

# "ISLAMIC STATE"

## THE NEW GLOBAL JIHADIST PHENOMENON

### EDITOR

Luís Tomé

Alice Feiteira

Elisa Giunchi

Felipe Pathé Duarte

Hasan Hilmi Güllü

Hugo Franco

Hüseyin Bağcı

Luís Valença Pinto

Mario Losano

Raquel Moleiro



EDITOR LUÍS TOMÉ

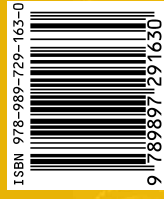
"ISLAMIC STATE" - THE NEW GLOBAL JIHADIST PHENOMENON



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.



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Av. 25 de Abril Nº8 B C/V Dto.  
2620-185 Ramada  
Telephone: 217 573 459  
Fax: 217 576 316  
mediaxxi@mediaxxi.com  
  
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# 3

## THE INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION OF THE SELF- PROCLAIMED “CALIPHATE”

Luis Tomé

### THE INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION OF THE SELF- PROCLAIMED “CALIPHATE”<sup>1</sup>

By proclaiming itself “Caliphate” on 29 June 2014, the “Islamic State” (IS) has intensified its propaganda and jihadist appeals, encouraging supporters to travel to Syria and Iraq, promoting allegiance declarations, encouraging local communities to support the IS, and instigating attacks to “apostates”, “infidels” and enemies of the IS around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the article written by the author, Luis Tomé, “The «Islamic State»: trajectory and reach a year after its self-proclamation as a «Caliphate»”, *JANUS.NET e-journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 1, May-October 2015, pp. 116-139. Available at [http://observare.ual.pt/janus.net/en\\_vol6\\_n1\\_art8](http://observare.ual.pt/janus.net/en_vol6_n1_art8).

### 3.1. THE IS'S SELF-PROCLAMATION AS A “CALIPHATE”

The so-called “Islamic State” has always claimed to be not just a jihadist organisation (*tanzim*), but what its name literally implies: a *de facto* “State” (*dawla*). In 2006, the newly created “Islamic State in Iraq” (ISI) issued an official document, claiming that «*This state of Islam has arisen anew to strike down its roots in the region, as the religion's past was one of strength and glory*» (cit. in Bunzel, 2014: 2). It also claimed to be a “State” that aims to expand into new territories: on 8 April 2013, the renamed ISIL/ISIS demanded the establishment of an “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/ash-Sham”, or DAESH (*Dawlah al-Islamiyah fil Iraq wa ash-Sham*), a region that includes Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon, and, in a broader sense, also territories in Egypt, Turkey and Cyprus. This announcement came two days after the leader of the AQ-core, Ayman al-Zawahiri, called for the unification of the jihad in Syria, but between *Jabhat Al-Nusra* (JN) and other jihadist groups, not through the expansion of the ISI into Syria and even less through the merger of JN within the new ISIS. Although the leader of the JN, al-Golani, rejected the manoeuvre and openly declared obedience to “Emir” al-Zawahiri, and the leader of the AQ-C instructed

Bakr al-Baghdadi to dissolve the ISIS and limit the activities of his group to Iraq, leaving Syria for the JN, ISIS reaffirmed the new designation and forced its expansion into Syria (al-Baghdadi, 2013).

Moreover, since its inception, the 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 (Bunzel, 2015). Therefore, several references and maps of the ISI, ISIS and, of course, the IS suggest an ambition that includes dominating all the territories of ancient historical Caliphates, ranging from the Iberian Peninsula (*Al-Andalus*) to Southeast Asia.

This self-proclamation occurred on 29 June 2014, through a document entitled "This is the Promise of Allah", written in several languages and posted on the Internet, where the ISIL/ISIS/Daesh announced the restoration of the "Caliphate", simply called "Islamic State" (IS) and appointed its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as "Caliph", hereinafter called "Caliph Ibrahim":

*«In light of the fact that the Islamic State has no sharī (legal) constraint or excuse that can justify delaying or neglecting the establishment of the khilāfah such that it would not be sinful, the Islamic State... decided to announce the establishment of the Islamic khilāfah, the appointment of a khilāfah for the Muslims, and the pledge of allegiance to the shaykh (sheikh), the mujāhid, the scholar who practices what he preaches, the worshipper, the leader, the warrior, the reviver, descendant from the family of the Prophet, the slave of Allah, Ibrahim Ibn 'Auwād Ibn Ibrahim Ibn 'Alī Ibn Muhammad al-Badrī al-Hāshimī al-Husaynī al-Qurashī by lineage, as-Sāmurrāī by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdādī by residence and scholarship. And he has accepted the bay'ah (pledge of allegiance). Thus, he is the imam and khilāfah for the Muslims everywhere. Accordingly, the "Iraq and Shām" in the name of the Islamic State is henceforth removed from all official deliberations and communications, and its official name is «the Islamic State», as of this declaration's date»*

