

# The international Jihadism: A new type of threat and regional cooperation as a remedy

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## Abstract

The capture of Mosul and the ensuing *blitzkrieg* of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) over the Sunni majority region of Syria and Iraq reminded the world of the seriousness of the threat posed by the Salafist-jihadists. By connecting the tactic of “the management of savagery” with external resources and links, ISIL seems to have succeeded in materializing the full potential that the new type of conflict can pose to the existing international order. The “New War”, as formulated by Mary Kaldor, is the product of the dual erosion of nation states that globalization has brought about. Due to the growing malfunctioning of nation states, it becomes more difficult to secure the governmental monopoly of organized violence and border control, while there is also the internationalization of criminal groups’ networks. So far, the U.S.-led coalition has waged war against ISIL, but the strategy based on older thinking about national security helps to proliferate ISIL-type threats rather than to contain them. One of the main reasons of the failure lies in the context that the U.S. administration has been supporting extremist networks as tools to subvert the regime it does not want. This is attested to by the fact that the ISIL is the end product of U.S. covert interventions in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and Syria. Therefore, a different type of remedy is necessary. The article assesses the effectiveness of concerted policing and the exchange of intelligence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in its fight against the Islamic terrorism in Central Asia and concludes that a regional cooperation based on pragmatic and limited purposes, rather than a military alliance based on some shared values, is a better model to cope with the new type of threats as represented by ISIL. Such regional cooperation has the potential to bring about more stable administration and provides the ground of economic stability as it gives its member states more resilience to the outside political pressures that are detrimental to the fight against terrorism, in addition to giving them the grounds for economic development with the purpose of mutual benefits.

*Key words:* ISIL, jihadism, salafi, new war, Middle East, Balkans, Central Asia, SCO

## 1. Introduction

The world was stunned by the abrupt rise of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL)<sup>1</sup> and the unprecedented brutality it exercised in the summer of

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<sup>1</sup> The author calls the group as “ISIL” mainly on the following grounds: Although the group’s control has so far been limited within the border of Iraq and Syria, they envisage as their territory the

2014. While the U.S.-led coalition took up concerted efforts to fight back against the Islamist assault, their air strikes so far have not produced impressive results. On the contrary, as the Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris highlighted, the number of sympathizers is constantly rising, partly due to their exposure in the international mass media, helped by ISIL's sophisticated social media strategy. The events remind us of the seriousness of the threats posed by international Jihadism, and the difficulty in eliminating them.

The article tries to find a possible remedy for this seemingly obstinate malady, making use of recent findings in the field of comparative conflict studies.

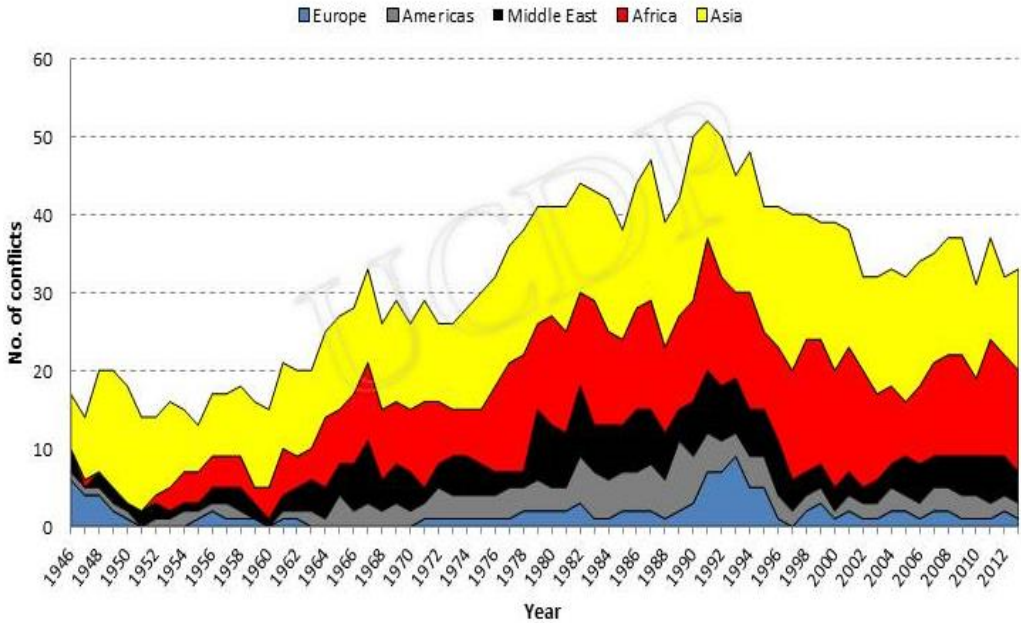
## 2. Regional conflicts: Withering away or thriving?

Since the end of the Second World War, the humanity has witnessed a cumulative rise in the number of conflicts. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), the annual number of military conflicts taking place all over the world remained less than 20 by the middle of the 1960s (See Fig. 1). Thereafter, it took a drastic upturn and has never fallen below the level of 30 since 1975, reaching a record high of 52 in 1991. The number declined after then, more or less constantly, until 2002. At that point, it shows a sign of stagnation, ranging between 31 and 37 (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2014a).

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historical region known as aş-Şam that includes contemporary Lebanon, Jordan, and a part of South-eastern Turkey. The group has a significant number of supporters (or dormant cells) there, and, as in the case of Northern Lebanon, is committed to subversive activities.

**Figure 1**  
 Armed Conflict by Regions 1946-2013



Source: Themnér & Wallensteen (2014b); UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, [http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/66/66314\\_1armed-conflict-by-region.pdf](http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/66/66314_1armed-conflict-by-region.pdf)

How to interpret the trend is a focus of academic discussions. Optimistic scholars like to relate it with positive signs of global peace. Pinker (2011), for instance, attributes the decline to the success of a new form of global security governance. For him, the post-Cold War period is the latest phase of “humane” development and the natural outcome of the lenient nature of human beings. In the same vein, the *Human Security Report* (HSR) describes the decline as part of a general reduction of violence recorded in the past decade, like the global drop in battle deaths or the rarity of inter-state conflicts, i.e. high-intensity conflicts, and attributes it to the elimination of “proxy wars” (Human Security Research Group, 2014).

The real story, however, is not so simple. It is true that the number of battle deaths has been in constant decline since the early 1950s (Lacina & Gleditsch, 2005). However, the number of conflicts increased almost fourfold from 1952 to 1992. This is partly due to the increase in the number of states – by twofold in the given period (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2014a) – but the gap still remains widely

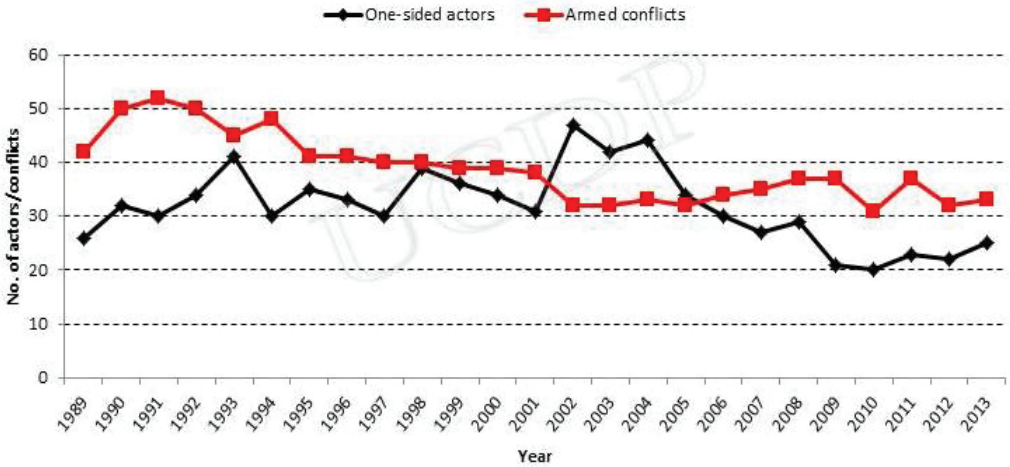
open. Given the constant development of military technology and the intensification of its killing ability, it may seem enigmatic. The answer can be found in the following context. The end of European colonial rule resulted in a sharp increase in the number of states from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. In the new states, the governments often failed in establishing physical control over the territory or effective administration over the population, let alone the population's political allegiance, mainly due to their deeply embedded economic dependency to their former European masters. The fragility of governance gave rise to dissidents, and the difficulty of physical control allowed the latter to procure arms. At the same time, however, due to their general penury, both government and opposition forces could not mobilize large armies with brand new weapons. The end result is the frequency of small conflicts contained to a discrete territory. The fact that the overwhelming majority of conflicts were taking place mostly in Asia and Africa corroborates this reasoning (See Fig. 1). In other words, both the sharp rise in the number of conflicts and the decline of their mortality between the 1950s and the 1980s were the products of the malfunctioning of newly formed nation-states.

As for the decline in the number of conflicts after 1991, we can apply the same theory. According to UCSD datasets, the peak of the conflicts was between 1990 and 1992. During this period, the world was constantly engulfed with more than 50 conflicts. The sharp rise was apparently the byproduct of the fall of the Soviet Bloc, as it chronologically corresponded to it.<sup>2</sup> After three consecutive extraordinary turbulent years (See Fig. 2), the frequency of conflicts decreased. The average was reduced to 42 for the rest of the 1990s, and 34.9 in the first decade of the 21st century. The trend seems to confirm the optimists' accounts, but, if one recalls that the average of the 1970s was 31.2, we have not yet returned to the safety level of some forty years earlier.

