

## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE TERRITORIES CONTROLLED BY THE ISLAMIC STATE**

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**Abstract:** *The transition from an al-Qaeda organization, a clandestine resistance movement activating through suicide attacks and harassment, to the territorialization and institutionalization of power, turned the Islamic state into a reference point for terrorist organizations. Although statehood and the idea of an Islamic state were not a missing piece from the Al-Qaeda doctrine and belief, the Islamic state militants were the first to implement such a state in the subdued Iraqi and Syrian territories, a state on which they could build and promote their political theology. Once a territory was subdued, it was enrolled in the „state’s” administrative logic and integrated in the administrative circuit proposed by the Islamic state. The administrative institutions of the Islamic state replaced the prior legit state administration by implementing new resource and service tax and distribution systems. A new (religious) police and court houses were institutionalized; all of these to mimic the attributions of a state and to convey to the people in those specific territories the feeling that the old administration was replaced with a new, more efficient one, based on its divine mandate.*

**Keywords:** Islamic State, public administration, territorialization, institutionalization, economic circuit, tax system.

The West has failed to prevent the emergence of al-Qaeda-like groups in the Middle East. It was also taken by surprise by the Islamic State when it took over large territories in Iraq and Syria, changing, at least temporarily, the political map of the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Jihad groups like al-Qaeda adapted, evolved and proliferated on the background of political chaos in Iraq and Syria; a chaos that was overlaid by the more or less discrete intervention of the great regional powers. Each of these regional powers tried to maximize its opportunities depending on their own stakes.

Unlike al-Qaeda, the Islamic State was characterized through its main focus on the territorialization of power or the capitalization of a developing state, a sovereign, the caliph and an army (not only a group of mujahedeen, like al-Qaeda fighters). Another major difference is that the Islamic State has a lot of money to carry on a war, financial resources that do not link the organization to the other states in the region (we refer here to the private donors in Kuwait, Qatar, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia or even other areas, of whose past or present existence is still questionable and unsure). An example relating to the financial

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<sup>1</sup> N. Parker, „Inside the Fall of Mosul”, in *Reuters*, October, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014, pp. 6-7.

independence of the Islamic State is the episode at the Central Bank in Mosul, during which the Islamic State militants got hold of a considerable amount of dollars and gold bars. These spoils of war alone, estimated at 313 million euros, were enough to give the Islamic State an unprecedented financial power among the al-Qaeda-like groups.<sup>2</sup>

In their majority, the Sunni Arabs have accepted the Islamic State, passively by some, actively by others, as it allowed them to regain political visibility through the social tag given by the Islamic State, which generated a feeling of membership and political power among individuals. For some, the affiliation to the territories conquered by the Islamic State turned into adhesion to its transnational project: would the Sunni Arabs have an acceptable future in an Iraq dominated by a Shiite majority?<sup>3</sup> The Islamic State has obsessively tried to convince the Sunnis that the answer was no. They should have turned to their brothers of Islam and Arabism in the Euphrates valley, beyond the Syrian borders. However, in a few months' time, many Sunni Arabs, especially civilians, were also disappointed by the „Islamic” administration, perceiving it as brutal, merciless and corrupt, and thus relating to the arrogant militants of the Islamic State just like to Iraq's Shiite army as there were abuses in the territories managed by the Islamic State as well, and not only against the apostate and infidel communities, but also among the Sunni Arabs who strayed from the limits imposed by the Jihadists.<sup>4</sup>

### **The territorialization of power**

Besides the destabilization and border changes in the Middle East, more precisely, besides the negative impact over the region, the Islamic State had also become a paradigm in terms of the terrorist phenomenon. After the summer of 2014, terrorism moved from the sphere of small, mobile, poorly financed or dispersed organizations, towards a

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Some have perceived the so-called Shiite domination of Iraq, which began in 2003, as a historical justice for the Shiites. Since the birth of the modern Iraqi state, a massive Shiite population was underlying the Iraqi social pyramid. Under the Ottomans as well, during the Hashemite and republican periods, the Sunnis had the monopole of power and of social promotion, especially the administration and the army. The Sunnis' current fear of the Baghdad policies and Shiite militias also resides, to a certain extent, in the fear that this neglected community (Shiites) might seek revenge once they come to power. The Islamic State also took advantage of these fears during its propaganda to attract as many Sunni tribes and discredit Baghdad

<sup>4</sup> J. Luizard, *Capcana Daesh, Statul Islamic sau întoarcearea istoriei (Daesh Trap, Islamic State or Return of History)*, Iași, Polirom, 2015, pp. 25-26.

centralized, well-armed state-organization (the Islamic State) that controls a territory within certain borders, has financial strategies and bureaucracy means and hosts a tax-paying population.

