

The Danger of ISIS Will Remain Even After the Liberation of Syria and Iraq: Why?

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Despite the ongoing military operations in Syria and Iraq, which daily engage vast territories under the control of the “Islamic State” (ISIS), the latter has been able to hit distant targets in the Islamic world, in Europe and in Asia.

Despite the loss of territories, the world is facing – and will continue so to do – an ideology adopted and incarnated by an organisation that has succeeded in attracting young men and women, provoked their emotion, brought out their hate and anger, and shaken the stability of established geographical boundaries. Many are the reasons, but the world does not want to pay attention to particular ones because they make it an accomplice in the spread of this ideology and its consequences, capable of hitting all societies regardless of any differences.

According to unofficial estimates, 40,000 to 50,000 men and women joined the ranks of ISIS, including some 5,000 to 6,000 from Europe, more than 10,000 from Russia, the Caucasus and thousands from the Maghreb, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, the United States and even the Maldives. This is in addition to the tens of thousands of fighters who have joined it from Iraq (the cradle country) and Syria (the country of geographical extension). The organisation reached around 100,000 fighters, being able to control vast territories in both Syria and Iraq, and has sustained dozens of battles on several fronts for four consecutive years of continuous war.

These numbers are an unprecedented leap in the contemporary history of polarisation and recruitment to an extremist Islamic organisation that holds a certain doctrine and calls for an “Islamic State from east to west”. In the Afghanistan war, for example, in the early 1980s, the number of foreign fighters were significantly lower. This enormous increase is due to many reasons that were not available to the days of “Arab Afghans” and Muhajereen (Foreign fighters joining the holy war – Jihad) during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

The obvious initial reason that contributed to the promotion of this phenomenon is Internet which allowed free and immediate communication between peoples across the globe. The second reason is the credulity of the media and the lack of commitment to the channeling of facts without politicisation rampant among the mainstream media and analysts. The third and most important reason concerns the occupation of Middle Eastern countries (the 2003 Iraq war, the Libya war and the Syrian war), the Western intervention with soldiers on foreign soil and the policy of regime change followed by President George W. Bush, and whose similar policy is today adopted by the current US President Donald Trump.

Internet:

The world woke up very late to react against the way ISIS (as well as al-Qaeda) exploited social media and the evolution of the development of the communication (internet and all attached facilities) to share images of its combat in action, its data and ideas. The Internet is the most powerful tool used to attract young people and families, not only to join the "Islamic State", but also to exposed "the injustice and abuse Muslims suffer in the Middle East due to the West ambition to occupy land and kill Muslims with no accountability". ISIS also called for an "Islamic uprising worldwide and the return of the glorious rule of Islam" that took place more than 1400 years ago.

ISIS benefited from immeasurable experiences of sympathisers who chose to join the ranks; doctors, engineers, university degree holders and many from all walks of life, including experts with large competence in propaganda. Those served ISIS and managed to create a regular magazine, radios and short films in many languages.

They integrated the widespread electronic games with pictures of battles and killing in real life. An abundance of informative materials emanates daily from ISIS through the Internet to deliver ideas and messages to every home and continent no group ever had access to before. ISIS used "live killing" to project the power over his weak enemies". The terrorist group was "innovative" in different ways of killing to show the all-powerfulness of the group and its capability to have life and death control over large numbers of the population in Mesopotamia and Bilad al-Sham. ISIS projected an image of "a beautiful life desired by many beings (many wives and slaves, sharing spoils of war, salary, housing, social well-being, social security, teaching, sharing a new family and society) and tranquility" under its "state" to address the dreams of intellectual and unemployed youth. Those joined the group "to do something", to "fight injustice", to "escape domestic harassment", to "improve their lives" or to contribute to the Islamic renaissance, apparently mistreated and abused by the West.

ISIS was able to reach a large number of supporters in many countries without stepping in, all to serve "the state of the Caliphate" and be part of it. Many of these were not necessarily asked to be the holders of a robust Islamic faith. A large number of these did not adhere to Islamic practice and do not know its rules and requirements. Many of these - especially those who managed to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria - needed intensive religious courses as the group showed in many of its propaganda videos. Youths were recruited by their will and enthusiasm or influenced by friends or family members. The "Lone wolves" that attacked the west were recruited in their places of residence through the Internet even if most of them were not strong believers and were born and raised in the same country where they have committed terrorist acts.

Unfortunately, it was too late when the security services finally paid enough attention to the power of Internet and its danger to begin the process of counter-propaganda and control. Governments in the west largely contributed to the direct and indirect support of terrorism by using Internet to promote their own policies towards the Middle East, mainly in their approach towards the war in Syria and the way this war was handled.