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<sup>2</sup> The change of U.S. policy is an additional factor. After the "Fall of Communism", Washington shifted its support from military dictators whom it had called "Friends of America" to "democratic" and less costly regimes. It brought about a number of regime changes and ensuing turmoil. The most notorious event was the "Rwanda genocide". See Takeuchi (2009).

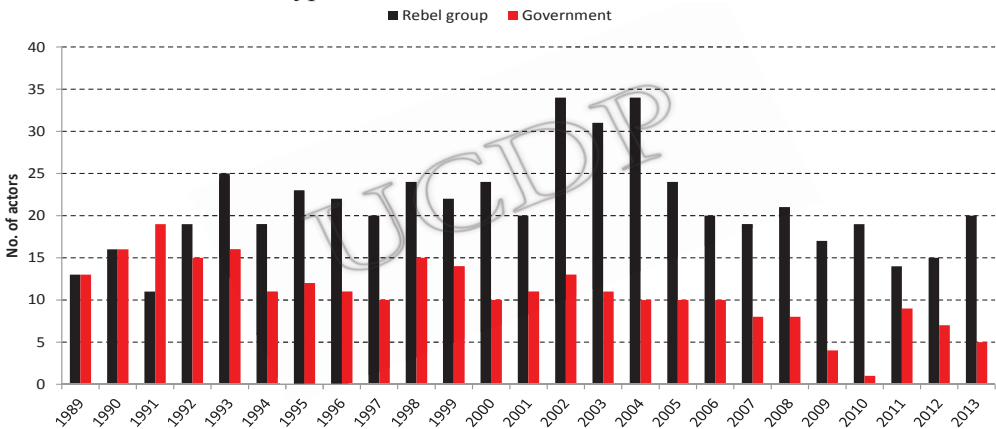
**Figure 2**  
One-sided Actors and Armed Conflicts, 1989-2013



Source: "UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v 1.4-2014, 1989-2013" and Eck and Hultman (2007).

There are other sobering facts. The Human Security Research Group, for instance, admits that the number of the internationalized intrastate conflicts has increased over the past ten years (2014: 90).

**Figure 3**  
Type of One-sided Actor 1989-2013



Source: "UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v 1.4-2014, 1989-2013" and Eck and Hultman. (2007).

The trend coincides with the rise in the number of non-state armed conflicts in general. The number of conflicts that endanger the civil population is actually increasing. In other words, the post-Cold War era is a period with a cumulative rise of violence against civilians by non-state military bodies (DCAF & Geneva Call, 2015: 18-21). Old UCDP datasets fail to capture this fact.

The UCDP's failure comes from its very definition of armed conflicts: "A contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which *at least one is the government of a state*, results in at least 25 *battle-related deaths* [Italics are added]" (Themnér & Wallensteen, 2014a). This is based on the assumption that the states monopolize organized violence and they are the sole entrepreneurs in war. This premise, however, has long been obsolete, and has also become powerless in the wake of new conflict patterns.

Our life in the contemporary world is more threatened by non-state organized violence, rather than by state sponsored violence (See Fig. 2). According the new USDR datasets of *one-sided violence*,<sup>3</sup> out of the total of 78 actors that were active in conflicts between 1989-2004, only 27 were governments and the rests were rebel groups, so the ratio is almost 1:2 (Eck & Hultman, 2007: 237). The ratio has shifted far more drastically in favor of the latter since the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (See Fig. 3). Now, wars are waged not by states but by non-state forces. In contrast to the traditional "Westphalian" war in which the state system was the norm, contemporary military conflicts have come to take sub-state features, as they are waged by militias, paramilitaries, warlord armies, criminal gangs, private security firms, and tribal groups. Thus, it is more appropriate to call them post-Westphalian wars (Sheehan, 2014: 226). Put another way, the change in the post-Cold War era has been toward a further malfunctioning of the state, or the universalization of post-colonial conflicts, rather than the general recession of wars.

### 3. Globalization and the new types of conflicts

The obsolescence of interstate wars and proliferation of intrastate conflicts has been a definite trend since the early 1980s. What merits attention is its overlap with the so-called process of globalization. Globalization is often described as a process of the rapid intensification of interdependency between various regions on the globe both in terms of the production and the consumption of material goods and information (McGrew, 2014: 16-20). Although the incorporation of local,

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<sup>3</sup> One-sided violence is defined as "the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organized group *against civilians* which results in at least 25 *deaths* per year [Italic is added]". See Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2014).

more or less autarkic, economies into a world market has a long history, this trend experienced a huge quantitative upsurge from the early 1980s.

The incentive first came with the intensification of the dependency of economically weak states on the Western monetary structure. As a result of the new formula guiding international loan policy, known as the “Washington consensus”, a growing number of states had to adopt a uniform set of economic policies that entailed a contraction of public spending, the privatization of state enterprises, deregulations and free trade. The effect was the gradual decay of “national economies”. As the governments renounced the major tools to protect their market integrity, the territoriality of supply and demand was corroded and was systematically replaced by the internationalized division of production. It resulted in the specialization and diversification of markets. At the same time, the control from above intensified as the worldwide financial system and technology accumulation became more cohesive (Woods, 2006). The fall of communist rule further precipitated the process and the tide sucked down even industrially sophisticated countries (Glaz’iev, 2014). Nowadays, very few governments can pursue their economic policy while ignoring international regulations and agreements, most of which have little to do with pure economics.

The end result is the dwindling of state functions in general. As their grip on their economies slacken, governments had to downscale their public spending, even regarding policing, and more often than not this also entailed outsourcing some of their core responsibilities, the most extreme example of which is the proliferation of personal military contractors (Motoyama, 2004). The process brings about widening social disparity, the constant deterioration of law and order, and the eventual loss of physical control over territory. The recent assessment of The Institute for Economic and Peace corroborates this reasoning. According to its report, only four indicators of world peace “improved” in the last six years. These are total military expenditures (slightly decreased), the number of police (slightly decreased), the number of heavy weapons and nuclear capability (substantial improvement), and the number of armed service personnel (slightly reduced). On the other hand, weapons imports and exports increased dramatically (by 30%), and such indicators as terrorist impact, homicide rate per 100,000, the likelihood of violent demonstrations, and perceptions of criminality were also on the rise (Global Peace Index, 2014: 41). All of these factors testify to the general loss of governmental control over organized violence. The expansion of the arms trade mixed with the downsizing of regular armies implies the privatization of militaries. The police budget cut naturally entails a proliferation of ordinary crimes, the outburst of public protests, and the intensification of terrorist activities.

The decline of state functions was not limited to the political and economic spheres. It also accompanied the rapid decay of the cultural structure that characterized the modern state. Now, the vertically organized cultural structure of the nation-state has lost its viability. As the fluency of international communication surpassed the customary code of cultural hierarchy, old national elites have been superseded by new dominant classes well incorporated into the transnational networks of information exchange. National popular education is now losing ground, not only because budget cuts degrade its quality, but also because national (therefore domestic) instruction can produce no more than domestically qualified working forces. If only a small number of wealthy families can afford to send their children to institutions with a “global standard” of education, the vast majority of the population will be excluded from the benefits modern education has hitherto conferred. The corollary to this will be a general mistrust of Western education, and a backrush to some traditional values peculiar to localities.

In this aspect, Kaldor’s (2012) analysis on the correlation between globalization and “new wars” merits attention. While globalization creates inclusive transnational networks of people, it simultaneously excludes and atomizes a large number of people. This logic explains the reason why identity politics have become a major mobilization tools in the “new wars”. Those who are excluded from the global, therefore universal, sets of values have to rely on the only alternative principles that are available to them, and they are, more often than not, the certain sets of values that are indigenous or specific to a limited number of people.

In this way, the “new wars”, as Kaldor (2012: 5-7, 73-5) puts it, arose in the context of the dual erosion of state functions. The nation-state was eroded from above by the “transnationalization” of governance and military forces, as well as from below by privatization and austerity measures. As the state ceased to hold a monopoly on military power, conflicts took different forms and shapes. Non-state actors, rather than the regular army, began to play central roles in the conflicts. As a result, the distinction among wars, organized crimes, and large-scale violations of human rights has become blurred. The distinction among the national army, paramilitaries, and foreign mercenaries is becoming less and less recognizable. The demarcation line between soldiers and civilians is obscured. Moreover, as statecraft and borders became porous, the demarcation line between inside and outside is blurred as well. This gives another character to the “new wars”. Despite their localized outlook, the “new wars” involve “a myriad of transnational connections”.



#### 4. The “Islamic State” as a perfect reflection of the “new wars”

In the “new wars”, the main actors and their tactics are qualitatively different from traditional warring forces. A growing number of paramilitaries predominates in the regions afflicted by conflicts. Their main method of territorial control is the constant instillation of “fear and hatred” among the population, through making use of extreme and conspicuous atrocities like systematic murder, ethnic cleansing, and rendering an area uninhabitable. Once they have established a certain degree of territorial control through those atrocities, the perpetrators introduce a new type of war economy, in which “external flows, especially humanitarian assistance and remittances from abroad, are integrated into a local and regional economy based on asset transfer and extra-legal trading” (Kaldor, 2012: 94-113).