IS, 2014

By proclaiming itself "Caliphate", IS also claims that *all* Muslims - individuals, states and organizations - should pay obedience and be faithful (*bay'ah*)<sup>2</sup> to "Caliph Ibrahim":

*«We clarify to the Muslims that with this declaration of Khilafah, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the Khalīfah Ibrāhīm and support him (may Allah preserve him). The legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations becomes null by the expansion of the Khilafah's authority»*

ibid.

Immediately following that announcement, on 1 July 2014, during his sermon at the Grand Mosque of Mosul, "Caliph Ibrahim" declared:

*«I have been appointed to rule over you ... And obey me so long as I obey God touching you. If I disobey Him, no obedience is owed from me to you»*

al-Baghdadi, 2014

Unsurprisingly, the alleged obligation of *all* Muslims to pay allegiance to "Caliph Ibrahim" and the corresponding nullification of all other States and organizations before the global authority of the IS is repudiated by all Islamic countries and numerous Islamic religious leaders, including the Grand Muftis of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Abdulaziz al al-Sheikh and Shawqi Allam, respectively, or the International Union of Muslim Scholars.

Although for different reasons, several jihadist groups also reject this. Even before the announcement of the "Caliphate", central *al-Qaeda* (AQ-C or AQS), presumably from Pakistan, as well as the Islamic Front and *Jabhat al-Nusra*, both in Syria, had publicly rejected the ISIS. After the

<sup>2</sup> *Bay'at* is a kind of obedience commitment given to a leader of an Islamist group; for a jihad, it is as if that commitment was with the Prophet Muhammad himself, and cannot be broken under penalty of apostasy (*takfir*).

self-proclamation of the IS "Caliphate", the AQ-C officially rebutted *bay'at* to "Caliph Ibrahim" again, and seven other jihadist groups repudiated the authority of the IS: Caucasus Emirate in Russia, the General Military Council for Iraqi Revolutionaries in Iraq, *Katibat al-Imam Bukhari* in Syria, Al-Qaeda Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines, Harakat Ansar Iran (HAI) in Iran, and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen.

For the IS, however, the self-proclamation as "Caliphate" embodies a *«fundamentally political, rather than religious project- even though the IS insists the two are inseparable»* (Rabbani, 2014:2). In fact, the IS does not recognize any Islamic interpretation and jurisdiction other than its own, imposing its brutal version of the *sharia* on all those it considers to be "apostates" and "infidels". As such,

*«following takfir doctrine, the Islamic State is committed to purifying the world by killing vast numbers of people ... Muslim "apostates" are the most common victims»*

Wood, 2015

In line with its predecessors, the IS continues extermination practices not only against Christians and Jews, but especially against Muslim communities, namely Shiites, Kurds, Alawites and Yazidis, implementing a policy of terror which includes mass summary executions, amputations, rapes, immolations, beheadings, and crucifixions, in what Amnesty International describes as "ethnic cleansing" and the UN calls "crimes against humanity".

The barbarity of the IS is also openly repudiated by most Islamic religious leaders, by all Islamic countries and by the Islamic Cooperation Organization (which brings together 57 Islamic countries), with the Secretary General of the OIC, Iyad Ammen Madani, affirming that

*«We need to condemn, particularly and in the strongest terms, the heinous and barbaric crime committed by the so-called IS terrorist group»* (Madani, 2015). Even the Vatican, which traditionally opposes the use of force, adopted an unprecedented position in mid-March 2015, declaring that if it is not possible to achieve a political decision without violence, *«the use*

*of force will be necessary»* against the IS in order to *«stop this genocide»* and protect Christians and other religious groups<sup>3</sup>.

However, and once again, the IS's "terror" is not only inherent in its *jihād* against all "apostates" and "infidels" but also a key driver of its expansion strategy due to the "demobilising" effect that it seeks to have in populations and opposition forces, particularly among the Syrian and Iraqi government contingents.

