Vinocur, “La France cherche son modèle de ‘déradicalisation’”, *Reuters* (26 November 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://fr.reuters.com/article/topNews/idFRKCN0JA1NR20141126?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

Counter-strategy

Since the first U.S. airstrikes of what would later be named Operation Inherent Resolve were launched in August 2014, the fight against IS has become a multi-pronged effort involving an international coalition gathering more than 60 countries.¹¹⁴ Objectives set out by President Obama are “to degrade, and ultimately destroy”¹¹⁵ the organisation led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, without deploying combat troops in Iraq and in Syria.¹¹⁶ With a duration that John Kerry, U.S. Secretary of State, has estimated to take years¹¹⁷ and an average daily cost of military operations at USD 9.1 million in June 2015,¹¹⁸ the U.S. “comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy”¹¹⁹ is based on four axes: (i) carrying out “a systematic campaign of airstrikes”¹²⁰ in Iraq and in Syria; (ii) training, providing intelligence and equipment to Iraqi and Kurdish forces as well as military assistance to the Syrian opposition; (iii)

making use of counter-terrorist measures and international cooperation in key areas such as funding, intelligence, ideology and foreign fighters; and (iv) providing humanitarian assistance to civilians displaced by IS.¹²¹

Iraq

IS capitalised on feelings of distrust, injustice and alienation shared by many Iraqi Sunnis towards Shia-led governments.¹²² As a result, strong emphasis has been placed by the U.S. on inclusive Iraqi policies.¹²³ Prime Minister of Iraq Haider al-Abadi has a similar political and religious background as Nouri al-Maliki,¹²⁴ but his first months in office generated promising results. This includes the conclusion of an oil and military support-related agreement with authorities of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and ministerial appointments of Sunni leaders.¹²⁵

¹¹⁴ Justine Drennan, “Who Has Contributed What in the Coalition Against the Islamic State?”, *Foreign Policy* (12 November 2014), accessed 4 March 2015, available online at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/11/12/who-has-contributed-what-in-the-coalition-against-the-islamic-state/>

¹¹⁵ Office of the Press Secretary, Statement by the President on ISIL, *The White House* (10 September 2014), accessed 4 March 2015, available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>

¹¹⁶ Carol Morelli, “Kerry Asks Congress not to Bar Ground Troops in Syria and in Iraq”, *The Washington Post* (9 December 2014), accessed 4 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-asks-congress-not-to-bar-ground-troops-in-syria-and-iraq/2014/12/09/791fc43c-7fec-11e4-8882-03cf08410beb_story.html

¹¹⁷ Peter Dominiczak, “Three-Year Battle ‘to Degrade and Destroy ISIL’”, *The Telegraph* (5 September 2014), accessed 4 March 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11078812/Three-year-battle-to-degrade-and-destroy-isil.html>

¹¹⁸ Operation Inherent Resolve: Targeted Operations Against Terrorists, *U.S. Department of Defense*, accessed 14 March 2015, available online at http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/

¹¹⁹ Office of the Press Secretary, Statement by the President on ISIL, *The White House* (10 September 2014), accessed 4 March 2015, available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Munqith al-Dagher, “How Iraqi Sunnis really Feel About the Islamic State”, *The Washington Post* (24 March 2015), accessed 23 April 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/03/24/how-iraqi-sunnis-really-feel-about-the-islamic-state/>

¹²³ Tom Dart and agencies, “Obama: US Military Action Futile Without Iraq Political Consensus”, *The Guardian* (21 June 2014), accessed 30 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/21/obama-us-military-action-futile-maliki-sectarian>

¹²⁴ Mohamed Madi, “Haider al-Abadi: A New Era for Iraq?”, *BBC* (9 September 2014), accessed 5 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28748366>

¹²⁵ Muhamed H. Almaliky, “Mending Iraq: Can Abadi Bridge the Country’s Sectarian Divide?”, *Foreign Affairs* (16 January 2015), accessed 8 March 2015, available online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142780/muhamed-h-almaliky/mending-iraq>

