# ISIS AND ITS HISTORICAL ORIGINS

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*Introduction*

The Islamic State terrorist group or what has been wrongly named as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or Daesh) has been the source of many concerns at the regional and international level over the past years. The form and intensity of violence of this Takfiri group and its representation in mass media and social networks are among the reasons for its notoriety, in a way that ISIS tops the list of Internet search engines, especially in terms of visual content.

Addressing this group and its function becomes even more important when its emergence and gaining power is observed through the prism of a series of terrorist phenomena in the Islamic world. The emergence of Taliban and its rule over Afghanistan, the formation of al-Qaeda and 9/11 attacks, the daily expansion of al-Qaeda and emergence of its affiliates, numerous fighting of different Takfiri groups in Iraq and Syria and parts of Africa which eventually led to the emergence of Daesh, has made the analysts to conclude that the formation of this groups must have been triggered in the past and is now approaching  a critical point.

What are the real roots and the main reasons behind the emergence of Daesh? This is the question that this study

aims to answer. However, beforehand, we need to briefly mention that this group is not merely a band of selected militants skilled at warfare and spreading terror. Daesh is a way of thinking. It is a kind of ideology that has deviated from Islam. Despite claims by Western analysts who describe this group and its actions as the manifestation of Jihad, which is an Islamic concept, we believe that this group is making use of a deviant concept of Jihad; a concept which in no way matches religious teachings of Islam. Daesh uses such deviant teachings for its own political ends. This is because the emergence of Daesh goes back to deeply political roots which are only understandable in the context of long-standing struggles for power in the Islamic world.

There are two hypothesis discussed in this article. First, despite the insistence of Daesh on outward aspects of the Islamic Sharia law and its draconianism, the group can in no way be linked to true Islamic thought and its nature and actions are considered deviant even in the most radical interpretations of Islam.[1] Second, this group's emergence and the gaining of power must be evaluated in the wake of extra-regional interferences of the world's powers and the meddling of regional states in the security order of the region. Those states are Arab countries seeking to indirectly challenge Iran's strategic power by the actual and potential strengthening of this group and pursue the project of checking Iran through the promotion of sectarianism. Before we move on to discuss these hypotheses, we need to review the historical and intellectual roots of Daesh.

## 1. *The History of Restoring the Caliphate*

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the issue of his succession became one of the biggest challenges of Islamic civilization in the first century. This princi-

pal dispute led to the division between the two main sects in the Islamic discourse, namely the Shiite and the Sunni thinking. Historically, and taking into account the events in the first century, Sunni Islam managed to gain access to the main source of power or the „caliphate". Shiites were left in the periphery for centuries as a dissident political group, which was protesting against the structure of power and whose ideas and beliefs could not be used in practice to form a political system after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Nevertheless, despite historical differences between these two Islamic sects, the Islamic „caliphate" was formed and it became the cornerstone of all political thinking in the Islamic world for centuries.[2]

In fact, the concept of caliphate was the most popular topic of discussions regarding politics and power in the Muslim world. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Turkey and the rise of a republic which claimed to be a monarchy and a caliphate at the same time  resulted in numerous disputes among the Arab, Turkish, Syrian and Indian elites of the Muslim world who were Sunnis.

Until that time, the caliphate had been the only model for Islamic rule to have emerged out of the tradition and the Qur'an. Even though the Ottoman caliphs ruled with the style of a monarch, being more a sultan than a caliph, they claimed that the caliph has a spiritual position and the caliphate is a religious institution and this legitimized and stabilized their rule. The collapse of the institution of caliphate in the Ottoman Empire opened a new chapter in the thinking of political intellectuals in the Muslim world. Some of them, those who had studied in Europe and were familiar with political developments in the West, tried to overcome this challenge by resorting to Islamic texts and references on the one hand and the ideas taken from the Western political ideology on the other.[3]

Thinkers from Egypt -the center of important Sunni schools,and India -the biggest and the most populous

country of the Muslim world, joined forces in this area. Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb formed the basis of the „Muslim Brotherhood" which supported a reformist and revitalizing interpretation of Islam. Then, however, the movement resorted to violent struggle and gradually gave in to Salafist thought. At the same time in India, such thinkers as Allama Iqbal and Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi seized the opportunity of India's independence and for the first time tried to establish an Islamic state in the Muslim world. [4]

The idea of a republic state was welcomed in Pakistan and later in other Islamic countries. However, what really came into existence were Western post-Westphalia nation-states, formed by colonial forces. They remained under the indirect colonial influence of such governments. In fact, the dream of reviving the Islamic empire based on the caliphate teaching was passed on from one generation to another. One of its offshoots joined eastern ideas and found its way into the beliefs of the Muslim world theorists in a democratic way. However, another of its offshoots was not so fortunate and was mixed with Salafist and apostate thinking because of social, regional and political reasons and eventually led to extremism and terrorism.

