



## A NEW WAR ON TERROR?

### THE CHALLENGE OF THE 'ISLAMIC STATE'

The challenge to international peace and security posed by the so-called 'Islamic State' has dominated international headlines for months. Yet, while thousands have been killed and hundreds of thousands are fleeing Iraq and Syria, the international community is still struggling to formulate – and implement – a credible response. Neither the desperate resistance of Kurdish militias nor the air strikes of the international coalition have thus far been able to put an end to the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. Against this background, the Center for International Security and Governance has brought together a distinguished group of experts to assess the situation and evaluate the options available to the international community for this edition of the 'Commentary'.

James D. Bindenage<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Islamic State as a Threat to the Region and Europe**

In assessing the threat posed by the Islamic State (IS), it is critical to understand that we are confronted here with a fundamentally new kind of challenge. As an organization, IS violently rejects even the few moral principles universally shared by humanity. It denies any notion of human dignity and engages in activities that at the very least border on genocide. It is financed as a criminal organization. If given the opportunity, there can be no doubt that it would commit crimes similar to those we witnessed in Rwanda and Srebrenica during the 1990s. This is why, secondly, it is significant that IS consciously seeks to establish its own territorial base. While Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda were still so-called guests of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, ISIS has created a 'caliphate' and placed it under its cruel and inhumane interpretation of Sunni Islamic law.

This combination of its extremist ideology, illicit financing and an independent territorial base turns the Islamic State into an existential threat to its – largely involuntary – inhabitants. Summary executions and forced displacement have particularly affected the Kurdish population, but Shia Muslims, Christians and other so-called infidels are by no means immune. In October, the UN reported that 24,000 Iraqi civilians have been injured or killed by ISIS in the first eight months of 2014, more than a million are fleeing the territories controlled by the jihadist militia.

The ambitions and actions of the Islamic State challenge our shared values and principles. More than that, however, they also pose a very real threat to our interests and security. As such, they demand an equally decisive response.

And this time, the World stands united in opposition to the Islamic State. In August, the UN Security Council declaring IS a threat to

world peace under Article V of the UN Treaty, unanimously passed a strongly-worded resolution in which it condemned the “gross, systematic and widespread abuse” of human rights by the Islamic State and called on Member States to take national measures to prevent fighters from travelling from their soil to join the groups as well as to interrupt supplies of arms and to cut off financial support.

As things stand, however, such measures will not suffice to contain the threat. The attack on the French magazine ‘Charlie Hebdo’ confirmed the threat is in Europe. Indeed, international condemnation of IS actions only seems to have emboldened the IS and its fighters. Increasingly, therefore, Western leaders have grown convinced that it is impossible to negotiate with an actor like the Islamic State, that we will have to back up our words with deeds and, if need be, defend our values and our interests militarily.

Yet, more than ten years into the war on terror and with ISAF’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, the West has become war-weary. According to a recent study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, more than four in ten Americans believe that their country should henceforth stay out of international entanglements. Consequently, they seem to have taken some comfort in the idea – an idea that was certainly nurtured and promoted by the Obama administration – that the fight against terrorists could henceforth be conducted largely through limited operations of Special Forces and drone strikes.

This perspective dramatically changed over the course of just a few weeks when IS brutally beheaded two American journalists – and subsequently also British and French citizens. While 72 percent of Americans opposed an intervention in the conflict last summer, now, 70 percent support such an intervention. President Obama, who was blocked domestically from ordering air strikes against the Syrian regime after Bashar al Assad used chemical weapons against his own people last summer, has ordered extensive air strikes against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Many European governments have joined the fight – by supplying weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga or conducting air strikes against IS positions in Iraq. Notably, Germany –

traditionally reluctant when it comes to military interventions – was among the first to take such action. In a move that would have seemed unthinkable to most observers just a few months ago, the German Federal Government discarded the long-standing policy of not supplying weaponry to war zones and arranged for the delivery of anti-tank missiles and other equipment to the Kurdish Peshmerga.

Germany is serious about what President Gauck said at this year’s Munich Security Conference and indeed it has deployed armed soldiers to for a training mission in the Kurdish region of Iraq showing it is prepared to take on greater international responsibilities. While, for good historical reasons, Germans have long been reluctant to play an international leadership role, particularly in the security sphere, their partners have long shed such reluctance. Already in 2011, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski said he was less afraid of German tanks than of German inaction.

