

Despite international efforts to contain, fight and delegitimise it, the self-proclaimed "Islamic State" - a terrorist jihadist entity also known for its previous designations ISIL/ISIS or DAESH - not only has consolidated characteristics as a *de facto* State, but has also expanded far beyond Syria and Iraq. In fact, the IS has become one of the most disturbing threats to international security in recent years, rivalling with al-Qaeda (AQ) as the leader of global jihadism.

How did this phenomenon emerge and evolve? How can we characterise the IS in terms of its goals, ideology, structure, governance, military and financial capabilities, propaganda, and recruitment procedures? Which groups have sided with the IS around the world? What strategies and legislation have been developed to contain and fight the IS? What are the dilemmas involving jihadist Internet use, and what is the balance between security and freedom? And what is the meaning of the IS's rise for our societies and also of so many actors involved in fighting it to the regional geopolitical chessboard?

These are some of the questions addressed in this book through nine essays written by a transnational team of some of the most prominent experts from Portugal, Italy and Turkey. So as to ensure a variety of topics related to this new global jihadist phenomenon, the book has relatively short and concise chapters, albeit containing in-depth and well-informed views from eight scholars and two journalists.



EDITOR LUÍS TOMÉ

"ISLAMIC STATE" - THE NEW GLOBAL JIHADIST PHENOMENON



THE NEW GLOBAL JIHADIST PHENOMENON

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INTRODUCTION

Luís Tomé

The self-proclaimed “Islamic State” (IS) is a terrorist jihadist entity also known for its previous designations ISIL/ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/ash-Sham) or DAESH (*Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil Iraq wa ash-Sham*). Just like al-Qaeda (AQ), the IS is based on the Salafist-jihadist ideology (*al-salafiyya al-jihadiyya*), a puritanical branch of the Sunni Islam that wants the Islamic community to return to “pure” ancestral practices, making a clear separation between “true believers” and “unbelievers” considered to be “infidels”. Refusing theological diversity, the Salafist-jihadists also base their views on the “*Takfir doctrine*”, which sanctions violence against other Muslims accused of apostasy, unbelief or unfaithfulness. However, the IS ideologically adopts an even more exclusive view than the AQ and other jihadist groups, being less tolerant of those considered to be “deviant Islamic sects”, particularly Shi’ism. As such, from its antecedents in Iraq, the IS pursues a strategy aimed at instigating a sectarian “holy war” within Islam, namely the Sunnis against the Shiites.

On the other hand, the IS has always claimed to be more than a jihadist organisation, as its name literally implies: a *de facto* “State”. And a “State” with expansionist ambitions: since its inception, the ISI/ISIL/IS aimed at the eventual restoration of the “Caliphate”, a mythical monarchic-theocratic form of government that represents the unity and leadership of the “Islamic world”, a coveted global empire ruled according to Islamic

law, or *Sharia*, led by a single leader, the Caliph, the Prophet Muhammad's successor. Therefore, several references and maps of the now so-called "Islamic State" suggest an ambition that includes dominating all the territories of ancient historical Caliphates, ranging from the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) to Southeast Asia.

The IS's origins date back to jihadist groups in the late 1990s which, after the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, became known as "al-Qaeda in Iraq" (AQI) from 2004 onwards. In October 2006, some jihadist factions grouped in the *Mujahideen Shura Council* created the "Islamic State in Iraq" (ISI), conceived as an independent group and not as a subsidiary of AQ, and attacked both the "foreign invaders" and the Shiite and Kurdish communities that started to be predominant in Iraq in the post-Saddam Hussein era. In 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took the leadership of a fragile ISI and the title of "Commander of the Faithful", and from 2011 onwards, a new combination of factors favoured the prominence of ISI and al-Baghdadi:

i) The American withdrawal from Iraq, leaving a fragile country led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (May 2006-September 2014), who pursued a pro-Shiite agenda and alienated the Sunni minority, which allowed the ISI to strengthen among Sunni tribes, former insurgents and also former members of the Baath Party and Iraqi military and security structures seeking to regain the power they had enjoyed during the era of Saddam;

ii) Osama bin Laden's death in May 2011, which meant not only the elimination of the main reference of the jihadist movement, but also the weakening of the AQ, leading to greater autonomy of its affiliate groups and to the rise of local and independent regional groups;

iii) The "Arab Spring" in North Africa and the Middle East, unleashing huge turbulence and conflict in most of these countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen), as well as the resurgence of sectarian rivalries and the expansion of extremist movements;

iv) And, in particular, the civil war in Syria from March 2011, as a result of a challenge to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and involving multiple factions (Shiite militias, Christian militias, democrats insurgents, the moderate and jihadists) and hundreds of groups (more

than 1000 were referenced at some point), in a chaotic stage that quickly became the largest "magnet" for jihadists from around the world and for complex "power games" (ranging from Iran and Russia to Arab countries, Turkey, EU or the US ...).

In this context, the ISI has rebuilt itself as an insurgent force capable of executing powerful attacks in Iraq. At the same time, in neighbouring Syria, the ISI and the AQ instigated the creation of the "al-Nusra Front" (*Jabhat Al-Nusra /JN*) led by Syrian Abu Mohammad al-Golani (or al-Julani), a former operational in Iraq. As the ISI was again a credible force and taking advantage of the situation in Syria, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi decided to expand the ISI into Syria, and, in April 2013, proclaimed the establishment of the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant"/"ash-Sham" (*Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil Iraq wa ash-Sham*) and the corresponding merger of JN in the new ISIL/ISIS/Daesh. Al-Golani refused this manoeuvre and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the successor to Bin Laden in al-Qaeda's core leadership, instructed Bakr al-Baghdadi to limit the ISI's activities to Iraq. However, al-Baghdadi reiterated that his group would also remain in *al-sham*, and after months of theological and operational disputes, the AQ officially announced its dissociation from the ISIS. As such, the ISIS ended up getting into fratricidal conflict with AQ's branch in Syria.