Copying the state and imitating statehood features were the operational bases underlying Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi leader's project; the infrastructure being the one that gave the Islamic State its advantage over al-Qaeda. After conquering the territories, the Islamic State has taken its state status very seriously, implementing new laws, public order, currency, taxes and other economic aspects. They would also manage a territory bureaucratically, not only control it militarily. They punished or rewarded exemplary citizens, increased taxes and monitored the market. The Islamic State gained a strong image capital in the beginning because it presented itself as concerned with repairing deficient or inexistent infrastructure and also provided security in areas in which the military threat was constant. Besides security, they also offered basic services that were previously lacking for the general population, like water and electricity.<sup>5</sup>

A major advantage which distinguished the Islamic State from other terrorist organizations in the Middle East, such as Abu Nidal or Fatah al-Islam, was financial independence.<sup>6</sup> After conquering Mosul, the Islamic State has governed itself, which brought along autonomy over any foreign agenda that would have required for the organization's interests to be adapted or subordinated to those of the sponsor.<sup>7</sup> The major economic advantage was that the Islamic State did not rely on external financiers, wanting to remain independent and pursue its own agenda. It is estimated that during the peak of the Islamic State, the annual budget of the organization was around 2 billion dollars; which made the Islamic State the richest terrorist organization in the world. The Islamic State was led as a mafia in terms of taxes and contributions and as an enterprise when it came to exploiting the natural resources in controlled territories. Of these natural resources, oil exploitation was the most important for the Islamic State, which controlled 60% of the oil

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<sup>5</sup> „The financing of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)”, 2017, Directorate-General For External Policies, Policy Department, European Parliament, pp. 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> „ISIS Financing”, 2015 Center for the analysis of terrorism, CAT, pp. 20-23.

<sup>7</sup> From an economic point of view, the Islamic State could be called a proto-state, however, economic issues are not enough to consolidate statehood. Of course, the Islamic State does preserve the name of state, which is used in itself to express the terrorist organization and be called as they called themselves. The first condition, however, to exist as a state is the relation with other states, and in this case we cannot address this issue like that, when it comes to the terrorists within the Islamic State.

production in Syria and 10% of that in Iraq by 2016. Besides oil, the Islamic State also used water as a financing resource by controlling certain major dams, especially in Syria.<sup>8</sup>

In June 2014, the Islamic State, along with other local Sunni tribes occupied the city of Mosul, giving a severe blow to the Iraqi security forces across four days. But, in certain ways, Mosul had long ceased to operate under governmental jurisdiction. Before the *de facto* take-over, the Islamic State had applied taxes for any trader, from vegetable vendors to construction companies. According to some estimates, the revenue of those sources amounted to eight million dollars a month. The same type of taxes was also applied in Tikrit, north of Baghdad.<sup>9</sup> The initial conquest plan did not stop at Mosul, but was meant to reach Baghdad and then the whole Iraq. The Kurds' lack of collaboration availability and their alliance with the government resulted in the disruption of the Islamic State's illusions related to Baghdad, Najaf and Karbala, the holy Shiite cities.

### **Impersonation of a state: administration and finances**

The leaders of the Islamic State realized that they had to be content with a Sunni Arab community and confessional territory. As an alternative, they chose the regionalization and internationalization of the conflict by building a transnational state; and started to blame the „impostor” regional states as the root of the Muslim community problems. Through the deliberate internationalization of the conflict (the massacre of the Yazidi community in the Mosul plain area for media purposes, among others) and the general denunciation of the regional states' legitimacy, the Islamic State was thus able to claim itself as the only true heir of the Arab Spring. It proclaimed itself as the sole, completely autonomous protagonist that only depended on its local bases. The desire to surpass the narrow community and confessional limit of Iraq, associated with a universalistic, militant speech, created the impression of an organization addressing a global community. Thus, the international community was presented the Islamic State's propaganda consisting of its own alternative to the international coalition, made up of European, Uzbek and Chechen fighters.<sup>10</sup> The internationalization of the conflict and the territorial expansion towards Syria was presented as

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<sup>8</sup> „The financing of the Islamic State”, pp. 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Damien Sharkov, „Chechen Volunteers Fighting ISIS In Syria and Iraq: Report”, in *Newsweek, World*, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

the abolition of artificial borders; the elimination of the border between Syria and Iraq, as a symbol of weakness of the colonial regional regimes.<sup>11</sup>