This, of course, does not mean that the Bundeswehr will – or should – soon be dispatched to any trouble spot around the globe. It does mean, however, that a genuine and strategic partnership with its European and North American allies requires that Germany bears its fair share of the burden. With its reunification a quarter century ago – and even more so with the recent Euro-crisis – Germany has become a natural leader in Europe commensurate with its international weight. As Germany assumes greater international responsibility, it will be taken seriously by its partners and will exercise influence on important strategic decisions taken in Washington and also Brussels. Berlin can no longer pursue the ‘checkbook diplomacy’ practiced by Helmut Kohl in the 1990s. Neither can it afford to impose countless caveats on the operation of the Bundeswehr, as it still did in Afghanistan. A genuine partnership implies a share of the burden as much as a share in decision-making.

The fight against ISIS, however, will not be decided in Iraq and Syria alone. The massacre of the Paris satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo’s staff was an assault on the freedom of expression and free press. The attack in France and the horrific shooting at the

Canadian Parliament in October illustrates all too vividly that the terrorist threat cannot be contained in the Middle East. The terrorist bombings in London and Madrid, which cost the lives of more than 200 people, remind us what may be in store.

Thus far, according to a United Nations estimate, more than 13,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 80 countries have joined the ranks of ISIS. Many of these people will return home, heeding the call of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to take the fight to Western shores. As one IS fighter, talking on the phone to a Reuters reporter, warned: "The West are idiots and fools. They think we are waiting for them to give us visas to go and attack them or that we will attack with our beards or even Islamic outfits. ... They infiltrated us with those who pretend to be Muslims and we have also penetrated them with those who look like them."

In confronting the threat posed by the Islamic State, therefore, our intelligence services will have an important role to play. Only they are capable of identifying the discontent Jihad-tourists travelling to the Middle East to fight the 'infidels'. Only they are capable of tracking them down before they return home in order to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe or America. But they will only be capable of doing this if the European and American services work closely together and share their information.

All the more important it is, therefore, to restore the trust in intelligence services that has been lost during the recent NSA scandal. The services must be accountable to democratically elected institutions and their work must be subjected to tight and transparent rules. The aberrations of the post-9/11 era must be corrected – not only in the United States, by the way, but also in Europe. Only if we adhere to it ourselves will we be able to defend the liberal order governed by the rule of law and human rights.

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Petra Becker

## **We don't Negotiate with Terrorists: The Limits of Diplomacy**

If we are to assess the merits of negotiating with terrorists, the most immediate question with regard to Syria is this: Which terrorists are we talking about? For not only are we debating the recent call by Italian political scientist Loretta Napoleoni to commence a dialogue with the so-called 'Islamic State' (IS), but there is also a discussion about the need to engage the Assad regime in Damascus – particularly with regard to the Islamic State.

### **Dialogue with the 'Islamic State'?**

If we accept the general definition of diplomacy as negotiations between authorized representatives of states, then we have to note that the 'Islamic State' is not in fact a state, but a terrorist organization that has conquered large swaths of land and now seems determined to market this territory as a state. As Volker Perthes, Director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, pointed out, the IS does not plan to apply for UN membership. Much rather, it merely tries to present itself as a state in order to recruit more fighters. To this end, the vision of a utopian society may indeed be more convincing as a mere call to arms.

The Islamic State, moreover, did not establish these state structures itself, but merely take them over by military force (like the civilian administration of Raqqa, the granaries or oil wells in the Euphrates area). Initially, these existing structures are largely left intact, since any change would exceed the Islamic States' capacities. Instead, IS focuses on the conquest of additional territory, the education system and its self-representation in the media. By means of propagandist videos, new fighters are recruited, in elementary schools the fighters of tomorrow are brainwashed and trained in the use of weaponry.

The IS does not consider itself a member of the international community of states. Rather, it sees itself as the force to replace this community. Its claim to power is of a totalitarian nature – not only internally, but also externally. At some point in the future, the Islamic State is

to span the entire world and all humankind shall subordinate to the teachings of Mohammed.

Against this background, negotiations with the IS must be futile, since the only acceptable outcome for the terrorists will be our unconditional surrender. Since they reject all universal values, there is not even a basis for negotiations to start from.

