



# **The Secret of Attraction**

## **ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment**

**The Secret of Attraction**  
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## Introduction: Falling for ISIS

Anja Wehler-Schoeck

*“I did not fight the enemies to partake of your forgiveness and grace. I did not desire paradise for myself but for others. I did not wish for prey or benefit. I wanted to cleanse the land of the Muslims from the dirt of our enemies and establish a state of Islam, in which your laws are respected and in which only you are worshipped, in which your book is being read and in which your word is sounding and becoming truth.”*

Thus Syrian Jihadi Samer explains his motivation to join Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in Fawwaz Haddad’s 2010 novel “God’s Soldiers”. The question of whether such spiritual motives apply to a majority or even a substantial part of Jihadis has been the subject of much controversial debate. Al-Qaeda in Iraq with its original aim of confronting the US forces in Iraq has since evolved into the “Islamic State” organization, commonly referred to by the acronym of ISIS or ISIL<sup>1</sup>, pursuing the creation and expansion of the caliphate. The valid question can hence be raised of how this transformation has impacted on the motives and backgrounds of Jihadis joining the fight.

Since its rapid expansion in 2014, ISIS continues to be one of the most mediatized phenomena of our time. ISIS has reached unprecedented levels of recruitment – no other organization in modern history has managed to recruit more fighters. Its professional and tactical use of media, propaganda and communications tools has far surpassed the strategies of other Jihadi movements.

Despite the military gains against ISIS on Iraqi soil since 2015, despite reports about declining numbers of Jihadis joining ISIS from abroad, despite hundreds of thousands of Twitter accounts having been closed and YouTube videos deleted, the organization has lost little of its appeal. Groups around the world are pledging their allegiance; chaos in countries like Libya and Yemen is providing new breeding grounds. Attacks carried out by individuals around the world are seen as “inspired” by ISIS ideology.

Through its line of work on Political Islam and extremism, FES Amman has been closely following these tendencies for many years with the aim of publishing in-depth analysis by local experts from the MENA region and fostering an open and educated discourse on these issues.

The papers assembled in this publication were presented at an international conference entitled “The Secret of Attraction. ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment” organized by FES Amman in June 2015. When first discussing the focus of the conference among our expert group, we felt that too little was yet known about the particular appeal of ISIS, leading to its extraordinary recruiting levels. We realized that – analogous to our previous work on Salafis and Salafist groups – we needed to know more about similarities and differences among the followers and recruits of

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<sup>1</sup> The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

ISIS. In particular, we wanted to answer the question of whether causes for succumbing to ISIS propaganda or even joining them as fighters differed according to their country of origin.

To further analyze this, we decided to divide the Jihadis into three groups: 1. those coming from countries where ISIS holds territory and is engaged in continuous armed conflict, i.e. Syria and Iraq (today you would add Libya to this category); 2. those originating from the broader MENA region; 3. Western Jihadis. The papers in this publication thus shed light on the situation of several different countries and on the motives of fighters originating from there. What became very apparent was that while there are certain tendencies that seem to appear in all contexts, it is crucial to grasp the heterogeneity of the organization's followers. Individual characteristics and motives of Jihadis from each category and country range across a very broad spectrum.

Assessing Jihadi dynamics across the region and worldwide clearly shows, furthermore, that combatting ISIS by means of technical and military strategies may well reduce the organization's capacities momentarily but will do little to address the root causes of Jihadi mobilization, nor will the development of so-called "counter narratives". Reports about the supposed pushback of ISIS on social media also can be of little comfort in the confrontation of this phenomenon since the organization, while profiting from the lure of the prohibited, will find other communication channels and adapt their strategies and tools. The example of AQI also teaches the lesson that unless root causes are addressed, it is only a matter of time and circumstances that the phenomenon will re-emerge in one form or another.

Consequently, combatting Jihadi trends effectively requires a commitment to long-term solutions addressing a number of profound grievances, which contribute to radicalization. Besides the obvious need to stop the violent conflicts that are tearing apart several countries in the region, these strategies include:

- creating structures of good governance and accountability
- promoting social justice and implementing effective social protection mechanisms to overcome the marginalization of certain segments of society and to reduce socioeconomic disparities
- investing in quality basic and higher education
- promoting pluralism and tolerance while eliminating the political instrumentalization of sectarian dynamics
- strengthening moderate actors of Political Islam and pursuing a genuine dialogue with them
- adequately addressing the issue of returnees and avoiding (re-)radicalization in prisons

# **The Secret of Attraction: ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment**

*Dr. Mohammad Abu Rumman*

Since the current military ascendancy of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) on the Iraqi-Syrian scene in 2014, and the dissemination of its culture and model to large areas of both Arab and Western states and societies, ISIS continues to stir a large number of questions, create widespread argument and debate, and make headlines.<sup>2</sup>

Such questions and debates are imbued with the sense of “severe shock” that resulted from ISIS’ sudden rise to prominence, which was experienced by Arab and Western public opinion, and even by the US administration, which subsequently admitted that its security services had “miscalculated” the strength of ISIS.

Indications of the current rise of ISIS began to appear in April 2014, when the organization’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, proclaimed the merger of Jabhat al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front) with what was then known as The Islamic State of Iraq, turning them into a single organization called “The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham”. That proclamation was rejected by Al-Qaida’s leader Ayman al-Zawahiri and Jabhat al-Nusra’s leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani. The world awoke (almost two months later) to news and pictures of ISIS seizing control of Mosul and large parts of Iraq; extending its hegemony to the areas that it already controlled in Iraq and Syria; overpowering Jabhat al-Nusra in Eastern Syria and annexing it to the territory it controlled in the Raqqa governorate to the North; scoring decisive victories against the Iraqi and Syrian forces; declaring an Islamic caliphate and appointing ISIS leader Al-Baghdadi as “Caliph of the Muslims.” These developments transformed the organization from a “virtual state” or a “paper state” – as some of its adversaries had described it – into an actual regime that has resources, an army, and a media apparatus and exerts its own pattern of control over millions of people in those territories.

The shock experienced by public opinion and the elites was not confined to the ascendancy of ISIS, but extended beyond that to the organization’s media discourse. The latter was sophisticated at the technical, professional and production levels, and terrifying at the psychological and social levels, with unfamiliar and unprecedented video productions that even surpassed those of the central Al-Qaida organization. Indeed, there is a “big leap” in the organization’s use of the media, YouTube, and social networking sites.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term “current ascendancy” of ISIS springs from the fact that the roots of ISIS predate 2014. It was established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq in 2003, joined Al-Qaida in 2004 and then the establishment of Islamic State in Iraq in 2006. The organization suffered subsequent setbacks because of the blows directed at it by the Sahawat (Awakenings), then ascended and became prominent once again in 2011, until Al-Baghdadi announced the takeover of Al-Nusra Front, followed by the declaration of the caliphate. For more details, see Hassan Abu Hanieh and Mohammad Abu Rumman, *The 'Islamic State' Organization: The Sunni Crisis and the Struggle of Global Jihadism*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Amman, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2015, p 23.-27.

The third source of shock was the bloody and barbaric behavior of ISIS, the extent of which was unsurpassed by other previously known radical Islamist organizations. ISIS presented “artistic productions” employing highly technical means to depict scenes of slaughter and murder in increasingly innovative ways, as in the case of the of the “Saleel al-Sawarim (Clashing of the Swords)” series of films, or of subsequent films showing scenes of the murders of the Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh, Egyptian Copts and members of the Iraqi tribal Sahwa (Awakening) movement.

All of the above prompted a large segment of Arab intellectuals and politicians to adopt a “conspiracy” theory, that is to say that “invisible hands” are behind the creation of ISIS and have infiltrated it, and that the organization is a tool used by some international and regional powers. However, a paradox exists amongst those who have adopted such a conspiracy theory as they exchange accusations and arguments. Supporters of the Syrian and Iranian regimes speak of ISIS as some sort of Saudi-Arab creation and the direct outcome of efforts to weaken the Syrian and Iranian regimes, stressing the financial support and Salafist tendency that has swept over the region. On the other hand, their Sunni Iraqi and Sunni Syrian opponents consider ISIS to be an infiltrated Iranian tool that is working for Tehran. A third group that includes Arab politicians and academics consider ISIS to be the outcome of a US or Israeli conspiracy.

An opposite trend has also emerged, linking the ascendancy and discourse of ISIS to cultural-ideological factors; in other words, linking it with the existence of an Islamic culture and a tradition of jurisprudence and thought that encourage, enhance and deepen ISIS thought, and provides it with a very effective shortcut to the hearts and minds of Arab and Muslim youth.

Another approach links the strength of ISIS to actual, objective political circumstances and the various factors arising from them, although interpretations differ in evaluating the importance of these factors, comparing them to one another and determining which of them are the most instrumental and effective in explaining the organization’s influence and ascendancy. Firstly, there is the question of the Sunni crisis in Iraq and Syria, and the organization’s adoption of a clear and strong identity-related discourse in this regard. This has facilitated and enhanced its ability to recruit Sunni Iraqi and Sunni Syrians and to disseminate its message and propaganda in Sunni Islamist youth circles. Secondly, the role of the chaotic situation and the political and security vacuum in the region and the contradictions amongst international and regional powers has afforded some support to the organization and to its ability to obtain logistical and financial support as it exploits the existing vacuum and conflict. Thirdly, the weakness of secular and liberal forces and even other Islamist forces in both Iraq and Syria has rendered ISIS, which is putting forward hardline identity-related rhetoric, the first choice of some government, political and military forces in the Arab region in their confrontation with Iran’s influence and allies.

The ambiguity and contradictions inherent in all the approaches to explaining the organization’s ascendancy and expansion are intensified by its very significant ability (compared to other Islamist organizations, even in Al-Qaida itself) to recruit

and reach a large number of people in various parts of the world. A look at several major indicators will suffice to shed light on the extent of the organization's ability to contact, recruit and mobilize:

Firstly – Thousands of people from all over the world have joined the organization, although no accurate count exists. However, security and research circles estimate a minimum number 15,000 and a maximum estimate of 40,000. That is an unprecedented number that was seen neither in the Afghanistan war (in the 1980's), nor in Iraq following the 2003 US invasion and occupation. It is an astronomical number, compared to previous experiences of other radical Islamist organizations and even non-Islamist organizations.

Secondly – Global geographic spread: estimates and reports indicate the influx of participants from over 80 countries around the world to join ISIS. Many of them are from the Arab world, and there are also thousands from Europe and Central Asia and hundreds from the US and Australia. This attribute of global variation is clearly illustrated by the videos issued by the organization.

Thirdly – ISIS has a significant influence on women and girls, particularly those coming from Europe and the West, and even from Arab countries. Females have a noticeable and unprecedented presence, and according to some reports, females make up 10% of those joining the organization.

Fourthly – The phenomenon of religious converts: There is also an unprecedented number of joiners from abroad who have changed their religions (usually from Christianity) and converted to Islam, and they have adopted ISIS ideology and moved to the areas controlled by the organization.

Fifthly – A significant number of those who join the organization have not completed their education, and some are young. However, an effective and qualitative percentage of those who join the organization are educated and professional individuals, and they come from within Iraq and Syria and even from abroad. Some have higher degrees and some are doctors, professionals, journalists, school teachers, professional military personnel, etc.

Such an immense ability on the part of the organization to recruit and attract young people from around the world, and the fact that it constitutes an unprecedented phenomenon in that regard give rise to structural questions about the reasons and conditions that give the organization influence and an ability to reach such a wide segment of people. This question has come to resemble a big puzzle that is preoccupying politicians, journalists and those monitoring the situation.

These questions are reinforced and given wider important dimensions because we are looking at a situation that appears to be contradictory, or difficult to understand and comprehend: how can we explain this unprecedented "attraction" of thousands of young people from across the world and the widespread dissemination of that model and organization, despite the organization's bloody, hardline and unprecedented behavior and its hardline and extremist discourse in religion, jurisprudence and politics?

The essence of the question or dilemma can be summed up by asking: What is seductive or attractive about this organization, which has a frightening and terrifying appearance? Why do young people or individuals like to join such a model, and why are they willing to take a course that entails strong possibilities of becoming a suicide fighter or of being killed, meanwhile living a life governed by prohibitions, leaving modern life behind? That question becomes even more pressing when we talk about young people who have lived in the West, or who come from wealthy families and have financial resources and a good social status.

The above questions lead to many more that are related to what we call “the secret of the organization’s attraction.”

Firstly – Is it possible to speak of unified causes that are common to all those who join the organization from all over the world? In other words, is what attracts an Iraqi or a Syrian the same as what attracts a Jordanian, or a Saudi, or a Swede or a Philippine national? Or are we talking about a loose set of common causes and local causes linked to different societies or countries and different priorities amongst those who join ISIS? If so, this would mean that we are speaking of causes that are specific to Saudis; others that are specific to Jordanians, Tunisians and Arabs in general and a third set of causes specific to Europeans, and first and foremost, causes related to each of Iraq and Syria, which are the countries where the organization first appeared and gained ascendancy. If that is so, what are the common or general causes, and what are the causes that are specific to each region, country or society?

Secondly – If the characteristics of those who join the organization are different and varied, do specific general characteristics exist? Or are there characteristics that apply to each country, whether related to age or to educational, social, economic or professional levels?

Thirdly – Do recruitment instruments play an important role in facilitating the process? For example, is the Internet, given its prevalence, the most utilized method on which the organization and its supporters depend to spread ideas, ideology and propaganda and then to recruit? Or are do other equally effective means exist, such as mosques and personal contacts? Does this differ between one society or state and the next?

Fourthly – What is the content that is most interesting to and exerts the greatest influence on those who are recruited? Is it the injustice suffered by Syrians and Iraqis and pictures of massacres and killing? Or is it the sectarian issue and the feeling that the Shiite identity poses a threat? Or is power in itself an attraction for those young people?

Fifthly – Are there numbers and data about those influenced by the organization while abroad, who then went to the areas controlled by ISIS? What happened to them? Were they killed? Were they arrested? Did they return to their countries?

## **The Identity Question: Why did You Join ISIS?**

“Before I came to Syria, I was a sanitation worker earning a monthly salary of 2,000 dollars. Although I was not rich, my financial situation was good. I was not a social outcast. I had family and friends to support me ... I used to watch hockey, and I used to go to the cabin and go fishing.” Those were the words used by Canadian ISIS member André Poulin (subsequently Abu Muslim), addressing Canadians and others in a video posted by the group. In that video, he answers the question about why he joined ISIS, affirming that the reason was that he wanted to live in an Islamic state, and that this did not mean that he was a radical, or that he was unbalanced.

Dr. Iman Mustafa al-Bagha, a faculty member at Dammam University, a professor of Jurisprudence and Islamic Economics and the daughter of a well-known Islamic jurist from Syria, also joined ISIS with her children after leaving the university and her students. She used to earn a very high salary.

Interestingly, Al-Bagha wrote a pamphlet (more like a short article) entitled “*I was an ISIS adherent before ISIS existed*”. She says of her decision to join ISIS, “I had read about the tragedies befalling Muslims, the life of the Prophet, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him and, the lives of the companions of the Prophet and the conquests. I read them scores of times, I read contemporary history, with all its revolutions, and I studied the jurisprudence of Jihad as taught by eminent scholars. After doing all that, I adopted the thinking and methodology of ISIS before ISIS existed, and I know that the only solution to be found for Muslims is through Jihad.”<sup>3</sup>

Mohamed ould Brahimat, a young man from Mauritania, studied Communications at Cheikh Anta Diop University in 2007 in the Senegalese capital Dakar. He earned a Master’s degree in Communications and Internet Systems in 2012. He then left for Syria, from where he sent his mother a letter, informing her that he had joined ISIS.

In his letter, he says, “Be assured that I did not take this path until I ascertained that it was the right one.” He adds, “After arriving, I became even more certain that the methods of the State are clear to those whose hearts God has not closed.”

He emphatically denies the stereotypical image by saying, “Do not be deceived, mother, by the claims of the evil scholars that we have been led astray, and that we are boys who understand nothing about religion.”<sup>4</sup>

Omar is a different example from Jordan. He was a Computer Science studies student at the Zarqa Private University. He was born in 1995, and his father was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Omar had no Islamist tendencies, nor did he have an ideological perspective. He used to work at a restaurant serving American-style fast food in the Zarqa governorate.

His story began when he started to frequent a mosque close to his home. He was influenced by a group of worshippers who had adopted ISIS ideology. He used the money for his university fees to travel to Syria, arriving in Latakia. However, after

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<sup>3</sup> Iman al-Bagha, *I was an ISIS adherent before ISIS existed*, 2014, p. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> News report entitled “Letter from a Mauritanian young man who joined ISIS” on the Sahara Media website, 25 April 2015.

some time, he discovered that the reality was different to the rosy picture he had built up in his imagination, and he decided to return to Jordan, with the help of his family and the Jordanian Embassy in Ankara. He subsequently arrived in Jordan and was sentenced to five years in prison under the amended Law on Combatting Terrorism.

The CNN report on Omar's case is entitled "He was a fan of Mickey Mouse and joined ISIS!" According to his mother, Omar still thinks like a child. He changed his major several times, and depended on his family for everything, even when it came to making sandwiches. When his mother visited him in prison, he told her that he had drawn a smurf pursuing Mickey Mouse on the wall. His parents fear that jail will influence him in a way that ISIS failed to in Syria. His presence in a cell together with members of such groups could turn him into a real extremist, while his visit to Syria was a mere adventure from which he miraculously managed to escape.<sup>5</sup>

There are tens of similar stories of Jordanian and Arab young people, most of them with higher education degrees. In Jordan, the Jihadist tendency has achieved two big breakthroughs over the past few years. The first breakthrough was amongst the middle class, and the second was amongst university graduates and students.<sup>6</sup>

If we look through the biographies of several of those who have joined ISIS, from different countries around the world, we find that we are looking at diverse personalities. Many of them liked singing and playing soccer. Others had comfortable financial and social lives.

Despite all the efforts by the international community and the Arab countries to confront ISIS, weaken its ability to attract new recruits and respond to its ideology through intensified security efforts and high-level coordination; despite electronically pursuing the group to try to prevent it from using the Internet, which offers the group a golden propaganda and recruitment resource; and thirdly, despite the current global war that is targeting ISIS militarily using aircraft, missiles and internal warfare to weaken it and kill its followers in Iraq and Syria; despite all that, the group's ability to recruit and gain followers remains effective and strong. Not only has the group not been cut down to size and eliminated, it is expanding outside the areas that it geographically controls in Iraq and Syria. It moves to various other geographical areas through the "model" that it represents. Groups in Africa and the Arab world have acknowledged its leadership, and thousands of Arab and Muslim youth have been influenced by it. It has branches that imitate it in every way: militarily, ideologically, in the use of the media and politically.

This obvious, unprecedented ability on the part of ISIS to recruit, use propaganda and mobilize has prompted crucial questions in international and Western debates about the secret of ISIS' attraction. The West and many Arabs and Muslims perceive

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<sup>5</sup> See Hadeel Ghaboun's report, "Can a Mickey Mouse fan join ISIS in Syria?" CNN Arabic, 29 April 2015 on the following link: <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2015/04/29/jordanian-student-isis-mickey-mouse>

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Abu Rumman, "What is the attraction of this model?", *al-Ghad* newspaper, 20 October 2014

the behavior of ISIS as savage, barbaric and bloody; and the movement does not hesitate in its media and political discourse to show its clear hardline nature, without resorting to any attempts at deception or embellishment.

Questioning the secret of the attraction of ISIS raises other related questions. It is certain that there are some things that those coming to ISIS from different parts of the world are looking for. There are things that they cannot find in their societies that they might find with ISIS. There is something else besides the bloody violent face that we see that they are searching for and that they believe members of the hardline group in Raqqa and Mosul have.

The crucial and pivotal question when approaching this subject is to understand whether we are looking at an organization that its adherents view as a criminal terrorist organization and a killing machine, and whether those who join it are bloodthirsty criminals seeking to kill, or people who enjoy violence, or mercenaries. Alternatively, are we talking about something that is different to known gangs and mafias when it comes to goals, structure, pathways and the nature of the individuals that belong to it?

The answer is obvious if we ignore the naïve, pre-fabricated Arab media rhetoric. Those who join ISIS are not, usually, individuals with previous criminal records, deviants or fortune diggers. They are young men and women who are looking for a “meaning”, or a “goal”, or a “cause” or a “mission” in defense of religion or the oppressed. Or they are searching for a spiritual dream that does not exist in the West. Alternatively, they are searching for a better life, or for salvation on the Day of Judgement by being martyred (that is being killed in defense of God’s cause.)

The motive or incentive that drives them to such thinking, as Simon Cottee says in an important article entitled “The Zoolander Theory of Terrorism”, is one that is usually close to an ethical feeling. That is followed by a process of brainwashing by those carrying out recruitment and ideological mobilization on the Internet, or even when the recruited individuals fall into the embrace of ISIS.<sup>7</sup>

The identity question is the main key in understanding the generation of young people who head towards ISIS today. Some feel a spiritual emptiness, some question their relation to the universe and existence, some are displeased with the existing reality, some want to save the world, some are searching for personal salvation, some want to help the oppressed and persecuted, some are looking for religion, some are worried about their religious or sectarian identity ... all of those are potential members of ISIS.

It is necessary to emphasize here that we are not referring to a single massive homogenous mass of ISIS members. The Iraqi and Syrian situations are, in general, different and they generate different reasons and motives for joining this group or embracing such thought. An armed conflict, an existential threat to the Sunnis, a chaotic situation and balances of power exist that point to various considerations on the part of ISIS members. However, it is important to understand that the question

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<sup>7</sup> Simon Cottee, The Zoolander Theory of Terrorism, *The Atlantic*, 12 May 2015.

of the Sunni identity and the fear of the existential threat posed by the Other (Iranian-Shiite) is one of the main reasons for the enhanced presence of that trend in Sunni Iraqi circles, providing ISIS with a tolerant or neutral social incubator.

We cannot, of course, overlook the considerations and enticements that cause others to join for personal reasons. However, we are searching here for general trends, which include those who join because they are the victims of a brainwashing process that exploits their search for an identity. They arrive with good intentions at the beginning, but they have joined the wrong battle. According to Egyptian intellectual Fahmi Huwaidi, they are “God’s soldiers in the wrong battle”!

By contrast, there are other theories and trends in the West that do not focus much on the issues of identity or a cause, which they consider to be complex and completely unclear issues. These Western theories concentrate more on practical and technical issues. That is what researcher John Horgan does. He believes that it is best not to ask the question: why? (that is, the cause), but rather how, when and where? How did a certain person integrate into that organization? What were the networks that facilitated his/her joining? Where are they and how do they operate?

The intention is to move away from an approach that focuses on causes and conditions pertaining to motives, the media and the political discourse that strengthen ISIS and support it with newcomers, and to adopt a security or technical approach that focuses on drying up its sources and dealing with individuals that have been recruited.

This is not to say that the second approach is unnecessary or not useful. It is important and essential. However, current experiences highlight the fact that international and regional efforts that focused on the questions raised by Horgan have not succeeded in weakening the group and confronting its media apparatus and recruitment tools.

We have encountered paradoxes in several cases. One such case was the attack on the Canadian Parliament building in October 2014 by Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, who was influenced by ISIS thought. The Canadian authorities had prevented him from travelling to Syria to join ISIS, so he carried out the attack on Canadian soil.

The emergence of the lone wolf phenomenon – that is, those influenced by ISIS thought who commit to carry out attacks for the group – reflects the fact that focusing on technical issues will not eliminate the phenomenon. It might even reproduce it in more dangerous forms, because individuals influenced by ISIS thought might resort to carrying out operations in various parts of the world, rather than merely heading for ISIS-controlled territories, or their sought-after paradise.

To sum up, it is necessary to understand these fine points when dealing with ISIS, because that might help us to construct the required media and intellectual discourse, and to face up to the conditions and motivations that lend strength and influence to the ISIS model, allowing it to infiltrate youth circles in various parts of the world.

# The Islamic State's Appeal: Theories of Attraction

*Hassan Abu Hanieh*

There has been a broad international campaign to address the “Islamic State” (ISIS) militarily, ideologically, and in the media. It has been categorized as a ‘terrorist’ movement. There have also been numerous operations to block, restrict, and prosecute its members and supporters, as well as its violent ideology, brutal strategies, horrifying combat tactics, and extremist form of governance. Despite all this, ISIS has had more success with its ideological appeal, attracting support, and recruitment into its organizational structure than any other radical jihadist movement in history. The Islamic State’s appeal relies on a combination of objective causes, circumstances, and conditions; the organization has become the preferred choice for new Mujahideen, and the epicenter of recruitment for Mujahideen from all across the world, both men and women. In contrast to prior experiences of jihadism, new Mujahideen aim not only to join in ‘solidarity’ jihad and traditional jihad that seeks to cause harm to the enemy [*Nikaya*], their goal is greater; they aim to immigrate, settle, and contribute to the jihad of “empowerment” [*Tamkeen*: the type of jihad that aims to seize control of a geographical territory and establish authority] and state-building. They intend to live within the borders of its caliphate in Iraq and Syria, voluntarily consenting to its exacting social and economic system and extremist form of political governance. An international military coalition has been built to combat the organization’s strongholds, and most countries have taken strict legal, political, and media measures to prevent the flow of fighters and civilians to ISIS. Yet despite this, the Islamic State still attracts young people in droves.

The Islamic State clearly has appeal, as evidenced by the unprecedented influx of fighters joining its ranks in Iraq and Syria. According to a recent United Nations report by the Security Council’s Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee, released on May 19, 2015, the number of foreign fighters has increased by 71% between mid-2014 and March 2015. According to the report, more than 25,000 people from more than 100 countries have left their own countries to join al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, and other countries, and more than 20,000 foreign fighters have gone to Syria and Iraq with the primary objective of joining ISIS and the al-Nusra Front.<sup>8</sup>

Operations to attract people and bring them into the ranks of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria have superseded the most notable two previous operations to recruit foreign fighters since the time that this became a phenomenon in the 1980s. The number of fighters recruited by ISIS has surpassed prior levels by far, and recent recruitment efforts have taken place in a much shorter time period. Between 1979 and 1992, it is believed that around 5,000 people left for the front in Afghanistan to

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations: More than 25,000 fighters joined Al-Qaeda and IS.  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2015/04/150401\\_un\\_fighters\\_islamic\\_state\\_qaida](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2015/04/150401_un_fighters_islamic_state_qaida)

join the jihad against the Soviets. More recently, between 2003 and 2007, around 4,000 people left for the front in Iraq for the jihad against the American occupation.<sup>9</sup>

A fundamental, perplexing issue that experts and analysts have begun to work on concerns the secret of the Islamic State's appeal and attraction of foreign and Arab jihadists. Understanding this is an initial step that is necessary in order to craft a successful strategy to limit and reduce the influence of ISIS' appeal. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State, has far surpassed Al-Qaeda's leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, while the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, founder of the jihadist network in Iraq, rivals the likewise deceased Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden in popularity. Al-Zarqawi laid the foundation that later enabled the local Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda to outdo the central Al-Qaeda organization's global approach.

The Islamic State's appeal is fundamentally based on its efficiency and success. Where the central Al-Qaeda organization insisted on harassing the 'far enemy' with *Nikaya* war tactics and drawn-out attrition strategies, the Islamic State was dedicated to fighting the 'near enemy' with *Tamkeen* (empowerment) strategies and an approach that includes cleansing, control, and confrontation. The central Al-Qaeda organization espoused that it was the fighting vanguard, carrying a message for the Muslim Ummah, standing up to Western hegemony to push it out of the region, and engaging in *Ansar* (local supporters) wars based on self-interested political grounds. Meanwhile, ISIS espouses that it is the combative vanguard, representative of the Muslim Ummah, fighting 'apostate' regimes tied to the West, and seeking to deprive them and their allies of stability and control. It insists on entering wars of identity based on existential religious grounds, which enabled it to surpass Al-Qaeda's central leadership. It successfully exploited the rift between sectarian identities, managed to present itself as a protective shield for downtrodden Sunni Muslims in Iraq, and worked to affirm this in Syria and Lebanon, heedless of the traditional *Nusra* (local support) policies adopted by Al-Qaeda. Instead, ISIS imposed control, cleansed the area, subdued its opponents, and took control of governance as the dominant power in a climate of chaos and brutality.

### **ISIS' Appeal: What Explains Its Attraction**

The Islamic State's Appeal, and its ability to recruit and attract supporters, may be summed up on the basis of six factors:

#### **1. *The Failure of the Nation-State***

The Islamic Arab state, which arose after the period of colonialism, has failed to meet the political, economic, and cultural aspirations of its people. Political systems

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<sup>9</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, Sunni Foreign Fighters in Syria: Background, Facilitating Factors, and Select Responses. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/sunni-foreign-fighters-in-syria-background-facilitating-factors-and-select>

have become dictatorships, and they failed to achieve modernization or autonomy. The nation-state has failed on all critical levels, including:

- *On the political level:* Authoritarian dictatorships spread throughout the region, there is a lack of good governance, and poor governance has resulted in deep-seated feelings of injustice. These feelings have been fueled by the fact that over the decades, Arab citizens have suffered systematic violence and repression at the hands of their governments, which consider them a threat to national security.
- *On the economic level:* The rentier state's corrupt policies and outdated neoliberal approach have led to the collapse of the middle class. The lack of transparency, prevalence of favoritism, and loss of equality has led to an absence of economic opportunities and weak state-provided social welfare systems. Citizens in the Arab world have had to turn to other alternatives in place of the state and formal economic sectors. The economic liberalization programs implemented by Arab countries undermined existing social welfare systems, and eliminated guaranteed employment in the public sector without providing alternatives. Arab governments did not promote investment in productive sectors, and their economies did not generate an adequate number of jobs, nor the types of jobs needed. Today, the highest levels of unemployment are among people who have completed higher education.
- *On the cultural level:* Arab educational systems have failed to deal with many shortcomings in the educational process. Instead of instilling civic awareness, principles of citizenship, and values of social solidarity and acceptance of others, or focusing on essential analytical and critical thinking skills, the curriculum relies on rote methods of learning instead of interactive ones. It also relies on an uncritical acceptance of a hierarchical authority with no accountability. Religious education and history curricula have promoted an 'us versus them' mentality along ethnic, ideological, and sectarian lines. This has made young people susceptible to various influences, and fundamentally changed the cultural environment in the Arab world, enabling the spread of extremist ideologies and early indoctrination of children and young people.<sup>10</sup>

The Arab nation state has injected its ideology into the official religious establishment in order to legitimize its authority. Religious interpretation has been monopolized in the face of political Islam. The nation state is no longer able to withstand challenges, and lacks the ability to convince an angered public to abide by ethics that serve ruling dictators. By invoking civil strife, it is also unable to achieve the stability people demand: revolutionary Arab social movements have proven how weak and troubled the official religious establishment is, and how unable it is to meet even a bare minimum of popular demands.

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<sup>10</sup> Maha Yahya, Fatal Attraction: Five Reasons Young People Join 'Da'esh'. <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=57251>

## 2. *The Emergence of Sectarianism*

More than four years after the ‘Syrian Revolution’ began, the disease of sectarianism has become an epidemic that is rampant in the Arab-Islamic world. Locally, regionally, and internationally, the discourse of most nations, powers, actors and movements has viewed the Syrian conflict through the lens of sectarian identity politics. ‘Sectarianism’ has become a key word in the conflict, and an effective tool used by regimes and groups to achieve their political and ideological aims. From the beginning, Al-Assad’s regime has worked to promote a fearmongering sectarian discourse in order to turn the conflict from a revolution against the regime’s corruption and authoritarianism into a sectarian conflict between a Sunni majority and Christian, Alawite, and Druze minorities, and thus gain Shia support. Various jihadist Salafi forces have also described their conflict and the nature of their fight against the regime in sectarian terms as a way to gain Sunni support.