The rise of ISIS/ISIL has contributed significantly to barbarism and humanitarian tragedy in Iraq and Syria, which occupy the first and second places, respectively, in the ranking of the most dangerous countries in terms of terrorist activity, according to the *Country Threat Index* of IntelCenter. In parallel, according to the same source in its *Group Threat Index* - which examines the volume of terrorist alerts, the traffic of messages, videos and photos, attacks and victims of several dozen terrorist organizations - the IS became the largest and the most dangerous and lethal terrorist organization in the world (IntelCenter, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Statement made by the Vatican Ambassador at the United Nations in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, in an interview with the American Catholic website "Cruz" (see Allen, 2015). This was stated on the same day that the Holy See, Russia and Lebanon presented the Council of the UN Human Rights with a document entitled "Supporting the Human Rights of Christians and Other Communities, particularly in the Middle East", supported by 70 signatory countries, hoping to encourage states around the world to provide humanitarian aid to Christians and other groups persecuted by the IS.

## 3.2. ATTRACTING GROWING NUMBER OF MILITANTS AND “FOREIGN FIGHTERS”

On the other hand, the IS's self-proclaimed “caliphate” has expanded far beyond Syria and Iraq, conducting activities which a report of the *Institute for the Study of War* (Gambhir, 2015) has organized into three circles: an “inner ring”, comprising, in addition to Iraq and Syria, Jordan, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon; the “near abroad”, covering Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and the Caucasus; and the “far abroad” circle, referring to the activities of the IS in Europe, North America, Asia-Pacific and also in cyberspace.

The total number of IS members, activists and fighters is imprecise and difficult to calculate; it varies greatly, depending on the source and also on whether it refers only to militants in Iraq and Syria, or whether it also includes individuals and groups operating in other countries and regions. On the other hand, in addition to Syrian, Iraqi and foreign volunteers and jihadists, the IS is known for forcing people from other conquered rebel groups or confined areas under its rule to fight on its behalf - so, even

restricting numbers to the territory controlled by the IS in Syria and Iraq, it's hard to distinguish the IS's militant members from those who carry out certain roles because they are forced to or for fear of reprisal.

Still, it seems clear that the number of IS members and fighters has continuously increased over the past years; its growth was very sudden and began after the proclamation of the “Caliphate”, and it is now well above other jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda. When the US withdrew from Iraq in 2011, the ISI had a few hundreds of members; in early 2015, the IS had between 17,000 and 31,500 combatants – well above, therefore, the 1,000 – 3,000 that central AQ had at its peak in the late 1990s (Gerges, 2015). In June 2014, the number of ISIS militants in Syria and Iraq was estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000; in the following month, numbers increased thanks to the 1,000-2,000 militants from other jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq (such as *Jaish al-Sahabah in the Levant* and the *Faction of Katibat al-Imam Bukhari* in Syria or *Ansar al-Islam* in Iraq) that joined its ranks; in September 2014, the CIA estimated the existence of between 20,000 and 31,500 IS fighters in Syria and Iraq; in late 2014, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimated over 80,000 (50,000 in Syria and 30,000 in Iraq) IS militants, while the office of Kurdish President Massoud Barzani rose the total number of IS members to 200,000, a number that included combatants and support staff, police forces, local militias, border guards, and paramilitary personnel associated with the various groups of security guards and recruits. Crossing several sources, the estimated number of IS fighters in mid-2015 varies between 35,000 and 100,000, while the AQ and its affiliates is believed to have between 5,000 and 20,000 members.

Through its self-proclamation as “Caliphate”, the IS also intensified the recruitment campaign of “foreign fighters” going to Syria and Iraq to defend an idyllic Islamic State<sup>4</sup>: «*mujahideen in Europe, Australia, and Canada... O mujahideen in Morocco and Algeria... O mujahideen in Khorasan, the Caucasus, and Iran... O mujahideen, we call you up to defend the Islamic States*» (Abu Muhammad al-Adnani [al-Shami]<sup>5</sup>, IS's spokesman, 22 September 2014). In parallel, the IS propaganda machine – through messages, photos

<sup>4</sup>See also *Dabiq*, issue 3 – *A call to Hijrah*.

<sup>5</sup>Or Taha Subhi Falaha, his birth name.

and videos channelled through the Web, virtual social networks and its official journal in English *Dabiq* – glorifies its “martyrs”, publishes regular reports on the “International faithful to Allah” and highlights the fighting skills of “true believers from distant lands”.