The formation of Daesh, at least in its declared form, is part of the project of reviving the Islamic caliphate, which unfortunately is related to the extremist and Takfiri side of it. That's why, if we take Daesh to be part of a way of thinking and not only a group, we need to imagine the idea of reviving the caliphate as central to its formation.

In the light of the above analysis, the emergence of Daesh is no longer strange or unexpected. Over the past decades, not only the Middle East, but also the Muslim world and even some Islamic groups and currents in the West have become prone to falling into some forms of fundamentalism or radicalism. Nevertheless, talking of the revival of the Islamic caliphate and claiming to establish it is so unique

that it has to be taken more seriously in comparison with the issue of Daesh rise to power. This is because the issue of reviving the Islamic caliphate, along with the growth of some form of Islamism, has never been at the center of Islamist actions over the past decades. None of the radical and fundamentalist Islamic groups, including the al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the al-Nusra Front, which have been closely affiliated with Daesh, has declared the revival of the Islamic caliphate as its key demand. Their specified goal has been fighting against the infidels, whom they consider to be the enemies of Islam, and enforcing the Sharia law by struggling to form an Islamic government. In fact, the concept of the Islamic caliphate had been sidelined as a political process and a model for governance and the issue of Islamic government had been highlighted and was at the center of attention.

Despite the close relationship between the thinking of al-Qaeda and „the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria", there is still no concrete evidence and no acceptable source as to the standpoint of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the caliph of ISIS, and its leadership on the concept of Islamic caliphate and its features. A coherent and strong body of intellectual work is also highly unlikely to be available. This is confirmed by comments made by the group's spokespersons and representatives. The political process preferred by Daesh and the relation between their way of thinking of the Islamic caliphate and concepts like government and governance have never been mentioned.

However, judging by the behaviors that have been displayed, and what has been said until now, we should consider „the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" to be an adventurist, highly pragmatic and ritualistic group rather than one with a deep ideology. The experience of Daesh has shown that it is not necessary to have a coherent and complicated ideological thinking in order to attract more and more supporters on a daily basis or wreak havoc in certain

parts of the world. It is enough to be seriously and cruelly pragmatic and ritualistic. This is the main driving force behind the growth and the development of fundamentalist actions, something which makes thinking difficult for the leaders and followers of such groups and makes the struggle a ritual which has to be observed under any circumstances. The world must become smaller and smaller for the non-Muslims and this can only be realized through violence and killing. In this way, the number of true Muslims also declines every day and as a result, the Muslims who are outside the group's sphere of thinking are considered infidels and deserve to be treated with violence. So, we are not faced with a body of thinking on the caliphate. We are faced with an image of it which is based on the outward and formal teachings of the Qur'an which are deviant and pragmatic.

## 2. *Daesh, the Salafist and the apostate thought*

Although the oppressive and cruel actions of this group do not even fall  within the most radical interpretations of Islam and the Sharia, Daesh has to be considered part of the Takfiri and Salafist thinking which has emerged over the past years. This link is also observable today, even if onlysymbolically.[5]

When many years ago Rashid Reza, the reformist Sunni thinker, criticized the situation of the Ottoman caliphate in Istanbul and talked about the need to return the caliphate to the Arabic world, he proposed Mosul as the seat of the caliphate, and now Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,who has a PhD in Islamic studies, is exactly following this very dream. Thus, the symbolic link is revealed even more clearly.

The Salafist thought has deep historical roots. Ibn Hanbal is the founder of the Arabic superficiality. This sect has currently the  fewest followers among the Sunni sects.

The role that he played in the promotion of the Arabic superficiality must not be overlooked. He was against any interpretation of the holy texts and the holy book of the Muslims and emphasized that our interpretation of the teachings of the Qur'an has to necessarily come from the literal meaning of such teachings rather than our rational interpretations.[6]

In this regard, Ibn Taymiyyah is even more controversial. Today, he has become famous for his antagonism to philosophy, although his intellectual position must not be neglected. Ibn Taymiyyah used one of the verses of the Qur'an[7] and referred to Prophet Muhammad's words to say that Islam's prophet had distinguished between the concept of „Islam" and „fate" since the beginning of his mission. He explains that Islam is achieved through observing superficial acts, confessing to the oneness of God and His prophet, saying prayers, fasting, performing the Hajj pilgrimage and paying Zakat (a religious tax). However, faith is to believe in God, His angels, his prophets and their holy books and "the Day of Judgment".[8]

In his book entitled „al-Hisba fi al-Islam", which reflects his beliefs on governance in Islam, he presents some valuable insights into the philosophy of the state and the government.[9] However, despite his deep interpretations of these issues and the philosophy of politics, he confronts the Shiites with ridicule, harshness and an incomprehensible strictness. He directs his criticism at the main teachings of the Shiites. Centuries later, his criticisms were adopted by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and led to the creation of Wahhabism which considers Shiites as its main enemy.

Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the superficial meaning of the verses of the Qur'an and words of the prophet in an exaggerated way. He even goes as far as to present material and worldly representations for metaphysical concepts in the Qur'an.[10] For example, considering God to be like a

human being and having physical aspects and interpreting his behaviors in a completely superficial way.

He is also the founder of a form of political conservatism in the Islamic world. Conservatism which has in practice led to the stabilization of the political systems and which censures any attempt to topple the corrupt regimes in the Islamic world. In his other anti-Shiite book entitled „Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fi Naqd Kalaam al-Shia", he renounces the struggle against corrupt rulers, which is a central teaching for the Shiites, and says that living under an oppressive government for sixty years is better than living without a government for one night.[11]

According to some Iranian thinkers, Ibn Taymiyyah's absolute defense of the Islamic caliphate is a sign of decline of the Islamic empire. The decline which philosophers like Ibn Taymiyyah want to prevent using such conservative reasoning.[12]

Nonetheless, some argue that Takfiri groups like Daesh cannot be considered to be under the influence of the tradition of apostate ascribed to Ibn Taymiyyah. „Belief" and „infidelity" are among the pivotal issues in the political theology of Islam. The importance of being faithful and sensitivities surrounding the becoming of an atheist are part of the Islamic jurisprudence and the political theology of Islam. „Takfir" is a religious and political term. It is used for a Muslim who has become an infidel. Since this will bring about serious legal repercussions for a Muslim, Muslim jurisprudents, both Sunni and Shiite, have set very strict and conservative conditions for it.

Even in the beliefs of Ibn Taymiyyah himself, who is known as the father of the Islamic conservatism and fundamentalism, there is nothing like the cruel treatment of other Muslims by such Takfiri groups because they consider them to have become infidels. He believes that showing faithfulness to God and the afterlife and having good deeds are principal to being a Muslim[13] and points out the

fact that in the past many people committed many wrong things, and yet they were not considered to be infidels.[14]

Ibn Taymiyyah has distinguished between infidelity and apostasy and although he considers many of the Islamic sects to be heretic, he emphasizes the fact that heresy is not equal to infidelity. In later centuries however, the founder of Wahhabism, ibn Abd al-Wahhab, intensely influenced by ibn Taymiyyah, considered Shiites to be polytheists because of some of their beliefs and rituals.[15] So in general, it can be argued that the actions of Takfiri groups in recent years have been more in line with the Wahhabi thinking than ibn Taymiyyah's thought. This assumption is not only understandable in reviewing the political views of ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but also politically more tangible and acceptable today. Especially that Saudi Arabia, as the birthplace of Takfiri ideology in the modern era, has always been accused of supporting such groups, for which there is ample evidence available.

The Daesh terrorist group is the product of deviation from the Islamic thought. But as mentioned earlier, political and social factors and international players have contributed to its formation. It would have been impossible for this group to make such massive gains in recent years without enjoying the support of beneficiary governments, although regional and international players have constantly traded accusations in this regard. Next, we will examine the nature of this group and analyze the factors that boosted it.

3. *The Nature and Function of Daesh*

The roots of this terrorist group go back to 2004. Following the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003, the situation became ripe for the formation and activity of many armed groups like al-Qaeda and Baathist and Sunni groups which were against the new conditions. A group named Jama'at al-

Tawhid wal-Jihad headed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi started its operation. In its early stages, the group's members were Arabs. The group then developed and changed its name to Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn and pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. The Arabic term for oath of allegiance is Bai'at or Bay'ah, which is in Islamic political jurisprudence and means declaring support for a political and religious leader. Zarqawi was killed in the U.S. bombing of the city of Baqubah in 2006. In 2006, when Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir were killed, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, whose real name is Ibrahim Awwadty Ibrahim Ali Muhammad al-Badri al-Samarrai, announced the establishment of his caliphate and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was gradually formed. Al-Baghdadi was born in 1971 in Samarra, one of Iraq's historical cities. His Salafist and tribal family background play a key role in his extremist ideas. He received his PhD from the Islamic University of Baghdad. In 2004, he was detained by the coalition forces and was released in 2006. In 2008, he took over the department of terrorist operations in Iraq. And finally in 2014, he declared himself the caliph of Muslims after establishing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Daesh is following in the footsteps of other Islamic fundamentalists. It should be noted that religions are not inherently radical, but become prone to extremism at some stages. In all Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions, we have witnessed the emergence of extremism at some point. Daesh is part of the „fourth wave" of Salafism. The Salafi movement which started in the 7th or 8th century AH, has undergone four stages. Its first stage was related to the ibn Taymiyyah's reaction to the Mogul's toppling of the Abbasid caliphate. The second came into existence at the end of the 19th century. The third wave is related to al-Qaeda and the end of the Cold War. And the fourth wave began in 2006 with the al-Nusra Front and Daesh. The