At the regional level, various forces have used sectarian discourse to prop up the legitimacy they lost due to the ‘Arab Spring’ and to maintain their authority and presence and extend their influence. The Arab revolutions shook up the alignments that existed previously, whereby the Arab world was divided into a ‘moderate’ Arab axis set against the ‘Resistance Axis.’ As a result, these alignments were recast along sectarian lines rather than geopolitical interest.

At the international level, the major powers—particularly the United States and Russia—have promoted sectarian cultural discourse. Early on, Russia’s Foreign Minister announced that Russia does not want a Sunni Islamic government in Syria. The United States and other Western countries have returned to their colonialist policies, supporting sectarian discourse under the pretext of protecting minorities. They have returned to Orientalist cultural theories, viewing the region through the lens of sectarianism in order to fragment it, and thus control, dominate, and subjugate it.

Sectarian terms used by Sunnis to cast Al-Assad’s regime and its allies as consisting of Iran; Lebanon’s Hezbollah; Iraqi Shia militias; *Nusayri* [a reference to Abu Shuayb Muhammad Ibn Nusayr, founder of the Alawite religion, and used to frame the Alawite religion as following a man and not God, therefore not divinely inspired]; *Rafidha* [“rejectionist,” a derogatory term for Shiites, on the basis that they reject the three caliphs after Prophet Muhammad that are regarded as “rightly-guided” by Sunnis]; *Majus* [a reference to Zoroastrianism (also sometimes called Magianism), which posits Shiism as a mask for a deviant religion of the past]; Safavid [a reference to the Safavid dynasty that ruled Iran from 1501 to 1736 and which imposed Shiism on the country, which previously was majority Sunni]; *Hizb al-Lat* [the Party of Lat, a reference to the pre-Islamic Arabian goddess al-Lat, believed to be a daughter of God, thus branding Hezbollah as a group of polytheists and not true believers]; and *Hizb al-Shaytan* [the Party of Satan]. Meanwhile, sectarian terms used in Shia discourse to describe the opposing coalition include *Nasabi* [a descriptor for those who hate the family of Muhammad]; *Takfiri* [a Muslim who declares another Muslim as an infidel]; *Ummayad* [a reference to the Ummayad dynasty, a Sunni dynasty that tried to suppress Shiism]; and *Wahhabi* [a reference to those who follow the

teachings of Sunni Salafist Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab]. These are a string of historical descriptions and labels frequently used to describe and characterize other identities as enemies, painting them as infidels bent on distorting Islam, changing it from its imagined 'pure' roots.<sup>11</sup>

Many Arab governments have long used sectarianism as a tool to consolidate their political influence, by consistently excluding ethnic and religious groups from political processes. Today, both Saudi Arabia and Iran are exploiting the specter of sectarianism in their regional political rivalry.<sup>12</sup>

Part of the Islamic State's appeal is their understanding of identity politics, and how they have dealt with the United States' imperialist sectarian vision, which has fanned the flames of identity politics in Iraq since it occupied the country in 2003. The US strategy to combat 'terrorism' after the Islamic State took control of Mosul in June 2014 is based on a fragile, precarious pragmatism that depends on allied forces, like extremist Shia militias, to carry out horrific attacks. This led to an increase in the militias' strength and control over all aspects of Iraq's fragile state apparatus. They also entrenched policies that marginalized and excluded Sunnis and helped Iran to extend its imperialist influence and control in Iraq. This provided the Islamic State with the appeal it needed to mobilize and recruit Sunnis, at a time when Shiites were solidifying their authority and influence in Iraq and Syria with Iran's patronage, and Kurds were expanding their position and independence. Sunnis in Iraq and Syria do not have critical strategic support from Sunni countries, and so the United States still relies on the same mistaken conceptions of politics and identity it has followed since it occupied Iraq in 2003. The Islamic State has successfully solidified its appeal by maintaining an extended central bureaucratic system, and using its success in the field to build a Sunni alliance based on religious identity with Iraqi forces, actors, and movements. It has emerged as an effective shield in protecting and holding onto a Sunni identity that has suffered under Al-Maliki's sectarian policies.

After three years of peaceful Sunni protests in Iraq and armed Sunni protest movements in Syria, the Islamic State has masterfully proven how empty the political process is and how futile peaceful demands are. It has depicted the conflict as a sectarian one between Sunnis and Shiites, and proven that Sunni states in the region have no clear vision for dealing with the destruction wrought by Shiites united under Iran's banner. The Islamic State also has proven that Sunni elites in Iraq have failed to provide even a modicum of justice, and failed to confront corruption in the political process created after the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, which was based on identity politics that granted hegemony to Shia on the pretext of majority rule. The Islamic State's vision of identity politics and sectarian policies

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<sup>11</sup> Hassan Abu Hanieh, Divergence of the Syrian Conflict: The Disease of Sectarianism.

<http://arabi21.com/story/725770/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81>

<sup>12</sup> F. Gregory Gause, III. Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War. Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, Number 11, July 2014.

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/07/22-beyond-sectarianism-cold-war-gause/arabic-pdf.pdf>

as the driving force behind local and regional movements has been realized. The driving force of sectarianism reached its peak as the Syrian revolution entered its fourth year, and as Iran explicitly intervened in support of Al-Assad's Alawite regime, crudely supporting Iraqi Shiite militias and Lebanon's Hezbollah. This convinced active Sunni forces to swear allegiance to the Islamic State and work under its leadership. At the forefront were military councils comprised of members of the former Iraqi army, armed tribal contingents, and most Iraqi resistance groups, including the Islamic Army in Iraq, Hamas of Iraq, The 1920 Revolution Brigade, the Mujahideen Army, the Ansar al-Sunnah and the Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Symbolism of the Islamic Caliphate

Although the most recent Islamic caliphate, under the Ottomans, was dissolved in 1924, the idea of the caliphate as an Islamic political system has great emotional resonance with Muslims and Arabs. A 2006 Gallup Poll exploring the opinions of Muslims in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, and Pakistan, found that two thirds of participants supported the idea of "uniting all Islamic countries" in a new caliphate.<sup>14</sup> The Islamic State implemented this idea after taking control of the city of Mosul, by announcing it had established a 'caliphate' on June 29, 2014. This was an important strategic step to emphasize its Islamic religious identity, and establish the legitimacy of its central organizational structures, to ensure either voluntary or forced obedience and prevent any possible cracks in the organization. Announcing a caliphate was the last link in the chain of a global jihad strategy, a final step in enacting the jihadist mission in history. While Al-Qaeda is based on building a *Nikaya* force through an elite decentralized military organization and policies to repel aggressors, based on the concept of 'defensive jihad,' the Islamic State is based on building an empowerment *Tamkeen* force by imposing geographic control with a centralized organization, a hybrid army that is both traditional and modern, and policies crafted around the "management of savagery," all based on a concept of offensive jihad.

The "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria"—or *Da'esh*, as it is known in Arabic<sup>15</sup>—showed that it has global ambitions by announcing the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the areas it controls in Iraq and Syria, and in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's call for Muslims everywhere to swear allegiance to him as its 'caliph.' Whether these

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<sup>13</sup> Hassan Abu Hanieh, The Appeal of the Islamic State Organization.

<http://altagreer.com/%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9/>

<sup>14</sup> Edward Stourton, Why is the Idea of a Muslim Caliphate Attractive?

[http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/10/141026\\_islamic\\_caliphate\\_return](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2014/10/141026_islamic_caliphate_return)

<sup>15</sup> Colloquially and in Arab media outlets, the organization came to be known as *Da'esh*, derived from the acronym for its Arabic name: *Al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fil-Iraq wal-Sham* (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ or Al-Sham (the Levant)). [Translator's note]

ambitions are real or not, many outside observers hypothesize that the organization's appeal goes beyond Iraq's borders.<sup>16</sup>

#### **4. Standing Up to Western Imperialism**

Jihadism entered the world stage as a reaction to the dynamics of globalization,<sup>17</sup> following structural changes in the international strategic landscape between 1989 and 1992. The Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989, the Gulf War broke out when Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and the failed US campaign in Somalia began on December 9, 1992.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet Union's collapse and the dissolution of the socialist system led to the United States' emergence as an imperialist hegemonic power, seeking to expand its control and impose a new world order. Within these strategic shifts, America's perception of international political reality changed from that which prevailed during the Cold War. During this era, it had adopted a military political strategy based on the principal of 'containment' of communism and 'deterrence' of Soviet power, both conventional and nuclear. Then in the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States fell into an ideological and political vacuum, which led to a multitude of opinions about how the future should be shaped.<sup>19</sup> This coincided with the failure of local jihadism and foreign 'solidarity' jihad, thus furthering the jihadist narrative that the 'near enemy' (i.e., Arab and Islamic dictatorial regimes) does not stand on its own: it is supported by imperialist might of the US and its Israeli allies. Amid three strategic realities, the narrative that combatting the 'far enemy' was a priority seeped in, as did the idea of globalized jihad. The first reality was the local and national reality of a Middle East characterized by closed political models, unkept promises of democratic transformation, and entrenched dictatorship. The second is regional and consists of the failure to arrive at real, just peace in Palestine. The third is the global reality

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<sup>16</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *ISIS: Global Islamic Caliphate or Islamic Mini-State in Iraq?* <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/07/24/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%85-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82/hhus>

<sup>17</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Mind of Terrorism and Why They Fight with Their Death*, Prepared and Translated, Bassam Hajjar, Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, First Edition, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam*, Translated by Lara Maalouf, Dar el-Saqi, Beirut, First Edition, 2003, p.195.

<sup>19</sup> It seems clear that the new enemy of American imperialism would be Islam. As former US President Richard Nixon wrote, "Some observers warn that Islam will become a monolithic and fanatical geopolitical force, that its growing population and significant financial power will pose a major challenge, and that the West will be forced to form a new alliance with Moscow to confront a hostile and aggressive Muslim world." Richard Nixon, *America: A Historical Opportunity*, translated by Dr. Mohamed Zakaria Ismail, Dar Bisan Publishing, Damascus, 1992, p.187. [Translator's note: Original English title: *Seize the Moment: America's Challenge in a One-Superpower World*]

ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States' unipolar rule, and the onset of globalization.<sup>20</sup>

The Islamic State developed a global jihadist ideology by combining local, regional, and global dimensions, and presenting itself as standing up to Western imperialism. After the organization took control of Mosul on June 10, 2014, the United States unilaterally launched airstrikes in Iraq on August 16, 2014 to stop IS' advancement towards the northern region of Kurdistan. On September 9, 2014 it formed an international coalition, and expanded air strikes to include Syria on September 23, 2014. This strengthened the Islamic State's appeal as an organization facing a new 'crusade'<sup>21</sup> aimed at the Islamic world.

Distrust of the West has negatively fueled the situation, and the Islamic State has shed light on the double standards practiced by the international community and the West. To many people, the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories and the apparent immunity that Israel enjoys despite its repeated attacks on Arabs are an open sore. Seventy-seven percent of Arabs feel that the issue of Palestine is an Arab issue, not simply a Palestinian one. While the West and their armies have intervened in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, they have failed to support the civil uprising in Syria, state-building in Libya, or democracy in Egypt, reinforcing accusations of the West's hypocrisy. In this context, for many young people, the Islamic caliphate—with its clear strength on the ground—seems a logical alternative to failed attempts by Arabs and Muslims to claim their rights.<sup>22</sup>

## **5. *The Communications Revolution and Social Networking***

Global jihadism—and specifically the Islamic State, as an organization—is considered one of the most important radical movements to use the communications revolution to spread their religious message. In the 1980s, the first generation of Mujahideen relied on traditional oral and written communications to spread their propaganda. The second generation has utilized the Internet since the mid-nineties by creating thousands of jihadist websites. With the third generation, which was forged by the Syrian revolution in 2011, global jihadism—and particularly the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria—relies on a variety of social media, most prominently and frequently Twitter, Facebook, and Diaspora. They also put

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<sup>20</sup> François Burgat, *Islamism in the Shadow of Al-Qaeda*, translated by Sahar Saeed, Cadmus Company for Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, First Edition, 2006, p.60.

<sup>21</sup> The Islamic State was not alone in describing the coalition air strikes as a crusade; the organization's opponents did as well. The Jihadi Salafist ideologue, Issam al-Barqawi, known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, described the jihadist Salafi view, saying that the American and Arab coalition airstrikes on Islamic State sites and jihadist organizations in Syria and Iraq were a "crusader war." Al-Maqdisi, 'Coalition Air Strikes are a Crusade,' *Al Jazeera*, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2014/9/24/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9>

<sup>22</sup> Maha Yahya, *Fatal Attraction: Five Reasons Young People Join 'Da'esh'*. <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=57251>

links and publish their propaganda literature on Justpasteit.it, a Polish site for sharing films and data.

The United States has coordinated with the managements of social media sites, particularly Twitter, to conduct a broad campaign to prevent the Islamic State from exploiting electronic means of communications to spread its ideological propaganda and to undercut its recruitment and mobilization operations. It has done so by tracking identifying information and tracking and deleting accounts belonging to the organization and its supporters. However, this is a nearly impossible task, considering the millions of tweets and an electronic army of more than 12,000 supporters, in addition to hundreds of active users within the organization with significant IT experience. The Islamic State has been able to attract hundreds of cadres of media and publicity professionals, both Arabs and foreigners.

The media is hugely important to the Islamic State's structure; it is more interested in the Internet and media issues than any other jihadist organization. Early on, it realized how exceptionally important communications are to communicating its political message and spreading its jihadist Salafi ideology. The concept of 'electronic jihad' has been a pillar of the organization; its media department has undergone considerable development in form and content, and enjoys extensive support and backing. Al-Furqan, an institution for media production, is the oldest and most influential of the Islamic State's institutions. Recently, new media outlets were established to propagate and spread IS' message, ideology, and missions; including: Al-Itisam, Al-Hayat, A'amaaq, Al-Battar, Dabiq Media, Al-Khilafah, Ajnad for Media Productions, Al-Ghurabaa, Al-Israa for Media Production, Al-Saqeel, and Al-Wafaa, in addition to a number of media agencies affiliated with provinces and regions under IS control, such as Al-Barakah and Al-Khair news agencies, among others. The department also publishes a number of Arabic and English language magazines and bulletins, such as *Dabiq* and *Al-Shamikhah*, and has established local radio stations, such as Al-Bayan in the Iraqi city of Mosul, and another radio station in the Syrian city of Al-Raqqah. It is also about to launch a caliphate television channel. The organization also has media activities through online blogs, most notably in Russian and in English. The organization's Media and Communications Department translates media productions into various languages, including English, French, German, Spanish and Urdu, among others.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, what sets the Islamic State apart from other jihadist organizations is its powerful media tools, particularly in cyberspace. This gives it a broad and crucial arena for propaganda and recruitment, and brings in more funding sources. With new developments, however, it seems the Islamic State's technological abilities are not just tools to help and support its wars and military operations on the ground

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<sup>23</sup> Hassan Abu Hanieh, The Islamic State's Media Apparatus: The Caliphate's Electronic Army. <http://arabi21.com/story/803770/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D9%84%D8%A9->

alone: the organization has also utilized its capabilities to create a new jihadist battlefield, parallel to its military operations, dubbed ‘electronic jihad.’<sup>24</sup>

## **6. Counter-Revolutions of the Arab Spring**

There is no question that the wave of democratic revolutions that swept the Arab world starting in 2011 shocked authoritarian regimes in the region. After decades where these regimes were preoccupied with pursuing, confining, and combating ‘Islamist jihadist’ movements that used armed force as the sole approach for opposing authoritarianism (while this violent ideology was itself the product of those authoritarian policies and repressive practices), these revolutions came along and produced ‘political Islam’ movements that adopted a peaceful approach to reform, standing up to authoritarianism with the minimum use of standards of opposition. It seems the wave of changes that threatened authoritarian regimes in the Arab world was more impactful and threatening than the September 11, 2001 attack on American soil. While after September 11 the United States drew a distinction between jihadist Islam and political Islam, and limited the label ‘terrorist’ to its jihadi enemies like Al-Qaeda, Arab authoritarian regimes on the other hand expanded their own understanding of the threats and dangers they faced, and extended their concept of ‘terrorism’ to include political Islam movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have become more repressive; sectarian conflicts have increased dramatically; and democracy, freedom, and justice have slipped more out of reach. Global jihadism has used this as evidence of the correctness of its violent approach, and radical discourse has become increasingly attractive to the young generations in the region.

The response to the Arab uprisings has only made matters worse. Harsh repression of popular movements across Arab countries has often taken on ideological or sectarian overtones, and this has exacerbated societal divides, encouraging societal polarization and sectarian tensions. Some countries have used violence against civilians; barrel bombs and chemical weapons were used in Syria, while other Arab countries used arbitrary killings, forced disappearances, and biased legal cases against opposition parties. These measures have caused rifts in Arab societies and generated stronger feelings of marginalization among young people. After their uprisings toppled authoritarian leaders, young people have felt a greater sense of power and ability to influence the world; they are searching for more meaning to their lives, and seeking affirmation of their identities. Peaceful paths to change and reform have been barred, however, and people seeking peaceful reform have been increasingly oppressed. It is an undeniable, historical fact that when peaceful paths to change are blocked, this automatically pushes people towards the use of force, whether organized resistance or random violence. The jihadist project—with its intellectual vision and active organization—is ready to accept people angered by the fact that the peaceful path has been blocked. Thus, it is not surprising that these

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<sup>24</sup> Tal Koren and Gabi Siboni, ‘The Caliphate’ extends into Facebook: How does ‘Da’esh’ recruit new jihadists in cyberspace? <http://www.rcssmideast.org/Article/2654/%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF>

young people naturally resort to jihadist organizations. Perhaps this explains why many jihadists on Twitter mock those advocating for and insisting on peace.<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

The Islamic State's appeal can be summarized in its ability to offer a religious ideology that claims to represent Sunni Islam and its zeal to build a state based on the idea of the caliphate and applying *Shari'ah* (Islamic law). It presents itself as a defender of Sunni identity in the face of Iranian expansion and Shiite influence, and as a resistance force standing up to Western hegemony, which it sees as leading a crusade. It uses the Internet, social media, and highly skilled technical experts to spread its jihadist ideological propaganda. Several objective factors contribute to the organization's appeal and the influx of fighters. These include how easy it is to travel through Turkey (since the country is a favorite tourist destination), local networks of support and backing with vast experience, how easy it is to recruit through social media networks, the Sunni-Shiite divide, compassion and cohesiveness found in religious identities, the appeal of jihad in Syria (given how amazingly picturesque the region is), a religious-historical appeal (given the Levant's association with historical battles and tribulations at the end of days), and the idea of an Islamic caliphate with its historical capital in Damascus.

There is no doubt that limiting the Islamic State's appeal and putting an end to its violent ideologies requires a series of far-reaching measures, beyond immediate military and security approaches. It would require radically addressing the deep, objective causes, circumstances, and conditions that have led to the organization's growth and spread. This would be done by offering successful models of good governance, restoring faith in the possibility of change and reform, and establishing political values based on freedom, equality, and democratic pluralism.

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<sup>25</sup> Turki al-Jasser, "What Do Young People Find Enticing About ISIL?"

<http://altagreer.com/%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AC-%D9%88%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3/>



# The Case of Syria

*Hassan al-Safadi*

The Islamic State is a phenomenon that transcends borders with its ideas, acts, and mobilization. In order to discuss ISIS in any one country, one must address the roots and reality of the phenomenon, as well as divergences in its manifestation—if any—from one country to another.

There is a set of factors and reasons behind the emergence and ascendancy of ISIS, which contributed to the solidification of the organization's existence and domination over vast swathes of land, and multitudes of people. These factors include historical, social, intellectual, and political elements.

## **Historical Reasons**

ISIS' emergence and ascendancy came as a result of the failures of Al-Qaeda's strategy, and the thought of its leaders and cadres. Al-Qaeda launched an open-ended jihad with unclear goals, milestones, and in an unclear and undefined arena, proposing a vague, intangible project. In contrast, the Islamic State has been able to bring these things into reality, tangibly realizing a dream in the real world. The Islamic State succeeded in its project so far by actualizing an organization and a state that stands on three core pillars: The ruler (the caliph), the land (Syria and Iraq), and the system of government (the State)

## **Social Reasons**

ISIS is a manifestation of "transitional violence," an instance of social anarchy resulting from a realignment of state powers and traditional actors growing weaker. The sudden emergence of similar entities has occurred during all stages of societal transformation throughout history, in a system of violence that provides an appealing framework for chaos and anarchy through appealing slogans.

## **Intellectual Reasons**

Contemporary Arab intellectual and political movements (both Islamist and secular ones) have stagnated, choked by stereotypes from the 1960s. They have utterly failed to keep pace with social, political, and intellectual developments, both in their discourse and their preoccupations. They also lack the ability to form intellectual movements that are mature, based in reality, and able to cope with major challenges. All this has led to a vacuum – and nature abhors a vacuum. Yet without natural, gradual, and objective mobilization, the result is what we see today: communal, political, or non-political violence, whether targeted or random.

## **Political Reasons**

Political prospects are closed off both domestically, regionally, and on the level of the Muslim Ummah as a whole. Regimes have no real project or clear national role; they are more concerned with their own survival than working on national issues. Furthermore, the principle of rotation of power has been abandoned in favor of shuffling chairs between the same group of political elite within the ruling circles. An alliance and mutually-beneficial relationship between authoritarianism and corruption further exacerbated the political reality. Elements of civil society have been destroyed, attempts to revive them have been thwarted, and there is focus on the centrality of state institutions that have failed to perform their fundamental responsibilities, much less fill the role of civil society institutions.

## **Factors Contributing to ISIS' Appeal**

The Islamic State's appeal is grounded in a deep understanding of the cultural background and living conditions of the region and people it controls. It is also based on the psychological needs of the younger generation, who reject the pressures of the current reality and who have not found convincing solutions or alternatives to it. Elements of ISIS' appeal include:

### ***Factors of Appeal at the Regional Level***

ISIS provides a means of compensating for feelings of national humiliation. With the underperformance of official institutions, and with armies and security institutions protecting regimes and governments instead of the nation or the people, groups form to undertake national duties by themselves, or at least this is what they claim to be doing.

ISIS represents an outlet of resistance for a social reality that has suffered material and moral outrages. It manifests a façade that combines shallow religious mobilization, criminal sectarian acts, and incendiary historic parallels of the Sunni-Shiite divide. There are many examples of this, the most important of which include:

- Using over-simplistic arguments based on *Shari'ah*;<sup>26</sup>
- Co-opting efforts of contemporary Islamic schools and movements that seek to restore Islamic rule, and using them in ISIS' project;
- Using *Hadiths* [sayings of the Prophet] about epic battles and the end of days, without regard to their historic and geographic contexts. ISIS' zeal to occupy the city of Dabiq and then give its magazine this same name – which is derived from a *Hadith* of the Prophet – indicates how important this is;
- *Fatwas* [opinions of religious scholars] that are not fully thought out, and do not bear in mind facts of the situation or the situation of people asking for religious and legal advice—in other words, the 'Mufti Google' complex.

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<sup>26</sup> *Terrorists to Combat Terrorists*, Bakir Hussein.

Another factor of appeal at the regional level is ISIS' taking advantage of the breeding ground for terrorism in Arab societies, and its claim that it is restoring the "lost dream."<sup>27</sup>

Arab Spring revolutionaries—and young people from the Islamist current in particular—feel their project has been stolen from them. The most recent indication of this is organizations that—though they may not be effective or promising—have begun to appear. These include organizations that joined, pledged allegiance, or expressed sympathy to ISIS, including the Islamic State in Helwan and Matareya, the Islamic State in Haram and Faisal, and the Islamic State in Sinai and Libya. Several jihadi Salafist organizations from several countries have also announced that they have joined ISIS.

### ***Factors of Appeal in the West***

There is the problem of postmodernity—faced with excessive materialism and self-indulgence. Hence, a modern version of heroism gives meaning to life and a chance for instant repentance (quick, easy, readily available, and with surefire results, like fast food or a "Rambo complex").

Some Western thinkers believe the phenomenon of Al-Qaeda and other such organizations is a natural product of, and reaction to, Western modernity's own violence.

Commenting on the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Jacques Derrida said "The most terrifying thing about this terrorism against the West is that it is a product of the West itself, with the tools of the West itself. It is the violence of modernity against modernity, not a violence from outside." Meanwhile Jean Baudrillard said "Al-Qaeda's violence is a violence against the violence of globalization. This violence cannot be understood outside the broader context of violence, and a wave of violence unleashed by the policies of the West itself."

Ahmad Abazeid points out that the violence ISIS employs depends on a principle that states that "it is not the most heinous act, in terms of morals or human rights, that becomes worthy of the public's outrage, but it is the act that imagery was able to skillfully prove its heinousness." Therefore, burning people alive, as was done to the Jordanian pilot, Muath al-Kasasbeh, sparked far more global outrage than burning thousands of civilians alive with all kinds of weapons in Darayya, Douma, Aleppo, Homs, and other cities in Syria.

Looking to Islamic religious texts to investigate the roots of this behavior is not an effective approach if we want to learn about ISIS' influence on young people in the West. It is better to search within the system of modernity, which is closer to the roots of this violence, particularly given the fact that those who produce these 'technical' products are often Westerners whose eyes have grown up amid the

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<sup>27</sup> *Why Young People in the Region Join ISIS*, Wardany Yusuf, Group Research Services.

West's same 'technical' products, and have not had the chance to read much about Islamic heritage.

Revenge for destruction and distortion is another factor behind ISIS' appeal in the West. Communist operations against Muslims in republics that were annexed to Russia (the Chechens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) during the Soviet period for more than a century was one such impetus for revenge. The Soviets did not succeed at giving or imposing on these peoples an artificial identity, yet nor did they let them keep their original identity: instead they worked to erase it.

ISIS also appeals to some Westerners by evoking adventure and thrill with a religious flavor. It does this by offering examples of legendary heroes overcoming the unjust, a Hollywood-like image of ISIS fighters in the film of burning the Jordanian pilot alive, and other such examples.

It also espouses that its "way of life" and system of governance provides liberation from the restrictions of an excessive, all-encompassing secularism (which asks nothing of people spiritually), and strict scientific rationality (which does not allow psychological yearnings or emotions to express themselves), in order to dream, break free, prove oneself, undertake challenges, achieve things, and reach real paradise: these are all phrases that ISIS regularly illuminate in its literature.

### ***Factors of Appeal Globally***

On the global level, ISIS employs a discourse that contributes to its appeal to a wide range of people, from different backgrounds and circumstances, by espousing generalized, and often universal, values and principles, and often incentives. These include simplified thinking and clear goals; offering the example of a state, not an organization; blatantly declaring hostility against all oppressors; funding fighters, paying them regular salaries that are attractive in comparison to fighters on the opposing side; marketing their achievements on the ground, giving the impression to their target audience that they are betting on the right horse; and offering idyllic examples that are attractive and convincing to two kinds of people: For people who want paradise, paradise is in their reach. For people who want to feel empowered in this life, and want power and influence, ISIS provides this, as it does not go begging for sympathy; it terrorizes its opponents and sows seeds of fear among them, thereby giving its members a sense of superiority, dominance, and empowerment.

### **Means and Tools of ISIS' Appeal**

- *Attracting the Minds of the Young:* Most leaders in ISIS are young people. Clothes and military gear bearing the organization's slogans have been produced, as has an online game simulating the organization's victories and its members' heroism, called *Saleel al-Sawarim* (the clanging of the swords). According to the British newspaper, *The Daily Mirror*, ISIS had an advertisement for job opportunities for young people, such as judges and oil experts—the salary for

one such position was 140,000 Euros—as well as an advertisement for marriage opportunities.

- *Showcasing Attractive Examples:* Images of fighters playing pool have been released. ISIS has also emphasized the fact that German rapper Dennis Kuster (Abu Talha) and British-Egyptian rapper Abdel Meguid Abdel Bari—the young brown man who said “I feel like I’m in a dream... you can’t imagine the joy we feel...I swear it’s amazingly fun”—have joined its ranks.
- *Media Propaganda:* On 8 July 2014, the organization released *Dabiq* magazine in several languages, using the latest photography and production standards. J.M. Berger, a researcher on terrorism, observed 3 million tweets from ISIS from more than 7,500 accounts. In a report released on the website Bustle, ISIS was described as one of the most well-versed extremist organizations in using new media, completely surpassing the Al-Nusra Front and other Jihadist organizations.
- *Diversified Keywords and Triggers of Appeal:* ISIS offers a diverse package to convince the most targeted populations, and addresses each target demographic with a number of approaches, respective to what appeals to each group most, such as: Establishing religion, building a mature state, ending injustice, liberating nations, justice in distribution, equal opportunities: these are all ways to recruit target audiences, through their own interests and aspirations.

They have adopted a variety of discourses to approach different demographics and address multiple viewpoints. For people who want to come to religion’s aid, ISIS is what they have been looking for, people who lost state institutions and their place within them (as in Iraq, after the dissolution of state institutions, including the army) will find the security they lost, and people overcome with humanity will cry out against injustice people face, and their resentment will be healed.

This enables ISIS to appeal to, and recruit from, a diverse range of people throughout the world. Michael Sawyer speaks about all this in his book *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes*.

Documents explaining ISIS’ organizational hierarchy were published in the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*. These were taken from the papers of ISIS leader Haji Bakr (Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khlifawi) after he was killed in Tel Rifaat. A former Iraqi intelligence officer, Bakr had been a military commander of ISIS, and enabled the organization to recruit fighters from a diverse range of nationalities and ages when he was in the countryside of Aleppo in the fall of 2013. He recruited 2650 foreign fighters, a third of whom were Tunisians, Saudis, Turks, Egyptians, Chechens, Europeans, and Indonesians.

On 14 September 2014, the Moroccan Minister of Interior told Morocco’s House of Councilors that the number of Moroccans who had joined extremist

organizations as fighters reached over 2,000. Similarly, the Tunisian Minister of the Interior stated that nearly 25,000 Tunisians had enlisted in these organizations, and that the security services had prevented more than 9,000 young men and women from joining them.

- *Relying on Areas of Weakness to Prove Achievements:* The Iraqi and Syrian regimes played a role in ISIS' ability to prove and showcase its achievements, at times through these regimes' own errors, and at other times through their weaknesses, or other factors that play into the respective regimes' own agendas.
- *Selling a Fantasy:* ISIS markets the illusion of achieving a promised dream or lost paradise, using simplistic opinions and sayings, and feeble arguments based on *Shari'ah*. Yet these tend to appeal to the emotions of the uneducated, people with exceptional goals, whether pure or un-pure. One of the sheikhs of 'Al-Baghdadi's Caliphate' wrote a book entitled *The Islamic State: Between Truth and Illusion*, in which he refutes the Islamic State's illusory statements.<sup>28</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Surour Zine el-Abidine, a leader of the global Salafist current, also calls ISIS' claims into question, in his book *The Kharijites of This Age*, explaining that they are based on ignorance and arrogance.<sup>29</sup>
- *Building on the Opponents' Actions:* ISIS strategically plays on the actions of its opponents and develops its strategies in reaction. When Obama announced a coalition of around forty nations to stop the spread of ISIS, what numbers are we speaking about? How large is this organization, and what is the extent of its abilities? When 75% of the coalition's strikes were focused on Ain al-Arab / Kobane—428 of 559 strikes launched by coalition aircraft between 1 September 2014 and 31 December 2014—and only 21 strikes were made against ISIS' sites in Aleppo, what are the real objectives ISIS' enemies? ISIS also focuses on, and highlights, the inexplicable withdrawal of the Iraqi and Syrian armies. Meanwhile, it plays on the emotions of its sympathizers by describing the enemy as unjust, sectarian, colonizers, infidels, agents, and so on.