However, questions have been raised about the extent to which al-Abadi would be willing to work in favour of national reconciliation, and whether the level of support granted by the anti-IS coalition would allow him to further this aim. Despite progress in the creation of a National Guard which is expected to mobilise Sunni communities against IS,¹²⁶ new amendments related to de-baathification and anti-terrorism laws have not been implemented at the dates of February and April 2015.¹²⁷ Iraqi Sunnis consider these pieces of legislation to be tools of discrimination,¹²⁸ which they firmly opposed during al-Maliki's tenure.¹²⁹ Gathered by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior into "Popular Mobilisation Units", dozens of Iraqi Shia militias play a leading role against IS.¹³⁰ These movements are considered by Al-Abadi to be an extension of his government,¹³¹ but their success could significantly undermine his fragile political legitimacy. Most of these groups have strong

linkages with the Shia Iranian regime,¹³² which widens the gap between Iraq's central government and its Sunni Arab neighbours. Reports of exactions carried out by Shia militias against Sunni populations increase sectarian hatred between the two main Iraqi religious communities.¹³³ Conversely, many Sunni tribesmen joined IS before the June 2014 offensive,¹³⁴ fuelling a state of distrust which equally undermines the prospect of anti-IS collaboration between Sunni tribal leaders and the Iraqi central government.¹³⁵

Syria and Iran

The U.S. excluded military cooperation with Shia-led Syrian and Iranian regimes,¹³⁶ while keeping open channels of communication with Damascus and Tehran.¹³⁷ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has been accused of contributing to the rise of IS in Syria, both to weaken its opponents and to present itself as

¹²⁶ Ned Parker (edit. by Angus MacSwan), "Iraqi Cabinet Approves Draft Law to Set Up National Guard", *Reuters* (3 February 2015), accessed 8 March 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/03/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-guard-idUSKBN0L70ZT20150203>

¹²⁷ Ibid. Sarah Margon, "Letter to President Obama Regarding the Visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Hayder al-Abadi", *Human Rights Watch* (13 April 2015), accessed 18 April 2015, available online at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/13/letter-president-obama-regarding-visit-iraqi-prime-minister-hayder-al-abadi>

¹²⁸ Suadad al-Salhy, "Iraq's Sunnis Push for Political Influence", *Al-Jazeera* (17 August 2014), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/iraq-sunnis-maliki-political-influence-201481710245695246.html>

¹²⁹ Ahmed Maher, "Iraq Sunnis Threaten Army Attacks After Protest Deaths", *BBC* (26 January 2013), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-21206163>

¹³⁰ Liz Sly, "Pro-Iran Militias' Success in Iraq Could Undermine U.S.", *The Washington Post* (15 February 2015), accessed 8 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-pro-iranian-shiite-militias-lead-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/2015/02/15/5bbb1cf0-ac94-11e4-8876-460b1144cbc1_story.html

¹³¹ Anne Barnard, "A Balancing Act as Iraq Claims Gains in Tikrit", *The New York Times* (12 March 2015), accessed 14 March 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/13/world/middleeast/tikrit-isis-iraq.html>

¹³² Zana K. Gulmohamad, "A Short Profile of Iraq's Shi'a Militias", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 13, Issue 8 (17 April 2015), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TerrorismMonitorVol13Issue8_01.pdf

¹³³ Fazel Hawramy, Luke Harding, "Shia Militia Fightback Against ISIS Sees tit-for-tat Sectarian Massacres of Sunnis", *The Guardian* (12 November 2014), accessed 8 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/12/shia-militia-fightback-against-isis-leads-to-massacre-of-sunnis>

¹³⁴ Hugh Naylor, "Plan to Train Iraqi Tribal Fighters to Face Islamic State Lifts Hopes in Anbar", *The Washington Post* (9 May 2015), accessed 8 June 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/plan-to-train-arm-tribal-fighters-against-islamic-state-raises-hope/2015/05/09/c78e73be-e12c-4085-b9d6-45219927ce1b_story.html

¹³⁵ Ahmed Rasheed, "Iraq's Abadi Struggles to Gain Sunni Tribal Support", *Reuters* (29 October 2014), accessed 8 March 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/29/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-abadi-idUSKBN0I1SO20141029>

¹³⁶ Stacy Meichtry, Jay Solomon and Maria Abi-Habib, "In Fight Against Islamic State in Syria, Iraq, Efforts Are Hampered by Arab Divide", *The Wall Street Journal* (15 September 2014), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/france-to-take-part-in-military-strikes-over-iraq-against-islamic-state-1410772479>

¹³⁷ Ibid.