Salafist movements believe that the reason for the presence of world powers in the Islamic world is because of the weaknesses of the Muslim world which is rooted in sectarianism. They believe a return to the text of Islam is necessary to combat sectarianism and there is no need for religious sciences. In fact, the verses of Qur'an must be read, without the intermediary of sciences which have been historically responsible for the interpretation of holy texts.

Regarding the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, we have to note that the group was formed by the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq which operated in 2003. The group was organized from 2006 to 2010 and grew until 2014. It now rules over large swathes of land with a population of 2.5 to 3 million people. Daesh first pledged allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri and became an ally of the al-Nusra Front. But in February 2014, it distanced itself from al-Qaeda and in May, abandoned the al-Nusra as well and declared the establishment of a caliphate. Both al-Qaeda and Daesh are fighting against the U.S., the West and the Shiites, although they differ in terms of priorities. For al-Qaeda, the first enemy is the U.S. and fighting against the Shiites comes second. But for Daesh, Shiites are the first target. That is why, unlike other Takfiri groups, which have put fighting against Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem on top of their agenda, Daesh is primarily seeking to liberate Baghdad and revive the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid.

Another difference between them is that al-Qaeda operates internationally and carries out attacks in the U.S. and Europe. Daesh attacks the Middle East as the center of the world. Another point is that Daesh is more generous in labeling all Shiites and some Sunnis as infidels, while al-Qaeda and even its leaders have been more reserved and have never made such remarks.[16]

Let us now examine the factors that contributed to the growth of this terrorist group. This article is based on three

issues. 1- Social, economical and cultural factors in Islamic countries or European Muslims who have joined Daesh. 2- Lack of proper understanding and deviance from the Islamic teachings and making up guidelines to suite power-seeking of Daesh leaders. 3- And, the undoubted influence of regional powers and world super-powers in the creation and penetration of this group.

## 3.1. *Socio-economic factors behind the emergence of Daesh*

The Relative Deprivation theory of Robert Gurr provides an appropriate theoretical model for understanding the motives of those who join Daesh. According to Gurr's model presented in his book „Why Men Rebel?", relative deprivation causes violence[17]. Of course, Gurr uses this explanation for political events like revolutions and social rebellions. However, the same model can also be used to understand the tendency toward extremism in the Islamic world. Most members of Daesh come from Arab countries that are ruled by secular and militaristic governments and such autocracies are the main reason behind economic crises and poverty. Even the Arab Spring, which led to the toppling of many of these regimes failed to curb the poverty. That is why, lower classes of the society, who have a weak economic and cultural background, see Daesh as a source of income, especially if we take into account the temptation that salaries of militants arouse among ordinary people who lack any ideological motivations. Although the number of people who joined Daesh from non-Arab countries was not significant in the beginning, there has been a gradual rise in the number of recruitments from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey and even Muslims who live in Europe and Africa. An important point regarding the sympathizers of Daesh is that the range of their nationalities is wider than any other Salafi or Takfiri group. Extremists from Australia and China to Europe and the Horn of Africa and

| Estimate | Country |
|----------|---------|
| 100-150 | Austria |
| 440 | Belgium |
| 100-150 | Denmark |
| 50-70 | Finland |
| 1,200 | France |
| 500-600 | Germany |
| 30 | Ireland |
| 80 | Italy |
| 200-250 | Netherlands |
| 60 | Norway |
| 50-100 | Spain |
| 150-180 | Sweden |
| 40 | Switzerland |
| 500-600 | United Kingdom |

SOURCE :(ICSR, 2015)

Iraq and Chechnya and many other Islamic and non-Islamic countries want to become Daesh members. Such diversity cannot only be explained with economic factors and motivations, especially that we see many European Muslims among Daesh terrorists. It seems that a cultural explanation would be more adequate. When a Muslim lives in an Islamic country, it becomes less likely for him to radicalize because he is similar to the people who surround him. However, living among people who live a completely different life could stimulate his extremist emotions. Motives like „Jihad" and radical approaches become attractive for Muslims who live in Europe. Moreover, Muslims who live in European countries have access to very little, sometimes distorted, information about the teachings of Islam and this makes them the favorite target of Daesh.