The new caliphate, proclaimed in June 2014 had its own government, economy and army. The Islamic State also created bureaucracy in the caliphate and institutions that functioned according to the strict and puritan ideology of Islam. At the end of 2016, the Pentagon stated that between 27.000 and 31.000 foreign fighters from all over the world traveled to Iraq and Syria, via Turkey to join the caliphate army and other extremist groups.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout the entire territory under its dominance, the Islamic State implemented what we could compare to institutions and administration, however, in a rudimentary and localized manner. The names of the positions within the administrative departments refer to the first Muslim states combined with certain forms taken from the modern administration. There was also a judicial power consisting of religious judges who commanded over a police responsible for the implementation of their decisions throughout the Islamic State territory. In Iraq, these judges are chosen from the old religious cast that has been infiltrated by Salafi elements since Saddam's rule. Given that Jihadists believed that Sharia was the supreme law that no longer supports other auxiliary laws, the Islamic State rejected the idea of having a legislative, replacing it with a consultative assembly.<sup>13</sup>

As a brief summary of this, we should remember that what was surprising about the Islamic State and distinguished it from its predecessor, al-Qaeda, as well as from the other Jihadist groups, was its concern with exercising power in its own territory, the Islamic caliphate. The international community was not new to the Salafi-Jihadist terrorist phenomenon, but was used to a specific type of organization that would practice it. The other groups of this kind, at the very most, controlled training bases in the states providing them safe haven or occupied small enclaves in difficultly accessible areas. They all claimed their mission to apply Sharia, but the Islamic State showed its desire to only apply it its own territory. Its preoccupation for statehood and institutions has greatly differentiated the Islamic State from the rest of the organizations,

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<sup>11</sup> J. Luizard, *Capcana Daesh*, pp. 32-37.

<sup>12</sup> R. Wright, „The Jihadi Threat ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Beyond”, 2015, Wilson Center and United States Institute for Peace, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> N. Cigar, „Iraq's Shia Warlords and Their Militias: Political and Security Challenges and Options”, p. 35, online at: [www.ssi.armywarcollege.edu](http://www.ssi.armywarcollege.edu), accessed September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017.

and this speech has prevailed, as the other organizations promised only terrorism and armed resistance in the mountains, which implied a certain type of exile. Hence, within its caliphate, the Islamic State built court houses, schools, social systems and local governments. They even had a publishing house that printed children's books and magazines.<sup>14</sup>

### **Demolishing symbols and building a new society**

The Islamic State became the richest terrorist organization following an armed robbery of the bank in Mosul, from where the amount of 450 million dollars was taken. They used self-financing through kidnapping and ransom demands, protection fees, refugee trafficking and black market oil transactions. At the same time, they have been able to acquire and sell modern American military equipment following various Iraqi military base takeovers. Among such equipment, they had helicopters, armored conveyors, heavy machine guns, bulletproof vests or uniforms. After becoming a self-sufficient organization, the Islamic State began to consolidate its attributions conferred by the state title.

After the military conquest of Mosul, they continued with the implementation of administration and the new rules. Alcohol and smoking were completely forbidden, as were public meetings, gun possession, with the exception of the Islamic State members, all sheiks and tribe chiefs had to collaborate with the new authorities, all sanctuaries, cemeteries and „pagan” monuments were destroyed, women were forced to adopt a strict dress code and cover their entire bodies.<sup>15</sup> Behind the absurdity behind all these measures, the elites of the Islamic State focused on a medium and long-term strategy to alter the society. Any change of regime (especially when it comes to a totalitarian regime) is sudden and highly violent in the first phases. Measures are adopted from the very outset with draconian strictness, precisely for the new regime to be able to enforce itself, not necessarily over the old order, but over the customs and collective mind that grew and learnt the old order habits. Thus, the societal takeover and conversion of the former residents to the new governing creed were the next step after the military conquest. This is the motivation behind apparently illogical acts, such as

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<sup>14</sup> J. Luizard, *Capcana Daesh*, pp. 151-159.

<sup>15</sup> B. Ammar, T. Tanase, T., *Terrorism-Causes, Effects and Solutions-ISIS Case Study. Terrorist Organization That Could Destabilize European Security-Islamic State*, 2017.

the blowing up of ancient Roman sites or significant cultural or historic buildings.