These attributes of the “new wars” were first conceived by Kaldor in her personal observation of the Bosnian Civil War, and were later elaborated into a sophisticated theory through a comparative analysis of various conflicts in Asia and Africa. Thus, the concept was originally proposed as an ideal type - a standard for better understanding the nature of contemporary conflicts. The recent developments in the Middle East, however, urges us to consider its implications more seriously, as the emergence and rapid pervasion of ISIL appears to be a full embodiment of the ideal type of “new wars”<sup>4</sup>.

ISIL became the focus of international media coverage after the fall of Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq, on the night of 9 June 2014. The ensuing blitzkrieg over northern Iraq and Syria in the course of the summer alarmed world leaders, as the U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stressed that the group was, “beyond anything that we’ve seen”<sup>5</sup>.

Contrary to the impression of an abrupt rise, created in the mainstream media, ISIL has a long history whose origins can be traced back almost fifteen years ago. The group was founded by a Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in 1999. Zarqawi was a former Afghan jihadi and spent most of the 1990s in Jordanian prisons. Released in 1999, he made a short trip to Afghanistan, then came to Iraqi Kurdistan, where he set up his own camp. Subsequently, his group launched a series of attacks against Iraqi civilians and aid workers, making use of

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<sup>4</sup> The so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” has gone through numerous name changes since its inauguration in 1999. Originally it was known as Jamā‘at al-Tawhīd wa-al-Jihād (JTJ: The Organization of Monotheism and Jihad), it changed to Tanzīm Qā‘idat al-Jihād fī Bilād al-Rāfidayn (The Organization of Jihad’s Base in the Country of the Two Rivers, or Al Qaeda in Iraq: AQI) in 2004, then the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006, ISIL in 2013. On 29 June 2014, it took its latest moniker, the “Islamic State”.; Corbette (2014).

<sup>5</sup> “ISIS is ‘beyond anything we have ever seen’: Chuck Hagel warns terror network is an ‘imminent threat to every interest we have’”, see *The Daily Mail Online*, 21 Aug. 2014.

a variety of tactics – car bombings, suicide attacks, guerrilla raids, kidnappings, and so on.

In the light of his Afghan connection, al-Zarqawi had, no doubt, ties with other “Afghan Arabs” and their network known as al-Qaeda, but al-Zarkawi’s Salafi-jihadi doctrines were different from those of al-Qaeda. Contrary to bin Laden and his successors, who underscore the fight against the West and envisage a “Caliphate state” in a future vision, al-Zarkawi’s group focused on urgently establishing an Islamist state and purging Muslim societies of “immorality and non-Islamic practices” (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 28). To justify attacks on Muslims, al-Zarkawi broadly stretched the notion of *takfir* (accusation of blasphemy) (Brachman, 2009: 45-6), and showed no mercy to his fellow Sunni Muslims if they did not give in. Even a reunion with al-Qaeda in 2004 did not change their attitude in pursuing their own jihadist agenda. After the death of Al-Zarqawi, the group was led by Abu Hamza al-Muhajir in 2006. Shortly afterward, it adopted the new name of the “Islamic State in Iraq”. This symbolized the shift of its allegiance from al-Qaeda to their self-claimed emir, Abu Umar al-Baghdadi. In 2011, his successor, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, sent a detachment under the banner of the al-Nusra Front (NF) into Syria to fight against the Assad regime. When NF eventually grew more formidable than its parent organization, al-Baghdadi declared that Syria would be incorporated into his domain, now called ISIL, in April 2013. Subsequently, he moved to a northern Syrian city, Raqqa, and started building a permanent administrative structure. Since then, ISIL rapidly took the shape of a territorial state and annexed a wide swathe of land straddling the border between Syria and Iraq (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 29-0).

The rapid growth of ISIL after 2013 is built upon two major pillars. First, it has succeeded in instigating internal chaos and instability by its systematic use of violence against the civilian population. The UN Commission’s report on the group’s atrocities in Syria is a good summary of these tactics:

“With the capacity and means to attack the civilian population on a large scale, ISIS [sic.] has carried out mass victimization against civilians... ISIS has perpetrated murder and other inhumane acts, enslavement, rape, sexual slavery and violence, forcible displacement, enforced disappearance and torture. These acts have been committed as part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population” (United Nations, 2014).

The perpetration of violence by ISIL has indeed been “deliberate and calculated”. Contrary to the propaganda image of ISIL as a bunch of bloodthirsty terrorists, disseminated by the western media, ISIL has a highly centralized command structure and is deploying its human and material resources according

to a well-elaborated overall plan.<sup>6</sup> Their use of violence is not at all random; rather, it is selective and well-coordinated. They did it systematically, first to eliminate unwanted elements, then to segregate society, and eventually to consolidate their control over it. Having defeated the government forces in an area, ISIL would round up the population and sort out those who do not fit into their doctrines. Their first victims were Arab Christians. When they conquered certain cities or regions, ISIL would issue a statement demanding that the Christians either convert to Islam, or, if not, pay the *jizya* (religious levy), leave the city, or be killed, as they did in Mosul in June 2014.<sup>7</sup> The result was a mass exodus. The Christians that used to make up around 10% of Syrian population and 7% of Iraqis have by now either been displaced or banished.<sup>8</sup> No less tolerable treatment is awaiting Shiite Muslims. In the territory under ISIL, their fate was also either mass execution or expulsion. The case of Yazidis was more atrocious. As ISIL regards them as “Satan worshippers”, males were instantly killed, and women were sold as slaves (United Nations, 2014).

Such discriminate use of violence has the effect of advancing the indoctrination of the group’s ideology among the rest of population. The rise of ISIL often created euphoria in the Sunni communities that had suffered from or born a grudge against Shiite domination. But the euphoria does not last long, as the imposition of strict Salafi norms is a disaster for most of them.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, local tribes and local Sunni leaders never welcome ISIL, but to rebuff them is no easy job, as ISIL gives only two options to its opponents: beg for mercy or face certain death. For instance, dozens of members of the Sunni Abu Nimr tribe were slaughtered, as they took up arms against ISIL in Anbar in Iraq.<sup>10</sup> In the same vein, ISIL unleashed mass executions of members of the Sheitaat clan that had refused to submit to them in the Deir-al-Zor province in Syria. The treatment of the Sheitaat was a powerful deterrent to resistance, and the other clans gave pledge of loyalty to ISIL.<sup>11</sup>

Ethnic cleansing and exemplary execution is followed by the policy of “rendering an area uninhabitable”. Life under ISIL is nothing but “surveillance, coercion, fear and punishment” (United Nations, 2014). For most citizens, the main interaction with ISIL is with its ubiquitous police and security agencies,

<sup>6</sup> “Significant threat to the entire region”, *The Jordan News*, 20 Aug. 2014.

<sup>7</sup> “Lights out for Christians in Mosul”, *Human Events*, 23 Jul. 2014.

<sup>8</sup> “For Arab Christians and secular Arab nationalists, Isis may be the death knell”, *The Guardian*, 23 Jul, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> “Crisis in the Middle East: The end of a country, and the start of a new dark age”, *The Independent*, by Patrick Cockburn, 10 Aug. 2014.

<sup>10</sup> “Iraq on ‘high alert’ amid ISIS attacks, mass killings”, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 3 Nov. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> “Islamic State turns radical Islam on Syria Muslims”, *Reuters*, 27 Aug. 2014.

including the *Hesbah* (religious police).<sup>12</sup> In the territory under ISIL control, civil life is subjected to the strict rule of Islamic law, and the slightest breach of its ruling means harsh punishment. According to the UN investigation, “the group’s calculated use of public brutality to spread fear routinely includes public beheading, shooting and stoning of civilians and captured fighters”<sup>13</sup>. ISIL apparently deems brutality toward its people the key to stabilizing and consolidating their otherwise unbearable regime. As a jihadist ideologue, Abu Bakr Naji (2006: 11), puts it, “[In] a region submitting to the law of the jungle in its primitive form... people... yearn for someone to manage this savagery. They even accept any organization, regardless of whether it is made up of... evil people”. This is exactly what ISIL is doing. In other words, ISIL successfully imposes the harshest Islamist order only by pushing the region to the brink of total collapse, and rendering their rule an acceptable lesser evil.

The second source of ISIL’s pervasion is its ability to manage the “war economy”. On one hand, ISIL subjugates civilians through terror. On the other hand, they indoctrinate and secure support by the provision of services to those who obey. In the conquered territories, ISIL tries to insinuate itself into every aspect of daily life by displaying its efficiency to govern. In its self-claimed “capital” of Raqqa, for instance, ISIL provides electricity and water, controls traffic, and runs nearly everything from bakeries and banks to schools, courts, and mosques. “Civilians have adjusted to the presence of the Islamic State, [not least] because they are doing institutional work”, one Raqqa resident reportedly said.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, ISIL has already separated military operations from civilian administration elsewhere, and has appointed civilian deputies called “*walis*” to take care of population. Administrative regions are divided into *wilayahs* (provinces) that sometimes span national boundaries. Fighters and employees receive a salary. Poor families, widows, orphans are given money.<sup>15</sup>

To finance their “state”, ISIL has established a revenue system connecting asset transfers and extra-legal trading with external flows. ISIL seizes properties and real estate vacated by Christians and Shiites, and distributes them among its followers.<sup>16</sup> They sell other illegal goods the group plunders from the land it

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<sup>12</sup> “Islam’s Dysfunctional State: In ISIS-controlled Syria and Iraq everyday life is falling apart”, *The Independent*, 26 Dec. 2014.