a legitimate and credible political alternative.¹³⁸ Teheran plays an hyperactive role in Syria and in Iraq through the involvement of Hezbollah, a Shia Islamist-Lebanese organisation fighting alongside Assad forces,¹³⁹ Iranian military units opposed to IS in Iraq¹⁴⁰ and support brought to Syrian armed forces, Syrian/Iraqi Shia militias¹⁴¹ and Iraqi Kurdish military forces.¹⁴² Some Western military voices were reported to believe in the necessity of collaborating with the Syrian army against IS. As emphasised by Mark Urban, BBC diplomatic and defense editor, Iraq and Iran “would be delighted at such a development”.¹⁴³ This nonetheless goes against the stance of major Sunni U.S. allies that explicitly favour the ouster of Bashar al-Assad¹⁴⁴ and, in the case of Saudi Arabia,

are firmly opposed to the expansion of Iranian influence.¹⁴⁵ However, (i) airstrikes led by the anti-IS coalition are directed against the major challenger to the Syrian regime, which does not prevent the latter from pursuing its own air operations;¹⁴⁶ (ii) it tends to divert international attention from Syrian military activities;¹⁴⁷ and (iii) it could imperil progress towards a political transition in Syria,¹⁴⁸ which is a declared objective of U.S. foreign policy.¹⁴⁹

Turkey

A key member of the Atlantic Alliance and the anti-IS coalition, Turkey has been accused of welcoming anti-Assad opponents without distinction and providing support to IS and JN.¹⁵⁰ Ankara has been called to intensify

¹³⁸ See supra, note 4.

¹³⁹ Kareem Shaheen, “US Warning as pro-Assad Hezbollah Fighters Launch Assault on Syrian Rebels”, *The Guardian* (11 February 2015), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/us-warning-assad-hezbollah-syria>

¹⁴⁰ Helene Cooper, “U.S. Strategy in Iraq Increasingly Relies on Iran”, *The New York Times* (5 March 2015), accessed 12 June 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/06/world/middleeast/us-strategy-in-iraq-increasingly-relies-on-iran.html>

¹⁴¹ Liz Sly, “Pro-Iran Militias’ Success in Iraq Could Undermine U.S.”, *The Washington Post* (15 February 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraqs-pro-iranian-shiite-militias-lead-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/2015/02/15/5bbb1cf0-ac94-11e4-8876-460b1144cbc1_story.html “The Shia Crescendo”, *The Economist* (28 March 2015), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21647367-shia-militias-are-proliferating-middle-east-shia-crescendo>

¹⁴² AFP, “Barzani: Iran Gave Weapons to Iraq’s Kurds”, *Al Arabiya News* (26 August 2014), accessed 9 March 2015, available online at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/08/26/Barzani-Iran-supplied-weapons-to-Iraqi-Kurdish-forces-.html>

¹⁴³ Mark Urban, “Islamic State: Is the US-led Coalition Working Six Months On?”, *BBC* (6 February 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31146715>

¹⁴⁴ Prince Turki bin Faisal, interview conducted by Susanne Koelbl in “Interview With Prince Turki bin Faisal: ‘Saudi Arabia Wants Downfall of Assad’”, *Spiegel Online* (17 June 2013), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-saudi-prince-turki-bin-faisal-on-syria-and-hezbollah-a-906197.html> Alice Fordham, “Turkey Urges Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to Step Down”, *The Washington Post* (22 November 2011), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-urges-assad-to-step-down/2011/11/22/GIQAInTmIN_story.html

¹⁴⁵ Angus McDowall and Amena Bakr, “Saudi King Aims For New Sunni Bloc vs Iran and Islamic State”, *Reuters* (5 March 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/05/us-saudi-mideast-brotherhood-idUSKBN0M127N20150305>

¹⁴⁶ Ian Black and Mona Mahmood, “Coalition Air Strikes Against ISIS Aid Bashar al-Assad, Syrian Rebels Claim”, *The Guardian* (9 October 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/09/syria-isis-bashar-al-assad-coalition-air-strikes>

¹⁴⁷ AFP, “Syria Escalates Barrel Bomb Attacks as World Attention Shifts”, *Al-Monitor* (2 November 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2014/11/syria-conflict-weapons-rights.html#>

¹⁴⁸ Terry Atlas, “U.S. Reassured Syria’s Assad in Back-Channel Message”, *Bloomberg Business* (26 September 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-09-25/u-s-reassured-syria-s-assad-in-back-channel-message>

¹⁴⁹ “State Department: Kerry Will Not Speak to Syrian President Assad”, *The Guardian* (15 March 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/15/kerry-us-negotiate-bashar-assad-syria>