The vision that was violently promoted by the Islamic State was a puritan, fundamentalist one that encouraged the return to the traditional Islamic values from the Prophet's time, discarding the society of all auxiliary contacts and cultural contacts, especially those coming from the West, which have perverted it culturally and spiritually and enslaved it politically. The new administration of the Islamic State demolishes a world presented as sinful, corrupt and rotten, blowing up the edifices that stand as proof of it. All of this to create a new Islamic society that would underlie the totalitarian administration. The Islamist vision (and of all Islamic terrorist organizations) needed a state on their political agenda. The state was the expression of Islam's exertion; they saw the state as a means to impose Islam based on rigor and totalitarianism, an entity completely different from the Western model. It confers the necessary political, power and coercive means to impose religion.

The origins of the idea of state were present since the establishment of the organization, and once materialized through the territorialization of power, the Islamic State moved to the state consolidation phase at the level of the occupied societies. A new social contract was thus concluded, and the previous one with the Iraqi and Syrian government authorities was annulled, as two main clauses from both parties ended. Governors could no longer provide security (which was the central element for which the contract was concluded in the first phase; based on the principle of giving up liberties in exchange for protection), and manifest their loyalty to governors, being able, at most, to do that at a level of thought, however, „citizen” obligations and duties had to be honored for another entity adverse to the state, namely the Islamic State.

The feeling of betrayal doubled for many who hadn't had the opportunity to flee the new conquerors and had to stay under the administration of the Islamic State. This first feeling refers to the failure to implement the security clause underlying the social contract with Iraq and Syria. The second feeling came after the attacks and fights between the new lords and the governmental forces. The question asked was a simple one, but no one could provide an answer: What are we to blame for that they (the Islamic State) are ruling us now and why are we collateral victims between them and the governmental forces (which should protect us)? The affiliation to the Islamic State's territory proved to be an impossible situation for many (although, as presented, a part of the community accepted and even supported the Islamic State militants,

as a consequence of the fact that authorities had already violated the terms of the social contract concluded prior to its arrival, idea shared by many Sunni Arabs). Their expectations have been deceived: being a Sunni Arab did not exempt you from forced evictions, from impossible taxes, from impartial judgment without appeal rights or even from non-discriminatory crime. The residents were often used as human shields, especially during the fight for Mosul<sup>16</sup> or Raqqa in 2017, which made it even harder for the security forces to advance as they were facing the following dilemma: Do we attack and eliminate terrorists, but kill innocents, or do we advance slowly, with additional costs and higher military risks but protect the non-combatants? For the most part, the second variant was observed, and still there were thousands of collateral victims.

The Islamic State was removed from its strategic positions in Iraq and Syria. The largest urban centers have been freed and the refugees can now return home. However, the question arises: What will they find back home? They will return to the ruins which were once their homes. They will go back to a city whose infrastructure was mostly decommissioned. Houses can be rebuilt and the infrastructure can be restored and improved. There are humanitarian aid financial packages provided by the United Nations, the European Union, etc. The question that is the subject of our study's conclusions is: How will the social contract between the Sunni communities (and not only, in general between those relocated and affected by war) and the government authorities be re-concluded, given that these communities went through the administration of the Islamic State? What will the clauses for the population to give up liberties in exchange for security be? How credible will be the governments' guarantee be and how many will be willing to accept it? Or will the idea of autonomy and powerful federalization become another choice? In other words, what will be the new administration to be built in the liberated regions and how will people relate to it? One thing is certain though, up until now the relationship between governments and the Sunni community was clearly a faulty one.

The fabulous rise of the Islamic State resulted from the organization's ability to consolidate itself (and create the impression that is) the shock wave of a general Sunni riot. It is quite possible that the offensive carried out by the Islamic State in the summer of 2014 meant the end of a Shi'ite-dominated government in Iraq, following the post-

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<sup>16</sup> J. Maslin, „They Just Took Us. Mosul Civilians on Being Used as Human Shields by ISIS”, in *Time*, March 30, 2017.



Saddam model of 2003. Drawing a new Iraqi political map will be necessary, both nationally and at the level of Baghdad as a power center. The lack of political dialog with the Sunnis and the return to an al-Maliki-like situation after the removal of any Islamic State presence in Iraq, will only mean the physical removal or some Jihadist militants. Keeping to such scenarios will preserve the elements that gave power to the Islamic State in the first phase. An exclusive Shiite-led government, the Sunni community's perception of being politically excluded, economically disadvantaged and socially alienated will continue to be the ingredients of success for any Salafi-Jihadist organization claiming to fight against such situations. The hatred of the Shiites will then reemerge, an infusion of weapons and militants from the outside will occur soon afterwards, the conflict will be stratified and sub-stratified and Iraq will once again be at point zero. The balanced management of the post Islamic State in Iraq through a serious political dialog between the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds will be absolutely necessary so that history does not repeat itself.