### **Negotiating? No! – Understanding? Yes!**

This is not to say, however, that we should not try to understand how the IS emerged and what makes it attractive for those who join its ranks. Only on this basis can we hope to formulate an effective strategy.

The Islamic State's predecessor, the 'Islamic State in Iraq' (ISI), emerged in opposition to the U.S.-led occupation of the country after the 2003 war. An important contributing factor in this process was the fact that the Sunni minority in Iraq, which held key positions in government, administration, and the military under Saddam Hussein, was completely marginalized in the aftermath of the American intervention. The Army was disbanded and many Sunnis found themselves without the means to make a living. In part, they were even criminalized because of their membership in the now outlawed Baath-Party. In this situation, Salafist terrorist networks did not find it hard to recruit volunteers for the fight against the Shia-dominated government and the American 'infidels'. The U.S. was able to win over several Sunni tribes, who founded the so-called 'Sahwa' militia to fight the ISI, but this military initiative was not followed by a political one. The Sunni population remained marginalized. Members of the Sunni opposition were prosecuted and demonstrations crushed.

In Syria, the Assad regime's brutal crackdown on the opposition movement led to its militarization and radicalization. The prolonged conflict has given rise to several phenomena that ultimately contributed to the emergence of the IS:

1. The regime's boundless violence against civilians, which is documented on the internet, has led to an almost complete inhibition with regard to violence and crimes against humanity;

2. The West's inaction in the face of grave violations of international law on the part of the Syrian regime has induced the majority of Syrians living in the rebel territories and refugee camps to turn away from the West and its values like human rights and rule of law;
3. The emergence of jihadi cells in Syria was supported by the regime, which released hundreds of jihadists from prison early in the revolt in order to discredit and subvert the opposition movement and re-establish itself as the only credible guarantor of stability in Syria
4. The lack of Western financial assistance for moderate opposition groups on the one hand and the plentiful financial assistance for jihadist groups from the Gulf states and international networks induced moderate fighters to join the jihadists despite ideological differences. They believe the priority is to topple the Assad regime and any ideological struggle within the opposition must wait until that goal has been achieved. Of course, however, they are indoctrinated over time.
5. Due to inadequate equipment, the local rebels in the Syrian Euphrates area were unable to fill the vacuum of power that emerged once they had expelled the regime's forces from the region. Instead, it was filled by the Jihadists, whose superior equipment enabled them to bring the region's oil wells under their control. This provided ISI (which now went by the name 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria', ISIS) with the necessary financial resources to conquer large parts of Iraq in summer 2014. Only at this point was the Islamic State proclaimed a 'caliphate' with a universal claim to power;
6. The fact that the Assad regime receives considerable support from Iran and compensates for its military inferiority by relying on Shia militias from Hezbollah in Lebanon as well as Iran and Iraq, plays in the hands of IS propaganda, which seeks to portray the conflict in

Syria as a struggle between the Shia and other 'infidels' against Sunni Islam.

### **A Dialogue with the Syrian Regime?**

For a strategy in the fight against IS this means that a dialogue with the Syrian regime does not offer a solution, either. To the contrary: If the west should try to rehabilitate the regime in the course of its fight against IS, this would only serve as a catalyst for the jihadists' recruiting strategy.

### **Starting Points for a Solution**

*Generally*, if we are to successfully combat the IS, and jihadism more broadly, we will have to work hard to preserve our credibility.

Jihadism did not only emerge with the IS. Al Qaeda and other predecessors are the result of decades of misguided Middle Eastern policy on the part of the West. Thus far, the great traumas of the Arab-Muslim world were the betrayal of the Arab uprising against the Ottomans codified in the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the creation of the State of Israel and the consequent eviction of the Palestinians from their homeland. We can ascribe responsibility for these to the generation of our fathers and grandfathers. But we cannot escape our own responsibility for the decades-long neglect of the rights of the Palestinian people and the political rights of those living in the Arab autocracies in the name of a superficial stability that suited our economic interest.