## **The Syrian Context**

At its origin, the Syrian Revolution was a revolution against injustice, tyranny and corruption, and did not have a specific political, religious, or sectarian ideology. It later took on an Islamist-sectarian dimension, for a variety of reasons that cannot be explained here, as they are outside the scope of this paper.

ISIS faces numerous obstacles to its efforts in Syria, including the following:

1. Syria is not ISIS' focal point, for the following reasons:
  - Most of its leaders are Iraqi, its activities in Iraq are deeper and have more experience.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Islamic State: Between Truth and Illusion*, Mansour Abu Abdullah Mohamed, Dar al-Jabiya, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> *The Kharijites of This Age*, Zine el-Abidine Mohammed Surour, Dar Al-Jabiya, 2012.

- Iraq is a more fertile breeding ground for ISIS, due to its painful history of the government's sectarian practices, and feelings of being threatened by militias that have led the battle against ISIS with clear support from the US. Meanwhile, Syria is positioned between the hammer of ISIS and the anvil of Al-Assad's regime.
  - There are no other Iraqi resistance movements, or they have gone underground, while there are various Syrian revolutionary factions have stood up to ISIS. ISIS has no domestic rival in Iraq (where they have inherited Al-Qaeda's constituency), whereas in Syria, the Al-Nusra Front, as a jihadist Salafi organization, opposes ISIS, as do other large Islamic factions, which are hostile to ISIS in principle.
2. Syrian religious scholars took a clear, early, and decisive position against the Islamic State.
  3. The moderate religious and social nature of the Syrian people.
  4. ISIS is unable to expand into densely populated areas, or places with heterogeneous social structures (in Damascus, for example, they are found in Yarmouk refugee camp and al-Hajar al-Aswad in particular). There are no more than 1,000 fighters in the Damascus countryside, while Syrian revolutionaries there number more than 30,000.
  5. ISIS' presence in Syria—its rise, achievements, and future prospects—depends on the regime's survival.
  6. Extremist thinking is foreign to Syrian Islamic thought, and were it not for the regime's continued tyranny, this kind of thinking would not have had the opportunity to enter Syria or thrive there. The first party to propose the idea of the caliphate was the Islamic Liberation Party, and then those who left Al-Qaeda (the Al-Nusra Front), and then all the way down to ISIS' fighters. The brutality of the regime, and the fact that the world denied victory to the Syrian revolution, are the two biggest factors in the spread of strange extremist thinking.
  7. ISIS' opposition to Syrian revolutionaries, calling the people of Syria infidels, and making it a priority to combat 'apostates' (Syrian revolutionaries and the general public in the country), instead of the original infidels it labels (Nusayris, Alawites, Shiites, etc).
  8. Most people who have joined ISIS are either people of a harsh and inflexible religious bent, new arrivals who do not belong to Syrian society, or convicted criminals who have been rejected by other revolutionary groups and embraced by ISIS. In either case, they are rejected by society and have no future there.
  9. Most Syrians who have joined ISIS—and they are a minority within the organization—joined either because of funding, the dissolution of revolutionary military factions, or out of frustration with the regional and international reaction to the Syrian situation.

## **Conclusion**

Through a reading of the opportunities and challenges involved in confronting ISIS, this paper demonstrates that a simplified roadmap to confronting ISIS must not focus on the security aspect alone, as the issue is far more complicated.

Islamists are asked to change their discourse about ISIS; they have resorted to describing them as Kharijites [a faction in the first century of Islam that adopted radical positions that brought them into conflict with both Sunnis and Shiites; they are the archetypical extremists in Islam] in order to justify fighting them, but in doing so they have put themselves in a position where ISIS has an advantage. If they are accused of being Kharijites, they will accuse others of being Murjit'ies (a faction that was in opposition to the Kharijites and Sunnis, particularly on the concept of *Takfir*, believing that only God may cast such a judgement on Judgement Day), and we will descend into an ideological debate that recognizes that ISIS is indeed part of the house of Islam. It will be recognized that although ISIS is deviant and has committed mistakes, it is still just a sickness that falls within the bounds of Islam. This is potentially dangerous, and heralds further ideological conflict among Muslims.

It is not the task of anyone to cast judgement on ISIS, its supporters, or any others as apostates. This is a doctrinal and ideological religious debate that serves no purpose in finding solutions to the quagmire brought about by ISIS itself, and by the historical, social, intellectual, religious, and political factors in the region that helped the emergence and ascendancy of ISIS.

A more accurate characterization of ISIS is that it is as an aggressive, pragmatic, fascist organization, one that uses religious slogans, and not of an Islamic, nationalist, or humanitarian project.

IS must be confronted, because its project is an affront to religion, the nation, and humanity.

The most important and powerful factor behind ISIS' appeal, and the most attractive part for its supporters, is the way it is being confronted and the forces fighting against it. If the way ISIS is being dealt with does not change, we will be faced with a long and bitter challenge, the consequences of which will spare no one in the East or West, and we will perhaps learn that ISIS is kinder than those who come after it. This factor contributes to fueling the anger of ISIS sympathizers, who may easily turn into actual fighters. Without addressing the key factors that contribute to ISIS' appeal, particularly to young generations, we are bound to witness an emergence of a new, more extreme and radical, generation that will wreak havoc.

## The Case of Iraq

*Uthman al-Mukhtar*

For a while now, I have been working on writing a book entitled *Stories from Fallujah Alleyways*, about young Iraqis who, unfortunately, are now fighters with a horrific organization that has been taken advantage of and beneficial to many parties, except for precisely those people that the organization claims to be representing.

Why did these young men become fighters? Why did they become terrorists? How can someone transform and turn their life upside down? What factor, or group of factors, impelled them to do this? Is it ignorance, backwardness, poverty, revenge, or brainwashing from mosques and groups that focus on memorizing the Quran and *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet)?

Is there variation within ISIS' thinking and aims, or has the organization become tantamount to a 'zombie' army, mobilizing at the sound of cellphones to bear arms?

Were they not mere observers, like me, of the dire situation, or fleeing from it? Was not one of them a drunk, did another not spend a whole three hours to go from Fallujah to Baghdad to catcall and harass young women? This young man was handsome, happy, and likeable – what transformed him into someone with a beard, a turban, and an amputated hand, someone who proclaims others to be infidels?

Just two years ago, he went to the mosque near his home to get back at his father, who had not allowed him to buy a new car. It was Ramadan, and he told the worshippers at the mosque, "Everyone, my father greets you and says everyone praying in the mosque should break their fast with him today." Dozens of them went from the mosque to the father's house, while the young man went to his uncle's house nearby, laughing about the embarrassing situation he put his father in.

Why have Ramy and others like him become ISIS members, and why did young men before them join Al-Qaeda? How did someone who would cry if a car ran over a cat become an extremist fighter?

All this led me to study the issue directly and indirectly, aided by researchers in Iraq, journalists, and citizens, as well as my own field experience in the country. I have reached a very simple, uncomplicated truth: three primary factors alongside supporting factors, and a single solution for Iraq and Syria. This must be the last organization and final such occurrence, because if they were to capture ISIS and similar organizations emerged from it, they would be worse by far.

No recent books or research have been able to penetrate ISIS' inner circles in practice, which mobilize tens of thousands of young people willing to die for ISIS' project (and for people of their sect who will live on after them). Here, note I say 'their sect,' a point we will discuss shortly.

Perhaps researchers' exaggerated analysis and conclusions have misguided them, away from secrets of how ISIS has persisted, and factors behind its strength, expansion, and rising number of fighters.

It also seems contradictory, in my opinion, for someone to claim to be an expert on this organization or to take on the role of a self-assured prognosticator of the next move to be taken by this new group that has inserted itself into our Arab and Muslim reality, when this is the first time in the world since the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 1900s that an armed Salafi Islamist group has announced a project such as we see today. ISIS does not just overturn Arab nationalism, but also it uproots ideological opponents that stand against it, even if they are from the same sect, as part of its effort to eliminate borders between Arab and Muslim nations. This is what has happened in Iraq and Syria, where ISIS eventually turned to brutally torturing anyone who opposed them.

What concerns us today is finding out the reason, or group of reasons, which impel people to join ISIS, from countries in the Arab world and beyond, including young men and women, teenagers and the elderly, the learned and illiterate alike. Latest reports—some of which have been covered in the media—indicate that ISIS' military camps in Iraq and Syria are packed with volunteers. ISIS' leadership has reduced the length of volunteers' training in the camps, both their combat instruction and Arabic language instruction. Prior to these two kinds of training, they are given instruction in the 'fundamentals of religion,' which is a recent Islamist approach that few Islamic scholars would speak of, whether earlier scholars or later ones, and that differs from any approach taught in Islamic schools over centuries.

### **Persecution and Oppression**

Turning to factors that motivate someone to join this organization, reasons that continue to draw people from distant countries to Iraq and Syria; the most important and compelling reasons why people flock to ISIS are persecution and oppression, whether sectarian, political or personal.

Thirteen years of injustice, oppression, discrimination, detentions, and displacement along sectarian lines, along with hundreds of thousands of people injured and dead, all peaked during Al-Maliki's rule. A society cannot produce football players, artists, or even the groundwork for peaceful green political parties under such conditions. What emerges will be a response to fear and persecution, and will seek to address these conditions by any means. In other words, people seek comfort in times of despair, and it is only natural for their response to be incredibly brutal.

Everyone expected the situation in Iraq to end poorly, as a result of the policies of successive governments towards particular groups. The mass detentions and killings, deliberate exclusion, displacement, and poverty, lack of jobs, security, construction and services, and discrimination along extremely strict sectarian lines have all continued throughout the past years. Millions of families were denied their monthly benefits. This culminated in a peaceful uprising and open-ended sit-ins, which were brutally suppressed by the government, and which claimed hundreds of

lives in Fallujah, Baqubah, Mosul and Huwaija. All this laid the groundwork for the birth of a brutal extremist organization—which emerged on the borders of Syria, and though it was very weak in Iraq, took advantage of the situation. Unfortunately, the West paid attention too late, and when leaders of major powers asked the prime minister of Iraq to engage in national reconciliation, and engage all sects in the running of the country, it was a gesture that came too late for Sunnis.

The situation in Syria does not fundamentally differ from that in Iraq, where persecution has been largely similar. However, the crucial factor in Syria is the people coming from the West and East, leaving everything behind to blow themselves up in suicide operations, or enter combat to kill or be killed.

Given this context, it would be wrong to conclude that all volunteers are victims of persecution in their own countries; one could say they are victims of *victims of persecution*. If this is so, the images circulated on satellite and Internet media channels of massacres with barrel bombs, people dragged, crushed, or burned to death in the field at the hands of the Iraqi and Syrian regimes and their Iranian-sponsored militias, have incited many people to go to these countries and fight, similar to what happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s. The phenomenon then was known as *Hijrat al-Nusra* [migration of assistance], people came from Arab, Muslim, and even Western countries, at a time when the media did not have the same reach it does today. The Muslim world was not in the deadlock it is today, but people were motivated to join the project by their faith, which the leaders of the Islamic State have encouraged since its early days, urging them to answer its call for volunteers to join its ranks in the fight—something known as *Nafra* [a reference to the rapid movement of pilgrims from Arafat to Muzdalifah during the Hajj]. Yet these people are not in the majority; while they do occupy high positions in ISIS' political and media structure, they do not have weight in its organizational or combat structure at all. In a recent example, the commander of the Tajik special forces, Gulmurod Halimov, arrived in Syria, vowing he would return only after Bashar al-Assad's regime was toppled and Islamic rule was implemented in his country.

It is important to note that the majority has signed up for suicide bombings, which ISIS coordinates in every *Wilaya* (province) for those who want to blow themselves up along with the enemy.

## **Despair**

Despair is a second factor that compels young people to join ISIS. This is more wide-reaching than the first factor, as it affects more people. In Iraq and Syria, people despair that despite conferences in Geneva, Paris, Washington, and other capital cities in the West and the Arab world, the world did not mobilize to come to their aid, and failed to stop the daily bloodshed against citizens. As a result, young people began to consider a force that would be more effective on the ground, as they could not stand by and watch, waiting for the regime, or ISIS, to come kill them.

They reached this level of despair thanks to changes in the situation and the inability of peaceful domestic means or foreign international efforts of a political nature to change the situation. “If they had any hope of peaceful, political change, half of the fighters in the Islamic State would stop the slaughter they engage in today with ISIS.” “Despair does it all, we are talking about young men, all doors have been shut in their face, and then suddenly a door has been opened, a ray of hope, not in the least for salvation, but to take revenge and quench their hatred. Of course they go to ISIS, searching for salvation.”

Perhaps the arrival of young men from failed states in the Arab world—or more accurately, countries where peaceful revolutions were brutally crushed—explains this.

### **The Desire for Revenge**

The desire for revenge is a final factor, and an important one, as to why young men join the Islamic State. Revenge against the Iraqi regime for its violations, sectarian policies, and the U.S.’s failure there; revenge against the Syrian regime for its daily bloodshed; and for those who are not Iraqi or Syrian, revenge against their own nations; revenge against their families and society; revenge against themselves at times, for feelings of guilt, trying to atone for their sins through jihad. Meanwhile, the Islamic State’s media seeks to reach these young people overwhelmed by a desire for revenge.

Everything described by these three factors are not the only recruitment mechanisms the Islamic State possesses, but they are important. They are factors for about 70% of ISIS’ fighters, and the number of fighters is expected to rise to 90,000 by the end of this year.

Added to these factors are the ongoing crimes of militias, and responding to them—this is what Iraqis and Syrians in many areas have chosen, whether as part of the dynamic between ISIS and the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq (Al-Hashd al-Sha’abi), or between ISIS and Hezbollah’s militias and Al-Assad’s *Shabiha* in Syria.

### **Supporting Factors**

Other factors include financial ones, extreme poverty, eagerness for high salaries from ISIS, self-protection, protecting one’s family, and immunity given to ISIS’ fighters: these are all factors that impel people to join. The most important, and most dangerous factor, is brainwashing, and taking advantage of the gullible and poorly educated, who form core battalions of suicide fighters in the organization.

The Islamic State has recently distributed financial aid and food supplies to families, and conducted other aid campaigns, starting with street cleaning operations conducted by fighters, all the way to blood drives for injured civilians and fending off attacks by sectarian militias aimed at their cities. These are additional factors that draw people to ISIS. In Mosul, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour and al-Anbar, the Islamic

State tries to make people feel that their rule is preferable. Security is better for them compared to those who live in Baghdad; there are legitimate shops, no thieves, raids, no fear of whoever is coming. People living in areas under ISIS control have nothing to fear except the red lines the organization puts in place, and the horrific ways they deal with those who violate or oppose them.

Some people have been able to avoid the organization, and are called things like 'apostates, infidels, and spies; harming the Caliphate.' In every city, there is a big banner with the words 'Medina Document,' explaining the laws of what is forbidden and what is permitted.

"The city is very safe, we're not afraid of the Islamic police as long as you do what the law says," says Ahmed Abu Said (a pseudonym), 39 years old, who lives in the area of Bab al-Toub in Mosul. "Before—during the days of the Baghdad government—we would see detentions, torture, extortion, robbery, and fear of the unknown – these days are over. No one in the city wants things to stay like this. But when we compare this to the Baghdad government, its sectarian army and barbaric militias, of course we prefer this situation. Tikrit is a prime example of that. We were up in the air, no firm ground beneath our feet to support us."

Within the ISIS organization, the elite is estimated at 30%: they are leaders, theorists, *Wilayat* governors, faction leaders, judges in *Shari'ah* courts. This elite is ISIS' ideologists and core workers who committed loyally to the organization from the moment they joined.

Given all this, we see that ISIS has not necessarily integrated all of its fighters on the basis of their pre-existing Jihadi or Salafi inclinations. Contrarily, ISIS happened to emerge in a climate so fatigued to the point of collective suicide and terrifying chaos, meanwhile, the world is standing by and watching, divided over where to hold the next conference to discuss the situation in the region. More than half of ISIS' fighters came to the organization for reasons that are not purely religious; for them, religion was a very minor factor in comparison to the three primary factors mentioned above. Hence, courses on religious doctrine, the Oneness of God, *Shari'ah* and so on are the first things volunteers receive when they arrive in the 'Land of the Caliphate.' We can conclude that "the leadership of the organization itself is cognizant of the factors that have brought people to it, and just like the Arabic saying "love comes after marriage"—that they religiously indoctrinate them after their arrival, according to ISIS' thought and principles, ideas that have been largely successful in achieving what we see today.

## **Conclusion**

Attempting to use firepower and force to deal with an organization that has continued to further its influence, study in detail the lay of the land in Iraq and Syria, and understand the power of its opponents will not only fail, but backfire militarily. Such an operation will only increase ISIS' power, buy it more time and finances, and attract more fighters, especially as the challenging terrain in Iraq and Syria has fallen under ISIS' expanding and undisputed control.

Addressing the reasons volunteers join ISIS to fight should come first. This is more necessary than sending planes to target Mosul, Fallujah, al-Raqqah, Deir ez-Zour, and other cities, which in the end will only claim civilian lives, earning ISIS more sympathy and loyalty among people in those areas.

Here, we must note that people see and hear only what ISIS wants them to. Most areas do not have electricity, and those who do, have no running water. ISIS Statements and news are spread by the mosques, and pamphlets are distributed to homes—this is the only way people living under ISIS control receive information, aside from rumors (in some areas).

Thus, stopping the flow of young people from countries in the region and around the world to Syria and Iraq, or stopping them from joining ISIS ideologically, if not physically, is more important than bombing ISIS. It is more important to stop the crimes of the Popular Mobilization Units and the Iraqi regime – which have an obvious sectarian tinge –, put an end to migration and demographic change in these countries, address human rights violations, reform weak political systems, actually involve Sunnis in running the country, and hold comprehensive parliamentary elections, which the United Nations should administer, but without intervening in every aspect of Iraq. Before this, a census must be held in Iraq, to give every segment of society their rights, and a balance must be struck between the army, police, intelligence and security services, and ministries. In Syria, uprooting Al-Assad's regime, and returning the country to its people, expelling the Iranians and Hezbollah's militias would help limit ISIS' growth, and cause it to shrink and finally collapse, with fewer human casualties. Here, we refer to human casualties, because the cities ISIS has taken over do not contain material things we fear destroying: the Iraqi and Syrian regimes' planes have already turned these cities to rubble.

Otherwise, it is impossible to defeat the Islamic State with the current approach, as the organization is gaining an increasing number of fighters. Ultimately, its strength is tied to the Syrian and Iraqi regimes, and the Arab people's anger and dissatisfaction, with clear blessing from Iran. The more crimes these regimes and militias commit; the more fighters will join ISIS.

Perhaps the verse of poetry found on the wall of a completely destroyed secondary school in Mosul speaks most clearly: "If I die of thirst, then let no rain fall after me."

Trying to dry a room while the faucet is running is mad. The Islamic State gains power from the Iraqi and Syrian regimes and militias' crimes because it benefits from the current chaotic situation, and fears those regimes will be overthrown before its project is achieved. The Islamic State is like a knife with no handle: it injures both its enemy and the one holding it.

# **ISIS – Contemporary Youth Fad and a Reflection of Illness: Searching for Meaning amid an Ideological Vacuum and the Failure of Modern Values**

*Bissane al-Cheikh*

When talking about the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the discussion often begins by describing its excessive, bloody violence, whether violent acts such as beheadings, dismemberments, stonings, and throwing people off of heights, or by highlighting this violence and its circulation on video on social media platforms.

One cannot study ISIS within a research-based or comparative context without directly linking it to the concept of “visual identity” in several ways. ISIS has created this visual identity for itself and imposed it through shocking acts with a direct message (about the approach they have adopted and promise to carry out), extensive distribution and circulation, and high production and media quality, as well as the first model of a “caliphate” as such that transcends “national” borders.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section will not seek to reduce ISIS to its violent nature; it will explore other reasons for its appeal and seek to explain them. The second section responds to these reasons, according to categories of members that belong to ISIS, paying special attention to the case of Lebanon, which despite recent escalations, still serves as “a passageway, not a base” for ISIS.

## **ISIS cannot be Understood through Violence Alone**

This paper presumes that ISIS cannot be reduced to violence alone; attempts to understand ISIS and the secret of its appeal to young people in the Arab world and the West should not be limited to the element of violence. Violence is not a source of appeal or revulsion in and of itself separate from other factors that we will examine below. If people who join ISIS were simply young men hungry for blood, they would have committed crimes where they grew up, indulging a tendency for violence, or perhaps the most extreme of them would have turned into serial killers, or joined gangs and other violent groups with nothing to do with politics or long-term causes. Yet nothing like this happened. Most of them—particularly those from the West, from the little we know about them from their profiles—do not have prior convictions, and are not necessarily “evil” in the traditional sense of the word. They are often described as having been “shy and introverted,” “loving to help others,” or “tied to family values,” and other largely positive, peaceful characteristics. They were convinced by ISIS’ way of life—not simply its way of death—and its program for society, for the sake of which they left their former lives behind.

If we undertake the following mental exercise, which may at first seem naïve, and imagine that ISIS had done these things without filming, circulating, or flaunting them as it currently does, where would we look for the secret of its appeal?

Here it must be said that exploring the element of violence in this paper is not a means of taking it lightly or accepting it, but rather a means of focusing on other influential factors.

First of all, there is no doubt that the propaganda films and statements that ISIS broadcasts embody the identity ISIS seeks to define itself by, and it exploits their impact on the audience – to spread fear in particular – so that people surrender to it and accept it as the de facto authority.

Violence in and of itself has never been an actual obstacle to transferring, imposing, or even maintaining power. It is, and has long been, a method adopted (whether relatively acceptable or unacceptable) for both regimes and groups (whether revolutionary, coups, liberation, or otherwise) to achieve the aims behind their ascent to power. It remains to be discussed whether violence is simply a means to an end, or an end in itself. This is a longstanding debate in research on the popularity of Nazism, and one we will not engage further here.

To return to the subject of ISIS' violence, the organization's bloody actions can be linked to the "Penal Code" that it has adopted. It is not necessarily any more or less brutal than the laws used and applied in any other country, except in terms of how they publicize and flaunt it.

One simply needs to look at how many countries (Arab and non-Arab) still use the death penalty – the merciful ones by hanging or the sword – as well as punishments of stoning, amputation, flogging, etc. One simply just has to look at societies that enforce all or some of these punishments under family or tribal arbitration, even if they are not required by the laws put in place by the political authorities. These include violating the rights of marginalized groups (such as women, homosexuals, or minorities), who they kill by burning them alive or pushing them off of high places, exactly as ISIS does.

Needless to say, the difference between how ISIS and other countries or communities use these violent practices lies in their legal, political, or social legitimacy. Those regimes enjoy domestic and international recognition for their control over a specific territory and their moral and legal authority within specific borders, while ISIS is still "maintaining and expanding" its territory. Once it proves its worth and gets past the critical early stage, it could succeed at becoming an alternative model, like the Taliban, only more modern and globalized.

We must not forget that there are many countries with political regimes opposed to the world order and its common values, like China, the former Soviet Union, Iran, or even the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which provided political cover for it (here, note that all these regimes are post-revolutionary). These countries were internationally recognized as soon as they proved their ability to survive, and their effectiveness as players in the international arena. Currently, there is no indication that either of these two conditions apply to ISIS.

But what if it successfully imposes itself as a viable "state," domestically regulated and integrated within the international system ordinary nations adhere to, including a monopoly on violence, implementing rule of law, and setting propaganda aside?

## **“My Heart Became Attached”**

Mark Kukis’ book *“My Heart Became Attached: The Strange Journey of John Walker Lindh,”*<sup>30</sup> published in 2003, is a biography of the first American to take up arms alongside the Taliban. More than 13 years ago, the book looked for answers to precisely what we are asking today, wondering what took a young white American boy from California to the mountains of Afghanistan to fight a war that had nothing to do with him?

This occurred more than a decade ago. Why does this influx still continue, in greater numbers, toward a more violent and extremist destination?

*My Heart Became Attached* is a title that says much about one man’s deep longing and need for meaning, his need for a cause to dedicate himself to and sacrifice his life, and how in his eyes, it was a just and right decision.

It is true that Lindh’s experience is more applicable to new converts to Islam, and just like any newcomers to any party, belief, or type of thinking, they are more prone to grandiose measures to prove their loyalty and that they belong. Yet it also sheds light on many facets of a crisis many young people in the West and other countries are experiencing. This new crisis began on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, percolated during ten years of war in Iraq, then exploded in the wake of the Arab Spring revolutions, when it devolved into daily massacres, particularly in Syria.

Today’s generation is a globalized one, one that belongs to a community created by social media, where virtual interconnectedness takes the place of a crumbling reality. This is reflected in their alienation from public affairs, and a sense of helplessness in effecting any change, especially by peaceful means. It is a generation that consumes thoughts and ideas at the click of a button, searching for meaning and relevance to the world.

There are many unanswered questions, both in the West and in countries affected by the West’s decisions and policies. For example, there is the big question: “Why do they hate us?” (one that has sharply drawn lines of confrontation between Muslims and the rest of the world), and also “How much does public opinion affect foreign policy?” For example, in the United Kingdom, the biggest demonstrations in its history were held in opposition to the war in Iraq, but they had no effect on the country’s participation in the war. Questions raised in the West, particularly after the Charlie Hebdo attack in France, include those such as “How do you define national identity?” “The war in Iraq was waged under the pretext of overthrowing a dictator and spreading democracy, yet Syrians are being killed with chemical weapons for calling for freedom?” and “Where were the guardians of democracy during Egypt’s elections?” not to mention the central issue that feeds into to all these injustices, the issue of Palestine.

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Kukis, “My Heart Became Attached, The Strange Journey of John Walker Lindh,” Brassey's Inc. 2003.

An entire generation was thrust into major issues and related wars that were prey to the whims of foreign policies that shifted with the changes in administrations and governments, and it lacked any intellectual, ideological, or philosophical leverage to act as a counterweight. Thus, this generation began to question the values it was raised on, and put them to the test.

Such a general intellectual vacuum may create a context in which young people are drawn to extreme choices (and why not violent ones, at that?), searching not for circumstantial solutions, but for a “struggle” and deeper meaning to their lives.

### **ISIS: A New Center for Migration**

There are many questions and hypotheses about ISIS’ appeal, which are closely linked to the personal and general motivations and conditions of those who migrate to join it. There is no one clear answer to them all, particularly as this field of study is still largely the preserve of security services, while not enough reliable data and information is available to researchers and scholars.

The Sunni-Shiite divide led around 900 Lebanese to join ISIS, and Al-Nusra Front before that, according to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.<sup>31</sup> 900 is a significant number in relation to the population of the country. Injustice against Sunnis is rooted in longstanding political opposition to the Syrian regime; however, this is not true for Jordanians who joined, for example, for whom national identity (Palestinian / East Jordanian) and not sectarian identity plays a fundamental role in shaping their concerns. In Tunisia, the primary impetus for the citizens who have joined ISIS (estimated to be around 3,000) is their quest for the dreamed-of caliphate. The caliphate that represents a stark contrast with the excessive secularism of Tunisia that quashes religious identity. This is actually a hidden motivator for young people from disadvantaged inland regions who were not integrated into the revolutionary scene, nor the Ennahda Movement, which for many people, was more pragmatic than they would have wished. This is the same excuse given by young Palestinians, who have left Hamas for ISIS: that it no longer is enough for them.<sup>32</sup>

Iraq, where ISIS first arose, offers another example of how the tribal environment intersects with Baath Party remnants, and how the post-Saddam model of governance failed to create a collective national identity, or even a common project that could include the full spectrum of Iraqi society. A mentality of revenge emerged, that fed off of past persecution, to reinforce the futility of the US-led war and focus the attention of Iraqis on the persecution that followed. This is epitomized by the Abu Ghraib prison incident, images of which became an open wound in Iraqis’ collective pride.

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<sup>31</sup> <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s>

<sup>32</sup> Badia Zeidan, Slogans Attracting Palestinians Unsatisfied by Hamas, the Abu Bakr al-Ansari Model, al-Hayat Newspaper, December 29, 2014.

Syria, which incubated part of ISIS, offers another case, where Baathism is intertwined with tribalism and local fighters' lean towards ISIS, as an organization that offers them concrete achievements on the battlefield.

### **The “Particularities” of Lebanon**

Lebanon offers a unique example, in which we are still almost ignorant of the dividing line between young people who join Al-Nusra, ISIS, or even other local jihadist groups that emerge in a moment of sectarian friction (Sidon / Tripoli / Aarsal), and then dissolve. Prevalent in Lebanon is a case of security and media fear-mongering claiming that every man with a beard belongs to that most dangerous of Islamist organizations, and the political exploitation that could result from it.

Sunni Lebanon is still more lax in producing a cohesive system of religious violence; most cases are matters of personal choice, people searching for a broader identity. Perhaps what is new this year in Lebanon is the second young Christian man to join ISIS, Eli Warraq, and go to fight in Syria, without going through successive stages of extremism. The first young Christian man was Charlie Haddad, from the Zahrieh neighborhood in Tripoli, next to Bab al-Tabbaneh, who was killed in Syria at the beginning of this year. There was also news that another young Christian man was recruited while studying in France. These three young Arabs are examples of what Western society is going through with their young people, who go from being Christians – and not necessarily religious ones – to members of the most dangerous terrorist organization, overnight.

In this context, perhaps the particularities of Lebanon go beyond the differences among other Sunni groups in other Arab countries. There are no indications of a problem of “new converts to Islam” in neighboring countries, even those that include persecuted Christian minorities. We do not hear of anything like this in Iraq, where Christian communities are being targeted, or even in the wake of church bombings. It is true that these young people are an exception, and not likely to become a phenomenon in Lebanon, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Christians have not been victims of the war so much as participants and influential actors. However, it is worth highlighting them because they are the epitome of a broader fragmentation in the country as a whole. Even in such a small country, there is not just a single profile behind those who join ISIS. For example, you find the case of defecting soldiers (the first such example is Atef Saadeddine, who announced he was defecting and joining Al-Nusra Front in mid-2014), those who are repenting for their crimes or drugs, or young people from the neighborhood (as in Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli), or people who suddenly feel a strong sense of Sunni identity, in contrast to a Shiite one (the most prominent example being the singer Fadel Shaker). There are also people recruited from within prisons (the Roumieh cell), or from families in the diaspora, in Germany and Denmark in particular (the Deeb family), and those who took up arms from places of social deprivation or universities. These examples are the first step for this research, yet none are examples of “becoming ISIS” in the organizational sense, with the exception of the

Deeb family, where successive generations of the family joined different organizations, starting with the Baathist father, down to the grandson, who joined ISIS.

The most recent case involving a young Christian man seems to resemble what is known in psychology as “vicarious suffering,” or in other words, when an individual takes on the persecution / injustice / pain experienced by a group they do not belong to. This happened to some whites in South Africa under apartheid, where their behavior, suffering, and then political choices were described as “black.”

Returning to the last young man’s behavior, he did not suffer any particular hardship or personal injustice in his personal life, but was affected by the injustice he experienced in his area, living close to a broader Sunni environment, burdened by deprivation, poverty, and political marginalization. This is an environment fed by an explosive war next door and a wider injustice extending across areas, families, and sects: the war in Syria.