¹⁵⁰ Yaroslav Trofimov, “Porous Syria-Turkey Border Poses Challenge in Fight Against Islamic State”, *The Wall Street Journal* (19 February 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/porous-syria-turkey-border-poses-challenge-in-fight-against-islamic-state-1424334057> David L. Phillips, “Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey List”, *The Huffington Post* (11 September 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html Aaron Stein, “Turkey’s Evolving Syria Strategy”, *Foreign Affairs* (9 February 2015), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-02-09/turkeys-evolving-syria-strategy>

its action against aspiring foreign fighters,¹⁵¹ many of which enter Turkish national territory before crossing the 560-mile Turkish-Syrian border. The establishment of a formal buffer zone and a no-fly zone in Syria would help Turkey to secure its Southern border and to regulate new flows of Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers,¹⁵² the total of those based in Turkey is expected to reach 1,7 million in 2015.¹⁵³ This would also wipe out Syrian air military capabilities and deal a severe blow to Syrian Kurds' claims for self-government, as the premises of an autonomous Syrian Kurdistan¹⁵⁴ could act as a source of inspiration for the Kurdish population living in Turkey. However, both measures have been excluded by the Obama administration,¹⁵⁵ despite mixed signals from U.S. officials.¹⁵⁶ The refusal of Turkish authorities to allow the U.S. to use its Incirlik airbase for the purpose of conducting airstrikes against IS is an additional bone of contention.¹⁵⁷ Ankara fears that destroying IS would empower the Syrian regime¹⁵⁸ while further exposing Turkey to

the risk of terrorist attacks. The difficulty of harmonising Turkish domestic constraints and the priorities of the coalition is further compounded by the links between the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), a major ally of the coalition on the ground, and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK),¹⁵⁹ an organisation against which Turkey has been engaged in a decades-long conflict over the issues of independence and autonomy for Turkish Kurds. Turkey's president Recep Tayip Erdoğan equated the PKK with IS,¹⁶⁰ in a tense context of peace process between the former's leadership and the Turkish government.¹⁶¹

Allies and Military Action

Anti-IS ground forces involve Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Iraqi Kurdish military forces or Peshmerga, both being trained and equipped by coalition forces. Iraqi Shia militias have overshadowed the role of the ISF in the fight against IS. These sectarian-

¹⁵¹ AFP/de, "Obama Urges Greater Effort to Halt Foreign Fighters Entering Syria", *Channel News Asia* (9 June 2015), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/obama-urges-greater/1901988.html>

¹⁵² Soner Cagaptay and Andrew J. Tabler, "Turkey's Calls for Safe Havens and No-Fly Zones in Syria: Five Things You Need to Know", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (10 October 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkey-calls-for-safe-havens-and-no-fly-zones-in-syria-five-things-you-need>

¹⁵³ "2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile - Turkey", *UNHCR*, available online at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e0fa7f.html> (accessed 15 June 2015).

¹⁵⁴ Erika Solomon, "Special Report: Amid Syria's Violence, Kurds Carve Out Autonomy", *Reuters* (22 January 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/22/us-syria-kurdistan-specialreport-idUSBREA0L17320140122>

¹⁵⁵ Terry Atlas, "Anti-Islamic State Allies to Review Efforts as Militants Gain", *Bloomberg Business* (2 June 2015), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-01/anti-islamic-state-allies-to-review-efforts-as-militants-gain> Michael R. Gordon, "Americans and Turks Discuss ISIS Threat", *The New York Times* (1 June 2015), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/world/europe/americans-and-turks-discuss-isis-threat.html?_r=0

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Barbara Slavin, "US Still Considering No-Fly Zone For Syria", *Al-Monitor* (3 March 2015), accessed 10 June 2015, available online at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/syria-crisis-us-intervention.html>

¹⁵⁷ Liz Sly and Craig Whitlock, "Turkey Denies Reaching Accord With U.S. on use of Air Base against Islamic State", *The Washington Post* (13 October 2014), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/turkey-denies-reaching-accord-with-us-on-use-of-air-base-against-islamic-state/2014/10/13/9f705cd0-52da-11e4-809b-8cc0a295c773_story.html

¹⁵⁸ Ewen MacAskill, "US Increasingly Frustrated by Turkey's Inaction Against Islamic State", *The Guardian* (8 October 2014), accessed 10 June 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/08/us-increasingly-frustrated-turkey-inaction-islamic-state>

¹⁵⁹ Wladimir Van Wilgenburg, "Syrian Kurds Win Support in Battle With Al-Qaeda Forces", *Al-Monitor* (25 October 2013), accessed 17 March 2015, available online at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/al-qaeda-fight-prompts-kurds-support-pkk.html#>

¹⁶⁰ Mark Lowen, "Turkey's Fear of a Reignited Kurdish Flame", *BBC* (8 October 2014), accessed 17 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29542040>