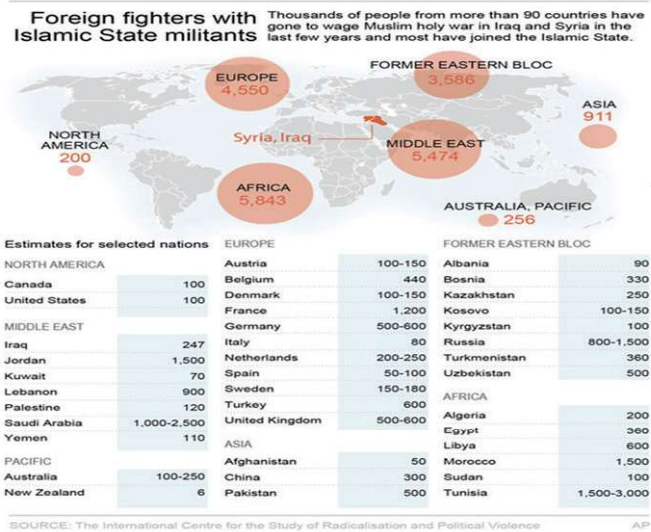According to the latest estimates, the number of peo-

ple who have joined Daesh from Western countries has increased to nearly 4,000. This has nearly doubled since December 2013 and is far more than the estimates by the EU officials. The largest part is from the biggest European countries including France, Britain and Germany. Many have also joined from Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. The following table, based on a report by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, shows that nearly 1/5 of foreign militants who are members of Daesh have come from Western countries.

The ICSR report also shows that 20,730 foreign militants have joined Daesh from around the globe. Eleven thousand of them come from the Middle East and 3,000 from the former Soviet Republics. The following table shows a list of countries and the estimated number of nationalities of those who have joined Daesh. [18]

Estimates show that between 10 to 15 percent of these militants have been killed and between 10 to 30 percent of them have left the region. Although it has been reported from inside the group that leaving is almost impossible and can have serious consequences.

As mentioned earlier, the attractiveness of the concept of „Jihad" is one of the most important factors for people to join the Daesh terrorist group, especially if it is taken into account that in the Sunni political jurisprudence, fighting against Islamic rulers, even if they are corrupt, is a forbidden act and most Sunni scholars, except some in the Muslim Brotherhood, have ruled against it. Most Sunni sects say keeping the rulers in place is compulsory. That is why, there is always a sense of enthusiasm amongst the youth toward Jihad for adventurism and pragmatism. In general, social and economic factors have played a key role in the growth of Daesh.

3.2. *Distortion of Islamic Teachings*

**Foreign fighters with Islamic State militants**

Thousands of people from more than 90 countries have gone to wage Muslim holy war in Iraq and Syria in the last few years and most have joined the Islamic State.

EUROPE 4,550

FORMER EASTERN BLOC 3,586

ASIA 911

NORTH AMERICA 200

Syria, Iraq

MIDDLE EAST 5,474

AFRICA 5,843

AUSTRALIA, PACIFIC 256

| Estimates for selected nations | | EUROPE | | FORMER EASTERN BLOC | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NORTH AMERICA** | | Austria | 100-150 | Albania | 90 |
| Canada | 100 | Belgium | 440 | Bosnia | 330 |
| United States | 100 | Denmark | 100-150 | Kazakhstan | 250 |
| | | France | 1,200 | Kosovo | 100-150 |
| **MIDDLE EAST** | | Germany | 500-600 | Kyrgyzstan | 100 |
| Iraq | 247 | Italy | 80 | Russia | 800-1,500 |
| Jordan | 1,500 | Netherlands | 200-250 | Turkmenistan | 360 |
| Kuwait | 70 | Spain | 50-100 | Uzbekistan | 500 |
| Lebanon | 900 | Sweden | 150-180 | | |
| Palestine | 120 | Turkey | 600 | **AFRICA** | |
| Saudi Arabia | 1,000-2,500 | United Kingdom | 500-600 | Algeria | 200 |
| Yemen | 110 | | | Egypt | 360 |
| | | **ASIA** | | Libya | 600 |
| **PACIFIC** | | Afghanistan | 50 | Morocco | 1,500 |
| Australia | 100-250 | China | 300 | Sudan | 100 |
| New Zealand | 6 | Pakistan | 500 | Tunisia | 1,500-3,000 |

SOURCE: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence                                        AP