The particularities of these young people go beyond their individual circumstances and overlap with the particularities of Lebanon more generally, where modern values and societal openness (Christians in Lebanon, and missionaries in particular, have been some of the most influential in forming Lebanese identity) run up against a deeply sectarian structure. The background to this is the complete and sudden failure of the state, while any solution to Lebanon’s fragmented public institutions has been put on hold until a solution comes from Syria itself.

In all this chaos, with a presidential vacuum and paralyzed government for nearly two years, young people’s inclination towards ISIS or other organizations will just be a fleeting detail unless it finds a domestic battlefield to manifest itself. At this point, the conditions for this do not seem to exist. Even the events in Aarsal are more similar to just another security hotspot where national and partisan forces clash, and any justification or *raison d’être* for an organization like ISIS is lost.

Thus, between a young man searching for utopia in the caliphate, and another who goes for personal or more general revenge, the other groups attracted by ISIS can be divided into the following categories:

### **1. Syrians in Liberated Areas**

When ISIS seized vast areas of Syria, and Iraq before it, and imposed its rule, ideas, laws, and lifestyle on the people there, attracting fighters with money and weapons, the prevailing notion was that Syrian society is generally not permeated with extremist thought, and that its religiosity is more social than it is political or militaristic.

One argument invoked to support this idea is that if the combat battalions that achieved tangible results on the battlefield against the Assad regime had been less religious, or even secular, domestic public opinion would not hesitate to support

them or even identify with them. Some people even believe that the situation brought about by the funding of extremists could be undone by funding of liberals. This extremist funding came at a time when battalions of the moderate Free Syrian Army were suffering a severe shortage of resources. As a result, their supporters either threw down their weapons or threw themselves into the arms of more radical groups like the Al-Nusra Front, which paved the way for ISIS.

The irony lies in the fact that ISIS did not arrive on the scene with money and arms alone, but with the military and organizational achievements it achieved during years of operating in Iraq, and real solutions to the lawlessness, corruption, anarchy, and excesses of power that the liberated areas were suffering from. It also maintained former institutional structures in vital sectors such as electricity and electricity billing, water, operating dams, keeping employees and increasing their salaries, etc. Thus, basing itself out of tribal areas—whether to open the borders to Iraqi tribes or because the area itself had been a cradle of the Baath party—was not purely coincidental.

Moreover, ISIS in Syria emerged out of the psychological and ideological matrix fostered by the injustice and persecution that Sunnis suffered at the hands of the minority Alawite rule. This rhetoric strongly resonates with the younger generation, which has nothing more to lose. Every day they see images of atrocities on the battlefield and in detention centers. Peaceful options, or less violent options, do not provide them with tangible results, and their primary focus is to get rid of the Assad regime first and worry about other evils later.

## **2. Arab Migrants to ISIS**

Migrants to ISIS from Arab and Muslim countries generally see ISIS as the utopian caliphate they aspire to. In addition to engaging in a holy war against injustice, they are living and raising their families in the first real, concrete example of *Shari'ah* rule.

This is because ISIS brought with it a promise and dream that appeals to any young Muslim: creating a caliphate and everything that it entails, from divine justice on earth instead of man-made laws, which they have experienced bad examples of under secular regimes (such as Tunisia or Iraq) or the hypocritical blend of religion and politics they have experienced in other countries (Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia).

Unable to try out different successive systems of governance by which these societies could accumulate a degree of political knowledge, it seems that relying on Islam as political ideology is the most secure option. It is the only local product to emerge from out of the depths of Arab culture and provide political and economic answers, solutions, and programs to people, as well as common ground and a collective identity.

### 3. Western Migrants to ISIS

In a chapter from Kukis' book entitled *Jihad's Last Cry*, during the bloody events of Mazar-i-Sharif prison in Afghanistan, an American officer meets John Walker Lindh without knowing he is American, and realizes he speaks English. He yells at him, and repeatedly asks him what he is doing there and whether he realized that the groups he belonged to were terrorist organizations that killed more Muslims than non-Muslims. Then he started shouting at him more and asked him if he accepted the killing of Muslims in other countries, as happened with September 11<sup>th</sup>. Silence was the only answer he received. Lindh could have turned himself in and been sent home as "deluded," but he stayed, to answer the "last cry of jihad." There are many like him today answering that call, and many still have the opportunity to be rescued and go home, but they stay, clinging more strongly to their choice with each test. These young men and women grew up with Western values that provide the foundation for democracy, rotation of power, human rights, individual freedoms, freedom of belief, equality, and other things the West generally provides for its citizens—most importantly of all, keeping violence out of politics.

Yet when it comes to applying these principles on the ground, they encounter a degree of falseness, double standards, and lack of ethics, and people are quickly let down, especially if they come from immigrant backgrounds. While violence is not used to eliminate political opponents in their countries, it is the primary means by which their governments deal with the rest of the world: using taxpayer money to topple a dictator here, while joining in alliance with another dictator there. People raise their voices, calling for freedom, human rights, and peaceful means of change, but they do not receive any political or military support; they are left alone to face mechanisms of mass destruction. Modern values and individuals' responsibility to protect them run up against the actual ability to apply these values or put them on the foreign policy agenda.

Many people believe the appeal of ISIS for women is different to that which appeals to men, in that their role would be limited to being a good wife for a Mujahid. However, this is very reductive of women's role and their free choice in migration to ISIS. An example of feminism is emerging within ISIS itself: it demands that of course a woman should be a good, obedient wife, yet one that also makes her directly responsible for the upbringing of the younger generation (or the vanguard, as it is called in Baath discourse), giving her a role in recruitment, media propaganda, implementing the social system, spreading styles and behaviors through the women's police, and other parts of daily life that allows women to enter the house and intervene in intimate matters.

When Khadijah Dare writes on her Twitter feed under the handle *Muhajirah fi Al-Sham* and celebrates the execution of American journalist James Foley, expressing the desire to be the first woman to cut off the head of an American or British terrorist, it was not simply out of a strong desire to kill, but the belief that she is just

like any other man in ISIS, engaging in a real war, and seeking to bring about this utopia in her own way.

Thus, despite strict behavioral rules and many differences between men and women, both are still greatly drawn to ISIS, not for reasons of gender, but of struggle. Whether they are marginalized in their own countries, children of immigrants who have failed to integrate, new converts to Islam, or even doctors and engineers, relatively successful in life, there is a common internal motivation bringing them to these far off countries. This is summed up in their deep feelings of having failed to achieve their humanitarian aims through peaceful means, and so they dedicate themselves to the heroic task of carrying out God's justice on earth, by the sword and their own strength. Faced with this great struggle, it becomes easier to commit an execution here and a human rights violations there.



## The Case of Jordan

*Wael Ali al-Batiri*

On April 9, 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, emir of “The Islamic State in Iraq,” announced merging Al-Nusra Front with his state to create “The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria” (referred to in the media as “ISIS”). This was a defining moment in the relationship between ISIS and the central Al-Qaeda organization, where the emir of Al-Nusra Front, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, rejected the decision to merge both organizations, instead declared an explicit oath of allegiance to the emir of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who in turn decided to overrule Al-Baghdadi’s decision. This ultimately led to a complete break between the two organizations, whereby, on May 11, 2014, the spokesman for ISIS released a recording entitled “Excuse Me, Emir of Al-Qaeda,” in which he said there was no organizational relationship between ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and that there was no place for Al-Zawahiri if he stepped foot in Iraq, unless he swore allegiance to Al-Baghdadi.

This division sparked a battle of polarization between the two parties, and split members of the jihadist current into two sides: one in support of Al-Qaeda, and another loyal to ISIS. This division extended to the global Jihadi Salafist map, including Jordan, where there are currently about 5,000 Jihadi Salafists. According to the leader of the movement, Mohammad al-Shalabi (known as Abu Sayyaf), since the Syrian revolution began in March 2011, about 1,000 Jordanians have gone to fight in Syria, 90% of whom are affiliated with the Jihadi Salafist movement.<sup>33</sup>

The most important Jihadi Salafist theorists and leaders in Jordan sided with Al-Nusra Front, including Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Abu Qutada al-Filastini, Luqman Riyalat, and Abu Sayyaf al-Ma’aani. Others took a stance close to ISIS, though they did not openly announce their position, those included Abu Bakr al-Sarhan from Mafraq, Mustafa al-Suraifi from Salt, Rashad Ishtewi from the Baqa’a refugee camp, and Abu Mohammad al-Tahawy from Irbid, according to a source close to the jihadist movement in Jordan.<sup>34</sup>

Omar Mahdi Zeidan (43 years old), one of the most well-known jihadi Salafist theorists in Irbid, also announced his unequivocal support for ISIS, dedicating himself to defend it, theorize on its literature, and respond to its opponents. He snuck into Iraq in October 2014, and appeared for the first time on a recording broadcast by ISIS on March 31, 2015, delivering a speech at a gathering of tribesman from the Nineveh governorate, who offered to renew their oath of allegiance to ISIS emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Other well-known jihadi Salafist leaders that have joined ISIS include Dr. Saad al-Hunaiti (44 years old), who went to Syria in April 2014 to work on reconciliation between Al-Nusra Front and ISIS. There he met Abu Ali al-Anbari, an ISIS security

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Al-Shalabi, June 11, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a source close to the jihadist movement in Jordan who declined to be named, June 6, 2015.

official, and ended up leaving the meeting outraged, accusing him of extremism and of casting accusations of unbelief (*Takfir*) too broadly. He then headed to Al-Nusra Front, which embraced him and appointed him as an officer of the court, alongside Saudi Cleric Dr. Abdullah al Muhaysini.

Al-Hunaiti soon disagreed with the emir of Al-Nusra Front, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, about the functions of the judiciary. Al-Julani asked him to not publish any statements about conflicts between the factions, but Al-Hunaiti disobeyed Al-Julani's orders several times, resulting in him being dismissed from the court. This prompted Al-Hunaiti to leave the Al-Nusra Front and return to ISIS, announcing on October 16, 2014 that he had joined the latter's ranks. He has not appeared since, and it is not known whether ISIS gave him a leadership position, though some people speak about his position in what is known as the *Dar al-Istitaba* (Office of Repentance).<sup>35</sup>

After gaining control over large parts of Syria and Iraq, the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" announced the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate state on July 29, 2014. ISIS' spokesman, Al-Adnani, released a recording called "It is God's Promise," in which he said that the organization was removing the words "Iraq and Syria" from the state's name, and that its fighters were erasing national borders he called "idols," and called on Muslims to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, inviting jihadists to dissolve their own organizations and join the caliphate.

The announcement of the caliphate and repeated calls for people to migrate there have enticed more members of the jihadi Salafist current in Jordan to pledge their loyalty and obedience to ISIS. There are no exact statistics about the percentages of Jordanian Salafists who have sided with one side or another; however, numerous indicators suggest that a greater percentage of the current has sided with ISIS. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi claims that 70% of Jihadi Salafists in Zarqa support Al-Baghdadi's state,<sup>36</sup> and another source close to the current also claims that more than 70% of jihadi Salafists in Jordan are supporters of ISIS.<sup>37</sup>

What factors have attracted such a huge number of Salafists and others to the Islamic State, and brought many of them from admiration to complete loyalty, or "the call to arms" to actually join it, despite knowing that even liking a piece of news supporting the Islamic State on social media could result in them being tried and imprisoned for years?

In this paper, which may serve as a stepping-stone to a more comprehensive study, we aim to answer this question using four examples: one of them is a young man currently living in the "land of the Caliphate," as he says; another is a young man imprisoned for his support for the Islamic State, who emerged from prison a supporter of it; the third is a *Shari'ah* theorist of ISIS' practices, who now sits in a

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with a source close to Al-Nusra Front who declined to be named, June 1, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, June 2, 2015.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a source close to the jihadi Salafist movement who declined to be named, June 1, 2015.

prison in Jordan; and the fourth is an employee in the Ministry of Awqaf, and a supporter of Al-Baghdadi's caliphate.

Here it must be noted that three out of four interlocutors refused to disclose their real names or provide complete personal information that could be used to identify them, for fear of being pursued by the security services.

This paper aims to describe the factors behind ISIS' appeal in the words of the individuals below.

### **Abu al-Bara': A Jordanian Living in the 'Land of the Caliphate'**<sup>38</sup>

Abu al-Bara' (A.S.) was born in 1993, and grew up in a family "very committed to the Qur'an and the Sunnah," he says, and describes himself as someone "committed to, and a seeker of, the truth" from a young age.

His family leaned towards the Muslim Brotherhood, and thanks to his father, mother, and siblings' influence, he loved the group, believing that "one day it will rule by the law of God, under the banner of Islam. "I was very close to the Muslim Brotherhood during my early years at university, because I love God's religion and I strive to implement it, but at the time I understood nothing about the provisions of *Shari'ah* law," he says.

"The members of the Muslim Brotherhood are nice," he adds. "But most of them are ignorant of religion, the emirs stray from it, and some of their leaders are government agents. I didn't notice these things at first, I came to it little by little, thinking their way of things would lead me to a life for the sake of God."

After Abu al-Bara' finished his second year of university, he sought out the study of *Shari'ah*, and learned to recite the Qur'an "proficiently" as one of the best students of Jordanian Sheikh Mahmoud Idris, who died in Zarqa in January 2015. He then devoted himself to reading books on the Sunni creed, such as books by Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Abu Jafar al-Tahawi, and commentaries by Ibn Uthaymeen and "other great scholars."

Abu al-Bara' began to compare what he read in Salafist scholars' books with the reality of Islamic groups domestically and abroad, only to discover—according to him—that "the Muslim Brotherhood had strayed from Islam completely, abandoned Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb's approach, and little by little God began to remove the love for the Brotherhood from my heart. They are no longer fit to achieve the dream I have always had—to establish an Islamic State that governs by *Shari'ah* instead of man-made laws."

Through reading and contemplation, Abu al-Bara' gained a firm belief that "the state of Islam will only be established through force and fighting." Since "the Levantine theater" was near his own country of Jordan, he began to plan to go to Syria for "jihad, and establishing an Islamic State there." Because there were many different

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<sup>38</sup> Correspondence with Abu al-Bara', May 15, 2015.

factions there, he was interested in learning about the approaches of these factions to decide which one he would join, before rallying to the “call to arms” of the group that he would join.

“I began to follow things in the Levantine theater,” says Abu Al-Bara’, “and found that the Al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham both had projects to establish God’s religion on earth, but after Al-Julani split from the Islamic State, many things became clear to me, and I realized that these two groups were based on approaches that were no more than words on paper. Ahrar al-Sham suffered setbacks due to its association with the Free Syrian Army and the puppet Military Councils, and the same happened to Al-Nusra Front. They could not resist the temptation of financial support offered to them.”

“But the Islamic State did not acquiesce to money or anything else, its approach on paper is the same as its approach on the ground, which is why nations oppose it from near and far, from impoverished Sudan to Obama, the “dog of the Romans.” It also applies the correct understanding of the oneness of God and restores the glories of the blessed state established by the Prophet, with the book to guide and the sword to grant it victory.”

This reinforced Abu al-Bara’s belief in the Islamic State’s credibility, and that its approach is the right one. As he said, “The incredible flow of Arabs and non-Arabs towards it, and his communications with friends who joined it before him, as well as ISIS’ media that is backed up by facts,” as he says, led him to the “certain truth” when he arrived in the “land of the Caliphate” several months ago, and confirmed that what he had been hearing and seeing in its media was true.

Abu al-Bara’ left his studies at a Jordanian university, where he had only one semester left before he graduated with a Bachelor’s degree, and instead chose to migration to the Islamic State and “jihad under its banner” over receiving his university degree.

“I found more than I dreamed of in the Islamic State,” he says. “I saw the creative application of the state of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and the approach of Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him). Brotherhood between *Muhajirun* [ISIS supporters who come from outside Syria, lit. immigrants] and *Ansar* [local supporters] is evident in our state, where half of its army are *Muhajirun*, and the other half are *Ansar*. Emirs are not selected by favoritism, and no one is above the courts, even the emir of the Islamic State. God’s law is above all, and whoever sins is held accountable.”

Abu al-Bara’ goes on about his dream that has been realized. “In our state, there are many civil servants, the state cares for them and gives them lucrative salaries. Restaurants distribute food to the poor every day, and the Office of Zakat ensures that every need is met. It collects God’s share of the money of the rich (Zakat), which they take and give to the poor. Wherever you go on the streets, you do not see anyone sin openly in public, the women are veiled, smoking is forbidden, and shops close at prayer time.”

“There are no exorbitant taxes in the caliphate state; no customs duties on cars; electricity, water, and medicine are all free for everyone who lives in the land of Islam; and the state pays for the cost of any medical or surgical operation. The *Hudud* punishments of the *Shari’ah* are applied in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the rightly-guided caliphs.”

The Islamic State guarantees that expenses are paid for all immigrants, says Abu al-Bara’, and it provides them with good loans when needed, as well as marriage expenses and support for their children.

All of this, including the Islamic State’s form and practices on the ground, cemented Abu al-Bara’s loyalty to the Islamic State, and turned him into a soldier, ready to offer his soul for it to survive and expand. He refuses to leave it and return to his homeland of Jordan until the latter is “open to it, to join the state of Islam that is good for all,” as he put it.

The fact that Abu al-Bara’ followed the videos the Islamic State releases had a “good effect” on his admiration for it. He felt that these images “as an approach, they are supported by sound evidence in the *Shari’ah*. On a technical level, they are shot, produced, and directed at a highly-professional level.”

But he asserts that the caliphate’s media is not the primary reason he is attracted to it, and summarizes the two most important factors that drew him to the Islamic State: “The first is that it applies the law of God, and the second is its combination of trust in God and professional preparation in both civilian and military matters.”

### **Abu Dujana: With the Islamic State, despite Imprisonment<sup>39</sup>**

When Abu Dujana (A.K.) began to follow Al-Qaeda’s publications in 2011, he did not pray consistently, but was a “reckless” young man, “with no greater goals in life,” as he says himself.

He spent long hours on the Internet, and followed videos on YouTube, which drew his attention to jihadist material. He admired the young men who appeared in the recorded videos, as they “embark on death, and fight fiercely”—particularly members of the Islamic State in Iraq, “who were, and still are, spearheading the defense of Sunnis against Shiites,” as he says.

Abu Dujana is 23 years old, and closely followed Sunnis’ suffering in Iraq, due to persecution by *Al-Rafidha* [literally “rejectionists,” a derogatory term for Shiites due to their “rejection” of the first three caliphs, who are regarded as rightly-guided by Sunnis]. He recalls a video clip that made a big impression on him, keeping him awake for many nights, that showed “a group of women from the Islamic State in Al-Anbar province, being led by Iraqi soldiers to Baghdad.” He says that after he saw this video, he became ready to support any group that would avenge Sunnis, and take revenge against the “sectarian” Iraqi regime, which is what the “the Islamic State was doing,” in actuality, “fighting *Al-Rafidha* (Shiites) in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.”

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Abu Dujana, May 28, 2015.

Abu Dujana kept following everything the jihadists produced, and his admiration for them led him to look for individuals belonging to the jihadist movement to become friends with, become one of them, and exchange with them the information and publications the jihadist organizations produce.

“I was very impressed with the writings of Humam al-Balawi (Abu Dujana al-Khurasani), the famous Khost bomber, who dedicated many of his articles to defending the Islamic State in Iraq, before it split with Al-Qaeda. I eagerly followed jihadists accounts on Twitter, and most of them became supporters of the Islamic State, and against Al-Qaeda, like Al-Nadhir al-Arian, Khansa’ al-Muwahhida, Ibn al-Siddiqa (Abu Muawiya al-Qahtani), and Turki al-Binali.”

After the split between the Islamic State and Al-Nusra Front (Al-Qaeda fi Bilad al-Sham/ Al-Qaeda in the Levant), Abu Dujana became confused, and very distressed at “the disagreement between brothers in the same approach,” and he intently followed news of this split, as well as all the statements, testimonies, and videos the two sides put out, in order to make up his mind and align himself with one of the two sides. In the end, he decided that “the Islamic State was right,” and that Al-Nusra Front’s leader Al-Julani was nothing more than “a renegade from his group, who abandoned his obedience to his emir Al-Baghdadi.”

He also concluded that the Islamic State was the true representative of Al-Qaeda, when it was led by Osama bin Laden. He felt that Al-Qaeda had changed since Bin Laden was killed, and afterward it had “deviated from the *Shari’ah*, associated with secular factions, and did not have a clear plan to establish an Islamic state, contrary to what Bin Laden had aspired to; they were content just to engage in *Jihad al-Nikaya* [fighting to cause harm or damage to the enemy].”

When Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, spokesman of the Islamic State, announced the establishment of the “Islamic Caliphate” on June 29, 2014, it was a defining moment for Abu Dujana. He was convinced that his decision to give the Islamic State his loyalty was the right one, because “this organization has become a real state, it extends over vast stretches of land, and its army, economy, and institutions are self-sustaining.”

Abu Dujana took no notice of the fact that the other Islamist groups who opposed the Islamic State rejected Al-Baghdadi’s caliphate on the basis that he was unknown, obscure or possibly dead. Yet the appearance of the *Amir al-Mu’mineen* (Commander of the Faithful, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) on July 5, 2014, in a Friday sermon at a mosque in Mosul, had a major impact on “proving that he was right,” and “refuting opponents’ arguments,” as he says. He does not hide his admiration for the caliph’s “charisma”—his elegant way of dressing, oratory style, and mastery at reciting the Qur’an and prayers, which are “characteristics unparalleled by any other Arab leader,” he says.

Abu Dujana’s belief in the Islamic State was strengthened when he discovered others’ lies about it. He heard that individuals from ISIS had massacred civilians, or raped women from militant factions in Syria opposed to ISIS, and quickly turned to the Internet to research and explore these claims on social media sites, and watch

videos that spoke about these accusations, only to discover in the end that they were “groundless fabrications, or that the caliphate’s soldiers had killed people they had the right to kill, such as people allied with the *Nusayri* [Alawite] regime, or Saudi agents, even if they were only indirectly allied, like the Jaysh al-Islam led by Zahran Alloush.”

Abu Dujana does not hide that he has been influenced by the “caliphate state’s” media apparatus, which as he sees it, “has been leaps and bounds ahead of other jihadist currents since it was established, and its production and editing are far beyond Western institutions. Each new release from the caliphate state or one of its *wilayas* (provinces) attracts many new fighters, because it is a righteous state that must survive and prevail.”

At the beginning of this year, Abu Dujana was arrested by Jordanian intelligence services, and spent dozens of days in prison, but it had no effect on his loyalty to the Islamic State. This confirms that the caliphate state’s supporters in Jordan are growing, not only the ranks of those who are committed to it religiously, but in all classes of society. However, “the grip of the security forces has made many supporters of the Islamic State hide their commitment to it, and not display signs of their religiousness, like growing a beard and other things, which has turned some of them into sleeper cells, unknown by the security forces.”

### **Ahmad Bawadi: From Conservative Salafist to Defender of the Islamic State**

Ahmad Bawadi, “Abu Dawud al-Safari,” (50 years old), was a student close to Sheikh Ali al-Halabi, a conservative Salafist theorist who has good relations with Jordanian security services and the regime.

He split from Sheikh Al-Halabi however, when he discovered divergences in the conservative Salafist sheikhs behavior, approach, and beliefs, as he said.<sup>40</sup> Bawadi moved towards reform Salafism, and from there to jihadism. After the caliphate was announced, he became one of the most important *Shari’ah* theorists supporting it in Jordan. This resulted in him being detained in January 2015, and then referred to a military state security court on charges of promoting the ideas of a “terrorist group,” and by June of this year had been sentenced to two years in prison.

Bawadi speaks about the individual components of the Islamic State that made him take up the cause against its opponents. In his article,<sup>41</sup> he writes “Proof that the *Baqiyah* (the ever-lasting nature) of the Islamic State does not contradict the doctrine of the faith,” is that the Islamic State “was only created in order support the oppressed, champion the believers, establish religion, oppose the idolaters, and uphold the doctrine of *Al-wala’ wa Al-bara’* [loyalty to God and fellow Muslims and disavowal of unbelievers] toward God.”

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<sup>40</sup> Previous interview with Ahmad Bawadi, March 13, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> This excerpt and following excerpts are taken from Ahmad Bawadi’s blog, <http://ahmadbawadi.blogspot.com>.

“The Islamic State is built on the sacrifice of Mujahideen, both *Ansar* and *Muhajireen*, who left to fight only to advance the cause of the religion. We are only saying this out of a belief in the words and actions we have seen, that have helped religion triumph, and fought the *Rawafidh* [Shiites] and idolaters.”

In his article “*Its Footprint Killed Them*,” he says “It is a state that does not ingratiate itself or play favorites... it is a state whose children have forsaken it, whose enemies fight it... it is a state dependent on no one, that does not bend to anyone except God... it is an oppressed state that has long been engaged in a silent battle, while its enemies have distracted the world with their trifles... it is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria... it is the state of the Islamic caliphate, God willing.”

Bawadi continues to list the qualities that attracted him and others to pledge their loyalty to the Islamic State, writing in his article “Clear Differences Between *Da’esh* and the Islamic State” that “it [Islamic State] is a state not harmed by those who oppose it or have forsaken it... it is a state that rules by God’s law... it is a state that preaches the true Oneness of God... it is a state based on Islam, and on the Book and the Sunnah and the approach of the Ummah’s pious predecessors... it is a state of glory and empowerment, God willing... it is a state that fights on the ground and protects religion and honor... it is an Islamic State moving towards its goal, and none of the rabble can stop it.”

He speaks of realizing a dream he had long hoped to see in reality, to “break” the borders that colonial powers drew between Muslim countries. He feels that Al-Baghdadi’s state has “brought down the borders of humiliation (Sykes-Picot)” and that “the Ummah [has become] one body, one nation, one structure, with shared blood, shared wealth, a single ruler, and a single state.”

In response to those who say that allegiance to Al-Baghdadi is false because he is unable to protect Muslims or carry out their duties, he says that the Islamic State has “torn down the walls, freed the captives, established courts, given people their rights, implemented *Zakat* [religious alms] and the *Jizya* [special tax levied on non-Muslims], created a police to protect Muslims and their rights, provided food and drink, as well as electricity, water, and sewer systems” and other services.

In another article, he says that “the Caliphate project has established God’s religion and his laws, and provided safety and security across all areas the Islamic State controls... it is the Ummah project, which controls more land than Britain... Muslims from around the world are immigrating to it.” He adds in a third article, that “Hopes have been achieved, dreams have been realized, because the Caliphate state has returned, erased borders, raised the banner of *Tawhid* (Oneness of God), and torn down flags of denunciation.”

For him, others’ opposition to the Islamic State—including what he considers the deviations of other factions—confirms that its approach is right, and means the Islamic State is innocent of their deviations. In the same article, he writes that “If we look at who is fighting the Islamic State, plotting against it, raising suspicions about it, and inciting people against it, expending all their efforts to divide its ranks, break its resolve, and rally other groups against it, we see that the only reason they fight it

is because its approach is sound, pure, and right. Therefore, we do not find this hostility among the infidels, or those supporting other groups, or helping other groups; their approach is tainted with suspicious tendencies, orders, and agendas. They do not live up to the purity of their approach or belief, that comes from the original source, including the pious predecessors [*Salaf*] of the Ummah in its best centuries.”

Islamic jurisprudential heritage plays a big role in Bawadi’s belief that the Islamic State’s approach is right, and in his support for its establishment. He quotes the consensus of the Islamic jurists on “the duty to create the Imamate, that the Ummah must submit to a just Imam who rules by the laws of God and the *Shari’ah* brought by the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, and those who believe otherwise still have not departed from this consensus, while it is forbidden to pledge allegiance to two Caliphs at once.”

In his article “*Was Al-Baghdadi too quick to declare the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant?*” he quotes several jurists and interpreters of the Qur’an on the duty to “install an Imam and Caliph to be listened to and obeyed.” He concludes by saying that the announcement establishing the Islamic State was legitimate, as is its continued expansion, and he claims that it is a duty to advocate for and support it, calling fighting against it “the pinnacle of treachery, desertion, and surrender.”

Bawadi also cites a *Hadith* [saying] of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that says “The Levant is God’s chosen land, and the best of his creation flock to it.” Referring to the migration of Muslims of different nationalities to the “Land of the Caliphate,” he sees the fact they are coming by the thousands as proof that its approach is right, and its method is sound. He says in the same article, “It should satisfy you that thousands of migrants, the best Muslims by our accounts, have joined it, and this is good news for the Islamic State, as God has chosen them for the Levant, and they have joined it... by our accounts, these elite are the best of his creation.”

### **Abu Abdul Rahman: An Employee in the Ministry of Awqaf who Supports ISIS<sup>42</sup>**

Abu Abdul Rahman (A. B.) speaks about the “miserable” state of the Islamic Ummah after World War I, which ended with the defeat of the last Islamic entity based on the Islamic creed and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s declaration of the abolishment of the caliphate on March 3, 1924. “Muslims practically fainted from what a huge shock it was, and Islamic movements around the Muslim world began to wake up from the shock four years later, looking into the idea of reviving the caliphate, or founding a state that would be the center for a future caliphate, one that would restore the Islamic Ummah’s glory and pride.”

Abu Abdul Rahman was born in 1953, and lived through the tragedy of the *Naksa* in June 1967, when the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were defeated by the Israeli

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Abu Abdul Rahman, May 23, 2015.

occupation. He emigrated from the West Bank to Amman with his father, who repeatedly told him that “the Arab’s defeat was the reason Palestinians were displaced. This would not have happened if the Caliphate had not been dissolved: it was feared by its enemies and the strength of its army was a true force to be reckoned with.”

This idea stuck in Abu Abdul Rahman’s mind; it took over his mind and actions, and he began to search for a group working on the project of restoring the Caliphate on earth so that he could join it. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood, and then began to move from one Islamist group to another, searching for the group most committed to establishing an Islamic State with the Prophet’s approach. Today, he is a proponent of the Islamic State and its emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

“Islamist movements tried to apply *Shari’ah* or create an Islamic state, as happened in Sudan, Libya, and Afghanistan, as well as under former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, who during the last years of his rule used to say that he sought to establish an Islamic State,” he says. “But these attempts were crushed and beaten down by various world powers... Now, the Islamic State has announced the establishment of a Caliphate, after it has expanded into Syrian land, and erased the Sykes-Picot borders. This is the day I had long hoped to see in reality before I died, and now I have seen it, made possible by the men of the Islamic State.”

But Abu Abdul Rahman, who still lives in Amman working at the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, does not hide the fact that he had mixed feelings when he heard Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, spokesman for the Islamic State, announce the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate and the erasure of the borders drawn by colonialism. “At the time, I felt a mix of believing what had happened, and happiness on one hand, and questioning whether this state would be able to survive,” he says. “But every day I grow more and more convinced that it is truly the Caliphate state I have awaited for decades.”

He adds that the Islamic State’s application of *Shari’ah* and information he receives from friends and acquaintances living under ISIS about the just distribution of resources, and how well ISIS deals with the people under its care, even prisoners, are some of the most important reasons for his growing attraction to the Islamic State.

Abu Abdul Rahman rejects accusations that the Islamic State is carrying out American, Israeli, Iranian, or Gulf schemes. He stresses that the accusations spread by Western and Arab media have only increased his belief that “they are sincere and honorable, because the media is built on lies and hostility to everyone working for Islam.”

“Hostility to the Islamic State has increased around the world,” he adds. “Especially from the United States. This has strengthened my conviction that ISIS members are sincere, and that it deserves loyalty and obedience, and for people to give up their lives to preserve it.”

