Research Paper

Islamic State the Product of a Bridging Between Regional Competitions and Islamic Radicalism

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ABSTRACT: *The Islamic state that was formed in 2006 in territories outside the control of two war-torn countries, with the capture of the city of Mosul in 2014 was world famous and be of interest to all news circles across the globe. This state used extremely cruel methods in relation to its prisoners of war, which is not a venue to discuss in this paper, came more than ever to fill the headlines of newspapers and online media.*
After a period of relative silence news, now with fighting to retake the city of Mosul, the "Islamic state" is once again under the focus of the news circles.
This paper intends to review primarily on the formation of the "Islamic State" and introduce a summary of the main factors involved in forming this state with a slightly different perspective than the views have been described earlier.

Keywords:Islamic State, regional competition, radicalism, Islam,the Middle East region, the Post-Cold War era, Iraq, Syria

I.   INTRODUCTION

The author believes that several factors have been involved hand in hand in the formation of a state, which is according to many analysts and historians a unique phenomenon. This phenomenon has united the whole world of the East and the West over the requirement that it should be dissolved as soon as possible. Even governments that at the outset have supported this phenomenon have felt this need. It is now more than two years that at least one major city with a population of nearly two million innocent people is this state's hostage.

The main factors involved in the formation of this state are:

1. The developments that took place globally after the collapse of the USSR and the impacts, which these developments had on the political processes in the Middle East region.

In brief, it can be said that in a multi-polar world in the Post-Cold War era, unlike the previous bi-polar, none of the world powers could play a decisive and clear role in the political developments in Iraq and Syria. The main perpetrators of the conflict process and finally the inside contradictions and disputes in these countries were the great powers, which is outside the scope of this paper. However, they abandoned the managing developments halfway across. It may also be said that they were not longer able to manage. Thus the direction of developments fell into the hands of the regional powers.

2. Regional powers with regard to conflicts, competitions, and disputes they had with each other found especially Syria as a battlefield for the fight between them. They tried in Syria - where the geopolitical position has a unique feature - to measure each other's strength and settle their accounts with each other.

3. In the next step, Islam as a religion that has great historical and social potentials to become a political movement and for removing the boundaries between religion and politics was used. Both sides of the regional conflict used the tool "Islam". On the one side the states that found their interests in the fall of Assad regime were involved, and on the other the states that had tied the fate of their interests with the survival of this regime.

What this paper will focus on is the third case. The paper intends to explain how religious credibility could be used in direction of political interests. These interests were even opposing each other.

During the formation of the "Islamic state", a process has been elapsed based on those religious credentials.

Finally, the political interests and the religious credentials go hand in hand creating a strange phenomenon. It can be said that the result is something apart from the former and the latter.

In the beginning, it's given a short explanation of the ideological capabilities that exist in Middle Eastern societies for the formation of political power in the society based on and intertwined with the ideology.

There will be including talk of the fact that a political power with its own political and economic interests tries to determine who are their allies and who are their enemiesby borrowing elements from the religion and inducing the people. Then it's referred to the formation of political power in an Islamic society.

In the second part, it will be tried to provide a short history of how the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In this regard, it's referred to the relationship between the Islamic State and the Wahhabi circles. In the third section, it's explained about foreign interests in connection with the formation of an Islamic state and convergence of those interests and this state, and finally, the consequences of such investment by major world powers, as well as the regional powers. At the end, the conclusion of this process will be presented.

1. Suitable capacities for the formation of political power in the Middle Eastern Muslim societies
1.1. Distinguish Friend from Foe

Basically, Islam canbeconsidered as a political religion. It is very difficult to distinguish between religion and the question of political power in an Islamic society, so that Ayatollah Modarres a political religious leader in the early 20th centuryhad the very famous words that "our religion is our politics, and our politics is our religion" [Chehabi 1990: 46].

It can be recognized as one of the main reasons for the absence of the secularization process and to the lack of distinction between the processofseparationbetween politics andreligion in the Islamic world. This non-separation of"religion" and "politics"in Islamic thought can be the basis of Islamic leaders'view of the relationship between two Western and Eastern worlds. It is on the basis of this viewandargumentin the Islamic worldthat the Westerncolonialism and direct domination overthe Eastern world from the 17th and 18th centuries, and later indirect dominations, has createdtwo unequalworlds; in the Islamic terminology "theoppressors"(*estekbar*) and "the oppressed"(*estez'af*).This argument has led to theproposition that the oppressedsocieties withdirectpolitical objectives andwith an Islamic identity mustresist"the world of arrogance"[al-Khomeini 1988].