¹⁶¹ Guney Yildiz, "Turkey-PKK Peace Process 'at Turning Point'", *BBC* (12 November 2014), accessed 17 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30000969>

based movements act as an emergency solution. However, the influence exerted by Iran on most of these powerful groups and their growing independence¹⁶² are likely to be fatal to President Obama's Iraq policy. Greater involvement of Shia militias in the Western Iraqi province of Anbar, overwhelmingly Sunni-populated, could further alienate Sunni populations and give credit to IS's self-declared status of defender of Sunnis against Iraqi and Iranian Shia forces. However, cases of collaboration among Iraq's Shia-dominated military, Shia militias and Sunni tribes have been noted on several occasions,¹⁶³ providing hope for the creation of an Iraqi cross-sectarian force opposed to IS. Deeply divided, Sunni tribes are in a cardinal position of support provider. Their collaboration is actively sought by IS, either voluntarily or coerced, and by the U.S. and the Iraqi central government.¹⁶⁴ In addition to support brought by the coalition to the YPG in Northern Syria, several dozen "moderate" Syrian armed opposition groups are backed by the U.S., including factions of the highly fragmented FSA.¹⁶⁵ A central question is to

determine whether these disparate "boots on the ground", the empowerment of which is a distinguishing feature of the anti-IS campaign, will succeed in convincing Sunni populations that the caliphate is not a potential answer to the eruption of sectarian violence in Iraq and the rule of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Following a request for air support from the Iraqi government¹⁶⁶ and the decision of the U.S. President to intervene on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border, more than 4,100 airstrikes¹⁶⁷ have been launched by the U.S. and its allies in Iraq and Syria between mid-August 2014 and early June 2015, damaging or destroying 7,655 targets as of 22 June 2015, according to assessments of the Pentagon.¹⁶⁸ U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reported that more than 10,000 fighters of IS had been killed between September 2014 and June 2015.¹⁶⁹ The organisation is said by the Pentagon to have lost 25 to 30 per cent of its territories in Iraq between September 2014 and April 2015, while its territorial implantation would have remained "largely unchanged"

¹⁶² David D. Kirkpatrick, "Shiite Militias Pose Challenge for U.S. in Iraq", *The New York Times* (16 September 2014), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/17/world/middleeast/shiite-militias-pose-challenge-for-us-in-iraq.html>

¹⁶³ Matt Bradley, "Sunni Tribes Join Iraqi Forces in Battle Backed by U.S. Airstrikes", *The Wall Street Journal* (7 September 2014), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/sunni-tribes-join-iraqi-forces-in-battle-backed-by-u-s-airstrikes-1410133588> Erin Cunningham, "Unusual Alliance Provides Hope in Fight Against Islamic State in Iraq", *The Washington Post* (10 March 2015), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/unusual-alliance-provides-hope-in-fight-against-islamic-state-in-iraq/2015/03/10/fe7e1928-c72a-11e4-bea5-b893e7ac3fb3_story.html Richard Spencer, "Shia Militias and Sunni Tribal Fighters Join Forces Against Islamic State in Ramadi", *The Telegraph* (18 May 2015), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/11614169/Shia-militias-and-Sunni-tribal-fighters-join-forces-against-Islamic-State-in-Ramadi.html>

¹⁶⁴ Ben Hubbard, "Iraq and U.S. Find Some Potential Sunni Allies Have Already Been Lost", *The New York Times* (15 November 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/16/world/iraq-and-us-find-some-potential-sunni-allies-have-already-been-lost.html?_r=0

¹⁶⁵ Ian Black, "US Syria Policy in Tatters After Favoured 'moderate' Rebels disband", *The Guardian* (2 March 2015), accessed 17 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/02/us-syria-policy-tatters-moderate-rebels-disband>

¹⁶⁶ "Iraq Formally Asks US to Launch Air Strikes Against Rebels", *BBC* (18 June 2014), accessed 10 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27905849>

¹⁶⁷ "Iraqi PM Urges Global Support Against 'Foreign' ISIL", *Al-Jazeera* (2 June 2015), accessed 3 June 2015, available online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/iraqi-pm-urges-global-support-foreign-isil-150602074436973.html>

¹⁶⁸ Operation Inherent Resolve: Targeted Operations Against Terrorists, *U.S. Department of Defense*, accessed 3 June 2015, available online at http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/

