

## **A SIGNS OF ISLAMIC STATE'S TERRORISM REACH AND INFLUENCE AMONG DIFFERENT GROUPS**

**Nenad Taneski, PhD**

Military academy „General Mihailo Apostolski“- Skopje  
*nenoreal@yahoo.com*

**Sasha Smileski, MA**

Military academy „General Mihailo Apostolski“- Skopje,  
*ssmileski@gmail.com*

**Metodija Dojchinovski, PhD**

Military academy „General Mihailo Apostolski“- Skopje,  
*m\_dojcinovski@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

In this paper are showed the Islamic State adherents group's which they are recognized since 2014, those groups have recognized the Islamic State caliphate and pledged loyalty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi<sup>1</sup>. Groups in Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Afghanistan, and Nigeria have used the Arabic word „wilayah“ (state/province) to describe themselves as constituent members of a broader IS-led caliphate. The implications of such pledges of loyalty to the Islamic State on groups' objectives, tactics, and leadership structures appear to vary and may evolve.

Those terrorist groups, followers of IS, use violent protests, assassinations, terrorist attacks in public places, air traffic, etc. to undermine the integrity of the countries where they operate and to overthrow legitimate governments. There are also isolated cases that seem to do the same thing, but they are again encouraged and driven by the ideology of IS.

**Key words:** caliphate, ideology, operations, terrorist organization, international security.

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<sup>1</sup> leader and the first Caliph of the ISIS.

## INTRODUCTION

While the eruption of the civil war in Syria and Islamic State of Iraq's (ISI) expansion of operations into that country undoubtedly energized the organization's base, its recovery and expansion was clearly well underway prior to 2011. In early 2011, with the Arab Spring in full flow, ISI continued the process of expansion and professionalization that it had begun in late 2009. It significantly escalated its military operations in Iraq, both geographically, incorporating southern Shi'ite areas and the Kurdish north, and in terms of scale, carrying out 20-30 attacks in multiple provinces, often within the space of an hour. For example, suspected ISI militants carried out 22 seemingly coordinated bombings in Baghdad and 12 other locations across Iraq on 15 August 2011. These intense and wide ranging attacks aimed not only to inflict material damage on the government but to diminish the morale of Iraq's security forces.

In July 2012, ISI initiated a 12-month campaign entitled „Breaking the Walls” with the principal objective of freeing its imprisoned members. ISI launched eight major attacks on Iraqi prisons over the following year. The September 2012 attack on Tikrit's Tasfirat Prison liberated 47 senior ISI leaders from death row.<sup>2</sup> The campaign's finale was an assault on Abu Ghraib prison on 21 July 2013 that enabled approximately 500 prisoners to escape.

ISI also placed an increased focus on collecting and exploiting vast amounts of intelligence, which was hugely valuable as leverage over local authorities. This gave the group extensive influence across much of Sunni Iraq and was advanced further when what was then Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) launched a second 12-month plan, Operation Soldier's Harvest (July 2013-July 2014). This campaign aimed to undermine the capacity and confidence of security forces through targeted attacks and intimidation. It entailed a 150% increase in „close-quarters assassinations” of security personnel and threats directed at individual commanders, soldiers, and police, including the bombing of their homes, drive-by shootings against their checkpoints and personal vehicles, and similar targeted attacks.

ISI and its antecedents had maintained links in Syria since 2003, when recruitment networks, facilitated by Syrian intelligence, funneled fighters from the Arab world into Iraq through Syria. By 2007, the U.S. government claimed

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Arango and Eric Schmitt, „Escaped Inmates from Iraq Fuel Syrian Insurgency”, *The New York Times*, 2014, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/13/world/middleeast/escaped-inmates-from-iraq-fuel-syria-insurgency.html>>.

that „85-90%” of foreign fighters in Iraq had come via Syria.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the emergence of a popular revolution in Syria in early 2011 attracted the attention of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who sent his Ninawa operations chief, Abu Muhammad al-Jowlani, to Syria to establish an ISI front.<sup>4</sup>

ISIS’s July 2013 killing of a senior Free Syrian Army commander in Latakia was the first sign of the inevitable. Six months later, in January 2014, a coalition of moderate groups launched operations against ISIS across northern Syria, eventually forcing their withdrawal east towards Raqqa in March 2014. By that time, ISIS’s refusal to submit to independent opposition courts and to al-Qaeda-appointed mediators had pushed Zawahiri to announce in February that „ISIS is not a branch of the al-Qaeda group, we have no organizational relationship with it, and the group is not responsible for its actions.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, from 2013 onwards, ISIS’s unrivaled information operations and exploitation of social media brought a renewed energy toward its cause of controlling territory and establishing an Islamic state.