<sup>13</sup> “New UN report depicts ‘relentless assault’ on civilians inside ISIL-controlled Syria”, UN News Release, 14 November 2014, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=49338#.VGbd3r5zC-Q>/Accessed on 14 Nov. 2014.

<sup>14</sup> “Life under ISIS, For residents of Raqqa is this really a caliphate worse than death?” *The Independent*, 5 Sep. 2014.

<sup>15</sup> “In Northeast Syria, Islamic State builds a government”, *Reuters*, 4 Sep. 2014.

<sup>16</sup> “Islamic State Imposes Strict New Order in Mosul, and Deprivation Is a Result”, *The New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2014.

captures. ISIL also has taken in at least \$20 million in ransom payments in 2014 from kidnappings, and raises several million dollars per month through its extortion racket. The group has also imposed Islamic taxes on wealthy traders and families.<sup>17</sup> The most important source of asset transfer is oil fields. ISIL sell oil for \$30 a barrel in the black market through Turkey. U.S. intelligence claims ISIL is earning about \$1 million a day just from black market oil sales.<sup>18</sup>

The external flows for ISIL consists of a variety of sources: remittances from foreign donors; the massive arrival of foreign mercenaries; the export of oil, “slaves”, drugs, and other booty through smuggling routes; weapons and ammunition supplied by sponsor states (first of all from the USA); and international humanitarian aid. Attracted by the declaration of a “caliphate”, wealthy Islamists from across the world are sending money to Raqqa to support ISIL.<sup>19</sup> ISIL’s media strategy, using online tools to circulate diverse propaganda, has helped make its presence felt among the world jihadist sympathizers. The group has developed its own smartphone apps and distinctive online messaging system, attracting thousands of “volunteers” from all over the world (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 9). ISIL’s territory is in the middle of the major trafficking route of Afghan heroin to the European market. Now, it is used to smuggle black market oil, “slaves”, and plundered goods.

### 5. The U.S-led coalition: Another source of power for ISIL

Washington and its allies have invested huge amount of weapons and equipment for Syrian opposition groups since 2011. As the Syrian military opposition is dominated by ISIL and NF in coalition with other extreme jihadi groups, the military aid almost automatically goes into the hand of ISIL. This is attested to by the fact that much of the ammunition used by ISIL was manufactured in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Although the U.S administration asserts they made a distinction between extremists and “moderates”, in reality there is no dividing wall between the two. ISIL fighters have been trained by the U.S. military at a camp in Jordan in 2012 (Corbette, 2014). John McCain, chief propagator to better arm Syrian opposition groups, met and photographed with ISIL commanders in May 2013.<sup>21</sup> So long as America continues to support its

<sup>17</sup> “In Northeast Syria, Islamic State builds a government”, *Reuters*, 4 Sep. 2014.

<sup>18</sup> “Oil fields have become prime targets in the ISIL”, *Syria Deeply*, 28, July, 2014; “US says ISIL makes \$1 million-a-day selling oil”, *Euronews*, 23 Oct. 2014.

<sup>19</sup> “Life under ISIS”. *The Independent*, 5 Sep. 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Conflict Armament Research (2014: 6); “ISIS’ Ammunition is Shown to Have Origins in U.S. and China”, *The New York Times*, 5 Oct. 2014.

<sup>21</sup> “McCain crosses paths with rebel kidnapper”, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 30 May 2013.

supposedly “moderate” opposition allies, the external flow of arms into ISIL will not stop.<sup>22</sup>

Further complexity lies in the context of humanitarian aid. Various Western aid agencies are providing assistance to poverty-stricken Syrians living in war-torn regions. This includes areas under ISIL control. There, the U.S. funds healthcare clinics and provides blankets, plastic sheeting, and other items to enable the neediest citizens to weather the winter.<sup>23</sup> Such seemingly unmilitary and genuinely humanitarian assistance has the function to prop up and buttress ISIL’s war economy, not least because it makes life under ISIL sustainable.

The U.S.-led coalition’s air strikes pose the same kind of paradox. However precise it may be, the bombardment can’t avoid collateral damage to civilians. Especially so, as the ISIL fighters are mixed with non-combatants. The bereaved naturally harbor hatred against those who dropped bombs, and join ISIL for revenge. As a German journalist pointed out, “with every bomb that is dropped and hits a civilian, the number of terrorists increases”<sup>24</sup>. The logic, however, does not explain fully the negative effect of air strikes. The air strikes demolish the infrastructure, and make civil life more unbearable.<sup>25</sup> The harsher living conditions become, the more solid ISIL’s “management of savagery” becomes. Bombing fortifies ISIL’s grip over the population, rather than weakens its strength.

This is just a part of the paradox the U.S.-led coalition is now confronting. As the coalition concentrates its efforts in Northern Syria and Iraq, the extremists are taking advantage of weak defenses elsewhere. One of the most urgent foci is on Libya. Since the forcible elimination of the Qaddafi regime, the country has been devoid of any workable institution. There has been a complete destruction of the existing power equilibrium, which has brought about an all-out struggle among town-, tribe-, and militia-based networks (Wehrey & Lacher, 2014). Capitalizing on the chaos, a small number of former ISIL militants carved out an enclave for a “caliphate” around the Mediterranean city of Derna in October 2014. The group is now trying to expand their “model state” elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> The threat is substantial, if one recalls the fact that a part of the umbrella organization of jihadists, known as the “al-Qaeda of Islamic Maghreb”, that has been a source of thousands of young fighters traveling from Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco to Syria

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<sup>22</sup> “Crisis in the Middle East: The end of a country, and the start of a new dark age”, *The Independent*, by Patrick Cockburn, 10 Aug. 2014.

<sup>23</sup> “Life under ISIS”, *The Independent*, 5 Sep. 2014.

<sup>24</sup> “First Western journalist granted access to 'Islamic State' returns to Germany”, *Deutsche Welle*, 22 Dec. 2014.

<sup>25</sup> “Letter from Mosul: Why ISIS is seen as the lesser of two evils: An anonymous letter from Sunni civilian in Iraq”, *The Independent*, by Patrick Cockburn, 11 Sep. 2014.

<sup>26</sup> “Libya city first ISIS gain outside Iraq, Syria”, *Daily Star Lebanon*, 10 Nov. 2014.

and Iraq, addressed loyalty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>27</sup> Nigerian extremists, “Boko Haram”, have now developed into a practical relationship with ISIL and are about to construct another “caliphate”<sup>28</sup>. Egypt’s *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis*, a group that has waged an insurgency from its Sinai Peninsula base, likewise pledged its allegiance to ISIS.<sup>29</sup> Barack Obama’s description of ISIL as a cancer describes their potential to fatally infect international security. In this way, ISIL-type threats are so seriously proliferating that the world at large has to confront them.

## 6. International jihadism and the USA - “the sponsor state of terrorism”

As our discussion hitherto implies, the U.S.-led coalition can never exterminate ISIL-type threats. This is not least because air strikes and the empowerment of non-existent “moderate” opposition has limited effects, but because the Pentagon’s theory of national security can not cope with the new reality. Based on the old theory of “defense”, forged during the Cold War era, the U.S global strategy set state-based military threats as its main targets. So, it does not work in face of non-governmental extraterritorial armed threats. Moreover, and much more importantly, its sophisticated method of counter-intelligence and proxy war has hitherto proliferated, rather than prevented, ISIL-type terrorists.

ISIL has long waged a campaign of terror against civilian targets to create irreparable instability. Their tactics of applying a “management of savagery”, however, had not yet paid off in 2011. The situation drastically changed with the U.S.-led covert intervention in the Syrian civil war. A huge number of foreign mercenaries, mostly jihadists, were recruited, equipped, trained, and smuggled into Syria by the U.S.-led sponsor states of rebels. The result was a state of chaos in the rebel-held territories, which has worked exclusively to the advantage of ISIL, as the group concentrated in subduing other rebel groups, deliberately avoiding open confrontation with governmental forces. In this sense, a recent comment from Andrey Klimov, the deputy head of the Russian Federation Council’s international affairs committee, hit the mark: “To a large extent, the U.S. is to blame for the formation of the IS [sic.] bandit group. Trying to topple SAR President Bashar Assad, Washington renders assistance, including military, to the Syrian opposition. Its former members and fighters of the so-called Free Syrian Army actively join the ranks of terrorists”<sup>30</sup>. As the Russian FM, Sergey Lavrov, puts it, “There is no such thing as a good terrorist”. The international community has to learn from the bitter lessons of the past and remind themselves

<sup>27</sup> “AQIM defectors pledge loyalty to ISIS”, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 14 Sep. 2014.

<sup>28</sup> “Boko Haram closes in on its dream of an African caliphate”, *The Independent*, 8 Sep. 2014.

<sup>29</sup> “Egypt’s main jihadist group pledges allegiance to ISIS”, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 10 Nov. 2014.