¹⁶⁹ John Irish and Louise Ireland, "U.S. Says 10,000 Islamic State Militants Killed in Nine-Month Campaign", *Reuters* (3 June 2015), accessed 4 June 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/03/us-mideast-crisis-blinken-idUSKBN00J0I620150603>

in Syria.¹⁷⁰ Apart from the liberation of the Syrian and Iraqi cities of Kobane, Tal Abyad and Tikrit, no major urban success has been achieved by anti-IS forces. The loss of Ramadi in May 2015 cruelly exposed the vulnerabilities of the coalition and its allies on the ground. By contrast, the organisation led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has demonstrated adaptive skills by concealing its movements and the resources at its disposal.¹⁷¹ It is likely to benefit from discontent generated by airstrikes among Syrian militants and rebels, many of whom are supportive of JN and believe the latter to be another target of the U.S. air campaign.¹⁷² A long-term and sustained war effort could significantly erode IS's paramilitary capabilities and drive it back to a state of semi-clandestinity, should a massive mobilisation of Sunni tribal groups and fighters be repeated. More crucially, the reestablishment of local structures of governance in liberated towns and villages would ensure the long-term sustainability of the coalition's gains on the ground.

Key Challenges

The show of regional unity between Middle Eastern states is being put to the test by acute divisions over military and political-religious motives. After three months of

involvement, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) temporarily suspended its participation in airstrikes, reportedly on concerns over the security of its pilots and dissatisfaction with the lack of support brought about by the coalition to Iraqi Sunni tribes.¹⁷³ Similar fault lines seem to have been expressed by Prince Turki al-Faisal, former Director of the Saudi General Intelligence Presidency (GIP), who underlined the perceived disorganisation of airstrikes and an alleged lack of intelligence-sharing between Arab members of the coalition and Iraq, which as he emphasised, did not request air support from Gulf states coalition members.¹⁷⁴ Tension between Arab Sunni states are equally strong, as Qatar's support to militant Islamist groups in Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist movement which the Saudi regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) consider to be a terrorist organisation, has significantly increased regional antagonisms.¹⁷⁵

The IS threat emphasises the challenge of overcoming sectarian lines in Iraq by reconciling different identities and aspirations. Decades of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime, years of sectarian attacks from Sunni insurgent groups and the recent success of IS have not disposed the Iraqi Shia populations to compromises

¹⁷⁰ "Iraq 'Retakes Over Quarter of Islamic State Territory'", *BBC* (14 April 2015), accessed 8 June 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32299602>

¹⁷¹ Siobhan Gorman and Julian E. Barnes, "Airstrikes Have Halted Islamic State, U.S. Says", *The Wall Street Journal* (14 September 2014), accessed 11 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/airstrikes-have-halted-islamic-state-in-iraq-u-s-says-1410729692>

¹⁷² Nabih Bulos and Patrick J. McDonnell, "Airstrikes Against Islamic State in Syria Stir Anger Among Rebels", *Los Angeles Times* (30 September 2014), accessed 12 March 2015, available online at <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-syria-bombing-protests-20140930-story.html>

¹⁷³ Rania El Gamal, ed. by Andrew Heavens, "UAE Sees no Defeat of Islamic State Without Iraq's Sunnis: Eithad Paper", *Reuters* (6 February 2015), accessed 20 March 2015, available online at <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN0LA1OQ20150206>

¹⁷⁴ Deborah Amos, "Saudi Grow Increasingly Critical Of The Campaign Against ISIS", *NPR* (19 February 2015), accessed 22 March 2015, available online at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2015/02/19/387533380/saudis-grow-increasing-critical-of-the-campaign-against-isis>

¹⁷⁵ See Amena Bakr, "Defying Allies, Qatar Unlikely to Abandon Favored Syria Rebels", *Reuters* (20 March 2014), accessed 22 March 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/20/us-syria-crisis-qatar-idUSBREA2J0WM20140320> Sami Aboudi, Ali Abdelaty, Amena Bakr, ed. by Crispian Balmer, "Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain end rift with Qatar, return ambassadors", *Reuters* (16 November 2014), accessed 22 March 2015, available online at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/11/16/uk-gulf-summit-ambassadors-idUKKCN0J00Y220141116>

with Iraqi Sunnis.¹⁷⁶ However, the latter themselves are divided on the appropriateness and the implementation of a federal option that would give them more self-determination, according to a Kurdish media report.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, Iraqi Kurds, who represent the second most important ethnic group in Iraq, do not seem likely to fulfil their long-standing aspiration for independence. Their leader Massoud Barzani stated in July 2014 that a referendum on this issue was “a matter of months”.¹⁷⁸ Recent gains of territories¹⁷⁹ and push for greater autonomy¹⁸⁰ appear to give weight to this proposal, but it does not follow that regional authorities could face the substantial political and economic costs of a sovereign Kurdistan,¹⁸¹ even less that regional and international powers would remain passive if this scenario were to become a reality.