Distinguishing between the original Islamic teachings and actions of Muslims is a cliché that is often used to defend the nature of Islamic beliefs. Here, we don't intend to use this cliché superficially as a tool to defend all the challenges of the Islamic world. But to be fair, it has to be said that Daesh acts of terror which violate the human rights are not compatible with any valuable or acceptable discourse of Islamic sects. Thereupon, the difference between the Salafist approach of the Taliban and Daesh can be pointed out. When the Taliban established their rule in Afghanistan, they started to enforce the Islamic Sharia law in a very strict manner, which was not approved by all Islamic sects and had nothing to do with standards of Sharia. Nonetheless, in their most horrible forms, they mostly constituted the violation of human rights rather than war crimes and crimes against humanity. Some Islamic sects could endorse those acts as in line with the principles of Sharia. We believe this is not so. However, even if we take

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them to be compatible with Sharia, there is still a wide gap between the Taliban Salafis and the Daesh terrorist group. Even the most extremist Islamic jurisprudents have described Daesh as terrorist and corrupt.

For example, Al Azhar, which is the center of issuing Fatwas for Sunnis and is conservative as well as the great Saudi mufti, Abdul azaz Al-aSheikh, have issued Fatwas against Daesh calling its members "Khavarij" (those who went out of Islam)[19]. Khavarij were an extremist and violent group in the early history of Islam whose superficial reliance on Qur'an led them to acts of terror and the assassination of the first Shiite Imam, Ali ibn Abu Talib, while he was praying. He was also the fourth caliph of Sunnis. In the history of Islam, this sect has become a symbol of religious terrorism which could not gain power because they were harshly suppressed by the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasties.

Generally, Daesh has distorted two main Islamic concepts of „Jihad" and „Kufr" (disbelief) and misused them in order to gain political power.

According to the Holy Qur'an, Jihad is more to do with defense. In fact, Jihad is the anti-thesis of surrender; the surrender of part of the society in the face of the enemy's physical aggression against the Muslim countries. The concept of Jihad is not far away from what has been termed as self-defense in international law. The sanctity of Jihad in the framework of Islamic thought is related to the motive behind it rather than its method. As a matter of fact, a Muslim who is fighting to defend his country's borders is praised because of his religious faith and intention. However, it is necessary point out that today and with the emergence of nation-states, defense has become national duty within national borders. However, „Jihad", which is the right to self-defense, is not something national in the religious discourse and is related to the Muslim world as a whole. In fact, from the viewpoint of Islamic teachings, aggression against any Islamic land makes Jihad obligatory. This

has been misused by terrorist groups like Daesh, because it gives them the potential to wage war in any corner of the Islamic world. This means that one can go to any Muslim country and pick up arms against anyone who has violated their beliefs. Of course, this has not been endorsed by many Muslim scholars and many of them emphasize that international treaties including those that have divided the countries into national government, must be respected. In fact, the violation is not permission to commit acts of terror. It is here that the difference between „the holy concept of Jihad" and „terrorism" must be reexamined.

Jihad is always called against the infidels and Muslims and this is exactly where it has been distorted by Daesh. In fact, the holy Qur'an has ordered Muslims to be kind among themselves[20]. However, most of Daesh victims are Muslims and Shiites. Even Qur'an says, during Jihad, one has to refrain from extremism and aggression[21] and when the enemy declared its surrender, peace must follow.[22]

Great Islamic figures and leaders have also set many criteria for Jihad. The Islamic teachings are very strict in this regard in order to eradicate any possible excuse for committing war crimes and pursuing excessive demands during the war.[23]

However, Daesh carries out the most repulsive crimes and widely uses criminal methods in its military operations which are in violation of human rights. Unfortunately, the concept of Jihad has become a very attractive cause for joining Daesh because of this lack of knowledge about the Islamic teachings.[24]

Another distortion has been in modifications to the meaning of „Kufr". This concept refers to Muslims who are no longer in the sphere of Islam and could face serious repercussions. Daesh uses the ideas of ibn Abd al-Wahhab in this regard.

Daesh usually uses the most trivial excuses for labeling Muslims as Kafirs (or infidels). This method has its prec-

edents in the Salafi and Takfiri thought. For example ibn Taymiyyah, who treated the issue with more caution, has harshly criticized Shiites for visiting the tomb of the dead and called it equal to idolatry.[25]

The Daesh terrorist group, which stands accused of abandoning the religion, uses the same mechanism as a tool to occupy Islamic lands. The Muslim world has been typically associated with religious tolerance during the past centuries and radical approaches have rarely emerged in the parts of it. Muslims are the first victims of Daesh wherever it goes. This distortion is the group's Sword of Damocles because it has both a sectarian as well as a military and strategic function. In fact, this mechanism provides an excuse for attacking Islamic lands and killing Muslims.