The Syrian civil war will likely be regarded as the third great trauma of the Arab-Muslim world by future historians. At first glance, Russia and Iran may appear to bear the main responsibility for this tragedy, but the West, whose Syrian policy amounts to a declaration of moral bankruptcy, is no less to blame. Within Syria, one will be hard-pressed to discern any hatred towards Russia or Iran – their agendas had been clear from the beginning. There is, however, tremendous anger at the West, from whom the Syrians had expected support. How are the supporters of a protest movement to understand that moral support for their concerns is not backed up with deeds. When the U.S. Ambassador to Syria visited the city of Hama on July 8, 2011, he was greeted with

flowers and olive branches by hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators hoping that the United States would come to their assistance. When the Syrian army attacked the city three weeks later and hundreds died, Washington protested – but nothing else. On all subsequent occasions, when the Syrian regime stepped up the level and degree of violence (including the use of chemical weapons, medium-range rockets, and 'barrel bombs' against civilians) Obama has pushed back the infamous red-line, the overstepping of which would entail real consequences.

Consequently, people in the Arab world have concluded that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, lauded as a great achievement of the international community after the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, may hold only for the privileged.

*Specifically*, this would mean to address the structural problems in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, we are on the right track towards a more inclusive political process and culture with the new government in Baghdad. There is still a long way to go, but the first steps have been taken. In Syria, it would be high time to create a no-fly-zone to finally protect the civilian population against the massacres carried out by the regime's air force. This would demonstrate to the people there that their suffering is taken seriously. Moreover, it would quickly tilt the military balance and thus might induce the regime in Damascus to finally engage in serious peace talks. This would strengthen the moderate forces and undercut the flow of supporters to the IS.

It is also essential to combat the IS militarily. At the very least, any further territorial expansion must be prevented. This fight, however, is counterproductive if it is not embedded in a broader strategy. If they do not lead the way towards a comprehensive solution, international air strikes against the IS only mean more death and destruction for the civilian population.

While we cannot avail Arab societies of the need to confront jihadism ideologically, we should take note of the fact that this debate has begun. If it is in our interest to strengthen those forces that seek peace and sustainable stability we can best achieve this if we stand by our

values and apply them to everyone – both in the Arab world and within our own societies.

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Egon Ramms

## **Shooting with Cannons at Sparrows: The Limits of Military Engagement**

When we think about counterterrorism operations in Germany, military means are not the first that come to mind. Domestically, our constitution strictly separates the operational spheres of the police and the military. Thus far, all at-tempts to change this state of affairs have failed. If Germany has been lucky recently and not itself become the target of a large-scale terrorist attack, this was largely due to information and intelligence provided by its allies.

Thus, with regard to the Islamic State (IS), we need to ask: who owns the cannons and who are the sparrows.

Under the mandate of Operation Enduring Freedom German special forces have been operating in Afghanistan in close cooperation with American and other special forces since early 2002 – even before the start of the ISAF operation. They were mostly engaged in special reconnaissance and rarely also in direct combat operations and remained on the ground until 2004. Subsequently, German special forces were withdrawn from Afghanistan, since the domestic political assessment of Operation Enduring Freedom had fundamentally changed. Only when the regular German ISAF contingent stationed in Northern Afghanistan found itself confronted with mounting pressure from the Taliban did special forces return to the country in 2007, this time to the North. Following the events of Good Friday 2009, these special forces also actively participated in counterterrorism operations, largely in the form of small-scale, targeted operations to capture Taliban leaders and hand them over to the Afghan authorities.

These were not, however, instances of 'shooting with cannons on sparrows'. The operations were carried out with a relatively limited number of personnel, targeted individuals or small groups and sometimes supported by other German, American, and also Afghan troops.

Moreover, we can no longer consider the Islamic State a 'sparrow'. And while I limit this assertion to the Syrian, Turkish, and Iraqi triangle for the time being, it is important to

follow reports from other instable Islamic countries as well. Whether you are looking at images from Mali, Somalia, or Libya, you will increasingly see the black flag with the large white circle and Arabic symbols. Even in Afghanistan and Pakistan, some Taliban groups have established contacts with the Islamic State.

Experienced soldiers know that a problem like this can only be successfully tackled if the operation is conducted jointly with the local armed forces. But we also know that

1. None of the Western states is interested in launching a new counterterrorism operation now that the ISAF operation in Afghanistan has just come to a – premature – end
2. The deployment of ground forces together with the necessary air support in this region, which is characterized by the situation in Iraq and the ongoing civil war in Syria, would be one of the most demanding and dangerous operations ever undertaken by Western states. By comparison, we had a pretty clear perspective on the situation in Afghanistan.
3. On the other hand, however, we will be unable to merely stand by as thousands of Yazidi and Kurds are expelled, murdered, and raped.