Although the emergence of an anti-ISIS front in northern Syria caused the group to lose considerable territory in early 2014, the setback was temporary. Having consolidated its capital in Raqqa, ISIS forces in Iraq exploited conditions in the Sunni heartland of Anbar to march into Fallujah and parts of Ramadi in January 2014. This marked ISIS’s renewed venture into overt territorial control in Iraq and set the stage for its gradual expansion in Anbar, particularly along the Syrian border. ISIS then began a concerted counter-attack against opposition groups in Syria’s eastern Deir Ezzor governorate in April 2014, focused along the Euphrates and Khabur rivers. ISIS’s operations in Iraq and Syria were becoming increasingly interrelated, with funds, fighters, and weapons crossing borders more frequently. It was under this emerging reality that ISIS led the rapid seizure of Mosul on 10 June 2014, thereby inflaming the wider Sunni armed uprising across Iraq.

To underline their accomplishments and goals, as well as to attract a wider following, ISIS issued a series of coordinated media releases marking the start of Ramadan. The most significant of these was an audio recording, released on 29 June 2014 in five languages that announced the establishment

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Neumann, „Suspects into Collaborators”, *London Review of Books* 36, no. 7, 2014, 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Zeina Karam and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, „Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front Leader Stays in Syria Shadows”, Associated Press, 2013, <<http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/al-qaedas-nusra-front-leader-stays-in-syrias-shadows>>.

<sup>5</sup> „On the Relationship of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham”, *Al-Fajr Media*, 2014, <<http://jihadology.net/2014/02/02/as-sahab-media-presents-a-newstatement-from-al-qaidah-on-the-relationship-of-qaidat-al-jihad-and-the-islamic-state-of-iraqand-al-sham>>.

of the caliphate. On the same day the group published videos titled „Breaking the Borders” and „The End of Sykes-Picot” that showed the physical destruction of a land barrier demarcating the Syria-Iraq border and a militant touring a captured Iraqi border post adjacent to Syria. A 1 July 2014 audio statement in which Baghdadi celebrated the caliphate’s creation was followed by a 5 July 2014 video of his first public appearance as „Caliph.”

## **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN EGYPT**

The Islamic State’s local affiliate in the northern Sinai Peninsula was formerly known as Ansar Bayt al Maqdis (Supporters of the Holy House or Partisans of Jerusalem). It emerged after the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and affiliated with the Islamic State in 2014. Estimates of its membership range from 500 to 1,000, and it is comprised of radicalized indigenous Bedouin Arabs, foreign fighters, and Palestinian militants. On social media, the group has displayed various pictures of its weaponry, specifically man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) such as the 9K338 Igla-S and Kornet anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) systems. SP has claimed credit for destroying Metrojet Flight 9268, which exploded in mid-air over the Sinai Peninsula on 31 October 2015, killing all 224 passengers aboard. The Egyptian government has been circumspect over the cause of the crash, while several foreign governments, including the United States, have strongly suggested that the detonation of a hidden bomb most likely brought down the plane.

## **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN SAUDI ARABIA**

IS leaders have threatened the kingdom’s rulers and state clerics directly and called on the group’s supporters there to attack Shia, Saudi security forces, and foreigners.<sup>6</sup> IS supporters have claimed responsibility for several attacks in the kingdom since 2014, including suicide bombing attacks

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<sup>6</sup> OSC Report TRR2014111361251279, „ISIL Amir Al-Baghdadi Accepts Pledges of Allegiance, Announces

‘Expansion’ to Saudi Arabia, Yemen”, Twitter in English, Arabic, 2014.