Basically, since Muhammad's death there have emerged unimaginable so many wars, conflicts, disagreements and contradictory interpretations of the Prophet's messages. Today there are therefore as many different perceptions and attitudes about this religion in the Islamic world.

Consequently, within thediscussion about the relationshipbetweenIslamand politics,the questionof who hasthe right to interpret the Islamic sourcesemerges. Similarly,the question ofwho candecideonwhatis best forthe religion arises. It's actuallyone of the centralproblemsinthis religion that there is no widelyacceptedhierarchyor a centralauthorityin the Islamic world.Specifying on the friends and the enemies of Islam has always been a controversial issue in this faith, and in all Islamic societies. The more complicated matter is the question on who have the right to this specifying.

In this chaotic world everyone can interpret the Islamic concepts in their own favor. Every scholar (*alim*) can issue "*fatwa*" and every "*imam*" can encourage his followers to do what he believes to be the best or in other wordswhattheassessesto be thetrueIslamicway of living[Glosemeyer 2005: 215],"*Shari'a*"–as set ofruleswhich is part ofIslamic law–is something that everyoneusesas the legalmeans tolegitimize hisassessments[Glosemeyer 2005].

Islam is not only a religion of worship, but one of the important features of this religion is being practical in the daily life.In fact, in Islam, the people (*Ummah*) are invited to participate in politics and to follow the leader (*imam*).Regarding this public political participation and political determination in following an "*imam*," there has always been disagreement among Islamic scholars and leaders.Nevertheless, "*ijtihad*" (the orders of the leaders who have reached the rank of *ijtihad*) as one of the important pillars of Islam has left a door open to the public invitation by "*mojtahidin*" (the religious leaders).If at critical junctures, they recognize that "the religion" is at stake and invite people to action, the people are obliged to respond positively to the call of "*mujtahid*".

With all of this, as mentioned earlier, there is not a centralized command center in Islam,but any Islamic priest (*mujtahid*) at his discretion can issue an order for "*jihad*". This is what it could do an Islamic community divided and scattered. Religious dispersion and segregation can consequently be an important factor in power struggle, hatred, conflict and sectarian violence.

With this briefdescriptionof the overallpicture of the ideological relations generally in Islamic societies regarding who is"in favor of us" and who is "againstus" we can better look at an Islamic state that emerged in a huge area of two neighbor countries in the Middle East, and gradually was strengthened and stabilized in these areas.

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1.2. The Process of Formation of a Political Power in an Islamic Community

Formation of a political power in an Islamic community can be seen as an entity with own process through several stages.Still, the first two steps are the essential precondition for a political sphere is formed:

In the first stages a central core is formed with the aim of trying to seize power (either a broad national/ regional power or at least a limited, local power). It takes place with a connection to this assessment that it can be a great political movement in a near future.As mentioned one of the prominent points within the Islamic jurist-scholarship is scholars' independence. Every religious leader or imam may issue "*fatwa*" or encourage his followers to do something, without that another leader or *imam* can cancel the *fatwa*.

In the second stage the process of wearing religious dress on the project begins. Battle for power in the format of battle to save the religion[Reichberg & Syse 2014:32] is launched. It is not important which groups do this. The important point is that this process is shaped under the name of Islam. It is obvious that the main actors in the implementation of the process are the religious leaders, scholars, and imams. However, it cannot surely be claimed that the starting point for the takeover of the power arises from the religious currents, since it can originate by those in political, military, and economic power, politicians and statesmen.

In any case it is the Islamic "*ulama*"(pl. to *alim*) and leaders, who have the lead role in mobilizing the people and together with the authoritarians and politicians, enter the scene of the power struggle. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini believed, "only the mullahs can bring the people into the streets and make them die for Islam, begging to have their bloodshed for Islam" (Speech in 1988, July 20).

It can be noted that many Western analysts know the Islamic power by their knowledge of various Islamic organizations in the Middle East. However this level of knowledge is extremely superficial. The power of Islamic leaders is much greater than the analysts imagine.

During the first steps of foundation of a power core, the quantitative and qualitative development of the popular support must be tight.

It could be noted that an Islamic power core cannot be created at once and suddenly, but it usually passes through a process of development, fusions, and evolution.

One important point to be considered is that it is impossible for a movement to be strengthened without popular support or, at least, some supporters with experience of founding and developing movements.

In all circumstances, a broad experience and intelligence is required and, finally, leaders and missionaries who will foster, direct and orientate potential supporters are needed.

In most cases-in almost all religious fundamentalist movements that gradually are expanded- it eventually becomes clear that religious fundamentalism is about "political effort," but not about "religious concern." Indeed, "religion" is used as a tool to pave the way for "political power". "It is the advanced stage of religious fundamentalism in which the use of the political function of religion reaches a peak and sometime leads to theocratic state" [Mofidi 2014].