Abu Abdul Rahman refers to the Islamic State’s military strength, which has given him “hope that it will survive and be able to fend off its enemies.” To ousted

Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, a product of the “peaceful revolutions of the Arab Spring,” he believes that Morsi “failed to establish a state that rules by *Shari’ah* because he did not control the military. The Islamic State, on the other hand, has both military power and financial power, and has consistently expanded and maintained ground since it was founded, as this is the center of the first Islamic Caliphate, and it will continue to persist and expand, God willing.”

## **Conclusions**

Through a review of previous experiences, we can say in summary that there are external and internal, personal factors that contribute to people’s attraction to the Islamic State, whether they admire it or join it. These factors can be summarized in the words of its supporters:

### ***External Factors***

- A prior belief that the Islamic State will only be created through force, a belief that was cemented after the Arab Spring revolutions were thwarted.
- Sectarian persecution of Sunnis, particularly the detention and assault of Sunni women.
- Media coverage in opposition to the Islamic State that excessively vilifies it. Since these slanders are easily exposed, it boosts the faith of observers that its approach is correct and that it is a duty to join it.
- The United States and other Western nations’ opposition to the Islamic State, since Muslims and Arabs feel hatred for the U.S. due to its support of the Israeli occupation and its occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.
- The Prophet’s *Hadiths* that speak about the virtues of the Levant, and that “the best of [God’s] creation flock to it,” and how these *Hadiths* are projected onto the Islamic State, as vast numbers of people from all different nationalities flock to it to live under its care.
- Islamic jurisprudential heritage that says it is a duty to create one state for Muslims, and that the Ummah should submit to one just Imam who rules the state by the law of God.
- Regimes in the Arab and Muslim world have failed to satisfy the hopes of their people, such as defeating the Israeli occupation and powers of Western colonialism. This has made them pin their hopes on the Islamic State, which possesses a formidable military force.

### ***Internal / Personal Factors***

- The Islamic State has not given in to monetary temptation, in order to gain the loyalty of Arab or Western nations, while all other factions receive financial support that comes with conditions, whereby they make their decisions subject to the approval of Arab or Western regimes.
- The Islamic State’s application of the provisions of Islamic *Shari’ah* and the *Hudud* punishments stipulated in the Qur’an and Sunnah, banning anything that violates Islamic law.

- There is no favoritism in the Islamic State, and no one is above the courts, even the *Amir al-Mu'mineen* (Commander of the Faithful)
- It has established all pillars of the state, including civil institutions, an economy, army, and courts.
- It established an Office for *Zakat*, where it takes money from the rich to give to the poor.
- People are not obligated to pay excessive taxes in the Islamic State, and customs duties on cars have been eliminated.
- There is free electricity, water, and medicine in the Islamic State, and insurance for medical operations.
- ISIS pays the personal expenses of *Mujahideen*, and provides them with good loans when needed, as well as marriage expenses and support for their children.
- The Islamic State combines trust in God with professional preparation in both civilian and military matters.
- It has a plan to establish a complete Islamic state through military force, realizing the dream of jihadists and others committed to this dream, while Al-Qaeda focuses on *Nikaya* fighting, and the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist groups plan a peaceful approach to change.
- It has expanded over a vast area of land, and existing regimes and alliances of Western and Arab nations have been unable to stop this expansion.
- It erased the Sykes-Picot borders between Iraq and Syria, thus provoking the sympathies of those who wish to unify the Muslim world.
- The Islamic State treats people under its care well, and is committed to providing for their needs.
- The power and intensity of the Islamic State's media, its highly professional editing and production, and its vigorous work refuting all defamation and suspicions raised about it.

## The Case of Saudi Arabia

*Abdullah al-Maliki*

Saudis are said to be the people with the most fortunate relationship with the Islamic State, and some foreign reports even say that ISIS is just a Saudi creation to confront Iranian expansion. Claims like this ignore that in 2003, Saudi entered a fierce battle with Al-Qaeda, the organization that spawned ISIS, and that the country subsequently suffered numerous terrorist attacks that continued nearly until 2007. Such claims also ignore the fact that most of ISIS' victims are Sunni, not Shiite or Iranian, and that in the eyes of ISIS, Saudi Arabia is "the head of the serpent," as the caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi described it. For ISIS, Saudi Arabia is no less dangerous than Iran, or any other nation in the world: Saudi Arabia might be the first country it seeks to overthrow, or at least destabilize, in order to ensure that its caliphate project is achieved. ISIS believes it must target Saudi Arabia, describing it as a true rival in Wahhabi Salafism that forms the intellectual background for ISIS and its leaders.

Some people imagine that there is a strong linkage between Saudi religiosity and ISIS' intellectual background, but I think this is exaggerated. In truth, this is a superficial, distorted claim, and it acts as an obstacle to understanding the secret of ISIS' appeal within Saudi society. We have seen that all sections of Saudi society nearly unanimously condemn ISIS, and are angry, worried, and fearful since ISIS launched attacks in the Eastern Province of the country. At the forefront of those denouncing ISIS are prominent members of the Salafist Wahhabi current, even though their intellectual background is supposed to be similar, and perhaps even the same as the religious background from which ISIS emerged. People living in Saudi Arabia and interacting with its society find it very difficult to accept the idea that ISIS is an extension of Saudi society, which has absorbed no small amount of modernity, openness, and Westernization as a result of its economy.

The latest poll conducted by the Rakeen Foundation, in cooperation with the newspaper *Al-Tagreer*, in October 2014, showed that 73% of the diverse target group opposed the international coalition to strike ISIS, despite the fact that only 20% of them sided with ISIS in the battle. The rest were neutral, or opposed ISIS' project.

Despite the fact that such exaggerated explanations cannot connect ISIS to Saudi Arabia officially, socially, or intellectually, we must recognize that ISIS has an appeal within Saudi society.

### **Where Does This Attraction Come from? And What Is Its Secret?**

We believe ISIS' appeal in Saudi Arabia may lie in the former's ability to use the same narrative that the first Saudi state was based on, as well as the third Saudi state in the early 1900s, in particular. By exploring this narrative, and highlighting

certain facts, events, and challenges within it, researchers will find they are reading the story ISIS' emergence, in reverse.

This paper seeks to review the general features and principal points of this historical narrative, which may help us understand the secret of ISIS' appeal in Saudi Arabia.

### **The Historical Narrative**

Following the fall of the second Saudi emirate and weakening of the Wahhabi movement, the Aal al-Rasheed tribe—a historical ally of the Ottoman empire—took control of the Nejd region (1891 AD / 1308 AH). The call to Wahhabism lost its political power and support that had enabled it to influence, dominate, and spread its doctrine among the common people.

The hopes of the religious scholars were renewed when one of Faisal bin Turki's grandsons, King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman, stepped forward to restore the ruling family's authority in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Recognizing the ideological importance of the Wahhabi Hanbali school of jurisprudence, King Abdulaziz quickly began to restore the historical alliance that linked his predecessors to the religious scholars and followers of the Wahhabi movement. This connection was made by reviving the historic deal between political power and religious authority through marriage. Thus, King Abdulaziz married the daughter of Sheikh Abdullah ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh, a sheikh and cleric of the Wahhabi school<sup>43</sup> at the time.

King Abdulaziz famously spoke of this alliance, saying "It is no secret to you that first, this matter originates with and was arranged by God and then with Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdul Wahhab. God Almighty had mercy on our forefathers and on the repeated disputes by Muslims over sovereignty. Whenever there is a dispute and it comes close to undermining God's religion and extinguishing God's light, God refuses to allow this, and so He brought forth from the two families (Aal Saud and Aal al-Sheikh) individuals to set things right."<sup>44</sup>

The Wahhabi religious scholars rallied all their symbolic and spiritual potential, to bless and support King Abdulaziz's political approach and faithfully stand alongside him in state-building, through popular religious mobilization and encouraging people to fight with him. In exchange, the king used his authority to enable his loyal partners to impose their religious discourse and spread it among people.

The Jurist Sheikh Abdullah al-Angari, (d. 1373 AH), one of the most important Wahhabi religious scholars at the time,<sup>45</sup> wrote that "God bestowed upon Muslims a

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<sup>43</sup> *Religious Scholars of Islam—the History and Structure of the Saudi Religious Establishment*, Mohammed Nabil, Arab Network for Research and Publishing, p.153.

<sup>44</sup> *Of Midnight, the Morning's Cry*, Abdulaziz al-Tuwaijri, p.520.

<sup>45</sup> The most prominent Wahhabi religious scholars, who had an active role in founding the third Saudi state are Abdullah ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh, Saad bin Ateeq, Abdullah Al Angari, Sulaiman bin Sahman, and Abdullah bin Saleem.

just, religious rule: the rule of Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Aal Faisal, his banner is still triumphant, soldiers of falseness are broken and vanquished under his assault, God maintained the *Shari'ah* through him, and through him he abolished abominable prohibited acts.”<sup>46</sup>

Sheikh Mohammad ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh (d. 1367 AH) wrote a sermon in which he said, “Remember, dear brothers, the blessing of Islam, and how God has enabled you to leave behind the customs passed down from your fathers, grandfathers, and their predecessors, most of which violated the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and thank him too, for what God has granted you in this age, the rule of this Imam (King Abdulaziz), through whom God has bestowed on you great blessings, and through him kept many curses away from you... He who asks for things to be perfect and in the way of the Caliphs, he is asking for the impossible; so hear and obey, respect his right and mandate over you.... And by God, by God, I do not know anyone on the face of this earth today, East or West, South or North, who has more right to the Imamate than him, we believe in the righteousness of his Imamate, because it is the Imamate of Muslims, and his authority is a religious authority.”<sup>47</sup>

Things did not stop with reinforcing the principle of obedience to the king, but extended to a call to jihad, and urging people to become martyrs and offer up their lives to achieve the intended goal. Sheikh Mohammad ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh said, “By, in hastening and undertaking, God loves when his servants hasten to do what He has ordered them to do. If the Imam calls his subjects to battle, jihad is an individual duty to all whom God has made able... hear and obey those to whom God has made your guardian, answer those who call you to jihad... you must be diligent and committed, and help the Imam of Muslims fight the enemies of the faith.”<sup>48</sup> “...I mean the gallant hero, courageous and brave, leader of the people of Islam, the Imam Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Aal Faisal, may God preserve him and prolong his life. If he calls you, Muslims, to jihad and to arms, listen and obey, and do not be like those who heard and rebelled. So perform the duties of the religion with him and assist him therein, as I do not know anyone on the face of this earth today, East or West, South or North, who must be obeyed, and joined in jihad, before him.”<sup>49</sup>

He adds, “Abandoning the duty of jihad is a form of casting oneself into ruin by one’s own hands, and as God says: {*cast not yourselves into ruin with your own hands*} (Qur’an 2:195).”<sup>50</sup> “Only manifest hypocrites hold back from jihad if they are called to it, so be careful not to listen to or heed the discouragers and dishearteners, or the doubts and suspicions they raise or their defamation of the people of the Islamic *Da’wa*.”<sup>51</sup>

He adds that, as the Jurist Sheikh Abdullah al-Angari wrote, “On the whole, his [King Abdulaziz] virtues are many and innumerable, and what God has bestowed by his

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<sup>46</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls] (8/47)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* (9/105)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* (8/30)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* (8/29)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* (8/30)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* (8/28)

hand to the people of Nejd is an unimaginable bounty, and he has given Muslims the duty of jihad at his side. As the Prophet, peace be upon him, said "If you are called to battle, go forth." In other words, the Imam calls his subjects to battle, and the call to jihad with him with their wealth and lives is a duty, because he is waging jihad to defend the lands of the religion and the weak spots in Muslim ranks, and he is guarding them from all the infidel aggressors who seek to cause them harm."<sup>52</sup>

### **The Expansion of the Saudi Project**

These two religious speeches urgently encouraged obedience and jihad. Hidden behind them was a political and religious problem that King Abdulaziz, and the Wahhabi religious scholars behind him, sensed. For urbanite Nejd, their firm social and economic position made them averse to attacks and fighting that had long gone on between Bedouin tribes seeking spoils or plunder as a primary means of sustenance and livelihood. People living in cities, who worked in agriculture, trade, and industry, did not have a motive to attack or fight, unless for self-defense or money.

While there were fierce fighters in urban areas, who left with the emir on a raid if necessary and the need arose, this was usually temporary, and for a specific purpose, and afterward they soon returned to their cities and settled there. They fought alongside King Abdulaziz in his early battles to expel the Turks from the cities of Nejd. Once the Turks withdrew and conceded their successive loss of these cities, the population of these cities was content to align with Abdulaziz and defend themselves with local military garrisons.<sup>53</sup> They had no set intention to expand to areas other than their cities.

Yet as the range of Abdulaziz's operations expanded, and as he went away further from Riyadh and cities loyal to him, it became clear that the military power by which he had controlled Nejd no longer suited the raids and military operations he planned to carry out in distant parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite how loyal the urban population of the cities were to Abdulaziz, they were not ready to leave their fields, trades, and factories to fight in these distant regions of the Arabian Peninsula. Of course, some of them were ready to do so, and stood beside the king to achieve his project, yet they were not numerous or powerful enough for the king's aspirations.<sup>54</sup>

The king needed a military force that was agile, brave, abstemious and deeply believed in his project. The Bedouins were the only people he had available to him, but the experience that the Saudi emirs who preceded him had with the Bedouins was not positive. The Bedouins had left during times of crisis and tension in the period of the former Saudi emirates, and even rebelled against it and allied with its

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. (8/47)

<sup>53</sup> See: *The Saudi Brotherhood through Two Decades*, John Habib, translated by Sabry Mohammed Hassan, Dar Al Mareekh, Riyadh, p.46-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.46-7.

enemies to achieve the greatest gains possible.<sup>55</sup> This was in addition to the Wahhabi establishment's view since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw the Bedouins simply as groups of people, outside Islam, rebelling against its teachings, and who must be saved from being lost in the Hereafter.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the importance of settling the Bedouin tribes became clear, as well as educating them religiously, politically, and militarily, and integrating them within urban life and the project of the state. Starting in 1912 (1330 AH), the authorities created several settlements made of clay, around water sources, in which to resettle the Bedouins. These were called "*Hijar*" (singular "*hijra*"). The choice of the word *hijra* to name these settlements is symbolic, since in the Muslim imagination, it conjures a concept of religious migration, moving from the life of an unbeliever, and joining a life in which the true religion is applied.<sup>57</sup>

### **Indoctrination and Solidification of Saudi Wahhabism**

Between 1912 and 1926, hundreds of "*hijar*"s were created, and around 150,000 Bedouins were settled there.<sup>58</sup> Accompanying this settlement—and with unconditional support from King Abdulaziz—the Wahhabi religious scholars engaged in a serious, intensive process to instill religious thought in them. Religious proselytizers called "*al-Mutawa'a*" were dispatched, tasked with teaching the tribesmen the rules of the (true) religion, and making them accept the Wahhabi Hanbali school and internalize its view of the world. The religious scholars also made many visits to different parts of the settlements, to oversee the religious education process.

In order to mobilize for jihad and combat, Wahhabi concepts that had taken shape through the political challenges of establishing the first Saudi state were invoked, concepts such as *Takfir* [levying accusations of unbelief at others], jihad, *Al-wala' wal-bara'* [loyalty towards Muslims and disavowal of unbelievers], in order to differentiate culturally and geographically between communities of the true religion and communities following false religion. For example, "scholar Hassan bin Hussein Aal al-Sheikh (d. 1339 AH), who participated in building the Al-Artawiyah *hijra*, one of the largest and most important settlements in the country, wrote a letter covering all the ideas adopted by Wahhabism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, forbidding any peaceful contact with the lands of the infidels and the people who lived there. It mentioned the South of Iraq and Kuwait in particular; that there should be no contact with them other than on the battlefield and in the context of jihad."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> According to some historical sources, the tribes of Nejd and Hejaz, which were primarily loyal to the first Saudi state, abandoned Wahhabism and allied with Ibrahim Pasha, the leader of the Ottoman campaign, and traveled through the desert until they reached the walls of Diriyah. See *Saudi Arabia*, St. John Philby, p.140.

<sup>56</sup> This has been covered in the discussion above; also see *Al-Durar al-Saniyya* (9/238).

<sup>57</sup> *Religious Scholars of Islam*, op. cit., p.159.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.159.

<sup>59</sup> Manuscript held by Dr. Mohammad Mulayyin, see *Religious Scholars of Islam*, p.160.

Sheikh Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh considered the Aal al-Rasheed and their supporters to be infidels and apostates, because they asked for military and financial aid from the “Ottoman idolaters.” For this, it was not enough to simply pronounce them infidels; they also had to be killed in jihad in God’s cause: “Those who know the blasphemy of the Ottoman state, and do not differentiate between them and Muslim wrongdoers, do not know the meaning of ‘there is no God but God,’ and to believe that those of the Ottoman state are Muslims is even worse, because this is to doubt the blasphemy of those who do not believe in God or are idolaters, and those who help them in any way or bring them down on Muslims are clearly apostates.”<sup>60</sup>

He also claimed: “Those who bore fierce hostility (the Aal al-Rasheed) to the people of monotheism [here implying the Wahhabi movement] and those who assisted them are certainly infidels. Muslims have a duty to fight them, except for those who do not have a whiff of religion, or who are hypocrites, or who doubt this call to Islam.”<sup>61</sup>

A group of Wahhabi religious scholars also issued a *fatwa* [legal opinion in Islamic law], proclaiming that those who advocated the sovereignty of the Sherif of Mecca over the Hejaz were unbelievers. It said: “There is no doubt of their apostasy, because they call for others to come under the rule of the idolaters. All Muslims must engage in jihad against them and fight them, and anyone who shelters them and aids them is subject to the same judgment as the other idolaters.”<sup>62</sup>

Sheikh Sulaiman bin Sahman, one of the most senior religious scholars at the time, decreed that whoever was under the rule of King Abdulaziz were so because they were Muslims (in contrast to those who were not under his rule, who were not of Islam), saying “I do not know what path everyone is following in the Arabian Peninsula, yet it is evident that most of them are not following Islam! We do not pronounce them all infidels, as there may be a Muslim among them. Those under the rule of the Imam of Muslims [i.e., Nejd and its surroundings], most of them are likely of Islam, and it is clear that they perform the manifest rites of Islam... but those not under the rule of the Imam of Muslims, we do not know what conditions they are in, yet what we said first is likely, that they are outside Islam.”<sup>63</sup>

This doctrinal literature, and previous literature of the religious scholars of the *Da’wa*, during the first and second Saudi states, fed into the combative “*Ikhwan*” (Brothers) mentality. As a result of this cultural education and jihadist ideological mobilization, Bedouin tribes were transformed into Wahhabi Salafists in just a few years, after decades of hostility, mistrust and dissatisfaction. The greatest proof of this success was the creation of an ideological army of Bedouin settlers, who became

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<sup>60</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], op. cit., (10/429).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. (9/83).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. (9/211).

<sup>63</sup> *The Way of the People of Truth and Following in their Opposition to the People of Ignorance and Innovation*, Sulaiman bin Sahman, Maktaba al-Firqan, Ajman, p.79.

known by the name of “the Ikhwan” and would come to make real contributions to the process of unifying the Arabian Peninsula under King Abdulaziz’s authority.<sup>64</sup>

### **Triumph in the Name of Religion**

With his imagination and courage, King Abdulaziz benefited from the fact that in just a few years, the Bedouins underwent a fundamental change, and turned into an agile force able to cross the length and breadth of the Arabian Peninsula. He also turned the Bedouins into a stable force that he could station in a given place if he wished, which Abdulaziz did without any uproar or fuss. This force appeared on the Arab scene for the first time, ready and eager to fight, under the name “the Ikhwan.”<sup>65</sup>

At the time, the world stage—as represented by the Ottoman and British governments—sensed how dangerous this underground movement founded by King Abdulaziz was. In 1918, Sherif Hussein bin Ali wrote to the acting British representative in Jeddah, appealing to him and saying “what worries me more than anything else, is that His Majesty the King [of England] should make the Emir [Abdulaziz] disband and demobilize this organization that goes by the name of “the Ikhwan,” this political association under the guise of religion.”<sup>66</sup>

The British Public Records Office has a report written by H. R. P. Dickson, when he was a political delegate in Kuwait, on September 2, 1929. He wrote at the time, “The Ikhwan were created at the hands of Ibn Saud, to fight his battles, and triumph in the name of religion... since they were brothers, and the flame of religion burns inside them, they have become truly invincible, and can be compared to Cromwell’s tanks, or German storm troopers.”<sup>67</sup>

The British Public Records Office in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also contains a lengthy report written by explorer St. John Philby, when he was a British officer in the Political Bureau in Baghdad, about the Ikhwan movement. He wrote, “The bottom line is that Ibn Saud’s goal of strengthening and creating the Ikhwan movement is to increase its military strength, by using the greatest number of his subjects, so that he can compensate for the weakness of the Bedouin state and Bedouin army, and the economy in terms of its resources, by replacing mercenary considerations with hope for the afterlife.”<sup>68</sup>

Reginald Wingate, British High Commissioner in Egypt, concluded in a report he wrote in 1918, that the Bedouin Ikhwan movement was a closed secret society with an ideological and combative nature. He wrote, “I do not have enough information on the strength and goals of the Ikhwan to assess how frightened King Hussein is of the Ikhwan’s influence. Yet from my experience in Sudan, I have learned the danger presented by secret organizations, under the cloak of religion among uncivilized

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<sup>64</sup> *Religious Scholars of Islam*, op. cit., p.160.

<sup>65</sup> *The Saudi Brotherhood through Two Decades*, op. cit., p.47.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* p.53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p.60.

inhabitants. In times of distress, a Muslim like this turns to religion, just as some people in Christian countries turn to drinking spirits, and this Muslim is also more likely to catch the first spark of extremism, sparks which turn into a fire if fanned by a leader who is injudicious, misleading, or impossible to control, in any case.”<sup>69</sup>

That same year, an official in the Foreign Office in London wrote the following observation: “King Hussein’s estimation of this movement is correct; this group will become hostile to civilization in Mesopotamia and Syria.”<sup>70</sup>

On May 12, 1918, the British political officer in Baghdad described the Ikhwan movement as “a socialist movement, in the sense that the rich have been required to divide their goods and items with people.”<sup>71</sup> In late 1924, a European newspaper described the Ikhwan as “the practically communist Ikhwan movement.”<sup>72</sup>

King Abdulaziz once said to British explorer St. John Philby, that “I just need to issue the call, for thousands to come fight under my banner, from Bisha to Najran, and from Ranyah to Tathlith, there is not one among them who would not love to die for the faith, and all of them believe that to flee from the advance would condemn them to Hell.”<sup>73</sup>

This context reveals that, at the time, there emerged a military-ideological army, one that somewhat resembles the Knights Templar from the Middle Ages in Europe, that is, ideologues committed to sacred battle, who have abandoned all the pleasures of life. “Miserable Bedouin life allowed them very few joys and pleasures, and it is no surprise that the Bedouins would seek martyrdom on the battlefield, so their souls will have a place in heaven.”<sup>74</sup>

The Ikhwan were forced to sell their camels and sheep, their primary economic resource, and became largely dependent on the allowances they receive from the *Bayt al-Mal* [treasury]. These government benefits were not compensation for unemployment; they were payment for achieving an important state requirement: military preparation and immediate mobilization. These allowances were known as ‘*ataya* [gifts], and were paid to the sheikhs and emirs of the tribes, their horsemen, and the general population of those living in the settlements (the *hijar*). Their names were recorded in the *Diwan al-Malik* [the Royal Office], periodically presented to the king, and the amount of the gift for each category of people was determined.

### **Forced Guidance and Overruling of the Ruler**

In just a few years, the Ikhwan became a distinguished class in the new state, and they considered themselves guardians of the state’s security and morals. Their growing political and military power generated a type of class superiority and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.63.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.63.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.63.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.66.

<sup>73</sup> *Saudis and the Islamic Solution*, Mohammad Jalal Kishk, p.395.

<sup>74</sup> *The Saudi Brotherhood through Two Decades*, op. cit., p.93.

arrogance, and they began to compete with, and at times surpass, other groups like the religious scholars and town and village elders.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to the Ikhwan's extremism, literal application of Wahhabi principles, and aversion to compromise, they also imposed harsh sentences on anyone negligent or lax in carrying out proper religious behavior.<sup>76</sup> This included being late for prayer, and engaging in behavior forbidden in the eyes of Wahhabism, like smoking, singing, shaving one's beard, wearing a *thawb* [ankle-length garment with long sleeves, similar to a robe] that falls past the ankles, or for women, failure to abide by modest dress, and so on. These "deviations" were dealt with by beating, flogging, or imprisonment.

In some cases, the punishment was death; someone who opposed what the Ikhwan believes was declared an apostate and infidel. In addition to their belief that they are Muslims, the wealth of the infidels who surrounded them was legitimate plunder.

The Ikhwan's extremism and authority over civilians expanded, and became a striking phenomenon, to the extent that the British government, which had a presence at the edge of the region, began to monitor the phenomenon of what it referred to in its reports as the "compulsory guidance" the Ikhwan used against other Muslims. For example, the British Commissioner in Kuwait, H. R. P. Dickson, submitted a memorandum describing the situation as follows: "Until very recently, forced guidance was a tool of faith among the Ikhwan, and these tools of theirs have surely caused discontent between the people of Hejaz and neighboring countries."<sup>77</sup>

Captain Garland wrote that there was a strong objection to "the brutal methods the Ikhwan relied on in order to implement their compulsory guidance and punish wrongdoers, more than an objection to the principles of their school of thought itself. There is no doubt that Bedouins [who had not joined the Ikhwan] were being systematically terrorized through compulsory guidance; compulsory guidance and punishing wrongdoers was carried out to the point of death."<sup>78</sup>

"It became clear to Abdulaziz that the Ikhwan were out of control, that they had become arrogant,"<sup>79</sup> and would use their authority to impose *Shari'ah* by force without asking him for permission, particularly after their impressive military achievements: toppling the Sherif of Hejaz's emirate and the Aal al-Rasheed of Ha'yil's emirate, and suppressing rebellions and defections in the Peninsula's South West. These victories were always attributed to their power, sacrifices, and bravery in combat.

In a situation like this, it was natural for differences, tension, and conflict to arise between the Ikhwan and central authorities in the Emirate. The Ikhwan had already begun to complain about the King himself and reject his modern policies, which were imposed on him by a new reality. The king was keen to obtain international

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.90.

<sup>76</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], op. cit., (8/82), (9/144 and 173).

<sup>77</sup> *The Saudi Brotherhood through Two Decades*, op. cit., p.82.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.83.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.80.

borders by communicating and reaching an understanding with the British government, which dominated neighboring regions at the time. Yet the Ikhwan believed that the true religion should not be limited by a specific geography called the “state”; the authority of the true religion and faith must extend and expand geographically as far as it could, through battle. To these ends, they continued to engage in jihad against the Bedouins and neighboring regions in the South of Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan, impose the *Jizya* [special tax levied on non-Muslims] on them, and raid them, without asking for the king’s permission.

They also rejected the government’s use of certain modern inventions, such as the telegraph, telephones, cars, bicycles, clocks, etc., some believing that such inventions might be a kind of forbidden magic.<sup>80</sup>

They applied *Shari’ah* on people in certain areas, strictly and cruelly, even if it resulted in an attack on the population. They also declared many of the King’s subjects who had entered his state apostates and infidels, relying on many of the Wahhabi religious scholars’ writings and *fatwas*, both past and contemporary, as described above.

### **Vying for Power and a New Wahhabi Discourse**

Senior Wahhabi religious scholars had announced their unconditional allegiance and solidarity with the King and given his modern state their blessing; they saw it as a natural extension of the contract between emir (ruler) and sheikh (religious scholar). When they were forced to intervene, they did so quickly and decisively, so that the situation would not get out of hand. For the first time ever, they found themselves faced with religious resistance from within the Wahhabi movement, from followers who had been their pupils, who had fought beside them against the infidels and idolaters and helped them establish a state based on belief in the Oneness of God [defined in Wahhabi terms]. It was necessary to impose a central authority to regulate religious meaning and interpret Wahhabi teachings, so they would not be open to anyone’s interpretation. The senior religious scholars (descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab or from his well-known, recognized followers) were the ones truly able to issue teachings and *fatwas*. The only way to be saved in the Hereafter was by following their teaching and carrying out their orders. “Whoever is reluctant to learn from them, and does not accept what they say, has refused the legacy of the Messengers, and instead receives the sayings of the ignorant and reckless, those who know nothing of the provisions of the *Shari’ah*,”<sup>81</sup> as “not everyone who is attributed to have knowledge, and wear its garb, should be asked or sought for *fatwas*, so protect your religion from such people.”<sup>82</sup>

The senior Wahhabi scholars also reproached the Ikhwan’s insolence toward King Abdulaziz, which got to the point that they were determined to rebel against him and remove him. The Wahhabi scholars said: “We are guiltless before God of this,

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<sup>80</sup> *Saudis and the Islamic Solution*, op. cit., p.535, and *Of Midnight, the Morning’s Cry*, op. cit., p.205.

<sup>81</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], op. cit., (9/133).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* (8/84).

and of anyone who did, caused or assisted therein. We have not seen anything from Imam Abdulaziz that would require insurrection against him or departure from his service. If he issues any decrees of what is forbidden, that is not justified by *Shari'ah*, the seeker of the truth should only pray for guidance for him, and advise him in a lawful manner.”<sup>83</sup>

The senior religious scholars also noticed that the Ikhwan were personally vying with them for power, mocking them, casting doubt on their integrity, and accusing them of hypocrisy, so they quickly and decisively responded by releasing statements, including the following:

“The following should be noted: what came from many of the ignorant, accusing the scholars and men of religion of hypocrisy and negligence, failing to perform the command that God imposed upon them, concealing what they knew of the truth, and refusing to make it plain: These ignorant people do not know that slandering scholars and men of religion and taking believers’ honor in jest is a deadly poison, a hidden disease, and a clear sin.”<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, that you “were first in great ignorance, and kept the truth at bay, most of your rulers were great idolaters, and the commoners uncouth and evil, you did not know the truth of the religion of Islam, you knew nothing of the truth but your own caprices, and the bloodshed, looting, slashing of wombs, trespassing God’s limits, and other forbidden things and great evils that were among you. Then God guided you towards knowledge of His religion, and towards work to unite it, and to the behavior of the people of Islam and of belief in the Oneness of God, and the books of the Sunnah and *Athaar* [traditions relating the deeds and utterances of the companions of the Prophet], the works of scholars of Islam, conditions have now changed for you, and you are trying to rebel against the Imam, seceding from the people of Islam and departing from their consensus.”<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the Wahhabi religious scholars released, between 1919 and 1920 in particular,<sup>86</sup> a series of collective *fatwas* that instituted a new Wahhabi discourse that fit with the new requirements of a modern Saudi state.

Yet the Ikhwan did not bow to or abide by these new *fatwas*, which they viewed as a coup, and a setback to what they viewed as true Wahhabism. They began to debate with the religious scholars, using the same writings and teachings that Imams of the Wahhabi movement issued during the two previous eras, those of the first and second Saudi emirates.

The religious scholars were forced to declare the Ikhwan unbelievers, no longer part of Islam, and that it was a duty to fight and engage in jihad against them. They issued the following *fatwa*, which said, “The questioner says, they [the Ikhwan] see all Muslims and their guardians as not being in the right, and this is their error, and one of the reasons that they are infidels and outside of Islam... and anyone from among

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. (9/183).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. (9/113).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. (9/185).