<sup>30</sup> “Military operation against Islamic State is within UN, not US competence”, *Itar-Tass*, 15 Sep. 2014.

that no double standards are acceptable in the fight against terrorism.<sup>31</sup> A recent CIA report corroborates the assertion by Lavrov, as it concluded that many past attempts by its agency to arm foreign forces covertly had a minimal impact on the long-term outcome of a conflict.<sup>32</sup> Barack Obama, however, seems to be the last person to listen to the Russian advice. Under the pretext of fighting against ISIL, he has not only authorized the CIA to arm and train a total of 5,000 rebel soldiers per year in Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, but also to ally with PKK, whom Washington had formally classified as “terrorists”<sup>33</sup>. So long as U.S. insist on the central role in the “war against terrorism”, the war is unlikely to cease.

Moreover, a retrospective assessment of what they have done reveals the fact that the U.S administration has been the main abettor, if not the architect, of the global network of jihadists. Jihadism is a violent subcategory of the modern Islamism known as Salafism. Its origin dates back to the late nineteenth century, when a number of Muslim intellectuals, having become alarmed by the imperialist threat to their lands, discussed an alternative to the Western type of modernization, addressing the revival of an Islamic set of values, but without fully denying the nature of modernity. In other words, it sought a different path to modernity other than the Western colonialism. In the early twentieth century, however, the reformist movement took a puritanical turn to ancient Islam, relying on the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah. In the following years, the Salafists developed their theory of Islamic puritanism and came to repudiate modernity as a whole (Brachman, 2009: 23-7).

Thus, Salafism and the Western values the U.S. allegedly espouse are incompatible in every sense. The cooperation of these two alien principles, however, materialized in the course of the Afghan War in the 1980s, when the U.S. equipped and trained foreign fighters, mainly of Arab origin, to thwart Soviet attempts to restore its satellite state (Maley, 2009: 65-8). These “Afghan Arabs” came to constitute the core of the extreme Islamist group subsequently known as al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda, at its initial stage, was more like a philanthropist organization than an international jihadist network. By the mid-1990s, the group had been largely dormant, consisting of no more than thirty core members (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 15-6). The crucial turning point came when the Bosnian Civil War broke out in 1992. Since then, al-Qaeda entrenched itself deeply in the Balkans and from this stronghold the group constructed a wide network encompassing Western Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

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<sup>31</sup> “No good terrorists: Lavrov urges anti-ISIS coalition not to put political interests first”, *Russia Today*, 15 Sep. 2014.

<sup>32</sup> “C.I.A. Study of Covert Aid Fueled Skepticism About Helping Syrian Rebels”, *The New York Times*, 14 Oct. 2014.

<sup>33</sup> “America’s Ally Against Islamic State: A Terrorist Group”, *Reuters*, 21 Aug. 2014.



The Balkans is now one of the major recruiting points and trafficking routes of ISIL fighters. It is estimated more than one thousand jihadists of the Balkans origin are now fighting in ISIL.<sup>34</sup> Their main recruit centers are such cities like Sarajevo, Prishtina, Prizren, and Novi Pazar. These centers are surrounded by a network of smaller towns and villages, scattered over the Muslim-populated countryside, and spreading over several countries. Novi Pazar, for instance, is at the center of a land bridge through the porous border running across the Serbian southern regions, connecting Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia, with Montenegro, and from there to Italy (Michaeletos, 2015). The fighters recruited in those centers were first sent to training camps in Europe, like Vienna, or in the Middle East, through channels affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, and are then smuggled into Syria and Iraq.<sup>35</sup>

The Balkans' jihadist networks are key to the illicit arms and narco-trafficking from the Caucasus to Western Europe. The major heroin trafficking route, for instance, is running through Turkey, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Bosnia. The rapid increase in the number of refugees widened the business chances for the jihadist human traffickers. In the last two years, for instance, the Bulgarian national security witnessed a drastic rise in the number of illegal immigrants, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> They are brought by jihadist-connected agencies, and terrorists enter Bulgaria as a part of the refugee wave.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Balkans is home to the largest indigenous Muslim population in Europe, this new form of extreme Islam is brand new, and completely alien to their traditional beliefs. Historically, Islam in the Balkans has been well integrated into the local multi-ethnic and religious cultures, and are characterized by a high degree of syncretism (Sahara, 2008).

The origins of the recent militant Islamist movement in Southeastern Europe are directly tied to a controversial person, the former Bosnian president, Alija Izetbegović. An al-Azhar graduate, Izetbegović was a sworn Salafist, the author of the "Islamic Declaration", a pamphlet openly propagating to establish an Islamic state in the Balkans (Sahara, 1994: 386-7). He was arrested several times for his commitment to extremist propaganda (Sahara, 1994: 386-7). Albeit these stained records, his government was strongly backed by the U.S. administration of Bill Clinton, and the support opened the doors for the proliferation of Muslim extremists during the Yugoslav disintegration in the 1990s (Bardos, 2014). Izetbegović, with the help of Washington, invited Afghan-trained *mujahideen* into

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<sup>34</sup> Tomović (2014).

<sup>35</sup> "Balkan Jihadists in Syria", *Serbianna*, 3 Oct. 2013.

<sup>36</sup> "Number of Illegal Immigrants in Bulgaria Grew Significantly in September", *Novinite.com* 18 Oct. 2014.

<sup>37</sup> "DANS Chief Admits of Terrorists Trying to Enter Bulgaria", *Novinite.com* 10 Oct. 2014

the Balkans in 1992 as mercenaries of the paramilitary units subordinated to his “Party of Democratic Action” (Hoare, 2004: 131-3). The advent of *mujahideen* on European soil brought about a pivotal change for the course of war in Bosnia in particular, and for the proliferation of the global jihadist movement in general. Their initial number was no more than a few hundred, and seldom contributed to the Bosnian army’s war efforts against the Serb and Croat rebels. The *mujahideen* were usually stationed at the Muslim stronghold in the central Bosnia, and mainly engaged in the intimidation of Bosnian Muslim populations. The number subsequently increased and reached around 6,000 in 1995, but their military contribution remained minimal. Although some of them were sent to the front, it only resulted in the increase of war atrocities, for example the rampant killing of Christian civilian population, often by means of beheadings, which tarnished the image forged by the U.S. media of the Bosnian Muslim government (Schindler, 2007).

The real effect of the deployment of *mujahideen*, thus, was the establishment of the European branches of Al-Qaeda, centering on the Balkans. For this purpose, Osama bin Laden visited the Balkans on three occasions between 1994 and 1996 (Schindler, 2007). His right-hand man, an Egyptian, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, had opened major terrorist training camps in Zenica and Kosovska Mitrovica by 1994. They were connected with a number of weapons depots and factories secretly built in many Muslim villages in and around Bosnia. He was also operating money-laundering and drug-trading networks throughout Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Turkey and Bosnia. Al-Qaeda’s command-and-control centers were further established in Croatia and Tetovo (Macedonia), as well as around Sofia (Bulgaria) (Schindler, 2007). The work of bin-Laden and Zawahiri was closely supported and protected by the Bosnian Muslim government and its patrons in Washington. The Bosnian Embassy in Vienna, for instance, issued a passport to bin Laden in 1993. The Sarajevo government gave Bosnian citizenships or issued journalists’ credentials and aid workers’ licenses, to the Muslim fighters from Chechnya, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, and others, with the intention to obscure the illegal use of foreign mercenaries. The U.S. agents of the CIA and NSA collaborated and even gave them IDs of various UN-affiliated missions (Schindler, 2007). It is clear that these acts of aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic’s being embraced by Milosevic and Tudjman, and the failure of international actors to find a solution to the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina all provided the best opportunity for jihadis to find the fertile ground and flourish.

After the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995, the infrastructure supporting jihadist activities continued and was further consolidated in the Balkans, as the foreign Islamist mercenaries, many of whom were now rewarded with Bosnian

passports, merged with domestic elements, settled in the villages, and developed a network of extra-territorial, sharia-run enclaves around the Balkans. It served as the entrepôt of extremists joining jihads in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Yemen (Kohlmann, 2004: 162-163; Bardos, 2014).

The Kosovo crisis of 1998 helped further fortify the Balkan jihadist grounds. Starting as an extreme leftist resistance movement to the Serbian occupation of Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army merged with the Balkan jihadist network after 1996 (Sahara, 2004: 359-2; Taylor, 2002). Bin Laden visited Albania in 1996 and 1997. During the Bosnian war, the jihadists had set up several training camps in Albania, including the one built on the personal property of former Albanian premier Sali Berisha in Tropje. The Albanian movement in Kosovo was formally declared as a "jihad" in October 1998 at an annual international Islamic conference in Pakistan.<sup>38</sup> The KLA profited from the network not only in terms of their weapons and fighters, but also as it was an enormous source of income. The KLA and their jihadist collaborators were widely engaged in international drug smuggling, human trafficking, and the kidnapping of Serb citizens to sell their organs in the European black market (Shay, 2009: 87-91; Zejneli & Jančević, 2011: 53-76). Washington was the middleman here, as it was in Bosnia. By early 1998, the U.S. had already established a direct relationship with the KLA. Well into the summer of 1999, KLA continued to receive official NATO/U.S. arms and training support and diplomatic back-ups.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of these wars, the jihadists have deeply entrenched themselves throughout the western Balkans, and their influence is posing a serious threat to Bulgaria (Bardos, 2014). There is an estimate that between five and ten percent of Balkan Muslims have already become indoctrinated with an extreme form of Islam. The former chief mufti in Bulgaria, Nedim Gendzhev, expressed deep anxiety about the militant Islamists' infiltration into the western Rhodope Mountains, and warned that a "fundamentalist triangle" was about to be formed that would connect Bosnia, Macedonia, and Bulgaria (Bardos, 2014). His concern is not at all ungrounded. The traditional Balkan Muslim culture is now in great danger.<sup>40</sup> With an enormous inflow of funds from generous Middle Eastern donors, Islamists have created a sophisticated infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> The new generation of Balkan Muslim clerics, educated in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, are operating a number of mosques and schools in the countryside. There are a lot of Salafi villages, serving as hotbeds for radical youth led by extremist clergies. The Salafists are now in possession of a wide array of electronic and print media

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<sup>38</sup> "Al Qaeda's Balkan Links", *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 1 Nov. 2001.