And the fact is that the number of foreign fighters ascribed to the IS has continued to grow significantly, with numbers currently estimated at over 25,000 (twice as many as those who went to Afghanistan in the 1980s), representing about 70% of foreign jihadists in Syria and almost all in Iraq, from almost a hundred countries. About half of the “foreign fighters” of the IS come from North Africa and the Middle East (Barret, 2014: 16), namely Saudi Arabia (7,000), Tunisia (2,500-5,000), Morocco (1,500-3,000), Jordan (1,500-2,000), Turkey (1,000-1,500), Egypt (600-750) and Iran (50-80). But the IS also has fighters from many other countries from all regions of the globe, including Russia (1,000-1,500), Indonesia (520-550), Turkmenistan (360-400), Bosnia and Herzegovina (350), China (300), Kazakhstan (300), Azerbaijan (100-300), Albania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and the Philippines (200 each), Canada (130), USA (100-120), Australia (80-100), and India (20-25)<sup>6</sup>.

From the European Union alone, by mid-2015, over 6,000 jihadists had left to join the IS in Syria and Iraq (nearly tripling those who were in Syria in late 2013), from more than twenty countries, including France (about 1,500), the United Kingdom (750), Germany (700), Belgium (400), the Netherlands (300), Denmark (250), Sweden (200), Spain (60-100), Austria (100-150) Italy (60), and Finland (50)<sup>7</sup>. This EU's figures also included Luxembourgers, Greeks, Slovaks, Czechs, Irish, Bulgarian, Lithuanian, and Portuguese.

<sup>6</sup> Figures estimated from crossing various sources, including research centres on terrorism and conflict and media.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3. AFFILIATED GROUPS AND NEW WILAYATS OUTSIDE SYRIA AND IRAQ

To its supporters who cannot or are unable to travel to Syria and Iraq, the IS instructs them to organise and pledge allegiances (*bay'ah*) to “Caliph” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi:

*«If you cannot perform hijrah (immigrate to the Islamic State) for whatever extraordinary reason, then try in your location to organize bay'at (pledges of allegiance) to the Khalifah Ibrahim. Publicise them as much as possible. Gather people in the masajid, Islamic centres, and Islamic organizations, for example, and make public announcements of bay'ah. Try to record these bay'ah and then distribute them through all forms of media including the Internet. It is necessary that bay'ah becomes so common to the average Muslim that he considers those holding back as grossly abnormal...if you live in a police state that will arrest you over such bay'at, then use means of anonymity to convey your bay'ah to the world»*

*Dabiq, issue 2, 27 July 2014*

And the fact is that, in addition to individuals around the world who have expressed allegiance to "Caliph Ibrahim," there are many other groups which, since the self-proclamation as "Caliphate", have become associated with the IS. Specifically, 36 jihadist groups outside Iraq and Syria that pledged *bay'at* or expressed support for the IS have been referenced: *Mujahideen Timor* in Indonesia; *Caliphate and Jihad Movement, Jundullah, Tehrik-e-Khalifat* and *Tehrik-e-Taliban* dissidents in Pakistan; *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* in Pakistan and Uzbekistan; *Ansar al-Khalifah, Bangsmoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, Bangsmoro Justice Movement, Abu Sayyaf* and *Jemaah Islamiyah* in the Philippines; *Jund al-Khalifah, al-Huda Battalion in Maghreb of Islam and Soldiers of the Caliphate* in Algeria; *Al Tauhid Battalion* in Afghanistan and Pakistan; *Khorasan Pledge, Heroes of Islam Brigade in Khorasan* and *Leaders of the Mujahid in Khorasan*, from Afghanistan; *Ansar al-Tahweed fi Bilad al-Hind* in India; *al-'Itisam of the Koran and Sunnah* in Sudan; *Uqba bin Nafi battalion* and *Jund al-Khilafah* in Tunisia; *Jund al-Khilafah* in Egypt; *Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem*, in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula; *Jund at-Tawheed Wal Khalifah* in Bangladesh; *Ansar Bait al-Maqdis* in Egypt; *Islamic Youth Shura Council, Islamic State Libya (Darnah), Lions of Libya, Shura Council of Shabab al-Islam Darnah* and *IS's "Tripoli Province"* in Libya; *Liwa Ahrar al-Sunna in Baalbek, Lebanon; Mujahideen of Yemen* and *Supporters for the Islamic State in Yemen*, in Yemen; *Supporters of the Islamic State in the Land of the Two Holy Mosques* in Saudi Arabia; *Boko Haram* in Nigeria.