<sup>86</sup> Volume VIII of *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], p.83, 84, 422, 480, and Volume IX, p.105, 108, 142.

the people of Nejd who answered their call, and helped them is subject to the same judgment as they are, it is the duty of all Muslims to fight them and engage in jihad against them. Anyone who refuses to engage in jihad against them, and claims they are his brothers, and that they are right, is subject to the same judgment that they are subject to.”<sup>87</sup>

The Ikhwan were apparently bitter about the coup by the senior religious scholars against them. While the religious scholars and their followers were repeatedly invoking the principle of *Al-wala’ wal-bara’* by forbidding any kind of peaceful contact with the idolaters, and even declaring that anyone who was politically pleased with forming an alliance with, and joining, the Ottoman Empire was an unbeliever, we can now see that the king and his advisers—with the blessings of the new Wahhabi religious scholars—were engaging in diplomatic relations with these foreign infidel powers. This was how the Ikhwan saw the situation, according to their vision of the world fueled by old Wahhabi teachings, or what they understood these teachings to mean.<sup>88</sup>

While the religious scholars repeatedly and publicly declared their disavowal and opposition to all sects and schools that were unbelievers or heretics, or made peace with such people, the new senior Wahhabi religious scholars thought it was acceptable for the King to tolerate them and include them in the state—to leave them alone and not force them, but instead simply invite them with wisdom, kindness, and a gradual approach. The Ikhwan, however, rejected what they perceived as “flattery,” “leniency” and “flexibility,” in keeping with the vision they were fed during their intellectual development in the Wahhabi settlements. When the Ikhwan tried to impose the “true faith” and ethical conduct on people by force in some areas, particularly in the Hejaz, the Wahhabi religious scholars condemned their actions and called on them to adopt a more lenient and wise approach, and to ask for permission from the authorities.

### **Wahhabisms: The Old and the New, Manifested Today**

Whatever this religious debate and conflict entailed, and no matter how it ended politically and militarily, it clearly represents the first rebellion and split of the Wahhabi Salafists. Two forms of Wahhabism now emerged: the Wahhabism of the old period, and the Wahhabism of the new period; a Wahhabism committed to a literal interpretation of its founding fathers’ texts, and a Wahhabism that deals with its texts with a more realistic and pragmatic approach.

This split did not end after a decisive military defeat was inflicted on the rebellious groups; old Wahhabi ideas have continued to be passed on from generation to generation up to today. For example, jihadist groups that adopt a violent, combative *Takfiri* approach draw on their ideological sayings, from teachings from the old Wahhabi period. Moreover, most theorists from Al-Qaeda, base their treatises and

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<sup>87</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], op. cit., (9/210).

<sup>88</sup> See the Wahhabi religious scholars’ discussion of the Ikhwan on this issue: (9/157).

interpretations off of writings of that era. When followers of Wahhabism today—now known as activist [*Harakiyya*] Salafism—confront these groups, or extremist Wahhabism, and engage in conflict with them, they are doing nothing more than repeating the same history between the Wahhabism that made peace with the state and allied with it, and the Wahhabism that was hard-lined, rebellious, and combative.

It is a clash of interpretations: it is a conflict over different interpretations of texts from the old period of Wahhabism. It is a constant struggle between two forms of Wahhabism: a Wahhabism that believes in realism and pragmatism, and a Wahhabism that believes in remaining faithful the teachings of the old era, and both forms of Wahhabism claim to be the legitimate representation of the true faith.

Following the teachings of Wahhabism from the old period, and applying old texts that disavowed anyone who allied with the Turkish military as an unbeliever, the Ikhwan called the Saudi state infidel, due to its contact and agreements with the British government. Yet the Ikhwan themselves later permitted their leaders to communicate with the British government, try to enter into accords with them, rely on them, and attempt to trade with them when they lost land after a series of losses and defeats at the hands of King Abdulaziz's troops.<sup>89</sup> So as not to appear contradictory before their followers, they justified this political behavior, saying that they were emulating the Companions of the Prophet when they migrated to Christian Abyssinia and left their infidel clans behind.

This prompted the Wahhabi religious scholars (of the new period) to issue a *fatwa* declaring the Ikhwan infidels, because they communicated with and resorted to the (infidel) British government. "The people in question, Al-Ajman and Al-Duwaish, and those who follow them, there is no doubt that they are unbelievers and apostates, because they have sided with the enemies of God and His Messenger, asked to enter under their domain, and aided them, and they have left Muslim lands and joined the enemies of religion. They are no longer of the people of Islam, and their blood and property is licit."<sup>90</sup> This *fatwa* was issued while these religious scholars themselves were permitting the King to communicate with the (infidel) British government, "because he is the Imam of the Muslims, with their interests in mind, and he must preserve his subjects and authority from foreign countries."<sup>91</sup>

These forms of Wahhabism are two sides of the same coin; each claiming it is the only one to possess absolute religious truth, that it is the sole, legitimate representative of the true faith, that it is the sole reference to understanding proper conduct that will lead to salvation in the afterlife, and that it has the right to produce and direct religious meaning, and apply and impose it in reality over others.

Yet despite all this, for the sake of objectivity and fairness, Wahhabism—in its new manifestations, after engaging in the project of the modern state and its needs, and responding to the pressures of modernity—cannot be placed alongside traditional

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<sup>89</sup> *Kuwait and Her Neighbors*, H. R. P. Dickson: (1/317-337).

<sup>90</sup> *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah* [The Sunni Pearls], op. cit., (9/209).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* (9/158).

Wahhabism, which is still committed to a literal understanding of the teachings of the old era.

## ***Majadheeb*—Individuals Drawn to ISIS**

*Sami Brahem*

The word *majadheeb*—the plural of *majdhub*—refers to a class of people in a state of ecstasy, or whose minds have been possessed, in a delirious or crazed mental state. Sufis consider this a state of passing away from existence and entering into the presence of the creator of existence.

However, in the popular, colloquial sense, *majadheeb* means something closer to mental underdevelopment, and a susceptibility to be led and utilized.

While this class of people is not interested in committing acts of violence, like the group that is the object of this study, the common denominator between them is a crazed mental state and willingness to be led by a sheikh.

In order to understand the mystery of why young people are drawn to the Islamic State, we must understand this group's identity and understand the reasons behind their attraction to ISIS, and why certain groups of young people are more susceptible than others.

### **Who Are the ISIS Sympathizers in Tunisia?**

By ISIS sympathizers we do not mean only those who have pledged their allegiance to the Islamic State, but all movements belonging to the Jihadi Salafist current, whether they are groups tied to Al-Qaeda or groups that have branched off of it. The only difference between them are structural issues related to the question of when the caliphate should be announced, who has the legitimacy to announce that specific event, who has the highest position in the caliphate, and who has legitimate jurisdiction over the regions and decides the status of jihad within them.

Pinpointing this group's identity is difficult: a researcher or observer finds himself or herself before a phenomenon that is complex on all levels, with many facets, labels, aspects, and effects:

- They are a diverse phenomenon, with overlapping kinds of people: Veterans from fronts around the world; prisoners of the anti-terrorism law; people attracted to it since before the revolution; new people attracted to it after the revolution; grassroots from the mosque; prisoners who were attracted to it in prison; people who strayed from what is right, suddenly seeking repentance; repentant followers of the old regime, or interested in the phenomenon, or who have infiltrated it; marginalized people who found support from these groups in the absence of the state or civil society; smugglers in disguise, or those who legitimized their activities through this phenomenon; religious people who have given up all hope of democracy; people with a predisposition to command and leadership; people with a predisposition to heroism and adventure; people influenced by substantive or personal factors, such as kinship or friendship.

- It is a sectarian religious phenomenon, with doctrinal, jurisprudential, and epistemic references, as well as specialized records taken from historic writings and modern and contemporary works.
- It is a proselytizing puritanical phenomenon, which assumes the duty of correcting corrupted beliefs and heretical behaviors in the community.
- It is a political phenomenon, pervaded by an obsession with radically changing the political order through armed jihad.
- It is a social phenomenon, primarily focused on marginalized areas, and consisting particularly of disadvantaged groups that it provides with a solid framework for solidarity, protection, and a sense of belonging.
- It is an informal economic phenomenon, open to smuggling and free acts of cooperation, open to marginalized groups of society, by creating a social incubator for armed revolutionary movements.
- It is a youth phenomenon, where most people aged between teenagers and thirties, including students and women, based on the principle of collaborative volunteering, and social and ideological solidarity.
- It is a phenomenon of associations, formed by a network of public, legal associations, and secret, illegal associations, which engage in social, charitable, legal, proselytizing, educational, and economic functions.
- It is a phenomenon with a legal front organization, with bodies and institutions that have legal status, which entitles them to engage in legal transactions. It also has activities not subject to legal oversight, which are partially public and partially secret.
- It is a media phenomenon that is active and highly productive in the virtual and digital realms. In high-tech fields, it benefits from using all media, effects, platforms, and high-quality media tools in its effective technical creation and production.
- It is a local, national phenomenon, with a deep extension abroad, emotionally, intellectually, ideologically, and behaviorally, as it belongs to an extensive jihadist ideology in terms of geography and the range of its global jihadist missions.
- It is a phenomenon highly able to deeply penetrate individuals' fragile psychological, emotional, educational, mental, and organizational structures, with a comprehensive utopian project.
- It is a phenomenon that vacillates between peace and armed violence, struggling between binaries, the most important of which are: armed jihad, social incubators, creating overwhelming chaos, and creating a new structure by completely demolishing the existing one.
- It is a phenomenon whose cultural and intellectual existence is based on literature<sup>92</sup> created outside Tunisia's cultural and intellectual context. It has

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<sup>92</sup> This literature includes: *The Management of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage Through Which the Islamic Nation Will Pass*, Abu Bakr Naji, published by the Islamic studies and Research Center, undated (likely after the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001), 112 pages.

\* *The Reality and Future of the Jihadist Current*, by Abu Saeed al-Aamly, published by the Tawhid and Jihad Platform, 2011 / 1432 AH.

been unable to produce a local culture that engages with the specifics of Tunisian reality, with the exception of some refined jurisprudential and proselytizing discourses. Students of the phenomenon continue to depend on material written specifically for Tunisia by sheikhs and proselytizers ignorant of the country's religious, cultural, and societal reality and specificities.

## **Susceptibility**

Through field communication with students of this phenomenon in the field, we have observed two factors that greatly contributed to people's susceptibility to being attracted to ISIS' "narrative," that belonging to ISIS does not simply mean belonging to a political organization with plans, goals, and programs on the ground. The whole narrative is a story, or dream come true, wherein social compensation, emotional fulfillment, cultural and religious dimensions, and exaltation in the afterlife all intersect.

These two factors are social marginalization and cultural marginalization.

## ***Social Marginalization***

It is clear that the distribution of people who belong to ISIS closely maps onto social marginalization and exclusion from development, especially in the border regions where terrorism intersects with smuggling. There, terrorist and smuggling networks exchange services, benefits, and burdens, including smuggling arms, smuggling people, supplies, protection, and surveillance, and also inform each other about risks.

Sometimes smugglers end up becoming leaders in terrorist organizations, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who was known as "Mokhtar Marlboro," for his expertise in smuggling that brand of cigarettes.

This group of people has experienced unemployment, poverty, deprivation, and exclusion from development; they are the most susceptible, and more likely than others to be attracted to ISIS for the following reasons:

1. A fragile psychological and social state and disturbed personality, which leads to vulnerability in the individual and social immunity that should ideally keep people from being misled by appealing discourse and the temptations of smuggling and terrorist networks. These networks represent an open market, as well as financial, emotional, and symbolic benefits in the absence of the state, while the political class and intellectual elite are preoccupied with fragile agreements about the shape of the new political system and democratic transition.

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\* *The World on the Threshold of Chaos*, by Abu Abdullah Khaled al-Adm, aka Abu Obeida, published by the al-Fajr Center for Media, written on November 2011 / 1432 AH.

\* Strategy note written by Abdullah Bin Mohammed, published online by al-Ma'sada Media Foundation (the voice of the Islamic al-Shomoukh Network) on October 5, 2011 / 1432 H, 55 pages including 4 strategy notes.

2. Self-contempt and frustration, resulting from feelings of “humiliation,” or hatred of others, and class, regional and social inequality.
3. A lack of feeling of belonging to the state and nation, which do not offer a life of dignity and social justice for citizens, as the state is absent in a number of ways. Basic facilities and infrastructure are lacking—and the state’s only presence is in its security and guard units, and the remnants of the old regime.
4. No sense of value or meaning, the most dangerous feelings a person can have in a fragile social state, and feelings of inferiority, where an individual feels his existence is meaningless, and that there is nothing tying him to reality, a specific place, the present day, society, and the country that he legally belongs to. The backwardness of swearing allegiance to another state—ISIS—is a condition of acute schizophrenia. (For example, should we consider Tunisians who pledged allegiance to a foreign nation not recognized by the rest of the world, while still living in their home country, as renegades, naturalized citizens, subjects, expatriates, immigrants, operatives, or spies?) Meanwhile, they consider themselves conquering heroes coming to their countries and peoples.
5. An overwhelming desire for symbolic, emotional, or physical destruction or revenge, against oneself or others, which is a natural result of everything mentioned above. These impulses take on a variety of forms as well, including social violence, drugs, illegal immigration, and rap music.

Involvement in ISIS is nothing more than a desire to enact collective revenge under the guise of religion—revenge on the entire existing political system in the anthropological sense, including the entire social order, in the name of “eliminating falsehood, fighting tyranny, and establishing a righteous state, or caliphate, according to the method of the Prophet.”

This is a form of rebirth, based on the complete destruction of the old.

### ***Cultural Marginalization***

A close look at socially marginalized regions indicates that they are also culturally marginalized, regions that have been excluded from cultural development or investment from the state, civil society, or the intellectual and cultural elite. These vast areas lack cultural facilities like theaters, cinemas, libraries, cultural centers, youth centers, and spaces for recreation, sports, dialogue, and communication between young people and the intellectual and cultural elite.

This exclusion does not only affect young people who have dropped out of school in the country’s interior. It also affects a large number of students at science faculties, and university graduates who have not studied literature, philosophy, or the humanities since secondary school.

In contrast to this marginalization, young people find themselves face to face with ISIS’ attractive discourse, with its religious, cultural, and political content, its symbols, sheikhs, and multimedia, its captivating and influential forms, trusted religious discourse, Internet savviness, social media, and intellectual and cultural materials, available to all without barriers.

## **ISIS' Attraction Strategy**

This field study of the phenomenon of people drawn to ISIS (Majadheeb) is consistent with what sociological studies have said about religious phenomena, including the influences and information that help shape them. This is done with a methodology created by religious sociologist Robert Merton in his book *Structure Sociale Anomie et Déviance*,<sup>93</sup> which divides the sociological phenomenon's specific factors into two parts: belonging, which is related to belonging to a specific class, region, and family; and reference points of authority tied to cultural and intellectual backgrounds. Here, the second part is shaped by a religious phenomenon, sociologically speaking.

Thus, we can distinguish between social, psychological, and economic factors on one hand, and between referential factors related to intellectual and ideological references. ISIS has strategies for captivating and attracting people on both levels.

## **Before Joining ISIS**

### ***On the Social Level***

To the people it attracts, ISIS provides a range of vital social services, which vary in value. In the absence of the state and civil society, these are significant both materially and morally, in many regions and for many classes of society. These include:

1. Reintegrating social groups who have been in and out of prison on drug or violent offenses. These social groups are highly vulnerable, and lack the ability to rebuild their lives or embark on a new life path through "university degrees, work experiences, and influential relationships." They find themselves stuck between options of recidivism, illegal immigration, and selling cheap or contraband goods. Reintegrating them, by providing them livelihoods within an informal or parallel economic system that covers their basic needs and can open the door to marriage.

The direct impact of these services is integrating these people within bonds of emotional solidarity packaged in religious sentiment. It fills a role of emotional and financial support and provides the conditions for them to naturally, organically integrate later on.

2. Scores of young people have gone from being hated, marginalized, lost, and crushed on the margins of society, to becoming significant and esteemed personalities with symbolic nicknames like "Abu so-and-so." They now have dignity, respect, a group of people around them, and supporters; they have goals and objectives they are working towards, that the media takes an interest in,

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Merton, *Structure Sociale, Anomie et Déviance*.

follows and tries to engage in dialogue with—after they have spent a long time feeling useless, meaningless, and despised.

3. Perhaps the most important factor in this regard is that from their initial attraction, they come to belong to a new narrative, one that integrates personal existence with objective existence; religious ideology with the social, economic, and political; the local with the regional and global; the here and now with the spiritual afterlife. Of course, this is a narrative dominated by the stylistic, emotional, imaginary, and utopian; it is not food for thought or a means of convincing people rationally, but aimed at those who are emotionally hungry and thus receptive.

These factors explain the mystery of ISIS' influence and ability to attract people, the size and reach of its influence, and how it has entered people's hearts and minds.

### ***On the Cultural-Referential Level***

ISIS was a vision, conception, explanation, and idea before it was an organization or a state.

The power of this vision lies in its simplicity and flatness, i.e. that it is without complications. It does not require much discussion or mental effort to grasp it. It is not elitist, but open to all, within a strategy that is reliable, whole, closed, and based on simplistic binaries of the world, values, ideas, and people, so that mental structure and discourse are composed of sharp dichotomies: belief vs. unbelief, truth vs. falsehood, *Dar al-Iman* [realm of faith] vs. *Dar al-Kufr* [realm of unbelief], land of *Da'wa* [call to and propagation of Islam] vs. land of jihad [where it is permissible to engage in jihad], and sacred vs. defiled.

This strategy is based on a set of illusions that constitute the mystery of ISIS' power and the foundation of its appeal and success in attracting and mobilizing supporters. These illusions include:

- *The illusion that theory is identical to reality*

Theory is supposed to be an extrapolation of reality, wherein partial or total extrapolation leads to the formation of general rules, or a standard approach, that can help understand the course of history, or analyze and predict. Presumably, theories change as information changes, and with methodological and intellectual limits. By contrast, these groups imagine that legitimate knowledge is bound within the limits of their vision, which exactly mirrors reality.

- *The illusion that interpretation is identical to the text*

In contrast to ritualistic worship that aspires to stasis, where it is assumed that all other questions are a circle of interpretation and *ijtihad* [independent reasoning], where the interpreted meaning does not correspond with the text.

- *The illusion that the interpretation matches the author of the text's intention*

Treating interpretation as sacred, and assuming that it corresponds with God's intention, exclusively and absolutely, that it is exactly what God intended: therefore those who slaughter are carrying out God's will on earth, by fate and divine decree.

- *The illusion of universality*

Disregarding the specific nature of things, and instead generalizing them. For example, using the words of the Prophet, "I come to you with slaughter," when these words were limited and confined to the specific time, place, and context in which they were spoken. When they are universalized and applied to other times and places more widely, the meaning is distorted. In the Prophet's message to the Ummah, "I come to you with slaughter" or "Prayers and peace to the one who God sent with the sword as a mercy to the worlds," the sword becomes an actual sword, and decapitating people becomes mercy!

- *The illusion of selectively understanding texts*

This is a means of arguing by collecting verses of the Qur'an that support the vision that groups of ISIS' supporters have adopted, and disregarding other texts or other interpretations of those verses. Thus, more than 50 verses about mercy and forgiveness, lack of hatred, control, or domination, and calls for peace and dialogue as the best way forward, are abrogated or cancelled out by other verses.

- *The illusion of the literal embodiment of texts*

This is one of the most dangerous illusions, wherein meaning is reduced to the text's literal meaning, word by word, and the verses of the Qur'an and *Hadiths* [sayings of the Prophet] are atomized, each viewed separately. Thus the words of the Prophet, "You are ordered to fight people until they testify that there is no god but God," according to a literal understanding, means that one must fight non-Muslims until they convert. The words of the Prophet, "Whoever changes his religion, kill him," according to the same understanding, mean that anyone who departs from the tenets of Islam—in actuality, or who is interpreted or suspected to have done so—must be killed.

- *The illusion of a singular religious truth*

All the referential approaches above entail a singular conception of the truth, not formed through objectivity, consensus, intellectual discussion, agreement, or contracts between different parts of society, but instead through monopolization, in which one group speaks in the name of divine truth.

- *The illusion of an absolute divine mandate*

In exchange for a mandate within the bounds of what is known and possible, individuals from these groups—who feel an inflated sense of absolute responsibility for human tragedies, and a duty to transport people from injustice into the light—engage in a sort of neurotic impersonation of the messiah or

Mahdi. These feelings are what give jihad its global dimension<sup>94</sup> and create feelings of solidarity and emotional connection, despite vast distances. This is the impetus to prepare and respond to the general call to arms.

- *The illusion that religious legitimacy overrules society's popular will*

All the illusions above justify the legitimacy of ISIS supporters implementing what they believe to be the divine will for social, political, behavioral, and value systems, without going through societies' popular will.

- *The illusion of representing Shari'ah and being God's proxy, to execute his judgments*

This is an illusion that comes out of the preceding illusions, where individuals and groups among ISIS' supporters are characterized as the proxy of divine will, the designated speakers in God's name and on his behalf.

- *The illusion that linguistic orders are identical to Shar'iah commands*

This is an illusion based on the idea that the linguistic form of every command, or in other words, any time a verb is placed in the imperative, turns it into an obligatory *Shar'iah* ruling, i.e., an actual divine command. This is a superficial perception of *Shar'iah* rulings, where the ruling is identical to the discourse. But it does not work that way. *Shar'iah* rulings are formed from an objective, rational perspective on the text, within its broader textual context (determined according to levels of clarity) and within the actual context of its circulation, as determined by the circumstances of revelation [*Asbab al-Nuzul*] and the interest achieved.

- *The illusion of the "People of Truth's" absolute justice*

Moving from an individual, mental, emotional status, where one has the delusion that he possesses the truth, to a collective, combative, structural position, where justice is reduced to its epistemological, ideological, legitimate sense, possessed by one sect that sees itself as the people of truth, righteousness, divine legitimacy, who will then become the people of valor [*Al-Shauka*].<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> "Global jihad" is a new term that appeared in the mid-1990s, when Osama bin Laden declared that the United States, and the West in general, are Muslims' greatest enemy, and urged his followers to fight this enemy, regardless of where or how. This shifted focus from the "near enemy" (local apostate states) to the "far enemy" (the West, or the Zionist-Crusader alliance), and as a result, supporters of global jihad began to strike Western interests around the world, including in the Muslim world. After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, there was a debate within the global jihadist current about the relationship between "internationalizing" jihad and globalized jihad, which aims to confront the "global Zionist-Crusader alliance," or national jihad, which aims to bring down what they term as "apostate regimes," who they consider agents of this global alliance.

<sup>95</sup> For the creator of the theory of management of savagery, *al-shauka* [literally "valor, élan, might"] means faith-based contract of clientage, in other words, that everyone in a group or region of savagery, no matter how minor, has everyone else' loyalty. Likewise, he is loyal to everyone else; he would sacrifice himself for them, as they would for him. On this basis, a special kind of loyalty tied to the group is created, wherein the ideological mixes with the emotional, behavioral, and organizational, in something called *al-shauka*. The goal of this is that they promise their lives to confronting the enemy, and thus achieve solidarity, trust, and collective power, that is only created through what the author terms achieving *al-shauka*.

- *The illusion of being a stranger and a minority that should not fear the path of truth*

The people of the truth are a minority who must not fear the righteous path; the few who have chosen this path are strangers bringing back the glory of Islam. This comes from an ahistorical understanding of the prophetic saying, “Islam began as something strange and will revert to being strange as it began, so give glad tidings to the strangers.” This perception reinforces isolationism and differentiation from the rest of society, as opposed to the Qur’anic principle of mutual knowledge, and the principle of Prophetic harmony and fellowship.

- *The illusion of monopolizing ‘bestness’*

Bestness, or the quality of being the best of peoples, for ISIS supporters, is limited to a specific place and time, and to a specific group of people that must be followed in order to be included in it. This comes from a limited understanding of the Prophetic saying, “The people of my generation are the best, then those who follow them, and then those who follow them, and then those who follow them.” This entrenched a gradually deteriorating vision of history, and rigidity in the way that the pious predecessors understood and applied religion. The quality of being the best stopped with them, and decreased throughout the course of history, and then was limited to people who followed and emulated the pious predecessors. What the Prophet’s saying referred to, however, was being the best by virtue of being the closest generation to Him in time, a select and unearned form of bestness.

- *The illusion of monopolizing the path to salvation in this world*

Everything mentioned above gives believers a steady, general sense of contentment and assurance. It gives them faith that this behavior will grant them salvation in this world from all evils, harm, deviations from what is right, delusions, and obstacles placed by political and intellectual wrongdoers in the path of those who believe in the Oneness of God, to keep them from carrying out the divine will.

- *The illusion of monopolizing the way to salvation in the hereafter*

This represents the pinnacle of setting oneself up above the divine essence, whereby they decide that they and their followers of this approach will be saved in the hereafter, by their victory over idolatry or through their martyrdom. This is because they are people of paradise, or people who have been promised paradise and its blessings—the most iconic of which are the *hour al-‘Aen*—maidens “sheltered in tents, no man or jinn ever touched them before”—who have been preparing themselves for the Mujahideen since time immemorial.

- *The illusion of the caliphate as the sole form of legitimate political organization*

The caliphate has gone from a historical, troubled and incomplete potential political system from the time after the Prophet and the Middle Ages, to a religious doctrine and *Shar’iah* ruling that Muslims are bound by. For its sake,

they must engage in all types of jihad: “defensive jihad” [*jihad al-dafa*] and “offensive jihad” [*jihad al-talab*], and national and global jihad.”

- *The illusion of legitimate violence*

Violence under the guise of jihad is a way to establish the caliphate state under the name of global and national jihad. This is sacred violence, boiled down in every ISIS narrative, coded and weighted with the meaning, symbolism, and values mentioned above, implicitly stated in jihadist songs, and filmed with effects and high production values.

### **Consequences of These Illusions**

These illusions that make up ISIS’ lessons naturally and automatically entail certain consequences, the most important of which are:

1. The victorious group and the surviving sect closes itself off. Even if the whole is dispersed, and becomes individual “lone wolves” with emotional, religious, and organizational links.
2. Casting accusations of unbelief [*Takfir*] heresy, sinfulness [*Tafsiq*], and apostasy on transgressors, and declaring that their blood, money and honor are licit.
3. Dissociating from society, behaviorally, mentally and emotionally, and limiting how open one is to the pragmatic requirements of life; instead, just creating a supportive popular echo chamber.
4. “*Al-Wala’ wa l-Bara*” [loyalty and disavowal] is a doctrine, behavior, and psychological construct: disavowal of the nation, society, and transgressors, and loyalty only to the surviving group and victorious sect.
5. Engaging in strategies of violence: “the project according to ISIS’ religious interpretation.”

### **ISIS’ Attractive Concept: “An Imaginary Mental Image”**

In the eyes of the people it attracts, the Majadheeb, ISIS is a dream brought to life in reality, a means of achieving its members’ dreams. These dreams include:

1. The Prophet’s glad tidings, and ISIS’ promise of the establishment of the caliphate state according to the Prophet’s approach.
2. Going back to a time of conquests, heroism, epic battles and plunder.
3. A new state with a mandate over a new people, new rulers and officials, without going through debates or testing its capability by recognized standards.
4. High-paying employment in the new state, without having to wait one’s turn or climbing the social ladder.
5. Feelings of pride, self-esteem, and honor for belonging to the minority restoring the glory of Islam, raising its banners, applying its *Shari’ah* and establishing its state.

6. Moving from the margins, from the “disadvantaged marginal areas” to establishing a new center, “the center of a new state / the caliphate state,” where they are the leaders, rulers, and proprietors.

### **Summary: Narrative and Strategies of Attraction**

All the analysis above can be summarized in a captivating, magical theme: *overwhelming chaos as a primary gateway to establishing the Islamic caliphate*. Here, chaos in its broadest manifestation means the entire collapse of the state and its institutions, and the disappearance of its fundamental functions (including security, food, vital services), limiting it to a minimum level of functions, and establishing a simple lifestyle.

Chaos has a structural role in attracting young people into its plan of building a caliphate; it is a rite of passage: from nothingness to rebirth through Messianic acts of salvation.

In addition to purifying its members, and saving the world and humankind from the evils of the tyrannical state and its leaders, ISIS opens the door for the faithful to demonstrate their talents and abilities in the caliphate state’s leadership.

The book *The Management of Savagery*, by Abu Bakr Naji, is one of the most important texts that made overwhelming chaos or savagery<sup>96</sup> a foundation for the establishment of the caliphate state. People’s faith in chaos increased after the revolutions of the Arab Spring, which overthrew authoritarian regimes, shook totalitarian countries to their foundation, and opened the door to chaos.

This book is considered an *ijtihad* [independent reasoning] within Al-Qaeda’s literature and strategic plans. Many jihadist proselytizers around the world, including Al-Qaeda’s leadership, hold it in esteem and have adopted its insights and plans.

The narrative of limited chaos or savagery lies at the heart of ISIS’ attraction strategy. It is what integrates all these heterogeneous groups and fuses them within a new project of a social and political system, and of emotional, mental, and cultural character building.

All these means and techniques of communication and media and attractions are tools to influence and convince people, to create an impressive emotional world for jihad. This includes icons, chants, stories, and tales of heroism, victory, empowerment, and overcoming enemies, depicting a world of Mujahideen in the mountains, valleys, and rugged terrain, scenes of fighting and inflicting losses to the

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<sup>96</sup> Savagery is the word used by Abu Bakr Naji, author of the book *The Management of Savagery*. By this he means the chaos that will permeate the limbs of a given state or region, if it is still in the grip of ruling authorities. The author believes that this type of chaos would be “savage,” and that the local residents would suffer, and therefore plea to Al-Qaeda—which would take the place of the ruling authorities, paving the way for the establishment of the Islamic State—to improve the “management of savagery” so that conditions would stabilize, noting that savagery is preferable to idolatrous rule under democracy, however great the disadvantages of savagery, i.e., widespread chaos.

enemy, and especially footage of martyrdom, where people give their lives with a smile on their face, and their bodies are buried between rocks and snow on the battlefield. All this is done to create a coherent narrative, consistent across audio and video clips, that ranges from jihadist chants and tactical speeches to scenes of killing and martyrdom.

These are stories that both narrate and quench young religious people's thirst for models and examples.<sup>97</sup> These are their stars and icons, whereas other groups of youth turn to the arts, sports, and politics for stars and icons to look up to.

These are stories narrated, recited, sung and chanted in high-quality production,<sup>98</sup> passed between the Mjadheeb drawn to ISIS with passion and longing for victory, martyrdom, and *houri* virgins. This is all in the absence of educational, cultural, and intellectual models from the nation-state, its institutions, bodies, and elite, which no longer represent an attractive narrative able to give them a sense of belonging and fulfillment.

One could even argue that the near-complete lack of care from the state, civil society, and the cultural and academic elite makes ISIS a natural and necessary response—in the sociological understanding of “necessary”—to the post-independence state's failure to shape young people culturally, educationally, and religiously. Culture is generally an urban phenomenon, but it is not available to all urban residents; people from marginalized working class neighborhoods in the capital, its suburbs, and other big cities are excluded from it. Culture has remained the preserve of fortunate or elite groups, while institutions to shape the young are lacking, as are authorities to arbitrate religious matters and respond to questions and challenges young people face.