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on Shia mosques in different parts of the country and attacks targeting Saudi security forces. In June 2015, an IS-affiliated Saudi suicide bomber blew himself up in a Kuwaiti mosque, killing more than two dozen people and wounding hundreds. Saudi officials have arrested more than 1,600 suspected IS supporters (including more than 400 in July 2015) and claim to have foiled several planned attacks.<sup>7</sup> U.S. diplomatic facilities closed temporarily in March 2015 in connection with threat information, and U.S. officials continue to warn of the potential for attacks on U.S. persons and facilities in the kingdom, along with other Western and Saudi targets.

The Islamic State arguably poses a unique political threat to Saudi Arabia in addition to the tangible security threats demonstrated by a series of deadly attacks inside the kingdom since late 2014. IS leaders claim to have established a caliphate to which all pious Sunni Muslims owe allegiance, directly challenging the legitimacy of Saudi leaders who have long claimed a unique role as Sunni leaders and supporters of particular Salafist interpretations of Sunni Islam. IS critiques of Saudi leaders may have resonance among some Saudis who have volunteered to fight for or contributed on behalf of Muslims in several conflicts involving other Muslims over the last three decades. Saudi leaders argue that it is the Islamic State that lacks legitimacy, and some Saudi observers compare the group's ideology to that of other violent, deviant groups from the past and present.

## **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN LIBYA**

Supporters of the Islamic State in Libya have announced three affiliated wilayah (provinces) corresponding to the country's three historic regions—Wilayah Tarabulus in the west, Wilayah Barqa in the east, and Wilayah Fezzan in the southwest. Detailed open source estimates about current IS size and organization in Libya are lacking. U.S. military officials estimated the group's strength at approximately 3,500 fighters in late 2015, but in early 2016, unnamed U.S. officials estimated that figure had grown to as many as 6,000, among a much larger community of Libyan Salafi-jihadist activists and militia members. In February 2016, the U.S. intelligence community described the IS presence in Libya as „one of its most developed branches outside of Syria and Iraq,” and said the group was „well positioned to expand territory under its control in 2016.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ahmed Al Omran, „Saudi Arabia Arrests 431 People With Suspected Islamic State Links”, *Wall Street Journal*, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> DNI Clapper, Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, Senate Armed Services Committee, 2016.

Since late 2014, IS supporters have taken control of Muammar al Qadhafi's hometown—the central coastal city of Sirte—and committed a series of atrocities against Christians and Libyan Muslim opponents. They also have launched attacks against forces from Misrata and neighboring towns in an effort to push westward and southward. Clashes with groups to the east have damaged vital national oil infrastructure, and as of February 2016, IS fighters continue to press for control over national oil assets in the area. IS backers sought to impose their control on the eastern city of Darnah, but have faced resistance from other armed Islamist groups that do not share their beliefs or recognize the authority of IS leader and self-styled caliph, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.

Statements made by U.S. officials in 2016 suggest that U.S. security concerns about the IS Libya presence have intensified, and U.S. action against IS targets might proceed even if political consensus among Libyans remains elusive. In January 2016, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford said „it's fair to say that we're looking to take decisive military action against ISIL in conjunction with the political process” in Libya, and, „The president has made clear that we have the authority to use military force.” In November 2015, the U.S. military conducted an airstrike thought to have killed the Iraqi leader of IS operations in Libya, the first such U.S. strike on IS operatives outside of Syria and Iraq.

## **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN NIGERIA**

This northeast Nigeria-based Sunni insurgent terrorist group widely known by the name Boko Haram („western education is forbidden”) and formerly known as Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa wa-al Jihad („People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad”) pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015. More than 15,000 deaths have been attributed to the group in the past five years (more than 6,000 in 2015 alone), and more than 1.6million people have been displaced by related violence, which increasingly spread into neighboring Cameroon, Chad and Niger (an area collectively known as the Lake Chad Basin) in 2015. The group threatens civilian, state and international targets, including Western citizens, in the region; in 2011 it bombed the United Nations building in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. The State Department designated Boko Haram and a splinter faction, Ansaru, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 2013. Counterterrorism cooperation with Nigeria has been constrained by various factors. U.S. counterterrorism assistance to the Lake Chad Basin countries has grown substantially since 2014 (now totaling more than \$400 million in Boko

Haram-focused support, in addition to intelligence sharing). The region is a priority area for U.S. Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) programs.