Within the Islamic culture it is extremely difficult to resist a "tyrant ruler" with non-Islamic means. It is almost impossible to enter on the battlefield of the political struggle in an Islamic community without using the Islamic approaches and tools. Therefore, it seems to be most effective to resist the Islamic State by Islamic methods and with the Islamic "*ulema*" on the lead.

Generally, it can be said that catastrophic social events in every society always begin with the failure of the domestic social structures, including internal political conditions. When a country encounters hard social, political and economic challenges, these can form a background for a move toward disorganization, chaos, civil war and destruction.

It is clear that, under these circumstances, there are always groups based on their own interests trying to exploit the situation and to realize these interests. These groups can even be internal backward forces. It can also be external states, groups or organizations with their political, military, economic and other means.

Islamic State can be said to be a product of both ideological and external political interests, so that a radical version of Islam, hand in hand with regional powers have created a situation in which has led to emergence of a very unique state in the region.

2. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

"Jama'at al-Tawhidwal-Jihad" was the cornerstone of the state, which later became known as the Islamic State. The organization has worked as Iraq's Al-Qaeda. At the time the most important factor for the growth of the organization was its opposition to the presence of coalition forces in Iraq. The organization's actions were in the name of resistance against "the occupiers."

If one goes back a little, one can find the State's roots in one of the most radical interpretations of Islam, which has affiliations with Salafism. Originally, the particular interpretations of Islam based mainly on the Wahhabi and Salafi thoughts have been the essence of ideological approaches of organizations such as "Jama'at al-Tawhidwal-Jihad." Abu Masab al-Zarqawi, the founder of the organization has had a very extreme interpretation regarding the concept of "*takfir*".

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Zarqawi, who fought against the Russians in Afghanistan, came to Iraq in 2003 -after Saddam Hussein's fall- in order to fight against coalition forces and foreigners. Zarqawi's organization gradually expanded its actions, so that it targeted civilians by car bombings, kidnappings, and other methods. The organization recruited Muslim Sunni individuals, and justified its actions under fighting against "the occupiers"[Associated Press, 2006]. In fact, the developing of "Jama'at al-Tawhidwal-Jihad" and its military expansion in Iraq was caused by Zarqawi's claim of resistance "against the infidel occupiers" in the country[Escobar, 2004], so that it gradually gained popular supports among young Sunnites, and changed into a strong military force. Afterthe organizationconnectedtoAl-Qaeda in 2004, it changed the name to "TanzimQaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn," which in the translated form is "Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia".

In 2006 six organizations in Iraq established "The MujahideenShura Council" (MSC), including Zarqawi's organization. The Council announced its own establishment as management of the resistance against the aggressive infidels "and the crusader occupiers…"[Roggio: 2006]. It was this Council which shortly after its establishment proclaimed an Islamic state in Iraq. This state gained popular support quickly in the Sunni majority areas in Iraq.

Theformation process of the Islamic State entereda newphase by starting the protestsagainstthe Assad regimeinSyriain 2011. The internal crisis-hit condition in Syria, the chaos in the country, and the lack of control of the Assad regime over its borders have led to a closer relationship between two Sunni "movements" against the two Shiite states in Iraq and Syria. In early 2012 the Syrian Sunnite anti-Assad organization Jabhat al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front) was announced in Syria.

The self-proclaimed Islamic state in Iraq insisted on a merger between itself and Jabhat al-Nusra, which was rejected by both Al-Nusra and Aiman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's leader after Osama bin Laden. Conflicts between the Iraqi al-Qaeda and the Afghan-based al-Qaeda were gradually increased, and finally, the relations between the two groups, after a contentious period, were interrupted in 2014.

Although the now-proclaimed Islamic State is a child born out of the civil war in Iraq, it has its roots in the Saudi Wahabbism. Since the formation of Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century the best source to foment animosity between Shiites and Sunnis is the Wahhabi's way of interpreting Islam. Basically, Iraq at the time was the most appropriate area in the Islamic world to launch a Shiia – Sunni confrontation.

One of the prominent Saudi *ulama*, who supported "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" and its leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, both ideologically and financially, was Sulaiman al-Alwan. From the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 Al-Alwan urged the Iraqi people to fight the Americans in Iraq. Hesupported the method ofsuicide bombings in this country.

While one part of the members of the Saudi ruling class denounce the Islamic State's brutal methods, other parts, "however, look more kindly on the movement, applauding its staunch opposition to Shi'ism and for its Salafi piety, its adherence to the original practices of Islam."[Armstrong 2014].