Despite anti-IS local forces' knowledge of the

ground and, in the case of the Peshmergas, decades of experience in irregular warfare, major military obstacles remain. Between 2003 and 2011, about USD 25 billion dollars were spent by the U.S. on the creation of a new Iraqi army.¹⁸² Sectarianism and politicisation, corruption and disorganisation have been put forward to explain a gradual process of decline and debacle.¹⁸³ Strong emphasis is being placed by the Obama administration on the training and the arming of Iraqi forces opposed to IS. 3,550 non-combatant U.S. troops have thus been/are being deployed in Iraq at the date of June 2015.¹⁸⁴ 7,000 Iraqi soldiers have been trained and another 4,000 is anticipated.¹⁸⁵ However, the genesis of a strong national defence force primarily depends on the easing of Iraq's inter-religious and ethnic tensions rather than training sessions and the sending of additional U.S. weapons and equipment,¹⁸⁶ important quantities of

¹⁷⁶ Nussabih Younis, “To Defeat Islamic State in Iraq, Bridge the Sunni-Shiite Divide”, *The Wall Street Journal* (12 February 2015), accessed 23 March 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/nussabih-younis-to-defeat-islamic-state-in-iraq-bridge-the-sunni-shiite-divide-1423785432>

¹⁷⁷ “Iraq's Sunnis Divided Over Need for Their Own Federal Region”, *Rûdaw* (16 May 2013), accessed 23 March 2015, available online at <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/16052013>

¹⁷⁸ “Iraq Kurdistan Independence Referendum Planned”, *BBC* (1 July 2014), accessed 23 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28103124>

¹⁷⁹ Jonathan Marcus, “What Next for the Kurdish People?”, *BBC* (17 March 2015), accessed 24 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31856889>

¹⁸⁰ Helene Cooper and Michael R. Gordon, “Iraqi Kurds Expand Autonomy as ISIS Reorders the Landscape”, *The New York Times* (29 August 2014), accessed 23 March 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/world/middleeast/iraqi-kurds-expand-autonomy-as-isis-reorders-the-landscape.html>

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² David Zucchino, “Why Iraqi Army can't Fight, Despite \$25 Billion in U.S. Aid, Training”, *Los Angeles Times* (3 November 2014), accessed 24 March 2015, available online at <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-iraq-army-20141103-story.html#page=1>

¹⁸³ “Why Iraq's Army Crumbled”, *The Economist* (21 June 2014), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21604629-politicisation-iraqs-security-forces-undermined-their-fighting-ability-why> Loveday Morris, “Investigation Finds 50,000 ‘Ghost’ Soldiers in Iraqi Army, Prime Minister Says”, *The Washington Post* (30 November 2014), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/investigation-finds-50000-ghost-soldiers-in-iraqi-army-prime-minister-says/2014/11/30/d8864d6c-78ab-11e4-9721-80b3d95a28a9_story.html Eric Schmitt and Michael R. Gordon, “The Iraqi Army Was Crumbling Long Before Its Collapse, U.S. Officials Say”, *The New York Times* (12 June 2014), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/13/world/middleeast/american-intelligence-officials-said-iraqi-military-had-been-in-decline.html>

¹⁸⁴ “President Obama to Boost Army Advisers in Iraq”, *BBC* (10 June 2015), accessed 11 June 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33083359>

¹⁸⁵ Michael R. Gordon, “Americans and Turks Discuss ISIS Threat”, *The New York Times* (1 June 2015), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/02/world/europe/americans-and-turks-discuss-isis-threat.html?_r=0

¹⁸⁶ Ahmed S. Hashim, “Defeating IS: Will the Obama Strategy Succeed?”, *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies* (17 September 2014), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CO14185.pdf>

which have already been lost to IS.¹⁸⁷ While collaboration between Baghdad and Iraqi Sunni forces is strongly encouraged by the U.S., the latter has left this responsibility to the Iraqi central government,¹⁸⁸ reportedly without substantial results achieved.¹⁸⁹ On the Syrian front, 15,000 “moderate” Syrian opposition fighters are to take part in a three-year train-and-equip programme involving the U.S., Turkey, Jordan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁰ The coalition will not be able to exert full control over a proxy force whose political and religious aspirations as well as organisational and operational characteristics remain uncertain,¹⁹¹ especially in a context of opposing views over the roles it would be led to play in relation to the different actors involved in the Syrian civil war. The U.S. and Turkey have not expressed a common position on the anti-Assad activities that this “moderate” division would be likely to carry out, the possibility of which, however, has been refuted by the Obama administration¹⁹² but openly supported by the Turkish government.¹⁹³