Mainstream media and its role:



(credits to the owner of the photo)

The way mainstream media is handling the war in Iraq and above all the war in Syria has had a devastating role and negative influence on various communities around the globe, mainly those previously considered as passive radicals but who never went into action. The media coverage has encouraged “lone wolves” and contributed to providing valid reasons for large convoys who joined in the exodus to “Caliphate land”. The media have helped mislead young people by adopting unverified and fake news related to the war in Syria, and in so doing, disregarded their responsibility towards the profession. News was widely shared, following the “newspaper/television’s policy”, without necessarily reflecting reality and, in many cases, in the absence of the journalists on the ground. Information was taken for granted from activists’ sources and roles were inverted: journalists became activists and vice versa.

The desire of many countries to remove the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and change the regime overwhelmed professionalism. Journalists became active on social media, spreading their fake news and “breaking news” about events in Syria and Iraq while they were thousands of miles away, without necessarily verifying their sources, as long as it fitted the globally agreed narrative. The ugliness of the war in Syria and Iraq was exposed as it was a kind of game and race: who shares the information first and who can gather the largest number of killed in one photo, attributing the blame to the Syrian state. It was a machine of propaganda, careless about the effect of their doing on the mind of the youths sitting at home and being affected by the event, wanting to “react and do something”. ISIS could not be more grateful than to have the entire main stream media working under the service of its own propaganda. ISIS sympathisers used available publishing material to its own benefit and narrative: a perfect recruitment tool, free of charge, powerful, reaching every single home.

Foreign Policy and System Change:

This is at the heart of the problem that analysts, media and experts deliberately pass or even conceal when analysing factors contributing to the growth of terrorism. These ignore what former US President Barack Obama did not hesitate to acknowledge that “[ISIS is the unintended consequences of the US-led war on Iraq](#)” in 2003. Terrorist analysts relied on “Islamophobia”, analysed the “lone wolf” phenomenon and studied the reasons behind the massive migration to ISIS but deliberately disregarded Liberal democracy leaders’ policy and decisions in handling Middle East issues, particularly Iraq, [Libya](#), and Syria.

Obviously, the reasons behind terrorism are many as those agreed by scholars specialised in

terrorism studies. But the fact remains that the “killing in the name of Islam” took place after the killing of [hundreds of thousands](#) of Muslims in their [homes](#). Under the excuse of dismantling the arsenal of [weapons of Mass Destruction](#) the regime in Iraq was changed, followed by Libya where the world suddenly discovered in 2011 the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi, to end up in Syria where leaders promoted the removal of Assad and offered as an alternative the radical Islam of ISIS and al-Qaeda.



US military deployment at Syrian-Jordanian border (credits to the owner of the photo)

In all places, US soldiers were part of the events, on the ground or in the sky participating in regime changes, building military bases and occupying more territories but leaving behind a fertile ground for terrorist organisation to proliferate and grow, like ISIS and al-Qaeda. Still today the US and Europe have not learned from history and still want to occupy territory: they set up four new military bases in Syria and are prepared to plant roots in Bilad al-Sham under the excuse of recovering ISIS-occupied areas. But ISIS will not be totally annihilated and these new occupying forces will face stronger and more experienced insurgency: history will repeat itself.

In the absence of justice and a climate of flourishing wars, ISIS ideology seems coherent and powerful, capable of recruiting and reviving itself. These radical organisations are composed of intelligent and educated people who can adapt to harshness and security measures taken against their methods to develop other, counter methods to keep conflicts going as long as Western policies insist on promoting regime changes through overseas intervention.

Every day in the Middle East there is an attack such as the attack on Manchester, Iran, France and other terrorist attacks around the world. Every day dozens are killed in Iraq and Syria. ISIS has demonstrated an ability to plan and execute, recruiting the largest number of suicide attackers in the history of mankind, all ready to blow themselves up for their cause. If we take the last [terrorist attack in Iran](#), ISIS was directly behind the attackers who were able to carefully examine the security weaknesses, break into the parliament and broadcast live video while the terrorist attack was on-going through A'maq, the ISIS broadcasting agency.

ISIS is very capable of planning, coordinating and synchronising attacks, like the [Bataclan](#)

and in [Brussels](#). Lone wolves are also capable of planning and triggering massive terror attacks with large numbers of victims as in [Nice](#) and [Manchester](#). The aim is to cause terror, large numbers of casualties and a wider audience.

If the US will not reconsider its foreign policy and keeps, along with many terrorism analysts, its head in the sand, ignoring the real implications of the expansion of terrorism, ISIS will strike again and again. If the terrorist group was able to attract tens of thousands of people in such a short time and attract them physically and intellectually to its cause, the new version of ISIS – after its defeat in Syria and Iraq – may be more aggressive and dangerous to societies. It is time to wake up and learn from past history and the power of revenge.

Featured image: Elijah J M

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