Undoubtedly, the ideological base of the Islamic State is the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. The IS will not hesitate to use brutal methods to force people to accept its own interpretation of the religion.

II.   THE EXTERNAL POLITICAL INTERESTS

Many scholars argue that actors from Saudi Arabia have been involved in the formation of the Islamic State, which currently has a major part of Iraq's territory in its occupation. Noam Chomsky in 2014 pointed to Saudi Arabia's involvement due to having "long been the major source of funding for ISIS as well as providing its ideological roots."[Chomski 2014].

Additionally, one can point to only one case of a volunteering envoy to Syria, where according to "The Soufan Group" has been of 2,500 Saudis in May 2014, to get a sense of the Saudis' role in Syria's internal struggle and thus shape the Islamic groups both in Iraq and Syria. Apartofindoctrinatorsto mobilizepeople is based on a form of religious sentiments for a return to the original Islam. And, finally, the regional and global powers support the aims of the Islamic State. It is a question why it is unclear as to where and how such organizations receive financial and military support.

Much of this support began in about 2011, and was originally associated with the attempts to overthrow the Assad regime.At the start of the protest movements against the regime of Assad and this regime's clashes with protesters, many of the region's states and international powers thought that the Arabic Spring had also come to Syria. Each of these states was involved in the acceleration of the process of the "Arabic Spring" in Syria, and even outpaced each other. This quickly led to the collapse of the internal discipline and the regime's loss of control over large areas of the country.

These developments have not led to a situation similar to the status of Egypt, Tunisia or Libya. Numerous armed groups have developed in Syria, while radicalization has expended and accelerated in the context of the "anti-Assad" struggle. In parallel, the most radical factions of these groups have taken advantage of the porous borders between Syria and Iraq to expand their influence and declare the establishment of the

Islamic State in Iraqi territories as well. When the threat began to be felt,some states began blaming each other.For instance,Joe Biden, the Vice President of the United States, blamed some countries in the region, because of their role in strengthening of the Islamic State, but apologized for his remarks a few days later.

The internal contradictions that emerge from the fight over power can make a political movement or a political formation in the Middle Eastern region more and more radical, which could make it difficult for the regional and global powers to support that movement or organization.After its establishment in Iraq in 2006, the movement gained broadly popular support in Sunni-dominated areas. Therefore, Iraq began to increasingly radicalize, extreme violence, such as committing suicide attacks in public places to kill innocent people, began to be used.

The radicalizationprocess inthe first stagescan ismilderandmoreinvisible than its later phases. This iswith respect tothe popularsupport.But afterthe dominant powerfeelsstableenough, thisradicalizationmay risemostly due toovercoming the internalrivals.This radicalization, in fact, is the result of a power struggle between different factions, groups, and individuals within the "popular" movement, in the sense that those who are more radical throw their competitors out of the field by accusing them to be "moderates,""opportunists," and so on. This process can continue, and even from within the core of power, "the more radical" defeat and reject "the less radical," and so the process continues again.In this way, the political identity of that new power will gradually be changed, so that the earlier supporters of the movement, which now works as a state, a strong power device, or a significant political weight, can no longer -at least openly- support it.

III. CONCLUSION

Global and particularly regional political and economic interests needed a series of ideological movements to change the Middle Eastern political equations, each for their own purposes. So there was opened a path for growth and maneuvering the religious forces. This tacit cooperation finally led to the formation of ultra-radical thinking that on which basis was established a political hegemony. The ideological feeder of this hegemony was the Wahhabi religion. The process of formation of the "Islamic state" can be separated in the following dimensions in order to be better understood:

1. In Islamic societies, there are huge potentials for the formation of political power.
2. Regional powers have used these capacities to advance their regional purposes.
3. The West welcomed the will and action of regional powers, especially to get rid of Assad regime.
4. Today, they are stuck in a mud, which they created in past.
5. This paper's central point is that both political and economic interests of the regional powers and the West on the one hand and the suitable factors and capacities in the Middle Eastern Islamic societies on the other hand together created a product that has plagued the whole Middle East today.

Now that those political and economic interests are realized to the extent of the crisis and are trying to get rid of the crisis, they are forced to use the same ideological tool by which created IS. It means a condemnation of IS by the Islamic circles that in the past urged people to support it. It is true that the defeat or success of the Islamic State is determined in the military fronts. However, ensuring the growth or decline of the Islamic State takes place first at the forefront of the ideological struggle. Therefore, the most effective way to confront the Islamic State is if Islamic leaders and authorities with closer religious identity to that of the Islamic State ideology reject this state and condemn its atrocities.

This would be an important step towards disabling the state's ideological tools.

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