Conclusion

Focusing on the meteoric rise to fame of IS would be misguided. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi leads a heterogeneous organisation that depends on fragile local alliances and is simultaneously attacked from different sides. Substantial material and financial resources make IS an unprecedented non-state armed force, however, most of IS’s prominent assets could easily be interpreted as significant weaknesses. Foreign fighters may provide the organisation with a source of renewable manpower, while the most experienced individuals, military and media expertise. However, their visibility among Syrian and Iraqi populations, as well as significant cultural gaps¹⁹⁴ are likely to increase a feeling of “foreign occupation”,¹⁹⁵ as a former resident of Raqqa described it. This could further undermine IS’s implantation. By contrast, other powerful non-state actors whose reported crimes receive much less media exposure have gradually normalised their presence and increased their political clout, including JN and Iraqi Shia militias.

¹⁸⁷ Martin Chulov and Paul Lewis, “Isis Jihadis Using Captured Arms and Troop Carriers From US and Saudis”, *The Guardian* (8 September 2014), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/08/isis-jihadis-using-arms-troop-carriers-supplied-by-us-saudi-arabia>

¹⁸⁸ General John R. Allen’s Remarks to the Press at U.S. Embassy Baghdad, *U.S. Department of State* (16 January 2015), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.state.gov/s/seci/236067.htm>

¹⁸⁹ Hugh Naylor, “Fall of Ramadi Reflects Failure of Iraq’s Strategy Against ISIS, Analysts Say”, *The Washington Post* (19 May 2015), accessed 12 June 2015, available online at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/fall-of-ramadi-reflects-failure-of-iraqs-strategy-against-islamic-state-analysts-say/2015/05/19/1dc45a5a-fda3-11e4-8c77-bf274685e1df_story.html

¹⁹⁰ “Syria Conflict: US and Turkey Agree Syrian Rebels Deal”, *BBC* (19 February 2015), accessed 25 March 2015, available online at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31511376> “US and Turkey to Train and Equip Syrian Rebels”, *Al Jazeera* (20 February 2015), accessed 26 March 2015, available online at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/02/turkey-afree-train-equip-syrian-rebels-150219190258895.html> Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Starts New Training for Syrian Rebels”, *The Wall Street Journal* (7 May 2015), accessed 18 May 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-starts-military-training-for-moderate-syrian-rebels-1431024869>

¹⁹¹ See Jeffrey White, “Train and Equip Not Enough for U.S.-Backed Syrian Rebels”, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy* (21 January 2015), accessed 26 March 2015, available online at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/train-and-equip-not-enough-for-u.s.-backed-syrian-rebels>

¹⁹² Phil Stewart, “U.S. Training of Syria Rebel Fighters Expands to Turkey: Source”, *Reuters* (28 May 2015), accessed 15 June 2015, available online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/28/us-mideast-crisis-usa-training-idUSKBN0OD1AF20150528>

¹⁹³ “Turkey and US Agree to Train and Arm Syrian Rebels in Fight Against Isis”, *The Guardian* (9 February 2015), accessed 28 March 2015, available online at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/19/turkey-us-train-syrian-rebels-fight-isis>

¹⁹⁴ Interview of Peter S. Neumann, Karen Leigh, *Syria Deeply* (29 August 2014), accessed 10 April 2015, available online at <http://www.syriadeeply.org/articles/2014/08/6020/european-jihadi-fighters-raise-profile-promotion/>

¹⁹⁵ Yaroslav Trofimov, “In Islamic State Stronghold of Raqqa, Foreign Fighters Dominate”, *The Wall Street Journal* (4 February 2015), accessed 12 April 2015, available online at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-islamic-state-stronghold-of-raqqa-foreign-fighters-dominate-1423087426>

Complex battle lines sustain the resilience of IS in Syria, which keeps feeding the presence of the group in Iraq. Tackling the organisation on a sectoral basis, without addressing interconnected dynamics of Syrian sub-conflicts, is a highly questionable expedient, both from a moral and from a strategic point of view. Should the objective of “destruction” be militarily attained by members of the anti-IS coalition and the actors it supports on the ground, it does not follow that the potential appeal of a resurging caliphate would disappear, nor would it mean

that other Iraqi and Syria-based movements would not try to follow in the footsteps of their predecessor. In a region experiencing massive upheavals, IS epitomises the intensity of issues encountered and the difficulties of going beyond ad hoc responses. Healing the open wounds of sectarianism is a first aid measure which, however, is similar to treating a symptom rather than acting upon the structural conditions affecting the spread of the disease. If not addressed properly, the latter will undoubtedly give rise to new “caliphates”.



About the Author

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