<sup>39</sup> "Al Qaeda's Balkan Links", *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 1 Nov. 2001.

<sup>40</sup> "Džihadisti upali u sarajevsku džamiju", *RTS*, 23 Jan. 2015.

<sup>41</sup> "Albanian expert: Turkey waypoint for Balkan jihadists", *Today's Zaman*, 19 Jul. 2014.

propagating various jihadist ideals. Their efforts are supported and implemented through a network of “NGOs”, “charities” and “humanitarian aid” organizations, active in southeastern Europe. The CIA has estimated that one-third of the Bosnian NGOs operating worldwide have terrorist connections or employ people with terrorist links (Bardos, 2014).

This development obscures the distinction between the moderate Islam traditionally practiced in the Balkans and the extreme and violent forms imported from elsewhere. Over the past decade, militant Islamists of the Balkans have been involved in numerous actions and conspiracies in and outside the region, including the attacks of 11 September 2001 attacks and the November 2008 Mumbai bombings. Most recently, a young man from Kosovo became “the Balkans’ first suicide bomber”, killing fifty people in an attack in Baghdad in March 2014. As mentioned above, ISIL’s advance in Syria and Iraq in the summer of 2014 brought about a renewed upsurge of militant jihadism in the region (Bardos, 2014).

Alarmed by the development, Balkan states are launching efforts to clamp down on the jihadists. Earlier in September 2014, the Bosnian police arrested 16 people on charges of abetting jihadists to fight in Syria and Iraq. In Kosovo, some 55 Islamists were arrested on similar grounds. The Bulgarian authorities announced that Ahmed Musa Ahmed, a Muslim spiritual leader in the Roma neighborhood of Pazardhik, and his followers were arrested on charges of extolling the ideology of ISIL. To assist with the crackdown, governments are busy amending their existing criminal codes. In April 2014, Bosnia passed a law giving prison terms of up to ten years to convicted Islamists and their recruiters. Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia are considering amendments to their criminal codes to make it punishable to fight abroad.<sup>42</sup> Given the political disunity in the region, however, their efforts lacked coherence and coordination, and it is unlikely they can stem the extremist threat by themselves.

Al-Qaeda’s second springboard was Chechnya. When the first Chechen War of independence broke out in December 1994, Ibn Hattab, an al-Qaeda commander of Jordanian origin, came to the Caucasus with a small number of jihadists. As in Bosnia, jihadists did not contribute militarily to the cause of the Chechens. There were no more than 300 foreign jihadists in 1995 (Chaudet, 2009: 39). Their presence, however, drastically transformed Chechen nationalism.

Al-Qaeda introduced Salafist doctrines to Chechnya, and here the roles of radical Muslims of U.S. origin were crucial (Bogdansky, 2007: 146). The United States has been financing militant Chechen groups through “civil society”

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<sup>42</sup> “Balkans launch fight against jihadist recruitment”, *The Daily Star*, 1 Oct, 2014; “Bulgaria Charges Seven with Promoting Islamic State, Propagating War”, *Novinite.com*, 27 Nov. 2014.

organizations with overt and covert links with the NSA, CIA, and other governmental organs. The U.S. State Department and intelligence agencies provide Chechen jihadists with diplomatic protection and moral support by orchestrating media propaganda (Madsen, 2013). It helped the Jihadists to infiltrate into Chechnya and other northern Caucasus regions.

Although Chechens are Muslims, orthodox Sunni Islam did not occupy a central place in the collective identity. Chechen nationalism is a secular one based on language, a distinct culture, and tradition. Tragic historical memories, such as harsh reprisal to the followers of Imam Shamil by Tsarist Russia and the mass deportation during the Stalinist era, are a much stronger national bond than religion. Moreover, the traditional Chechen Islam is Sufism, thus orthodox Sunni norms were little revered (Sokirianskaia, 2010: 101-11).

The original liberation fighters of Chechnya were, therefore, either nationalists or pan-Caucasian federalists, little inclined to religious extremism. During, and especially after, the war, some of them accepted Salafism for pragmatic reasons. The case of Shamil Basaev, the main warlord in Chechnya, was a good example. Originally a secular pan-Caucasian nationalist, Basaev became a jihadist, not because of a real conversion to radical Islamism, but due to military realism. He realized the utility of the link with international jihadists in terms of its financial, military, and propagandist resources. To outwit his political rival, Aslan Maskhadov, Basaev allied with the jihadists, and gave them opportunities to infiltrate Chechen soil (Chaudet, 2009: 43-4). With the help of Basaev, foreign jihadists settled in Chechnya, took charge of training Chechen troops, and disseminated Salafist doctrines in tandem with the radical clerics coming from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, creating a deep rift inside the society (Akaev, 2010: 69-77; Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006: 110-1). The outbreak of a second war in 1999 came as the fatal blow to secular Chechen nationalists, as Moscow annihilated their forces mercilessly. The result was the jihadists' take-over of the Chechen resistance leadership (Zürcher, 2007: 89-97).

After the second war, Chechen resistance has been neutralized by the pro-Moscow regime of the Kadyrovs. The jihadists, therefore, shifted their main field of activities to outside of Chechnya. They allied with other extremists in the former USSR and committed various terrorist acts, including suicide attacks (Hahn, 2007: 92-3). They are playing crucial roles in the recent advance of ISIL. According to Russia's Federal Security Service, as many as 500 militants from Russia and hundreds more from other ex-Soviet nations are fighting in Syria. The presence of Chechens is outstanding among them. They are regarded as the best

fighters in the rank and file of the ISIL forces, and the most feared for their extreme brutality.<sup>43</sup>

Our brief look at the past records attest that the U.S. administration has been pursuing a consistent policy to use Jihadists as a tool to subvert the regimes of its ideological enemies – Communists, ex-Communists, and Arab Socialists. It has empowered Jihadists in various ways, including financial and military assistance, diplomatic protection, and morale support with mass-media propaganda. In this regard, one can safely conclude that the U.S. has been the main “sponsor state of terrorism”.

One can notice several common features in the Balkans and Caucasus, two of the main springboards of international jihadism. First, both of the regions had been ruled by communists and were largely secularized and de-Islamized by the end of the regime. Like other religious institutions, the communist authorities controlled Islam through official channels such as the chief mufti offices. It rendered the “official” Islam something alien to ordinary Muslims. On the other hand, there existed “popular” Islam embodied in various forms of custom and traditional culture. As a rule, “popular” Islam is a product of locality and shows a strong tendency of syncretism. After the fall of the communist regime, both forms of Islam were rebuffed by the new generation who sought spiritual salvation instead of Marxist materialism. They were partly attracted by Salafism, deeming it, wrongly, as a true path to religious belief (Hahn, 2007: 12-3). Second, both regions were economically hard hit. Due to a lack of domestic resources, religious-minded people welcomed external donations, especially from Saudi Arabia. Saudi money helped build mosques and madrassas through which Salafism was disseminated (Yemelianova, 2010: 26-29; Schindler, 2007: 261-271). Third, the Balkans and Caucasus were divided into small states as a result of the fall of the socialist federal system. Newly formed states have long suffered from poor governance: the bureaucracy is corrupt, the police are disorganized, the intelligence is unsophisticated, and their borders are porous. These factors created the optimum soil for a proliferation of trans-border criminal groups. Fourth, the two regions have come through several military conflicts, and a huge inflow of weapons and ammunition has been a corollary fact. All of these enabled otherwise trivial jihadist terrorists to become deeply entrenched into society.

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<sup>43</sup> “Chechen Isis fighters under Omar al-Shishani threaten to take fight to Putin”, *The Independent*, 10 Oct. 2014; “The face of evil”, *The Daily Mail Lebanon*, 29 Jul. 2014.

## 7. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the international Jihadist threat

There is another region that had all aforementioned attributes: Central Asia. Since their independence, the Central Asian countries have faced a dire, and even more substantial, threat posed by Islamist/jihadi militant groups than that in the Balkans and the Caucasus. With ties across a wider region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, they are formidable enemies that no country can ward off alone. In Uzbekistan, a number of Islamic radical organizations appeared mainly in the Ferghana Valley seeking to establish a Caliphate during the 1990s. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, too, are facing the danger of Islamic extremist parties. Kazakhstan is trying to control the activity of Uyghur separatists. The main protagonist of those extremists is the al-Qaeda affiliated group known as “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” (IMU). In 1999, IMU militants crossed from their bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan’s Batken province, and clashed with Kyrgyz troops. Subsequently, they made a series of terrorist attacks against the government of Uzbekistan (Rashid, 2003). Since then, IMU has committed sporadic but incessant attacks all over Central Asia. In 2002, several bombs were planted and exploded in market places in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In July 2004, IMU attacked the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Tashkent. More attacks occurred in cross-border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the Ferghana Valley in 2006 and 2007 (Tolipov, 2006: 166). IMU has cooperated with another extremist group, Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The group was associated with the events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, in May 2005 when an assault by a militant Islamic group led to an uprising that merged with wider socioeconomic discontent, and its brutal repression by government troops (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008: 2).