### **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN**

The June 2015 semi-annual Defense Department report on Afghanistan stability states that the United States and the Afghan government are closely watching the Islamic State's attempt to expand its reach in Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> The Islamic State presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan appears to consist of individuals of more mainstream insurgent groups, particularly the Afghan Taliban, „rebranding” themselves as members of „The Islamic State of Khorasan Province,” or Wilayah Khorasan. This group differs from the so called Khorasan Group identified by U.S. officials as being an Al Qaeda affiliated cell seeking to conduct transnational terrorist attacks. It does not appear that Islamic State leadership has sent substantial numbers of fighters from Iraq and Syria into Afghanistan or Pakistan. According to the report, „[the Islamic State's] presence and influence in Afghanistan remains in the exploratory stage.” There also reportedly is growing competition and conflict between the Taliban and Islamic State fighters. Still, the emerging Islamic State presence in Afghanistan is a growing factor in U.S.-Afghan discussions on the joint response to a deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan overall, according to official readouts from 2015 high-level U.S.-Afghanistan exchanges.<sup>10</sup>

### **THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP IN YEMEN**

In Yemen, militants who claim allegiance to the Islamic State have taken advantage of ongoing war to repeatedly bomb mosques known for attracting worshippers of Zaydi Islam, an offshoot of Shia Islam (with legal traditions and religious practices which are similar to Sunni Islam). Islamic State terrorists have targeted supporters of the Houthi Movement, a predominately Zaydi armed militia and political group that aims to rule wide swaths of northern Yemen and restore the „Imamate,” or Zaydi-led monarchical rule that intermittently governed northern Yemen from 893 AD to 1962. The Houthis are currently at war with a coalition of predominately Sunni Arab states led by Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic State may see this war as an opportunity to increase sectarian hatred in Yemen. Though wracked by

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Josh Lederman, „Obama finalizes slowdown of U.S. troop withdrawal with Afghan leader”, AP, 2015

war, Yemen has not traditionally had the same kind of sectarian animosity as other Arab states such Iraq and Lebanon.

## **CONCLUSION**

IS intention is developing a support base capable of provoking domestic instability before attempting to establish an actual operational presence. This process takes time, of course, making it unlikely that IS will seek to do more than encourage localized instability in neighboring states in the near future. However, IS doesn't succeed in consolidating its „state” in Syria and Iraq. The intention consolidating its „state” in their wilayah in Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Afghanistan, and Nigeria are not feasible today, but still a burning idea in a minds of leaders waiting for a fertile conditions. In the Philippines, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and a splinter faction of the Abu Sayyaf Group led by Isnilon Hapilon both announced their allegiance to IS. In Indonesia, the imprisoned former Jamaah Islamiyya leader Abu Bakar Bashir pledged his allegiance to IS after allegedly facilitating the transfer of finances to the organization.

Confrontation between the Islamic State organization and its adherents on the one hand and the other countries on the other may be protracted, costly, violent, and challenging. For example an Islamic State group online publication in India has called for its supporters to spread the coronavirus. The group claims that devout Muslims will not be sickened, because „no disease can harm even a hair of a believer.” It is the latest in an effort by the Islamic State group and its followers to take advantage of the pandemic and general civic instability in the West. The group's transnational appeal and its supporters' violent fanaticism pose considerable risks to international security and appear likely to continue to force policymakers in the other countries to address complex questions regarding the use of military force, privacy and civil liberties, intelligence sharing, immigration, identity, religious liberty, diplomatic negotiation, and national strategic priorities.

This paper shows how no country in the world is excluded and 100% safe from terrorist attacks by IS. Whether through joint groups or psychological warfare over the internet using hash tags calling for violence by killing civilians, destroying state and public infrastructure, spreading the coronavirus, IS reaches into every society. In most terrorist attacks in Europe in recent years, the perpetrators of these attacks have stated that they were driven by the ideology of IS, although they have never been in direct contact with IS. And they were encouraged to commit the crime through the propaganda that IS spreads on the Internet.



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