In addition, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself announced, on 13 November 2014, the establishment of five new IS *wilayats* outside Syria and Iraq, precisely in Libya, Algeria, Yemen, Sinai (Egypt) and Saudi Arabia, as well as the intention to create more *wilayats* elsewhere in the future. The same aim was reaffirmed in the fifth edition of *Dabiq* entitled, in good propaganda fashion, "Remaining and Expanding", where the IS recognizes those *wilayats* with «either the appointment or recognition of leadership by the Khalifah for those lands where multiple groups have given bay'at and merged, or the establishment of a direct line of communication between the Khalifah and the mujahid leadership of lands who have yet to contact the Islamic State and thus receive information and directives from the Khalifah» (*Dabiq*, issue 5).

Meanwhile, the IS has expanded its *wilayats* in Yemen (in clear competition with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, both combating the Huthi Shiite militias and other rebels loyal to former President Abdullah Saleh and the forces supporting President Hadi) and also in West Africa, in the latter case through the alliance agreed in March 2015 with *Boko Haram*, which has controlled the northeast of Nigeria for years and is also active in Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Currently there are twelve IS *wilayats* outside Syria and Iraq: *Khorasan* (Afghanistan), *al-Jazair* in Algeria, *Sinai* in Egypt, *Burgah, Tarabulus/Tripoli* and *al-Fizan* in Libya, *al-Haramayn* in Saudi Arabia, *al-Yaman, Sanaa, Lahij* and *Shabwa* in Yemen and *Gharba Ifriqiyah* in Nigeria.

This means that the IS "caliphate" now reaches other stages of conflict beyond Syria and Iraq, while it is trying to expand to other places such as Palestine or Afghanistan and Pakistan:

«The relationship between the Taliban and the Islamic State is emerging as the most influential factor in the future of violent jihadi movements in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region.... If the IS were to successfully recruit influential Taliban figures, they could upset the delicate yet volatile balance of jihadi movements and insurgents within Afghanistan, causing realignments of anti-state actors across the Khorasan region»

Azamy and Weir, 2015

Concerning Palestine, after months of speculation about the possible Hamas and Fatah support for IS or, conversely, over Hamas' attempt to snuff out purported attempts by the IS to establish a foothold in Palestine, the "Islamic State" directly threatened to turn the Gaza Strip into another of their Middle East fiefdoms, and condemned Hamas for its crackdown on Salafist groups in the Gaza Strip, for its failure to implement the Islamic law and for its dealings with Iran and Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah, as well as with "nationalist", "secularist", and "communist" factions, in a video message addressed to the "tyrants of Hamas":

*«We will uproot the state of the Jews and you and Fatah, and all of the secularists are nothing and you will be overruled by our creeping multitudes...The rule of sharia will be implemented in Gaza, in spite of you. We swear that what is happening in the Levant today...will happen in Gaza... The road to liberate Palestine goes through Iraq and we (IS) are getting closer, day by day »*

*Al Jazeera, 2015*

## 3.4. THE IS'S WORLDWIDE ATTACKS AND CYBERSPACE

On the other hand, the IS calls for *jihad* in countries where its militants are based through attacks against their enemies and other “infidels”. For example, in a declaration addressed to the “soldiers of the Islamic State”, IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani [al-Shami] made the following appeal:

*«So rise O mujahid. Rise and defend your state from your place wherever you may be... You must strike the soldiers, patrons, and troops of the tawāghūt. Strike their police, security, and intelligence members, as well as their treacherous agents. Destroy their beds. Embitter their lives for them and busy them with themselves... If you can kill a disbelieving... including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah, and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice and do not seek anyone's verdict. Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling. Both of them are disbelievers. Both of them are considered to be waging war [the civilian by belonging to a state waging war against*

*the Muslims]... If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving... Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him. Do not lack»*

*al-Adnani, September 22, 2014*

Two months later, the IS magazine *Dabiq* expressly included references to attacks by its supporters in Australia, Canada and the US, claiming that

*«All these attacks were the direct result of the Shaykh [Adnani]'s call to action, and they highlight what a deadly tinderbox is fizzing just beneath the surface of every western country, waiting to explode into violent action at any moment, when given the right conditions. Suddenly, the mujahidin of the Islamic State weren't some esoteric concept fighting in a land nobody knew or cared about, they were on the doorstep of millions of people living in some of the biggest, most modern cities in the western world»*

*Dabiq, issue 6*

Regardless of the propaganda content of such statements, the fact is that over the past year multiple events and attacks involving jihadists and "lone wolves" supporting the IS were referenced in dozens of countries - Afghanistan, Algeria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, Spain, the Philippines, France, Germany, the Netherlands, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, United Kingdom, United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Yemen... - victimising people from around the world and forcing the strengthening of alerts and counterterrorism efforts.