This procedure by Daesh has not only been denounced inside the Islamic world and places ruled by the group, but also by Muslims who live in other non-Muslim countries. Therefore, even Islamic currents in Europe, which could potentially support the radical Islam, are less inclined toward the beliefs of this group. For example, the head of Muslim minority of Spain has condemned acts of violence by Daesh terrorists and said the group has nothing to do with Islam which demands peace and compassion. Tatary has emphasized that the terror group's aggressions and barbaric acts are in no way in line with Islamic values and peaceful coexistence.[26]

Looking at Daesh from the outside, one sees a powerful and united group. However, the group is grappling with major ideological challenges and every now and then, such secrets are leaked when a member leaves the group.

Daesh has been particularly weakened in eastern Syria, because its field officers and Sharia officials have abused their power in the regions which are under their control, especially during the summer when water is scarce. The group's problems lie not so much in issuing arbitrary Fatwas, but in cancelling them. Hundreds in its rank and file

have been killed because of paradoxes that they faced. Moreover, many elements of Daesh act in defiance of some Fatwas. For example, hundreds who were critical of the Fatwa against Zawahiri and al-Nusra Front were executed. Such mass executions sounded the alarm for Daesh which is now facing the threat of the fleeing of members.

Such conditions have revealed the true nature of Daesh to its own members and hundreds of Takfiri terrorists, who had joined the group under the guise of Jihad, and have now abandoned it and returned home. Some of them have managed to flee, whileothers have been arrested and executed to prevent any further faltering of beliefs among its members.

### 3.3. *Daesh, Regional Powers and Global Superpowers*

Examining the effects of regional and extra-regional forces, i.e. Arab states, Israel, Britain and the U.S., on the formation, or at least, the operation of Daesh is not possible in this article because there is so much to say and the data are generally contradictory. Those who link the creation of Daesh to the political will of superpowers and those who see the rise of the group from inside the Islamic societies, lack evidence to prove their claim and ignore some part of the truth.

Arab states including Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf littoral states can benefit from the operation of Daesh at some point in time. The group's advances in countries which are under the influence of Iran will lead to the controlling of Iran, which is in line with the political will of Arab regional powers. Many years ago, Arabs referred to Arab regions which were under the influence of Iran as „the Shiite Crescent". With the expansion of political and strategic power of Daesh, Iran's strategic dominance in these regions has either been totally ceased  or severely challenged.

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Over the past three decades, the government of Syria has been treated with anger by members of the Arab league because of its support for and close political ties with Iran, even during the Iraq-Iran war. Even now, this government is one of the closest strategic allies of Iran. Therefore, putting pressure on this government and a possible regime change can be a strong motive for Arab states so that they can cut Iran's strategic depth. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the structure of government in countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and even Pakistan has undergone major changes in recent years and they have become open to Salafi and Takfiri lobbies. So, the sectarian Takfiri ideology, which is fighting Shiites, can benefit from the presence of Daesh in regions that have been under the influence of Iran.

Israel is another powerful player which can theoretically benefit from Daesh in the current stage, at least in three ways. First, the presence and functioning of Daesh has downgraded the importance of the issue of Israel in the public opinion of the Muslim world.

Another benefit of Daesh for Israel is that it can control Iran while being engaged with Daesh. And finally, Israel can put pressure on Iran and Syria simultaneously to weaken the axis of resistance.

The possible interests of the U.S. and Britain are also imaginable. Controlling of Iran, exercising pressure over Iran's nuclear program (which led to an agreement between Iran and the world powers), curbing Iran's influence in Iraq and over Shiites in such Arab states as Bahrain and Yemen and challenging the hegemony of Russia in the Middle East by weakening its allies, namely Iran and Syria, are some of such hypothetical interests.[27]

This is a theoretical perspective of possible interests of Arab states, Israel and the West regarding the activities of Daesh. The role of regional and extra-regional powers in the creation and growth of Daesh may have been exagger-

ated. An example of this could be to say that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was intentionally released from Abu Ghraib prison by Americans. According to the deputy head of Damascus Center for Strategic Studies, Baghdadi was constantly in contact with the CIA and Mossad during his time in prison and later received training from them. Even more exaggerating is the claim that Baghdadi is originally a Zionist Jew and his name is Simon Elliot.[28] Such speculations are not reliable. However, there is evidence to prove the hypothetical benefits of Daesh activities for the regional and world powers.

U.S. politician and Republican Senator Rand Paul mentions wrong American policies and its excessive interventions in the Syrian crisis as a reason for the creation of a refuge for terrorists in the Middle East and dragging northern Iraq into chaos.[29]

The evidence of Turkey becoming a transit route for terrorists, Saudi Arabia's military support for Daesh and the treatment of injured Daesh members in Israeli hospitals are enough to put the issue as a serious hypothesis before political observers.