We can consider the success of ISIS' attraction strategies in penetrating the minds and emotions of young people, who were raised in the schools and universities of post-independence Tunisia, a critical indication of how weak the nation-state's steps towards modernization have been, and how weak the elite are in fields of education and culture. They failed to acclimatize modernity within people's culture and identities. This needs to be quickly redressed by creating comprehensive strategies to combat social, cultural, and educational marginalization, on the basis that this is a peaceful framework that will make the security plans to combat this phenomenon effective and efficient. No nation, regardless of its policies, can dedicate a security guard unit to every road, street corner, alleyway, facility, and building, and guard every citizen day and night, throughout the year, in public spaces and private ones.

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<sup>97</sup> Groups of young religious Tunisian people in the 2000s and on found an example in an impressive Jihadi Salafist figure, who represented all contemporary Muslim youth's aspirations, healed their wounds related to civilization, and remarkably embodied a model of Islamic heroism, stories of honor, chivalry, manliness, magnanimity, and sacrifice for the sake of faith. These values were embodied only in historical figures from the early and middle Islamic history. This Jihadi Salafist icon is Samer bin Saleh bin Abdullah Al-Suwailem, famously known in Jihadist circles by his pseudonym “Khattab,” and his story is found in most primary research documents and investigations about Jihadist Salafism. The tape that contained his story and jihad, “Russian Hell,” was an essential tool for attracting people, mobilizing them, and making them emotionally charged.

<sup>98</sup> One of the most famous ISIS singers, Abu Hajar al-Hadrami, whose songs fuel fighters' zeal.

Even if such a broad scope of surveillance were possible, this would not be able to penetrate people's minds and feelings, and engage in the same level of surveillance.

It is necessary to invest in citizens' general awareness: their cultural, religious, intellectual, systematic, and educational awareness. This type of investment, though it may seem long-term compared to the urgent dangers on the ground today, is necessary as a start.

Note too, that this sort of strategic investment has an effective, lasting impact, and is cost-effective.

Most importantly, its effects are not measured in time. It is sufficient to have a real, serious, national effort, in which educators, academics, and religious, cultural, media, and civil society actors all participate to create greater awareness, a national wake-up call, and spiritual awakening. These things uphold values of life, freedom, human dignity, physical and emotional inviolability, and the right to dissent: they uphold principles of knowledge, good treatment, and charitable works as values that are universal modern values and Islamic values at the same time. Such an effort would be enough to invest consciously and collectively, in record time, in the immunity that will protect young people from being blindly drawn into ISIS' mesmerizing discourse and falling under its sway.



# **Propaganda and Communications: Tools of the Penetration of Da'esh**

*Marco Lombardi*

## **Communications and Hybrid Warfare**

Since the establishment of its Caliphate in June 2014, Da'esh (ISIS or the Islamic State, IS) has additionally drawn attention to itself due to the specific communications methods it has utilized. In actual fact, terrorism has always, by its very nature, used communications as a means for conveying threats. Al-Qaeda was no exception: Al-Qaeda used communications as a tool in the fight, knowing exactly how best to make use of new media technology to its advantage. Since it began, Al-Qaeda has been structured with members dedicated to the production and dissemination of media products, enlisting specific competences that enabled it to progress from the first dissemination of raw videos filmed on the field by "embedded Jihadists" to videos enhanced with effects, chroma key, girth, fade-outs, and everything else technology had to offer, through to the use of the first social platforms.

But the Islamic State stressed the importance of communications in declaring its project, also in the masterful, evolutionary use of its name. In actual fact, the objective of the Islamic State is to establish itself and gain recognition as a state, first by the global Muslim community and then by the international community, and this can be clearly seen from the use of the name: ISI when its origins stemmed primarily from Iraq (Islamic State of Iraq), ISIL or ISIS when it extended to Syria and the Levant, incorporating the mythical and symbolic references to the Sham<sup>99</sup> (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Sham, the Arabic word for the Levant) into its name, and finally IS, simply and effectively the "Islamic State," when all geographic reference was superfluous in the supranational affirmation of the Caliphate. Therefore, a name that is of media interest due to its geographical-political connotations and because it is explicitly programmatic, explaining Islam's objective in the "State."

Since its very creation, IS has expressed its institutional afflatus in constituting a state between states, unique among the Jihadist groups closest to Al-Qaeda also in its organizational form, which envisaged the institution of provinces. In actual fact,

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<sup>99</sup> What we know as Syria today is only part of the Greater Syria (Al-Sham region, or the Levant): for the more radical Islamists, Syria is understood as the Greater Syria between the East coast of the Mediterranean and the River Euphrates, from the border of the Arabian desert through to Toros Dağları, the mountain chain to the South of Turkey. It more or less corresponds to the current states of Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Israel, and South Turkey. Traditionally, this area is called "Sham" (or "Al-Shaam") or the "Levant," filled with evocation for Jihad: "Muhammad says: 'You will be split up into groups of armies. One army will be in Al-Shaam, one army in Iraq, and one army in Yemen'" (Abdulla Ibn Hawala). In short, for each Muslim, Syria is part of a sort of "holy geography" and, for a radical Islamists, it becomes the ideal, precious land in which to exercise Jihad in a violent manner.

the evolution of the Islamic State shows the progression of a criminal organization that becomes an entity controlling extensive strips of territory, including some important major cities of Syria and Iraq, and which offers a diversified range of bureaucratic and administrative services. Of these, for example, it offers "security and justice" with a system of order in conflict zones for populations that have only known the chaos of war and conflict between competitor factions in the last four years. It has also structured a sort of state administration with its own budget (it has declared that it coins its own currency in silver and gold) obtained from tax: expenses to go to school, fines for traffic violations, waste disposal. In addition to the income from the smuggling of oil and antiquities, robberies or trafficking of people, weapons and drugs. This state-like evolution of IS in Iraq and Syria is also a model through which to promote the development of the Islamic State organization in other countries, through its affiliates. Such development would presumably involve an initial stage of adhesion and loyalty to the Caliphate, a subsequent increase in military actions before then taking consolidated form in the application of the administrative model.

In the development of this project, communications is particularly important, also because IS has managed, perhaps more successfully than those fighting it, to fall into the new framework of the so-called "Hybrid Warfare," the way in which the "Third World War" takes place. The President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, declared on Wednesday, August 19, 2015: "Terrorism, also driven by fanatical distortions of faith in God, is seeking to introduce the seeds of a third world war into the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa. (...)." Almost exactly one year earlier (August 18, 2014), Pope Francis, during his return flight from South Korea, declared: "We have entered the third world war, only that it is fought in pieces, in chapters," then declaring the brutality of non-conventional wars, which have reached "a frightful level of cruelty." The two austere, tranquil characters just mentioned would appear to have understood the new geopolitical stage characterized by Hybrid Warfare better than many others: a multitude of stages of conflict in which different players (armies, conventional members, terrorists, organized crime, NGOs, media, etc.) maintain conflicting relations without sharing any system of regulations. To put it simply: a new form of diffused, pervasive, delocalized warfare of which neither the start nor end are declared, in which all armies are potentially involved by groups with or without uniforms, of which terrorism is an important player.<sup>100</sup> It is the new method of conflict of the globalized world, in which even local wars are reciprocally in order of inter-dependency and potentially coherent with an individual strategic project: this form of conflict would appear to be present and updated in the IS growth route, with a great deal more awareness than is expressed by the rather non-cohesive responses of the various alliances fighting it.

Therefore, hybrid warfare as a general context and project for institutionalization as a specific context have qualified the IS strategy since its very beginnings and, above all, the processes in which it has played such a leading role during this first year of

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<sup>100</sup> The concept of Hybrid Warfare has recently been investigated, above all by NATO, following Russia's intervention in the Ukraine. For more information, see: [www.nato.it](http://www.nato.it)

crucial start-up, when the prioritized tools used were: territorial penetration, behavior consolidating its presence in the Levant, and media penetration, focused on propaganda and recruitment.

### **Some Examples of Communications**

Amazement has, since the very start, qualified the attention paid to communication by Islamists: an amazement due to the insistence on the communications technologies used by the Jihad Majors. But the real innovation of IS is that for the first time, we find ourselves facing leadership that is competent in the use of the various media tools, not only the techniques, as part of a more complex political and military governance of consolidation of radical Islam within a territory.

*In so-called hybrid warfare, in which players and battlefields have become increasingly varied, communications has taken on a key role that goes well beyond traditional "psychological warfare operations."* Indeed, it was no coincidence that in April 2015, the British army formed its first and only brigade of specialists for "Internet combat." This is the Seventy-Seventh Brigade, already identified by the nickname of "Twitter Troops," which will have the task of fighting the pervasion of IS, above all on social media: it is an important step forward made in military combat strategies that, for the first time, are starting specific kinetic activities in the virtual world (in this case, unconventional, non-lethal combat actions) with specific combat objectives.

In fighting IS, the study of communications becomes particularly important. In actual fact, it is useful to remember that all communications processes provide information on the objectives and strategies of the source of the communications; the understanding of production techniques (competences and instruments) provides information on the human resources involved and the technological needs for production; the study of dissemination techniques (infrastructures and logistics) tells us about the type of public use channels and about the skills and media organization of the source; the message, how it is articulated and structured, tells us about linguistic and symbolic codes and, therefore, the culture that binds the source to the public; the analysis of addressees helps us define the profiles, in this case, of aspiring Jihadists and supporters. This is particularly true if the communications produced is better: if, therefore, for IS, communications is a strategic asset, the communications of IS is also a potential vulnerability for those fighting it.

Below are some specific examples of recent communications.

#### ***1. Relationships with Organized Crime***

There has been a confirmed relationship between organized crime and terrorism for some time: it is a connection of "mutual exploitation" of different operating procedures that converge in the interests of "doing business." The whole of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region shows a convergence of networks, above all the North African area, which makes exchanges between organized crime

and terrorism simple and useful. The Libya case is symbolic of this: on the ground, trafficking of weapons, drugs, clandestine migrants, and goods cross paths. The weaving is functional in numerous forms: for example, the terrorist groups act as service providers, guaranteeing logistics and security, regardless of the materials transported; or migrants are used as drug carriers, and so on.<sup>101</sup> One clear example is the presence of the organization in certain areas of Mauritania and Mali, where it provides drug trafficking from Latin America with logistical support, through the use of improvised landing strips created in the desert. The convoys that unload and carry the load towards the North African coasts are then escorted by the Jihadists themselves. Intelligence sources estimate that there are approximately 20,000 fighting militants, not necessarily IS, involved directly in the trafficking, as well as an important involvement of Tuareg and Tebu groups, semi-nomadic ethnic groups who have always controlled illegal cross-border trade. It is therefore a mutually beneficial exchange with increasingly integrated organizations and organizational confines that have waned above all in North Africa. What is interesting is the confirmation that this exchange takes place on a strategic basis, and that IS is aware of this: it is estimated that in September, through the illegal migration routes, between 100 and 200 Boko Haram militants have already transferred to fight for IS in Libya.

The Caliphate itself informed us of this strategic awareness in the Cantlie article published in IS' Dabiq Magazine (issue 9 of Saturday, May 23, 2015; pp. 74–77) entitled "*The Perfect Storm*," where an attack with radiological material in the United States was threatened. An attack that the author himself defined as part of a "*scenario [that] is far-fetched*." What is more interesting is the conscious declaration of the perfect integration of IS with the circuits of crime: IS uses the money to corrupt and purchase nuclear power in Pakistan; with the network of Mujahideen, goods are transported to Libya, Nigeria, and then Western Africa; here, through the Colombia drug network via sea; then North, through the clandestine immigration channels to the United States. The network and relationships between crime and terrorism is therefore consolidated and is an important tool for the penetration, stabilization, and enrichment of IS.

## **2. Hegira: Migration, Foreign Fighters, and Colonies**

Dabiq is the English-language magazine distributed by IS, which has published 14 issues so far. The March 2015 issue, number eight, was titled "*The Call to Hijrah*." It is a call to migration, packed with the usual references to Islamic doctrine,<sup>102</sup> to drive Muslims who see themselves in the proposal of the Islamic State to flow into its ranks: this is the revelation of one of the penetration strategies of IS, with

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<sup>101</sup> For example, according to the estimates of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the cocaine that is transported via the desert towards Europe is approximately 14% of the total, equal to 1.3 billion dollars. The weapons recovered after the Tuareg rebellions are fewer than 4 thousand for more than 12 thousand combatants mobilized, those from the Ghaddafi arsenal number more than 450 thousand.

<sup>102</sup> The Hegira (Hijrah) of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE.

multiple consequences and faces. In fact, it generally includes both the Hegira (or Hijrah), understood as the migration towards the Islamic State, and the Jihad in the countries of origin. The call to the Balkans, an important land of expansion for the Caliphate, is particularly symbolic for both these meanings: on May 5, 2015, through its main production house, the al-Hayat Media Center, IS released a video specifically focused on those populations, with particular attention paid to Bosnia-Herzegovina, entitled: "*Honor is in Jihad. A Message to the People of the Balkans.*" The aim was clear: to move the Muslims of the Balkans and drive them to join IS, or fight for IS at home, with all means available. The "migratory project" of IS is articulated: in a first stage, it above all envisaged the recruitment of foreign fighters, intended as fighters willing to die on the battlefield or go back to perpetrate attacks in their countries of origin. But at a later, more recent stage, it encouraged the recruitment of "fighters," as technicians and experts, whose work took place behind the scenes, to organize the communications, logistics, and services of the state. Together with them, it began to attract women, often to marry the fighters, pursuing a plan to colonize the lands, establishing a homogeneous population that shares the radical Islamic vision, but is multi-ethnic and diverse in origin. Precisely during this latter phase, in the context of hybrid warfare, IS began exploiting the major migratory flows generated by the ethnic cleansing pursued in the occupied lands and, more generally, the situation of conflict. These flows above all weaken Europe, facilitating its fragmentation, and the Middle Eastern countries subjected to a migratory pressure that has now reached almost unsustainable levels; collecting money by means of the trafficking of people; exploiting the flow routes to have any returning fighters penetrate; exploiting migrants both in terms of recruitment (rare) and removal of identity (use of SIM cards and documents).

### ***3. Threats to Italy and Elsewhere***

On January 14, 2016, the Italian media was filled with declarations made by Abu Yusuf al-Anabi, the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb. The tone of the message, which commented on the agreements reached on Libya in Shkirat, Morocco, is as follows: Libya "has sold itself to foreigners," Italy has occupied the country and Tripoli and "you will pay," "new invaders, grandchildren of Graziani, we will bite your hands and make you regret having entered the land of Omar Al-Mukhtar. You will be humiliated," "We are not a population that gives up. You will have to step over our dead bodies. We will win or die." This was not a message exclusively for Italy, which the usual media tend to pass it off as, but rather more extensive, entitled: "*Between the Hands of Aggression, So Be Aware.*" Abu Yusuf al-Anabi uses more traditional Libyan anti-colonialist rhetoric: he shows his profile, with a background image of the Libyan anti-Italian resistance hero Omar al-Mukhtar, whose photograph, used in the video, is often found in Italian books accompanied by the following caption: "Omar al-Mukhtar, hero of the Libyan resistance to fascist occupation, hanged in the concentration camp of Soluch in September 1931, aged seventy years old."

On January 23, 2016, this time under the name of the Islamic State, a video was released that ran for around 28 minutes, during which a scene was shown that was taken from the famous 1981 film *Lion of the Desert*, filmed in Libya, Rome, and Latina, partially financed by Ghaddafi with 25 million dollars and set in the 1920s, when the forces of Omar al-Mukhtar fought the Italian army, guided by general R. Graziani, in Libya. In general, the whole video is a juxtaposition of unique works and sketches that had already been seen, also showing Raz Degan acting as Darius III, emperor of Persia. The anti-colonialist rhetoric resumed a week earlier by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is the same for IS too, as are the symbols and characters. The instrumentalization of the Libyan hero (Omar al-Mukhtar) and the themes used are shared. In a context of non-random, yet competent strategy in the use of communications, this convergence of media themes provides further confirmation of the progressive alliance of IS and AQIM in North Africa and opens up important questions regarding a possible Italian "consultancy" in the preparation of the two media products, which use symbols and products (images and films) of Italian production. Moreover, the capable communications strategy of the Jihad struck its target: it is not only propaganda but also a counter-narrative able to divide the enemies of terrorism (evoking colonialism of Europe opens up the gates to separation!). Above all, it is an accurate strategy aimed (and powerfully in this case) at organizing the Libyan tribes against the new invader evoked by ghosts past: success is assured (as I was told by the leader of the Muslim Brothers in Tripoli) and AQIM with IS present themselves as the parties able to unite against the new colonialism.

### **IS' Communications Strategy and Certain Conflict Guidelines**

It has been stressed on several occasions that the innovation of the communications of the caliphate is seen above all as part of a complex, articulated strategy: this is the innovative aspect of the communications that, in addition to providing specific evidence that can be analyzed on a case-by-case basis (see previous examples), can be traced to an extensive project organized into various media products:

- the massive use of social media (Twitter, Facebook, chat rooms, and forums), promoting viral videos, imitative behavior through the narration, often of the businesses at the front, thereby facilitating the recruitment above all of foreign fighters;
- videos promoting the "communication of horror," such as the decapitation of enemies, aimed at striking emotionally and deep down, threatening it, the Western public, and, at the same time, supporting the radical action of its affiliates;
- a counter-narrative action, of which the English journalist Cantlie, in the hands of IS, is the author: in this world, we enter the arguments pertaining precisely to the countries fighting IS, providing alternative visions that are not separated out from the arguments already featured in the West, to encourage the fragmentation of the "enemy front";

- actual information products (the newsletters of the Islamic State, also published on a provincial level), which illustrate the services offered by IS to its "citizens" in the territories it controls, with the aim of attracting families of Jihadists, the new colonies necessary to the institutionalization strategy;
- magazines, like Dabiq, disseminated over the Internet in multiple languages (Arabic, English, French, Turkish, Indonesian, etc.) and addressing supporters across the globe, covering political and theological matters as well as providing operative competences and potential targets to be hit;
- interactive games, mirroring known Western games (such as *Grand Theft Auto*, in *Salil al-Sawarim*) to use gamification (learning and socializing through play) to entrap the so-called "digital natives," that is the younger generation;
- radio and television over the web, updating a strategy of convergence that proposes a different, more active use over the Internet of the content disseminated by other means of communications.

This typology clearly reveals how an articulated media strategy is not at all random, but rather uses competencies belonging to the world of globally disseminated, pervasive communications. The failure to recognize this, or amazement when faced with the use of these technologies, shows a frequent cultural delay and the ethnocentrism with which the Western world all too often classifies its adversaries, simply because they fight in "slippers," thereby resulting in a huge vulnerability. Amongst other aspects, it is a strategy that belongs not to Jihad but rather to the global world of communications, so competently adopted by the Caliphate, certainly having recruited not only fighters able to use a gun but also those using computers and video cameras to the foreign fighters.

It is now clear that the IS media structure is organized into an effective, competent system that pursues the strategies, and that media technologies have been used for years by the Jihad, just as the media war is a matter in which terrorism has invested money and competences for some time now. The leap made in quality by IS lies in the articulated governance of the various media products, on different lines: lines that all converge towards supporting the general objective of the institutionalization of the Caliphate, so that it should be recognized in its state form, and in this sense, both media production and organization are just one of the components, albeit an important one. But the progressive dramatization and the increased frequency of significant new media products in 2015 and early 2016 would appear to reveal a second objective, aimed at promoting forms of radicalization not only aimed at recruiting the foreign fighters but also at promoting conflict, facilitated by reactive attitudes taken in the countries of the Western world. In practice, the attempt is to obtain an indirect effect, acting on the activation of the potential enemies of the Caliphate identified in European citizens, not relying only on possible direct terrorist-type attacks for the explosion of violence between "Islam" and the "West," but also on the reactive response that is promoted. Alongside the accreditation as a state, therefore, IS would appear to be interested in violently overturning the

Western societies, facilitating all forms of conflict, with the greatest ease being that inspired by the ethnic and religious radicalism.

Together with the *institutionalized communications strategy*, we therefore have the *emotional communications strategy*: both traps that IS has once again prepared and into which we risk falling.

I define this second communications scheme, in which the series of "decapitations" is a central tool, as directed towards a "*double radicalization*": on the one hand, promoting IS in the search for proselytes and new fighters, indeed we should not forget that the horrendous end met by the Jordanian pilot is "included" as restitution to he who with bombs had done the same against the IS villages and that the indignation aroused is not necessarily shared by all spectators: therefore promoting the form of radicalization to which we are accustomed, focused on recruitment. But, on the other hand, precisely because it causes indignation, exasperating and surprising another public (the European public), it stimulates the violent reaction towards a re-generalized enemy in the form of a "beast" (the most frequent comment seen on the media), but specified in its Islamic characteristic.

Both strategies aim to affirm the Caliphate's status as leader of the Islamic world, fragmented into multiple groups in disagreement and in search of a new command, and to threaten Europe (identified as the "weak multitude" of the West), using its destabilization to gain legitimacy and a key role of IS.

If, as is likely, this also combines with the difficulties that the Caliphate experiences in expanding, and the capacity it has shown in making the most out of the vulnerabilities of those it fights, constantly drawn into the traps prepared, we can expect a forthcoming increase in encounters on all levels of hybrid warfare.

It would appear clear that, in a complex communications context such as the weapon of Hybrid Warfare, it is essential to respond with adequate communications weapons. From this standpoint, our working group is now making its move: The Italian Team for Security Terroristic Issues & managing Emergencies ([www.itstime.it](http://www.itstime.it)). The route taken starts from the so-called Social Media Intelligence (SocMInt) to reprocess it as a tool in a more extensive approach we call Digital Human Intelligence (DiHumInt).

SOCial Media INTelligence is one of the techniques for the location of information useful to the intelligence cycle through the monitoring and analysis of contents exchanged through the Social Media so extensively used by the Islamic State. At present, the theoretical debate rotates around the possibility of considering this technique as autonomous, or strictly dependent and, therefore, almost comparable with Open Source INTelligence. Part of the various scopes and approaches to the search for significant information (TechInt, geoInt, sigInt, HumInt, Masint, Cibint, etc.), OSINT (Open Source INTelligence) takes the form of the systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of information that can be justified by a specific need for intelligence. The mistake that is often made is of thinking that this practice is limited to materials accessible online only. OSINT instead refers not only to the Internet, but also to radio and television, journals and magazines, institutional and academic

publications, etc. This aspect, often ignored, instead defines a clear boundary line between OSINT and SocMINT: the latter, in fact, only concerns information exchanged by means of social media.

Clearly, the essential aspect around which the whole of the debate on SocMINT revolves is the identification of objectives that can be reached. Social media can provide crowd-sourced information, i.e. data generated directly by the public that, aggregated according to certain parameters, is able to outline the general context of a situation in real time. In the second place, SocMINT, as it is considered a source of information useful to the intelligence processes, is mainly used in an attempt to reduce "ignorance" and improve the quality of the decision-making process, providing the decision-maker with more detailed information. This aspect is key to the possibility of improving public safety. If, in fact, the online space is increasingly used to organize and coordinate criminal activities, social media can represent a tool of inestimable value in their identification. However, the scope of use of SocMINT is not limited to a "passive" level of monitoring, but rather also used proactively to interact with the various network subjects: if IS talks through the social media, those fighting it could also use the same tools to do so.

But SocMINT is only a very first step that, in our operative proposal for the fight, takes form in light of a simple consideration: users of social media, the recruitment target of the Islamic State, are young and are members of the "Digital Generation." This generation has now developed specific competences that do not juxtapose a virtual identity with a real one, but which rather constitute a complex identity that belongs to both domains. If, therefore, SocMINT is a useful tool with which to obtain information in the virtual world, it is not a sufficient theoretical space neither to understand the mixed identity generated nor to make the fighting activities operative, which, at the same time, must be developed both in the virtual domain and the real domain. According to the old intelligence codes, SocMINT and HumINT acknowledge and are based on the perspective of Digital Human Intelligence, the new approach that perhaps allows for the restoration of balance in the communications confrontation in Hybrid Warfare, in which the Islamic State has engaged us.

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## **Jihad Export: Why Young Germans Become Jihadists<sup>103</sup>**

*Marwan Abou Taam*

The surprising social upheavals in the Arab world have so far spelled the end of four despotic regimes and created possibilities for new political constellations. In Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, the political revolutions resulted in civil wars. The disintegration of governmental support and security structures gave rise to a power vacuum in which jihadist forces are persistently developing into resolute players. The jihadists' success is traceable, among other causes, to their ability to allure followers of the Muslim faith from all over the world— including Germany—to their ranks for the battle.

While it was long assumed that Islamic radicalism is an imported commodity, lessons learned in the category of "Islamic terrorism" in recent years attest that causes of radicalization processes can also be found in European societies. The number of "foreign combatants" who have traveled from the EU to Syria and Iraq is estimated at 7,000. This number is relative, however, as counting is not uniform in the various EU countries. Most of these combatants come from Western European countries with a large Muslim community and, prior to their respective departures, were in active contact with the respective Salafi<sup>104</sup> community. 680 individuals, with ages between 13 and 63 have left Germany for Syria, the vast majority of them being in the 16-25 age group.

Hormonally charged, revolutionary, seeking justice and solidarity, they identify very strongly with the suffering of the victims of the Syrian war and pursue the objective of overthrowing the systems in Syria and Iraq in order to establish an Islamic commonwealth based on the precepts of Islamic Shari'ah law. Most combatants are third-generation Sunni Muslim Germans, children of immigrants from the Middle East. Others are young converts from the native population without an immigrant background. While most foreign combatants are single men, the number of women moving to the war zone has greatly increased; even children are evermore drawn by their parents into the undertow of jihad. The majority of the individuals involved are classic school dropouts. However, the outbound also include educated young men who have abandoned their studies in order to join the Islamic State.

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<sup>103</sup> The insights and the classification of the motivations founded thereon are based on biographical analyses, interviews with affected individuals and the analysis of expert interviews. Here people were surveyed who are active in the practical prevention and de-radicalization work. Further, court decisions, jihadists' own accounts in the social forums and propagandistic statements were analyzed. This article is an extract from a not yet published study by the author.

<sup>104</sup> On the subject of Salafism in Germany, see Thorsten Gerald Scheider's (pub. 2014): *Salafismus in Deutschland. Ursprünge und Gefahren einer islamisch-fundamentalistischen Bewegung*, Bielefeld. Therein, especially El-Mafaalani, *Aladin: Salafismus als jugendkulturelle Provokation. Zwischen dem Bedürfnis nach Abgrenzung und der Suche nach habitueller Übereinstimmung*, p. 355 ff.

## Reasons for Radicalization

There are many causes for radicalization. It is not a question of gender or social background, and it occurs at all levels of society, regardless of economic circumstances or amount of education completed. Although radicalization is an individual process, biographic similarities can be detected, at least in the German activists: the departing individuals are often youth with identity issues who are seeking powerful group adventures and meaning in life. They want to have a role in society which is often—as they perceive it—denied to them. Their parents admonish them for "being like Germans," and society problematizes them as "Muslims." Thus many break from their present social surroundings in the course of their radicalization. The disengagement from family and former friends ahead of the departure is usually accompanied by growing involvement with a Salafi group.<sup>105</sup>

On closer look, the motives for departure can be typed into four rough categories, with mixed motives being the rule:

- persons with ideological convictions;
- adventurers and their followers;
- "born-again," many of whom want to atone for a criminal past;
- and those who believe that they can act out their violent and homicidal fantasies unpunished in the civil war.

Such individuals see violence as a justifiable instrument for achieving higher objectives in jihad.<sup>106</sup> The ideological indoctrination needed for this primarily takes place in small groups in the context of "Islam Seminars" and in Salafi reading and discussion groups. Here the "Holy War" against all types of "infidels," Muslim and non-Muslim, is taught, and an ideologically closed, Salafi worldview is conveyed. This worldview prescribes radical, binary, black-and-white thinking: every conflict is reduced to a contest between good and evil. This simplification of the world creates a habitat in which the individuals concerned feel very much at home. In considering the discourse about the causes behind the radicalization of the outbound individuals and the associated debate concerning the proper governmental and social response thereto, it must be stated that, despite all efforts, no conclusive theory exists which is capable of explaining the majority of cases. Existing theories point merely to certain aspects of a radicalization process, only to note later that the approach is unsuitable for analyzing other groups of people.

Radicalization processes and the decision to move to the jihad venues are promoted by various, often complementary factors. They have ideological, political,

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<sup>105</sup> See Wiedl, Nina (2012): *The Making of a German Salafiyya: The Emergence, Development and Missionary Work of Salafi Movement in Germany*, Aarhus, p.32 et seq. and Steinberg, Guido (2012): *Wer sind die Salafisten? Zum Umgang mit einer schnell wachsenden und sich politisierenden Bewegung*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP-Aktuell 2012/A 28, May 2012, p. 6 et seq.

<sup>106</sup> See Wagemakers (2012): *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, 2012, p. 29 et seq.

psychological and sociological dimensions. Which of these dimensions is determinative depends on the particular individual concerned.

### **The Ideological Dimension of the Radicalization Process**

Jihadi Salafists champion an Islamic ideology which is oriented on the role model of the founding fathers of the Islamic religion and which wants to create a supposedly ideal Islamic society. The basic sources of Islam—the Koran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah)—are their immutable foundations. Differing from the majority of Muslims, Jihadi Salafists categorically reject any adaptation of the interpretation of the authoritative sources to altered social and political circumstances as "un-Islamic innovations" (Arabic: *bid'ah*). According to Salafi perceptions, such innovations inevitably result in "disbelief." They also espouse a dualistic worldview, which consists only of believers and unbelievers (Arabic: *kuffar*). Along with the "usual" atheists, Jews and Christians, such unbelievers also include non-Salafi Muslims.<sup>107</sup> Associations with such people are to be limited and, if possible, avoided altogether because they discriminate against the "true" Muslims. Precisely these feelings of discrimination are fomented and exploited to recruit followers. The Jihadi Salafists justify their campaigns through religion and represent the position that militaristic jihad is a duty for every Muslim and, in principle, recognizes no restrictions in the selection of means. This applies until the goal of universal implementation of Islamic ideological principles has been attained. Jihadism is therefore a clear battle doctrine which obligates every believer to take up the battle for establishing and preserving an Islamic state.

### **The Political Dimension of the Radicalization Process**

Considering the Islamic State's mode of operation and recruiting strategy, it can be observed that the instilling of ideology and polarization constitute the primary element of its success strategy.<sup>108</sup> The Islamic State is increasingly fighting for regime change in the Middle East. Persons mobilized for this are those who are disposed to be antagonistic toward the West and who are ready to transform their hostility into action. The recruiting propaganda is therefore targeted at individuals who already feel rage, but are unable to articulate their rage politically. The archenemy or constituting element in the view of the Islamic State is the decadent West that bleeds the Muslim Ummah to death and marginalizes Muslims. Western values must be rebuffed accordingly and one's own Islamic identity defended. Most persons traveling to Syria state that they are primarily motivated by the unjust violence toward the Sunnis in Syria and hold the "Western" interventions in the Muslim world responsible for it. They allege that the West brought the conflicts to the Middle East and it now looks on as the Sunnis in Iraq and Syria are "butchered" by the Shi'a. They further charge that they are excluded in Western societies based

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<sup>107</sup> See Abou Taam, Marwan (2014): *Salafismus in Deutschland – Eine Herausforderung für die Demokratie*, in: ZIS 9/2014, p. 442 et seq.

<sup>108</sup> On this, see the annotated edition of the speeches of Osama Bin Laden, Abou-Taam, M./ Bigalke, Ruth (2006): *Die Reden des Osama Ben Laden*, Munich, in this, especially: *Die Wegweisungen*.

on their religious identity.<sup>109</sup> These groups also have the unyielding impression that politicians in this country have conspired against Islam and left them no option other than to assert their identity and religion with force.<sup>110</sup> They feel unrepresented by the political elite and denied the opportunity to participate politically. Outwardly, they feel obligated to dedicate themselves to the rights of Sunni Muslims. In the process, they fail to consider that the majority of victims of the Islamic State are Sunni Muslims.