Capitalizing on the porous border and transnational ethnic, tribal, and kinship ties, IMU and its allies freely trespassed on various public and civil targets in the Central Asian countries. Faced with the common threat, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed the treaty “On Joint Actions in Fighting Terrorism, Political and Religious Extremism, and Transnational Organized Crime” on 21 April 2000. Though it mostly remained on the declaratory level, this treaty laid the foundation for a regional approach to counter-terrorism.<sup>44</sup> The initiative of Central Asian countries, in due course, merged with a similar endeavor undertaken by China.

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<sup>44</sup> The Treaty stipulated the following points: (1) a harmonization of national legislations for counteracting terrorism and other forms of extremism and transnational organized crime; (2) the development and realization of practical measures for preventing the territory of Central Asia to become a breeding ground for terrorist bases; (3) the exchange of information about crimes and suspected persons and organizations involved in them and terrorist activity; and (4) the execution of

Beijing has long been struggling with terrorist threats emanating from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, first of all from the extremist “East Turkestan Islamic Movement”. Its anxiety eventually led to the creation of a regional multilateral forum known as the Shanghai Five on 26 April 1996. Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan agreed on the necessity to address their common issues formulated as the “three evils”: terrorism, religious extremism, and secessionism. In June 2001, with the admission of Uzbekistan, the Shanghai Five transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the “Shanghai Convention Against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism” was signed (Chung, 2006: 3). The SCO was further institutionalized by the adaptation of its charter, composed of twenty-six articles, at a meeting in St. Petersburg in June 2002.

As defined in its charter, the SCO’s main purpose is “working together to maintain regional peace, security and stability”. So its priority is the containment of Islamist rebel groups capable of acts of terror over the region (Fredholm, 2013: 4). To address the threat, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) was established in June 2004. Starting as a “hub of information exchange” and an analytical center, the RATS was initially not meant to have an operational role. Its staffing at the headquarters in Tashkent was very modest, made up of only thirty officials, including seven Chinese, seven Russians and sixteen Central Asians. Subsequently its competence was extended. In 2005, it was decided to expand the role of RATS to the coordination of investigations, anti-terrorist operations, and anti-terrorist exercises, as well as to the training of specialists. The Shanghai summit in 2006 attached high priority to the further expansion of RATS’ capabilities (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008: 13-4).

The tendency for fruitful cooperation within SCO regarding the containment of jihadist threat is obvious. So far, member states have been successful in combating terrorism within their own jurisdiction without outside help. For instance, over 250 terror attacks were pre-empted in 2005. IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, besides al-Qaeda, are listed as terror organizations in all of the SCO’s member states. Moreover, about 400 suspected terrorists are on the Agency’s wanted list. By close exchange of intelligence information and coordinated crackdown against the terrorists’ cells, the SCO has displayed the effectiveness of regional cooperation in the battle against the international jihadism (Tolipov, 2006: 168).

Effective policing is just a part of the function that the SCO has performed in its battle against the “three evils”. In parallel with the development of RATS,

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joint special operations of competent agencies against terrorists and other criminals. See Tolipov (2006: 154-5).



the SCO has conducted a series of military exercises since 2002, and their size and proportion are gathering momentum. The joint show of force is a strong deterrent message to terrorists. Although Western observers see in them the sign that the SCO will be a military alliance, their speculation is groundless and disregards reality (Hongxi, 2013: 139; Germanovich, 2008: 38). It is true that the SCO's mandate includes cooperation on security matters, such as measures to combat illicit proliferation of conventional weapons and the establishment of a rapid reaction capacity to regional crises; however, it does not have a mandate for peacekeeping (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008: 4). The SCO is an inter-governmental rather than supra-national organization that involves little surrender of state sovereignty and, so far, there is no sight it will grow into a collective security body.

As made it clear by the Dushanbe Declaration on 5 July 2000, the SCO confirmed the right of each state to choose its own path of political, economic, and public policy development, condemned intervention into the internal affairs of other states under the pretext of “humanitarian intervention” and “human rights protection”, and supported efforts by member states to protect the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and social stability (Chung, 2006: 8-9). From a military point of view, therefore, the SCO takes the form of a non-aggression pact of mutual recognition of sovereignty based on non-intervention principles, rather than acting as an alliance based on certain shared values. These pragmatic principles not only enable effective cooperation among the states with different types of regimes, but also created mutual confidence among them. “In the framework of the Shanghai Five – SCO”, a Chinese researcher maintains, “all the disputes regarding the western section of the formerly Sino-Soviet border of more than three thousand kilometer, which had bred instability and conflicts for centuries, were completely solved in eight years” (Guang, 2013: 20-1).

The success of SCO in the “battle against terrorism” shows that a coalition built for practical purposes is more effective in the fight against the jihadists than internationally coordinated actions based on shared values. Jihadists are the kind of people who openly declare: “All moderate Muslims who promote democracy, should be killed. Because they promote human laws over the laws of God”.<sup>45</sup> Against such an enemy, the normative constrains based on Western-style democratic values have little effect. Rather, they provide the perpetrators with a kind of shield against governmental or interregional forces, not least because the latter are required to abide by the codes. It is attested by recent findings that rebels are more violent in democratic countries than in authoritarian regimes (Eck &

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<sup>45</sup> “Reporter who spent ten days with ISIS says the West ‘has no concept’ of how dangerous the group is and says they want to ‘kill all non-believers and enslave their children’”, *Daily Mail Online*, 23 Dec. 2014.

Hultman, 2007: 244). The past records, likewise, show that effective policing is much more useful in containing the terrorist threats.<sup>46</sup>

It is true that a police state is no welcome thing, but suspension of certain elements of civil rights and extrajudicial procedures seem to be necessary to contain the Salafist-jihadist threats. Even Western countries have already disrupted their civic values by introducing controversial measures that interfere *ex post facto* principle, such as preventive detention, conspiracy, and inchoate offense. It has the potential to destroy the major principles of Western civil society. To resolve the dilemma, one can find a model in the judicial measures against the glorification of Nazism or against the dissemination of anti-Semite discourses.

The dilemma of civil principles in the “battle against terrorism” has further connotations. Such discourses as “humanitarian intervention” must be strictly scrutinized. As a number of cases including recent events in Libya, Iraq, and Syria have shown us, international jihadism has grown especially rampant by capitalizing on the U.S. policy of covert intervention into its unwanted regimes, taking “human rights abuses” as a pretext. So long as the practice is left intact, an effective fight against terrorism can not be expected. In this regard, there is another merit in the SCO. While a single state is vulnerable to the external pressure of “democratic change”, a coalition can display more resilience. One of the impressive examples was the SCO’s successful elimination of U.S. bases in 2005. When the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan started, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan provided air bases for U.S. military. Russia and China, likewise, saw in the U.S. an ally in combating terrorism and religious extremism. The U.S., however, was reluctant to evacuate the air bases after the fall of Taliban government. Moreover, the so-called “Tulip Revolution” of Kyrgyzstan and subsequent Western criticisms of Islam Karimov for the violent crackdown of an uprising in Andijan of May 2005 led to an anxiety shared among SCO leaders. They suspected the U.S. was engaging in covert operations to subvert the incumbent regimes in Central Asia. Reflecting the mood, the Astana summit in 2005 called for U.S. to pull out from airbases. The request was materialized by the end of year, something that would have been unrealistic if it were the endeavor of a single government (Bin, 2013: 56-7). In contrast to the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus cases, where U.S. covert intervention by means of the Islamist proxies has been the major source of proliferation of international

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<sup>46</sup> According to the Global Terrorism Index 2014, since the 1960s, 83% of terrorist organizations ceased to operate due to policing or the initiation of a political process. On the other hand, full military intervention eliminated only 7% of them. See Institute for Global Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2014*, [www.economicsandpeace.org](http://www.economicsandpeace.org)

jihadism, the SCO's successful efforts to ward off the U.S. threats to Central Asia has produced stabilizing effects in the region.

The third and seemingly most enduring deterrent effect of the SCO against international jihadism is its economic cooperation. The SCO has realized that poverty is one of the major sources of instability and extremism in Central Asia and Xinjiang province. Since the 2003 Moscow summit, the SCO has expanded to embrace economic cooperation in the form of encouraging trade, investment, and infrastructure development among members. Next year, the organization decided to establish five specialized working groups in the areas of commerce, customs, quality inspection, investment promotion, and transportation. The function was further consolidated by the creation of the SCO Development Fund in 2006 (Chung, 2006: 9).

Thanks to the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, the transformation of the SCO from an anti-terrorist police union to an institutionalized economic confederation has hitherto been successful. Beijing's move away from dollar-denominated assets such as U.S. Treasury bonds and the expansion of the scope of its investment targets, including infrastructure and property projects abroad, helped a great deal in the development of the region.<sup>47</sup> China was especially active in its regional diplomacy in 2014, including the inauguration of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the "Silk Road Fund". If the SCO will secure a new economic structure in the region, it will mitigate the hardship of a broad swath of people who have hitherto been excluded from globalization.