More than fighting Assad's regime, the ISIS then concentrated its efforts towards occupying and administering territories and localities in Syrian Sunni areas (Raqqa, Idlib, Deir ez-Zor and Aleppo), triggering, in parallel, a similar campaign in Iraq: after capturing Fallujah and Ramadi in January 2014, the ISIS expanded rapidly and conquered other bastions, like al-Qaim and Tikrit, and the strategic city of Mosul in the beginning of June. On 29 June 2014, the ISIL/ISIS/ Daesh announced its name would change to just "Islamic State" (IS), proclaimed itself a "Caliphate" and named its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi "Caliph Ibrahim". It thus evolved from a jihadist insurgent terrorist organisation into a politically organized territorial terrorist entity in Syria and Iraq.

The alarm caused by the extension of the IS "Caliphate" led to a sudden change in the geopolitical chess in the region and brought about a very eclectic "anti-IS coalition" since the summer of 2014. However, despite international efforts to contain, fight and delegitimise it, the IS not only

has consolidated characteristics as a *de facto* State, but has also expanded far beyond Syria and Iraq. In fact, the IS has become one of the most disturbing threats to international security in recent years, rivalling with al-Qaeda (AQ) as the leader of global jihadism.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

How did this phenomenon emerge and evolve? How can we characterise the IS in terms of its goals, ideology, structure, governance, military and financial capabilities, propaganda, and recruitment procedures? How does the IS fit in global jihadism and what kind of relationship has it developed with al-Qaeda? What does its self-proclamation as a “Caliphate” mean? Which groups have sided with the IS around the world and what new *wilayats* has the IS created outside Syria and Iraq? What strategies and legislation have been developed to contain and combat the IS? What are the dilemmas involving jihadist Internet use, and what is the balance between security and freedom? And what is the profile of Western jihadists who join the IS? What is the impact of ISIS in rekindle rivalries between Sunnis and Shiites and between Saudi Arabia and Iran? What other interests pursuing the US, Russia or Turkey in Syria besides fight against the IS? In sum, what is the meaning of the IS's rise for our societies and also of so many actors involved in fighting it to the regional geopolitical chessboard?

These are some of the questions addressed in this book through nine essays written by a transnational team of some of the most prominent experts from Portugal, Italy and Turkey. Purposely, in order to enhance the variety of backgrounds of the authors and their different perspectives, essays do not follow any specific methodology or theoretical approach, concerned only with crossing relevant information with sustained analysis. So as to ensure a variety of topics related to this new global jihadist phenomenon, the book has relatively short and concise chapters, albeit containing in-depth and well-informed views from eight scholars and two journalists.

After this Introduction, Hüseyin Bağcı and Hasan Hilmi Gullu describe the rise of a “violent *de facto* State” from a regional non-state actor to self-proclaimed “global caliphate”, also characterising the IS in terms of its structure, governance, military and financial capabilities, propaganda and recruitment procedures, highlighting the case of the Turkish youth. In the second chapter, Felipe Pathé Duarte addresses the IS within the framework of global jihadism, from both an ideological and a functional perspective, emphasising the ambivalent relationship with al-Qaeda.

In the next chapter, 1, Luis Tomé, will analyse the international expansion of the IS, including its attraction of “foreign fighters”, the new IS *wilayats* outside Syria and Iraq, the jihadist groups around the world who have joined the IS, the involvement of the IS in other stages of conflict and fragile States, and IS activities in cyberspace. The latter is the central focus of Elisa Giunchi's essay, debating the issue of authority in Islam, the web and the jihadists, showing how the Internet has opened up new spaces for interpretations that differ from both the classical doctrine and official Islam. In connection to this, the chapter written by Mario Losano reflects on the delicate balance between security and freedom, relating new technologies to the fight against terrorism and fundamental rights, with references to the “Arab Spring” and IS activities, also discussing the “hybrid war” and launching a prospective view of demography and religion.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the strategies used to counter the IS, and the author, Luis Valença Pinto, describes the many challenges and the efforts of international organisations, the Islamic world and coalitions of States to combat the IS, also evaluating the effectiveness of current strategies. Then Alice Feiteira addresses the legal dimension of terrorism and anti-terrorism fight, analysing the challenges of law as an instrument for preventing and combating transnational terrorism and the associated phenomenon of foreign fighters. In the last chapter, Hugo Franco and Raquel Moleiro examine the case of the Portuguese jihadists, including the profile and route of about a dozen young Portuguese who left several European countries to join the IS in Syria and Iraq.

At least, the book is not ending with the traditional “conclusions” – purposely, these are left to our readers. Instead, the final remarks summarize the multiple threats to international security posed by the IS,

and reflects on the delicate geopolitical chessboard in which the fight against the “Islamic State” is going on.

This is a pioneering book collaboratively written by several experts who aim at a wider audience, of utmost relevance to our understanding of the “Islamic State” and the threat and challenges it poses. Covering a still understudied topic usually approached from one single perspective, this book is an undeniable contribution due to the diversity of interrelated topics addressed by authors of different backgrounds and nationalities.

I thank all of the co-authors for sharing knowledge, and for the invaluable contribution to this collective work – it was an honour to organise this edition with such an extraordinary and competent group.

On behalf of us all, we the authors thank OBSERVARE - Observatory of International Relations of the University Autónoma of Lisbon and Mediaxxi for publishing this work. We also thank our readers for joining us in our interest to better understand the new global jihadist phenomenon represented by the “Islamic State” and which has shaken both our societies and our security.

Thank you all.

Luis Tomé,
29 October 2015