### **The Psychological Dimension of the Radicalization Process**

The Islamic State profits from various socio-psychological elements within the Muslim diaspora. Connected to their ancestral countries through the media, many young people think about and live through domestic conflicts.<sup>111</sup> They identify with the tribulations there and define their conflicts through the transnationality of the religion along an ethnic-religious dividing line. However, these conflicts are combined and interpreted with their own in the diaspora. The fathers of the affected generation of Syrian refugees are very frequently described as weak and cowardly, but the role of the father is central in a patriarchally-structured society, especially when, in one's own perception, the father is seen as the only legitimate authority. If it happens in such complex relational systems that the father as protector of the family fails in his traditional role, a feeling of rejection can arise. If the familial structure with the father at the top cannot offer protection, children in a patriarchal society experience a feeling of disappointment that expresses itself in forms of material and existential anxieties. Such experiences leave a mark on children and adolescents and make them especially sensitive to alleged injustices.

It is possible to speak of a cannibalistic narcissism with regard to this complex process, for a continual debasement of the existing power relationships is taking place.<sup>112</sup> What is disastrous is the automatism with which one's own "magnificence" can only be rescued through the debasement of others—what means to employ is secondary. The negative narratives on the perception of Islam in the West begin here. One is no longer Turk or Arab and not yet German. Affiliation with Islam is the basis of identity. The debate over Islam greatly attacks this. It must be noted here that collective identities are strategically social constructs<sup>113</sup> that are constituted of tightly interwoven ideas, worldviews, religions and ideologies as well as sociocultural values. Precisely at this juncture, Salafism delivers the necessary

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<sup>109</sup> Concerning hostility toward Islam, see Heitmeyer, Wilhelm (2011): *Deutsche Zustände. Das entsicherte Jahrzehnt: Folge 10*, Bielefeld.

<sup>110</sup> On this, see the study by Peters, Till Hagen (2012): *Islamismus bei Jugendlichen in empirischen Studien: Ein narratives Review, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Religionswissenschaft und Religionspädagogik 2*, Bremen.

<sup>111</sup> On identity and crisis see Erikson, E.H. (1968): *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York.

<sup>112</sup> See Schmidbauer, Wolfgang: *Der pharisäische und der kannibalische Narzissmus*, in: id.: *Der Mensch als Bombe. Eine Psychologie des neuen Terrorismus*, Reinbek 2003, p. 64 et seq.

<sup>113</sup> Finnemore, Martha; Kathryn Sikkink (1998): *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, in: *International Organization* 52: No. 4, p. 887-917.

interpretation of the world and actively structures a historical reality.<sup>114</sup> The distinction becomes superfluous in Salafi dualism. The more complex the world, the simpler its interpretation must be. This is complemented through the Islamic State propaganda with the objective of producing a collective madness.

### **Sociological Dimensions of the Radicalization Process**

Radicalization processes frequently take place in Salafi groups. The group thereby delivers a group identity that overshadows the individual identity with all its weaknesses.<sup>115</sup> The inner dynamics and sociocultural values of the Salafi group explain not only the recruiting power, but also the staying power and loyalty of the members. The Salafi group has its own group culture with specific traditions and values that are principally totalitarian and demand that the individual show absolute solidarity with the group as a whole, not necessarily with the individual person. Here external contact is vehemently opposed and radically sanctioned, as this is only to be conducted in accordance with strategic precepts by specially designated group members who are steadfast in their ideology. No group member expresses his own opinion, as there is only the collective. Migration to the group isolates the individual psychologically and very often also physically from his "normal" environment. Relationships of trust exist only with other group members.<sup>116</sup>

The forces that are developed through this can also be observed in cults. The more a person integrates with the group, the more remote the individual is from his or her original world. Integration into the group means the complete dissolution of the individual in terms of the group identity and thus hierarchical, one-way, absolute control by the group. From religious cults we know that not only social contacts are regulated, but also that marriage with group members is dictated. We can observe similar structures in Salafi groups. In the course of time, existential bonds develop between the group members.<sup>117</sup> This gives rise to the reality that esteem and reputation within the group, hierarchical ascension, and acceptance by the members are vastly more important than the external perception. The religious texts are of

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<sup>114</sup> See Straub, Jürgen (1998): *Geschichten erzählen, Geschichten bilden, Grundzüge einer narrativen Psychologie historischer Sinnbildung*, in Straub, Jürgen (pub.): *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewußtsein. Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte, Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität*, Frankfurt am Main, p. 81 et seq.

<sup>115</sup> Waldmann, Peter (2009): *Radikalisierung in der Diaspora. Wie Islamisten im Westen zu Terroristen werden*, Hamburg, p. 111 et seq.

<sup>116</sup> See Fuhse, Jan A. (2001): *Unser »wir« - ein systemtheoretisches Modell von Gruppenidentitäten*, in SISS: Schriftenreihe des Instituts für Sozialwissenschaften der Universität Stuttgart: No. 1 / 200, p. 18. Here Fuhse asserts, with reference to Coser, that the conflict with other groups contributes to the creation and stabilization of the group identity and maintains the boundaries with respect to the social environment. This permits a group "to structure and continually restructure ... its system boundaries in the course of the conflict with negative reference groups."

<sup>117</sup> See Schwonke, Martin (1999): *Die Gruppe als Paradigma der Vergesellschaftung*. in: Schäfers, Bernhard (pub.): *Einführung in die Gruppensoziologie. Geschichte, Theorien, Analysen*. Wiesbaden, p. 37-53.

great importance for religiously motivated groups.<sup>118</sup> To be well versed is simultaneously fascinating and bonding. Religious indoctrination is therefore simultaneously the goal and the means.

### **Dealing with Syria Returnees—between Repression and Reintegration**

About one third of the persons who have left the country have returned. For German authorities, the jihadists who return from the "Holy War," above all, constitute a special threat because they bring with them experiences in combat missions, in the use of firearms, in bomb building or in the recruiting of new members. Some of the returnees are traumatized and disillusioned. Moreover, others are also radicalized and are returning with the assignment and the desire to bring terror to Germany. Their inhibition threshold for active violence could be much lower. According to present case law, returnees from Syria must therefore expect that an investigational proceeding will be commenced against them for suspicion of preparation for a serious act of violent subversion against the state. This has to do with the fact that the federal prosecutor's office desires to employ the resources of terrorist criminal law as effectively as possible in order to protect the population against possible attacks, for the returnees are viewed as an incalculable risk. In this context, resources were increased for the Federal Police, the Federal Criminal Police Office and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and 750 new positions were created.

Despite investigational proceedings, in the case of many returnees, it is frequently unknown whether they actually received military training. And, most of all, it is very difficult to prove in accordance with the rule of law that they were involved in war crimes and to what extent. This is especially the case as the legal basis for a war crimes conviction is not absolutely certain. The courts are therefore dependent on the statements of those affected.

A different philosophy prevails in the city of Aarhus in Denmark. There, it is argued that jihadists who have fought in Syria or Iraq may be a danger after returning to their home countries if they are ostracized. A special program was therefore introduced there to integrate the affected persons into society when it cannot be proven that they participated in terrorist campaigns and therefore cannot be convicted. The reintegration into society includes psychological and medical assistance and support with the search for a job and an apartment. In addition, returnees are given a mentor.

This approach from Denmark makes it clear that the reintegration of these persons is essential in the context of a culture based on the rule of law. Even if it is possible to prove that these persons have violated the law, immediately after the conviction

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<sup>118</sup> On alternative dealings with texts of the Koran, see Kermani, Navid (2009), "*Und tötet sie, wo immer ihr sie findet': Zur Missachtung des textuellen und historischen Kontexts bei der Verwendung von Koranzitaten*". In: *Islamfeindlichkeit*. Pub. by Thorsten Gerald Schneiders. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, p. 201–207.

the question arises as to how it is possible to prevent these persons from radicalizing other inmates while in prison or how the affected persons can be de-radicalized. It must always be kept in mind here that resocialization—in other words, reintegration of convicted persons into the social structure of the society—is one of the goals of imprisonment. Turning away from radicalism and extremist tendencies is a lengthy learning process and requires intensive social work. Despite the many cases and the increasing number of convictions, we have no comprehensive projects for resocialization in Germany.

Those who are not convicted for want of evidence after returning present a special challenge for the parties involved, both in terms of security policy as well as in preventive work. For police and the intelligence services, they are to some extent clearly an overload that overextends capacity. 24-hour surveillance consumes so much personnel and resources that it appears illusory. On the other side, the prevention work depends on the voluntary participation of the individuals. There is no legal leverage that compels them to participate in the measure. Prevention and de-radicalization work with these groups of individuals is time-consuming and protracted. There are currently a lack of projects and qualified personnel.



## **Confronting Terrorism and Extremism—the Arab World Today**

*Amr Hamzawy*

The Egyptian people do not have the luxury of waiting for the new U.S. war against terror to fail, nor do the rest of the Arab people. The brutality and bloody nature of the terrorist organizations spread throughout the Arab world, and their constant threat to the rights and freedoms of citizens, societies, nation-states, and all their institutions, is a phenomenon that calls for fast, comprehensive action to protect countries domestically and contain regional explosions.

I do not dispute that it is important to engage in security—and at times military—means of confronting terrorist organizations in the Levant, Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, Libya, and Egypt's Sinai. I do not dispute that it is important to coordinate on security and information with the United States and its allies in the “military campaign” against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. I do not dispute that it is central to put terrorist organizations in Libya on the regional and international agenda, in order to keep Libya from collapsing or disintegrating, as well as to protect neighboring countries, and keep terrorist organizations' crimes from moving into Egypt, Tunisia, or Algeria.

I am simply issuing a reminder that engaging in security confrontations and military campaigns, isolated from broader domestic, regional, and international means of addressing the issue, will not enable us to rein in ISIS or its fellow organizations. It will not enable us to save citizens from bloodthirsty and brutal terrorists who are leading an assault on their lives, rights, and basic freedoms. Nor will it enable us to restore peace to societies and put the pieces of nation-states and their institutions back together, or overcome an ongoing explosive situation in the region.

We, in Egypt and the Arab world, need to protect countries domestically, by establishing guaranteed rule of law, ending injustices, and ensuring people's rights and freedoms, accountability for rulers, the peaceful transfer of power, and increasing sustainable development. These processes and procedures will keep our citizens and communities from becoming safe havens for terrorism.

Egypt and the Arab world can rein in ISIS and its fellow organizations by rationalizing the security confrontations and military campaigns that the United States and Arab governments allied with it are carrying out. We can do this by making it a priority to maintain the cohesion of the nation-state and its institutions, and overcoming authoritarianism, sectarianism, and factors like poverty and ignorance. Such factors result both in the growth of terrorism, and in placing systems of governance / authority in a purely reactive position. Alternatively, they can also cause them to lose popular support and legitimacy altogether. This then will degenerate into extended crises that neither security responses nor military campaigns can prevent.

We, in Egypt and the Arab world, have an urgent mission to provide successful models for peaceful, developed societies, and modern, fair nation-states, to once

again attract citizens' consciences, hearts, and minds. These men and women are weary of authoritarianism. Injustices, sectarianism, and state institutions' lack of neutrality have stripped them of their hope for a developed society, and their faith in just governance. They are surrounded by violations of rights and freedoms, and feelings of fear that have settled across our countries. They are pushed into the furnace of sectarian loyalties, and even tribal and clan identities and false promises, which offer protection against oppression, violence, repression, and the injustice of the systems of governance / authority, as well as against gaps in society between people of influence with significant special interests, and marginalized sectors of society who have been silenced.

I am simply saying that we, in Egypt and the Arab world, will fail to neutralize the U.S. war on terrorism's expected failure to overcome crises of the citizen, society, and state, unless we achieve a broad national consensus on fundamental questions of basic rights and freedoms— necessary things that citizens cannot do without – as well as citizens' duties. We also must reach consensus on the nature of the developed society we want, the roles of religion, wealth, and governance / authority in various sectors and spaces, the identity of the nation-state we are seeking, and the weight of justice, diversity, pluralism, tolerance, and peaceful transfer of power in these contexts and within state institutions.

### **Confronting Terrorism – Domestic Challenges**

In the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks, former President George W. Bush took advantage of a moment of widespread popular fear in American society in order to pass numerous special measures and decisions that threatened both rule of law and guarantees of rights and freedoms. This meant exposing citizens of Arab or Muslim descent, as well as established groups with Arab or Muslim roots, to unjust strategic and security surveillance.

Rule of law has only recovered in the United States to the extent that it has through the independent judiciary's resistance to extraordinary measures and decisions, and through civil society and a free press's role in documenting and exposing crimes of torture and abuse, and raising public awareness about how dangerous it is to sacrifice rights and freedoms while confronting terrorism. The Democratic Party, which was opposed to Bush's policies, then won a majority of the seats in Congress, and its candidate, Barack Obama, won the presidential race in 2008. Despite this, the United States has still not gotten rid of the special measures and decisions established during George W. Bush's time in office from 2000-2008. The Guantanamo Bay detention camp is a testament to this, as are other violations of rights and freedoms in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places that are not far from the superpower's grasp.

When terrorist attacks similar to those of September 11, 2001 occurred in European countries (such as the UK and Spain), some governments or ruling coalitions (particularly right-wing ones) sought to pass special measures and decisions just like the ones George W. Bush passed. This included expanding comprehensive

surveillance of citizens, men and women, of Arab descent, or established organizations. It included reducing guarantees of rights and freedoms, and engaging in arbitrary practices, such as wiretapping and keeping certain residents out of Europe by cancelling their residency or work permits, or engaging in strategic and security cooperation with U.S. agencies. However, in the UK, Spain, France, Germany, and other countries, parliaments and judiciaries kept their countries from Bush's slippery slope, and from sacrificing rights and freedoms while confronting terrorism. The vast majority of special measures and decisions were stopped, and only a few were passed that still haunt the consciences of politicians, jurists, and the intellectual elite who defend the rule of law and democracy.

Civil society organizations and the free press had a central role in raising public awareness about the possibility of confronting terrorism without sacrificing rights and freedoms, and proving the effectiveness of confronting terrorism with a mix of military tools (outside Europe), security tools, and development and social tools (to address the limited social and economic opportunities of people of Arab or Muslim origin), political tools (to integrate them into public life) and intellectual tools (to fight extremism).

It is true that Europe did not completely get rid of terrorism, or stop its citizens and residents from joining terrorist organizations. Nonetheless, its experience—and some aspects of the U.S.'s experience, after rule of law somewhat recovered—demonstrates the effectiveness of confronting terrorism without special measures and decisions, and without a confrontational approach. Instead, terrorism can be confronted through pluralistic and objective public debate, with the participation of civil society and a free press, and by enabling people to hear voices of dissent and opposition. It can be confronted by *not* taking advantage of a moment of fear and popular solidarity to rashly abandon rule of law and the guarantees that it provides. It must not be confronted through military and security solutions alone, which while necessary, are insufficient.

Confronting terrorism without sacrificing rights and freedoms is effective.

### **Confronting Terrorism – Regional and International Challenges**

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States went to Afghanistan and the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with its armies and equipment. It went to fight the Taliban, a creation of Pakistani intelligence, and Al-Qaeda—organizations that produced a stream of brutality, bloodshed, and extremism. Al-Qaeda in particular had formed out of groups supported by U.S. and Gulf intelligence agencies in the 1970s and 1980s to confront the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

The U.S. war on Afghanistan brought down Taliban rule, eliminated some safe havens for Al-Qaeda, scattered them to various regions, and allayed the danger of a terrorist attack within the U.S., which regained a relative level of security.

Despite much talk about development, democracy building, and civil peace, and subsequent discussions on plans and programs for institutional reform and state-building, the United States and many of its allies in the West have failed to create stability in Afghanistan, just as they have failed to fulfill their promises of development, democracy, and peace. They have not achieved their goal of completely eliminating the Taliban and Al-Qaeda splinter groups in the border regions with Pakistan. These are all organizations that still use those local communities as incubators for injustice, corruption, and spreading extremist ideologies, to conduct terrorist attacks and military operations that tax American and Western forces, which have still not been able to withdraw from the country.

History was repeated when the United States and the UK invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime. The central difference here is that Saddam Hussein's regime had been deeply involved in systematic terrorism and crimes of genocide against his people and during wars in the region. Yet unlike the Taliban, he did not support terrorist organizations or offer them a safe haven, and he was not proven to possess weapons of mass destruction—one of the lies spread by the US and UK governments to justify their invasion and occupation of Iraq. However, the similarities lie in the quick fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, as well as Iraqi state institutions that were dismantled by the occupation. Numerous plans and programs for democratic transition did not come to pass, development declined and security vanished. The results were similar: society was faced with an onslaught of injustices, hatred, and extremism, the remnants of the state were dominated by sectarianism, and a series of crimes were committed. Terrorist organizations fed off of the injustices and extremism, and established themselves in several regions, with brutality and bloodshed that conjures up the specter of all-out war and growing regional threats.

An objective reading of the U.S. and its Western allies' war against terrorism in Afghanistan points to the fact that though military and security tools are able to fend off terrorist organizations and movements' attacks, they alone are not able to fully eliminate them, or guarantee they will not return in more brutal and bloody forms. Using military and security tools is necessary, and cannot afford to be delayed, but in order to ensure that the "benefits" tied to such tools last, we must integrate more comprehensive societal, development, and political solutions.

The US-UK invasion of Iraq reminds us how important it is to keep state institutions cohesive in order to keep terrorism, sectarianism, and extremism from gaining control over citizens and the nation, over the medium and long term. Justice, development, and social solidarity are the most important conditions—created by feelings of patriotism and rule of law, which guarantees people's rights and freedoms—that enable us to mobilize regional and international support.

### **Towards an Arab Approach to Confronting Terrorism**

Looking at a map of the Arab world, we see that terrorism attacks regions with low population density. Terrorist organizations take up residence in Iraq, Syria, Yemen,

Libya, and Algeria, either in unpopulated areas or areas going through human rights issues, development, or social crises, due to hateful or extremist sectarianism. This turns these environments into incubators for terrorism and violence. In the Egyptian Sinai, and areas on the Western border with Libya, for example, military and security tools need to be used effectively, and also there is need to strengthen and engage communities there, considering their demands for rights and fair development, in order to mobilize their efforts and capabilities towards confronting terrorism.

Looking at a map of the Arab world, we see that successive explosions in the region have enabled the phenomenon of terrorism to “easily” cross the borders of nation-states, and enabled terrorist organizations to benefit from various sources of funding and armament. A broad regional and international alliance is necessary to rein in terrorist crimes, one that limits terrorists’ ability to move across nation-state borders, and stops sources of funding and armament. We need an alliance that does not replace other entities with terrorist organizations to achieve narrow-minded, short term political goals, or neglect to strengthen state institutions with a mix of development, societal, and legal solutions, alongside military and security tools. Decision-makers in Arab countries must put stopping sources of funding, movement, and weapons for terrorism on the agenda for all actors in the region, and on the U.S.’s new war agenda.

Looking at a map of successful models for confronting terrorism, we see that it is necessary to mobilize communities in areas where terrorist organizations have settled or are attacking, in order to support official and grassroots efforts. The only way forward is to engage in conversation with these communities and alleviate the injustices they suffer from, through fair application of the law and championing their rights, alongside confronting terrorism. Regional and international actors must actively work in solidarity with these efforts; this is a condition for success. We in Arab nations must coordinate with various parties to clamp down on terrorist organizations’ resources. We realize that ensuring internal security in the Arab world, and convincing foreign countries, near and far, to support us, is closely linked to effectively using military and security tools. This also opens the door to popular solidarity and honest social dialogue, to reassure everyone that there is a real desire for a blend of security, law, rights, and freedoms, that there is a clear, positive vision for the future, and for the development, progress, and justice we dream of.

### **Faced with Black Flags: Clinging to Opposites**

Terrorist gangs, and those who hate life, have no identity except for killing, slaughtering, burning things, and committing all kinds of other crimes against humanity. They have no goal except for spreading destruction and ruin, and pushing people, societies, and nations into all-out endless war. They have no agenda except stripping away our love for life, by spreading terror, fear, and frustration, and eliminating our individual and collective abilities to reject the barbarism, ignorance, and violence whose black banners they wave.

In our sorrow and mourning for the victims of terrorist crimes in Sinai; in our deep pain for the brutal death of the young Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh and other people ISIS slaughtered before their sadistic eyes across different parts of Iraq and Syria; in the series of shocks, hearing of the wave of crimes against Christians in the Levant from different towns and villages, who had always lived there and whose houses of worship were destroyed; in reviewing the list of martyrs and injured from Libya to Yemen, as the numbers steadily rise and the map of blood expands to cover vast swathes of the Arab world—we have a moral and national responsibility in the Arab world. This responsibility is closely linked to our commitment to confront terrorism and its crimes, which steal people’s right to life as they defend us, cleansing the land from the scourge of terrorist gangs’ brutality and bloodshed, and protecting our own right to life, society’s right to stability, and the right of nations to integrity.

For many long decades, autocratic regimes and republics of fear in Iraq, Syria, and Libya have stripped the nation-state of its legitimacy, reduced its institutions to military, security, intelligence, and administrative apparatuses that oppress civilians, violate their rights and freedoms, destroy rule of law and the principle of equality between men and women citizens without discrimination. All this, for the ruler’s sole aim of staying in power, preserving his cronies’ special privileges, and eliminating opposition.

Republics of fear, Iraq, Syria, and Libya have not lacked plans for economic and social modernization, and programs for development, improving education and health services, and caring for people, and they have made some improvements to living conditions. Despite this, the nation-state has been stripped of legitimacy, and engaged in continued injustice, repression, and violations against naturally diverse and pluralistic societies. Within systems of rule / authority, there is only denial, and imposition of a single point of view, a single voice, and the permanence of a single ruler / leader / hero / president. Citizens are not allowed to participate freely in public affairs, and as a result, modernization plans fail and development programs collapse. State institutions, which serve as nothing more than an apparatus to defend the authoritarian ruler, inevitably crumble. Rulers are never free of paranoia and fear, which increases the money allocated to the military, security, and intelligence apparatuses, and turns every citizen into a possible “conspirator,” who must be constantly monitored, who they must always be ready to eliminate.

The United States and its international coalition invaded Iraq in 2003 and overthrew Saddam Hussein’s dictatorial regime. It demolished and fragmented the nation-state’s institutions, and handed it over to hate-filled sectarian violence and rule. This created violent, extremist, sectarian oppositions in their own image—the different splits in Al-Qaeda from 2003 until today, from Al-Zarqawi’s group to ISIS. The destruction and fragmentation of the nation-state in Iraq had created authoritarianism, even before the arrival of a foreign invader and occupier. The sectarianism of Iraq’s new rulers did nothing but continue the long record of dictatorship, including repression, injustice, violations of rights and freedoms, disregard for the law and equality, and promoting paranoia and fear. All that

changed were the identities of the executioners and victims. The dictator's repression and authoritarianism; foreign armies that invaded, occupied, and then were stationed in nearby military bases, ready to undertake missions in the "War on Terror;" and the new rulers' sectarianism: the only result these events had was to eliminate peaceful opposition and political movements seeking democracy.

What is true in Iraq is also true in Syria, where a bloody dictator, regionally and internationally backed, is faced with armed opposition, which also receives regional and international support. It is also true in Libya, where Gaddafi's dictatorship destroyed and fragmented the nation-state, and then foreign intervention distorted an uprising of people demanding freedom.

Authoritarianism and foreign intervention are inseparable from the creation of extremism, terrorism, and violence in the Arab world. We will not succeed in a "War on Terror" waged by foreign armies and supported by authoritarian Arab regimes that are still unable to recognize the positive connection between democracy and defending the nation-state.

### **Towards an Arab Organization for Security and Cooperation**

Since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Arab world has sorely lacked – and with disastrous consequences – an effective regional system to protect the security of its people, ensure the nation-state's survival, establish a relationship of equal cooperation with international powers and non-Arab regional actors—i.e., the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey—, prevent Arab sovereignty from being violated and Arab interests from being encroached upon, end the Arab-Israeli conflict by establishing an independent Palestinian state, and bring about the right of return for refugees and Israel's withdrawal from occupied Arab lands, in accordance with legitimate international resolutions.

When Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, Arabs had regional arrangements that had gradually taken shape throughout the Twentieth Century. These took various historical and geopolitical paths, though often in contradictory directions, including the fall of the Ottoman Empire; colonial European powers' scramble for Arab countries; the emergence of the modern nation state in the Arab East and North Africa under colonial hegemony and the growth of national liberation movements; the departure of traditional European colonizers in the aftermath of World War II (1939-1945) and the arrival of Israeli settler colonialism, robbing Palestinians of their land; the foundation of the Arab League as a framework for regional cooperation, and the emergence of Arab republics in the Arab East (with the exception of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and North Africa (with the exception of the Kingdom of Morocco); successive failures of Arab unity in the 1950s and 1960s (the most prominent example being the United Arab Republic, a union between Egypt and Syria that lasted from 1958-61) in a way that cemented the nation-state as the sole entity of governance in the Arab world; repeated military confrontations with Israel and the scramble for spheres of influence and sources of power between the United States and the former Soviet Union (1917-1991); the

intra-Arab cold war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, the proxy war between them in Yemen, and other Arab-Arab border conflicts in other countries (Algeria and Morocco, for example); then the disaster of 1967; restructuring of Arab-Arab relations in the 1970s and the redrawing of the superpowers' spheres of influence after the October 1973 war; a peaceful settlement between Egypt and Israel, and the unprecedented move of Egypt supplying Israel with oil; the declining role of the Arab League and state governments—official Arab regimes—with their inability to find a just solution to the Palestinian question, end Israeli aggression and its settler policies, or save Lebanon from being destroyed by civil war and Israeli occupation; the rising role of Palestinian and Lebanese popular or non-governmental resistance movements; the Iranian Revolution overthrowing Shah Reza Pahlavi's rule in Iran in 1979 and the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988, which drained both countries militarily, economically, and which took a huge human cost; the Palestinian question moving away from joint Arab action, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization's acceptance of the two-state solution in 1988.

Yet throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even up to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Arabs did not suffer regionally from the repercussions of these events. Arab armies engaged in wide-ranging, open wars; for example, the Egyptian and Syrian armies joined the Gulf Cooperation Council's armies in the international coalition led by the United States to liberate Kuwait from the Iraqi Army. The invasion of Kuwait restored Western armies and military bases to Arab lands after they had departed with the end of European colonialism in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century—and after Lebanese and Palestinian forces had forced American and French forces to quickly withdraw from Lebanon in 1983 (which was not longer than the American forces' presence in Lebanon in 1958). With its troops and military bases spread across the Gulf, the United States went from being a superpower, influential over regional developments (and even domestically, in some Arab countries) with its influence and alliances, and turned into a superpower with a permanent military presence on Arab land, which it could use to directly achieve its goals and protect its interests.

America's military presence—as well as the numerous military facilities the Gulf and other Arab states proceeded to grant the United States, the UK, and their Western allies—enabled it to invade and occupy Iraq, and carry out other military operations. Arab countries—whether they have accepted military bases on their lands, given the West military facilities, or done neither of these things—have watched Western armies appropriate Arab lands since 1990. Arab countries, and their people, have watched Israeli aggression seize Arab lands in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, while a constant Arab position was not to be found, neither among Arab countries or those who supported them, openly or secretly. They watched the collapse of 20<sup>th</sup> Century regional precedents, which protected national sovereignty and prevented international and non-Arab regional actors from intervening in Arab affairs.

Intra-Arab wars, the constant U.S. military presence, and repeated appropriation of Arab lands have resulted in the total collapse of regional arrangements; the decline of the Arab League and frameworks of cooperation and joint action (with their inaction, as they were reduced to a symbolic presence alone); and escalating armed conflicts, civil wars, and secessionism, which have fragmented the nation-state in various parts of the region. They have resulted in major powers and regional non-Arab actors encroaching on Arab countries, the Palestinian question being reduced to an endless, futile discussion, and distorting Palestinian-Palestinian conflicts, while Israeli settler colonialism continues to swallow up the land. The total absence of democracy and reigning authoritarianism's inability (outside the Gulf) to achieve sustainable development, improve people's living conditions, preserve civil peace, and create a modern vision of citizenship based on equality, rights and freedoms, are among the disastrous consequences of the current regional arrangements.

Between 1990 and 2015, Somalia collapsed, its state disappeared, and foreign forces still have not intervened.

Between 1990 and 2015, the United States and its allies invaded Iraq. American occupation resulted in the disintegration of state institutions, and—as expected—the inability to build a new framework for governance and managing peoples' affairs. The outcome today is a failed state, where Shiites control the Southern and central regions, Sunnis are being fought over by terrorist gangs from Al-Zarqawi's Al-Qaeda to Al-Baghdadi's ISIS, and Christian minorities live in fear of ISIS' bloody crimes.

Between 1990 and 2015, South Sudan separated from the North, and armed conflicts and civil war raged in other regions of the country, from Darfur to Kurdufan.

Between 1990 and 2015, North Yemen and South Yemen united at the beginning of the 1990s, a civil war occurred in the mid-nineties, and in the past few years it has suffered the same disintegration as Somalia. It has become a failed state, with the successive armed conflicts that tribal and sectarian actors have engaged in, as violent terrorist gangs have broadened their scope of action, and with conflict and a proxy war between the two regional powers of Iran and Saudi Arabia. For Yemen, the result has been the collapse of state institutions, and for the Arab world, the result has been Iranian influence crossing the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Between 1990 and 2015, the situation in Syria has not been unlike that in Somalia and Yemen. Syria is now beset by the brutal crimes of Al-Assad's gangs and violent terrorist gangs. Both sides receive regional and international support, in the form of arms and funding, and the popular revolution for democracy has turned into an armed conflict and bloody civil war. The situation in Libya is similar: the country has been torn apart by all-out war, terrorism is endemic, and the nation-state lacks authority. Lebanon is similar too, with its broken state that is in hock to sectarianism, Iranian arms, Gulf money, repercussions of the conflict in Syria, and the network of Israel's allies.

Between 1990 and 2015, Iran has been able to encroach upon Arab interests in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, and Israel has continued its aggression and colonization. Turkey has gone from a marginal actor, in terms of power and influence in the Arab world, to a pivotal actor with Arab allies and enemies alike, and it has gotten involved in armed conflicts and civil wars in Syria, Iraq, and possibly Libya.

For us as Arabs, there is no way out of this negative series of events, no way to engage international powers or non-Arab regional parties in our interests. There is no way out of the repeated appropriation of our lands, and of armed conflicts, civil war, all-out war, sectarianism, secessionism, dissolution of the nation-state and collapse of state institutions, endemic terrorism that thrives on the absence of the nation-state and on authoritarianism, injustice, poverty, sectarianism, foreign military presence, and Arab states' hypocritical policies—except by consensus on a new system or new arrangements for regional security. These must uphold common factors between Arab countries, piece together the remnants of nation-states, and confront terrorism, violence, and extremism together. They must develop negotiation-based solutions for ongoing armed conflicts and civil wars, prevent non-Arabs from encroaching on our territory and interests, and above all, make democracy, human rights, freedoms, rule of law, rotation of power, and sustainable development part of our values, a societal commitment, and an Arab catalyst for transformation in this direction. This is the precondition for getting out of this negative chain of events, and the key to a present where we have crises under control and a future that brings us into the developed world.

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