Of course, internal gaps between the decision-makers in the political systems of the world powers must not be neglected. For example, it has been reported that the White House and the State Department have been seeking to combat Daesh in recent months. However, Pentagon has openly opposed it and believes that the activities of this Takfiri group facilitate the toppling of Assad. The CIA's position is somewhere in between. It believes that Daesh activities in Europe and America must be controlled. However, the group must be allowed to destabilize lands that are under the influence of Iran and Syria.

The European Union has adopted a different approach, although there are some inconsistencies in how each member state has dealt with Daesh. The EU hopes that a support group, made up of regional countries including Iran,

can be formed to help Iraq and tackle the threat of Daesh. However, Britain and France have acted differently.

A blame game is not necessary to examine the role of Western countries and Arab states in the creation of Daesh. Even if we ignore all the aforementioned evidence, we cannot shut our eyes to issues that were a result of the wrong actions of these countries in the past. In fact, there is no need for a conspiracy theory to explain the role of extra-regional powers in the formation of extremism in general and Daesh in particular.[30]

The decision of world powers to crush the Ottoman Empire was the first step meant at depriving the Islamic world of a coherent and unifying center of power. This led to the reinvention of the idea of Islamic caliphate in Salafi approaches and revived the hope of having an Islamic caliphate in the minds of Muslims who lived in Islamic countries.

That is why the incomplete process of building nation-states has triggered a cycle of crises and chaos in the former Ottoman states, which have been formed with imposed and artificial borders. This issue, along with the crisis between Arabs and Israel, has turned the Middle East into a hotspot for political disputes. The political will of major powers over the past decades, in keeping the regional governments week in order to guarantee oil sales and preventing the Arabs from attacking Israel, has been in their interest in the short term, but have led to extremism and terrorism in the long run.

In recent times, it has become obvious that the U.S. is also to blame. President Bush's war on Iraq and Afghanistan not only left the work of combating terrorism unfinished, but also opened new fronts for terrorists. This was coupled with other mistakes on the part of the U.S., including the dissolution of the Iraqi army and the failure to remove Baathist elements from the executive and security apparatus of the new Iraqi government.

Regional powers benefit from this chaos as well. For example, these mostly autocratic governments are vulnerable and try to pass on the crisis from within their own borders to other countries by supporting the Takfiri terrorism. Knowingly or unknowingly, the Western countries also follow in the same path, promoting Islamophobia and racism in Europe. European officials have occasionally pointed out that major powers are responsible for the emergence of extremism and Daesh. In an interview with L'Espresso, Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni blamed EU's lack of interest and the interventionist U.S. policies and called on Washington to set aside such policies.[31]

Therefore, although the creation and the rise of Daesh are historically situated within the Islamic world, they are also rooted in the interventions by major powers and regional governments.

*Conclusion*

It is not so that the Islamic world has been the cradle of peace and coexistence until the emergence of Western powers and the modern world. Power struggles and sectarian disputes have undoubtedly existed in different forms. The historical Sunni-Shiite quarrel had existed in the early days of Islam and since the passing away of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) it had even turned violent and bloody at times. However, Muslims managed to reach a form of coexistence with such ethnic and sectarian diversity. Equations changed when the Western world and modernism have been coming into contact with the Islamic civilization over the past three centuries. Especially since the second half of the twentieth century, the creation of the Israeli occupation regime has been changing the parameters of security equation in the Islamic world and the Middle East has been sliding into sectarian wars and extremism more than ever. Part of this is to be blamed

on Muslims who did not act smartly when faced with the modern world. However, those powers that manipulated the Islamic world politically, strategically and geologically in colonial and postcolonial times and turned the Middle East into the „Jurassic Park" of terrorism are also to blame.

In this article, we tried to examine the nature of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq or Daesh from several viewpoints. First, we reviewed the formation of this terrorist group in terms of revival of the caliphate and then tracked its roots to the jurisprudence and political philosophy of the Takfiri thought. Then we analyzed the social and religious backgrounds and the role of the major powers. There are two main arguments discussed in this article. First, despite the superficiality and ritualism of Daesh, there is no rational link between this group and the teachings of Islam. We tried to prove this by making historical references and citing holy Islamic texts. And second, interventions by regional and extra-regional powers, whether intentional or unintentional, have contributed to the strengthening of Daesh. There is no doubt that this work must be considered along with other research in this field, although we have tried to observe the objectivity of academic writings. The future developments in the Middle East and the future of Daesh are not the topic of this research and need to be studied further. This study was an attempt to present a comprehensive and brief understanding of the background of the formation of Daesh.

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