Indeed, the IS has revealed that it is capable of launching or instigating large-scale attacks, as apparently happened on 26 June 2015: at least 67 people have been killed across three continents, during three separate terrorist attacks in France (a decapitated body was found following an

attack on a factory belonging to a US gas company in Saint-Quentin-Fallavier, south of Lyon), Tunisia (on a beach hotel in Sousse, with 39 people killed and 36 wounded), and Kuwait (at least 27 people were killed and other 227 were injured by an explosion at a Shia mosque in Kuwait city during Friday prayers). These attacks are not believed to be coordinated, but they were all perpetrated by alleged IS supporters and came just days after an IS statement urged its supporters to make the holy month of Ramadan «a time of calamity for the infidels» (The Guardian, 2015). Less than a week later, a group pledging allegiance to the IS, the Province of Sinai, claimed responsibility for attacks on more than 15 security sites and military checkpoints in Egypt's Northern Sinai, in the deadliest fighting in the peninsula in years - more than 100 fighters and 17 soldiers were killed.

The international expansion of the IS derives much through the cyberspace. The IS is proving to be extraordinarily skilled and versatile in the use of cyberspace and new media, showcasing jihadism on the web. Indeed, the IS displays an effective propaganda machine, terror, radicalisation and recruitment, particularly orchestrated by *Al Hayat Media Centre* and its videos and publications (such as the aforementioned official magazine in English "*Dabiq*") but also disseminated by thousands of "fighters" and activists in Syria and Iraq, all posted on the Internet and through virtual social networks, including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

This is particularly relevant to "attract" young people, including Westerners. Therefore, as the US Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson states

*«we're definitely in a new environment, because of ISIL's effective use of social media, the Internet, which has the ability to reach into the homeland and possibly inspire others... We're definitely in a new phase regarding the global terrorist threat, where the so-called lone wolf could strike at any moment.»*

*cit. in ABC News, 2015*

On the other hand, IS supporting hackers, such as the self-called "Cyber Caliphate", have intensified cyber-attacks, aiming at all types of targets, ranging from military commands to government agencies or the media: for example, more than 19,000 cyberattacks hit French websites in the week following the attacks in Paris on 7 and 8 January 2015; on the 12th of the same month, the "Cyber Caliphate" attacked Twitter and YouTube accounts of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), which heads the anti-IS international coalition operations; in February, the same group attacked the websites of the US magazine *Newsweek*; and on 8 April, again the "Cyber Caliphate" attacked the Internet pages, social networks and broadcasts of Francophone *TV5 Monde* television group, whose eleven channels not only failed to broadcast but also showed IS videos and propaganda messages and threats.

## 3.5. CONCLUSION

Despite international efforts to contain it, the number of IS's militants has not stopped growing, and the number of jihadist "foreign fighters" from all over the world leaving for Syria and Iraq to join the self-proclaimed "Caliphate" is also increasing. In addition, there are now 36 jihadist groups around the world that pledged *bay'at* or expressed support to the "Caliph Ibrahim", as there are 12 new IS provinces or *wilayats* outside Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, the expansion of the IS's "Caliphate" has contributed to intensify historic rivalries and sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in several countries and, collaterally, between regional powers (namely, in Saudi Arabia and Iran), as well as to strengthen the power and the role of the opposing Shiite militias and Peshmerga Kurds and to change the volatile connections of jihadist movements and insurgents in various other stages of conflict beyond Syria and Iraq.

On the other hand, the IS has continued its campaign of terror and also inspired countless "lone wolves", and multiplied the number of attacks and victims worldwide. In parallel, the IS has shown an unusual ability to use the Internet and the new media for the purposes of propaganda, radicalization, recruitment and terror, in addition to successive and powerful cyberattacks. This aspect, combined with the impressive number of militants and "foreign fighters" it successfully attracts, also makes the IS an "internal" threat in many societies all over the world.

The self-proclamation as "Caliphate" was instrumental in the IS's expansion beyond Syria and Iraq. And given the scope that it has reached, there is no doubt that the IS has become the new international terrorist threat, disputing with al-Qaeda the leadership of global jihadism.

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