There can be no doubt that the fight against the Islamic State has to be taken up quickly and with all necessary means. This organization draw on supporters and volunteer fighters in hitherto unprecedented numbers. This is an entirely new dimension of counterterrorism, which requires political determination to initiate the necessary measures before the Islamic State can consolidate – let alone expand – its ideological and territorial control. We may like this or not, but these are the facts.

Therefore, politics must not confine itself to wishful thinking. It must confront the realities and, on this basis, act upon its humanitarian and human rights responsibilities. In a situation like that in Northern Iraq and Syria, where hundreds of people are killed every day, inaction is no longer an option.

In conclusion, it is unacceptable to refer to a terrorist organization like the Islamic State as a sparrow, a cute little bird. Much rather, it has now become a full-grown predator. If we are to prevent this predator from continuing its killing raids, we will have to fight it with the necessary means. This can no longer be the police, but it will have to be the armed forces. The question of whether we will then have to shoot this predator with cannons, can be answered by asking a different question: What risk are we willing to take? For the time being, 250 or 500 pound bombs can certainly be described as cannons, but, except for drones and helicopters (airfields?) there is no alternative to their employment in the unclear situation in Northern Syria.

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General (ret.) Egon Ramms was commander of NATO's Joint Force Command in Brunssum, Netherlands, from 2007 until his retirement in 2010. In this position, he oversaw all allied operations Afghanistan.

# AGENDA

## AKTUELLES AUS DEM CISG

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### CISG Colloquium

#### **Wirtschaftswunder oder Ausverkauf von Interessen? Die Transatlantische Handels- und Investitionspartnerschaft TTIP**

23. Februar 2014, 10:00 bis 14:00 Uhr  
Universitätsforum Bonn, Heussallee 18-24  
Anmeldung bis 15. Februar 2015 unter [cisg@uni-bonn.de](mailto:cisg@uni-bonn.de)

Seit Jahrzehnten wird in Fachkreisen über die Möglichkeit eines transatlantischen Freihandelsabkommens diskutiert. Nun, da ein solches mit der Transatlantischen Handels- und Investitionspartnerschaft (TTIP) in greifbare Nähe zu rücken scheint, regt sich in vielen beteiligten Staaten breiter öffentlicher Widerstand gegen eine vermeintliche Aufweichung von Verbraucherschutzstandards, einen Kotau vor den Interessen der transnationalen Konzerne und die mangelnde Transparenz der Verhandlungen. Von Seiten der Befürworter wird demgegenüber vor allem auf zusätzliche Arbeitsplätze und Wohlstandsgewinne verwiesen, die durch den Abbau von Hindernissen im transatlantischen Handel entstehen sollen.

Für den sachlichen Austausch von Argumenten ist in einer überhitzten öffentlichen Debatte, die zumeist zwischen fragwürdigen Warnungen vor der ‚Invasion der Chlorhühnchen‘ einerseits und überzogenen Wachstumsversprechen andererseits oszilliert, oftmals wenig Platz. Kritiker und Befürworter des Abkommens reden vielfach mehr über- als miteinander. Dabei ist ein offener und lösungsorientierter Austausch der Argumente beider Seiten für eine fundierte Beurteilung der Chancen und Risiken des Abkommens sowie seiner wirtschaftlichen, gesellschaftlichen und strategischen Implikationen unerlässlich. Hierzu möchte das *Center for International Security and Governance (CISG) an der Universität Bonn einen Beitrag* leisten. Als Diskutanten haben u.A. zugesagt: **Ulrich Kelber, MdB** (Parlamentarischer Staatssekretär, Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz) und **Matthias Ruch** (Corporate Affairs, Evonik).

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### Weitere Vorträge und Veranstaltungen

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| 14.1.2015 | 16:00 Uhr | <b>Sollbruchstelle der Globalen Ordnung?<br/>Konfliktlinien im Südchinesischen Meer</b><br>Universität Bonn, Hauptgebäude, Hörsaal XV |
| 28.1.2015 | 16:00 Uhr | <b>Begrenzt Einsatzfähig?<br/>Deutschlands Internationale Verantwortung</b><br>Universität Bonn, Hauptgebäude, Hörsaal XV             |
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