The successful records of the SCO imply that regional cooperation based on practical purposes, rather than shared values, can play a more effective role in fighting against the international jihadist threat than a military coalition led by the "world super power". The SCO was born as an *ad hoc* union of countries that shared a common concern over the trans-border activities of jihadists. The cooperation started as an exchange of intelligence among a handful of officers. Although it subsequently embraced joint military maneuvers, it never developed into a military alliance, nor mounted joint military actions. The moderate efforts, however, brought about conspicuous stability in the region. The reason behind its success lies in the member states' realization of the benefit of mutually recognizing the difference of regimes, and their agreement not to intervene into the others' internal affairs. It enabled the consolidation of governmental control over their territory, the stability of their international borders, and the effective policing against terrorists within the jurisdictions of each state. The cooperation subsequently enlarged the spheres of cooperation into concerted diplomacy and economic ties. It eventually reduced the margins in which the sponsor states of

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<sup>47</sup> "A friend in need during hard times", *People's Daily*, 23 Dec. 2014.

terrorism could meddle, and enlarged the possibility of economic development from within.

## 8. Conclusions

The abrupt expansion of ISIL has changed the worldview of modern Islamist terrorism drastically. As the Quilliam report warns us, “we are in the throes of great shifts to the jihadist *status quo* that will have profound international geopolitical consequences” (Saltman & Winter, 2014: 7). Some may imagine a further jihadist upsurge that would eventually embrace huge swathes of Muslim regions. Such a scenario is actually unlikely, as the ratio of jihadists is very small in the total Muslim population in the world. The author’s assessment of the future geopolitical shifts is quite different.

Instead, possible geopolitical shifts will result from the initiatives of nation states that are threatened by extremists. As the new threats are the products of the gradual erosion of nation state and more closely resemble criminality than political opposition, the restoration of effective policing and the state’s role in economic redistribution and social welfare are much more effective remedies to the malady than are concerted military actions. Taking into account the growing pressures of globalization, the restoration of the nation state has to be done on the basis of regional cooperation. As the case study of SCO attests, regionally based permanent anti-terrorist cooperation is a strong deterrent against extremism. In other words, the key to eliminate the extremist threat is a well-coordinated security and economic partnership among neighboring states. Recent developments in other parts of the world support this reasoning. In December 2013, a BRICS senior security officials’ meeting agreed to take steps toward forming a standing expert body to fight against “terrorism, extremism, and radicalism” in Cape Town.<sup>48</sup> Recent initiatives to create an Arab Action force will be another example.<sup>49</sup>

The development of SCO as an economic framework suggests to us the possibility of further geopolitical shifts regional cooperation can bring about. Due to the U.S.-led sanctions on the pretext of the Ukraine crisis, Russia has been forced to make a pivotal shift to the East. Although China and Russia have

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<sup>48</sup> “Senior BRICS officials discuss international security in Cape Town”, *Itar-Tass*, 9 Dec. 2013.

<sup>49</sup> Secret talks between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait are underway to create a military pact to fight against Islamic militants. It is motivated by the threats emanating from Libya and Yemen. “Arab allies hold secret talks on joint action against militants”, *The Independent*, 4 Nov. 2014. In the same vein, Fouad Siniora, former PM of Lebanon, and Amr Moussa, former secretary-general of the Arab League, jointly proposed to take steps to expand “the concept of a joint Arab defense body... a joint Arab force on land, sea and in the air that protects peace and deters threats to the whole Arab region”. See “The dangerous disintegration of Yemen”, *The Daily Star Lebanon*, 13 Nov. 2014.

merged their long-term objectives in a strategic partnership since 1996, they are less cooperative in economic terms. Moscow's inclination to the Western market and several incompatibilities over Central Asia retarded their economic cooperation. Since SCO took a turn toward acting as an economic confederation, however, Moscow realized the profit it can expect from it. Western sanctions have precipitated the process, and the two countries now share common interests in non-western economic and financial schemes.<sup>50</sup>

The Russo-Chinese rapprochement has further implications for structural changes in the global economy. Led by these two powers, Brazil, India, and South Africa have taken a decisive step to create their own currency union. The sixth BRICS summit agreed on the establishment of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement in Fortaleza, Brazil, in July 2014. Although it is uncertain whether NDB-CRA will eventually grow into an alternative to the dollar-dominated IMF-WB system, the potential is enormous, as the BRICS account for almost 30% of world GDP and for about 45% of the world population. As Indian PM Narendra Modi remarked, the NDB and the CRA signal the group's collective capacity to create and manage global institutions.<sup>51</sup>

Another impact of Russo-Chinese rapprochement is the initiative to enlarge the membership of SCO. The group's Dushanbe summit in September 2014 adopted the amendment of its charter to enable new enrollments. According to Sergei Lavrov, India, Pakistan, and Iran are the most probable candidates.<sup>52</sup> If one takes into account that the three have serious concerns over the interior threats of jihadists, the plan is not at all unrealistic. If they become permanent members, the SCO will control twenty percent of the oil and half of the gas reserves in the world. Moreover, the bloc will be home to about half of the world's population.

The BRICS currency union and the enlarged SCO will mark the decisive turning point from the so-called "unipolar" system of post-Cold War to the multi-polar global order. The multi-polar economic system will have, in theory, mitigating effects to the rigid financial and monetary policies imposed by the "Washington consensus". It will ameliorate the austerity measures that have precipitated sharp economic stratification. If multi-polarity brings about alternative decision-making structures based on certain regions, it may mitigate

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<sup>50</sup> The recent remark on the "Yugoslav scenario" by Vladimir Putin makes it clear that Moscow has real concern about the US intervention from within. "My gorovy pobedit' poslanie Vladimira Putina v tsitatakh (Мы готовы победить: послание Владимира Путина в цитатах)", TACC, (TASS), 4 декабря (December) 2014; China has the same concern for a long time, and underscores the importance to cooperate with Russia to ward off the threats. See "Cooperation with Russia a priority to Chinese military: senior official", *Peoples Daily*, 19 Nov. 2014.

<sup>51</sup> "G20 summit: PM Narendra Modi pushes government agenda in repatriation of black money", *Indian Express*, 16 Nov. 2014.

<sup>52</sup> "Russia, India, China to cooperate in energy, global issues", *Zee News*, 3 Feb. 2015

the cultural exclusivity that globalization has hitherto produced and that have been one of the sources of extremism.

What is clear is that fighting against the international jihadist threat is urgent, and it inevitably requires regional cooperation among states exposed to the threats, such those in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. As these regions have the same problems as Central Asia – among them differences of regimes, border disputes, and the absence of a military alliance – the SCO is a practical role model.

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## Özet

### Uluslararası Cihat Hareketi: Yeni bir tür tehdit ve bir çare olarak bölgesel işbirliği

Musul'un ele geçirilmesi ve ardından gelen Irak Şam İslam Devleti (İŞİD)'nin Suriye ve Irak'ın sünni çoğunluğa sahip bölgesine yönelik yıldırım savaşı Selefi-cihatçıların oluşturduğu tehdidin ciddiyetini dünyaya hatırlattı. "Vahşetin yönetimi" taktiğini dış kaynak ve bağlantılarla birleştirerek İŞİD yeni tür çatışmanın mevcut uluslararası düzene oluşturabileceği tüm potansiyeli gerçekleştirmede başarılı olmuştur. Mary Kaldor tarafından formüle edildiği gibi "Yeni Savaş" küreselleşmenin getirdiği ulus devletlerin ikili erozyonunun ürünüdür. Ulus devletlerin artan kötü çalışmaları nedeniyle ve suç grupları ağlarının uluslararasılaşması da söz konusuysen organize şiddet ve sınır kontrolü üzerindeki hükümet tekelini güvenceye almak daha zor hale gelmiştir. Şu ana kadar, ABD'nin liderliğindeki koalisyon tarafından İŞİD'e karşı yürütülen savaşın ulusal güvenlik konusunda daha eski düşünceye dayalı stratejisi ile İŞİD türü tehditleri kontrol altına almaktan çok çoğalmalarına yardımcı olduğu görülmektedir. Başarısızlığın ana nedenlerinden birisi ABD'nin istemediği rejimleri devirmek için bir araç olarak aşırı ağırları desteklemesinin yarattığı bağlamda yatmaktadır. Bu, İŞİD'in ABD'nin Afganistan, Bosna, Çeçenistan, Irak ve Suriye'deki örtülü müdahalelerinin son ürünü olduğu gerçeğiyle kanıtlanmıştır. Bu makale, Şangay İşbirliği Örgütü (ŞİÖ)'nün Orta Asya'daki İslamcı terörizme karşı mücadelesindeki uyumlu polisliğinin ve istihbarat alışverişinin etkinliğini değerlendirmekte ve bazı ortak değerlere dayalı askeri bir ittifaktan ziyade pragmatik ve sınırlı amaçlara dayalı bölgesel işbirliğinin İŞİD'in temsil ettiği yeni tür tehditlerle başa çıkmak için daha iyi bir model olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır. Böyle bir bölgesel işbirliğinin daha istikrarlı bir yönetimi getirme potansiyeli vardır ve oluşturduğu ekonomik zeminle üyelerine terörle mücadelede zarar veren dış politik baskılara karşı daha fazla esneklik sağlamanın yanında karşılıklı yarar amacıyla ekonomik kalkınma için üyelerine zeminler de kazandırır.

*Anahtar kelimeler:* İŞİD, Cihat hareketi, selefi, yeni savaş, Orta Doğu, Balkanlar, Orta Asya, ŞİÖ.