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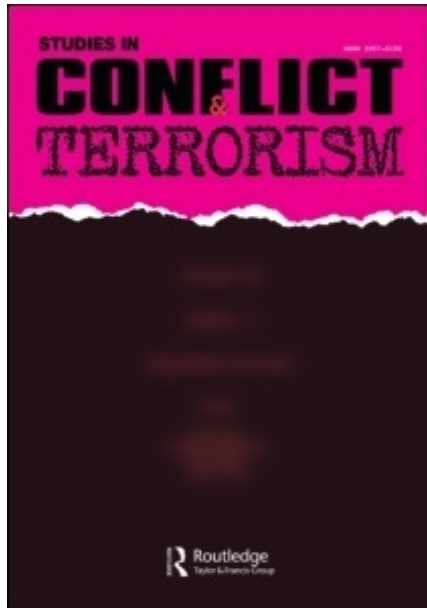
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## The Islamic State: A Clash within the Muslim Civilization for the New Caliphate



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### Info and contacts of the author:

Personal Web site: [marcomarsili.it](http://marcomarsili.it) E-mail: [info@marcomarsili.it](mailto:info@marcomarsili.it)  
[marco\\_marsili@iscte.pt](mailto:marco_marsili@iscte.pt) Skype: [marcomarsili](#) Twitter: [@marcomarsili1](#) - <https://twitter.com/MarcoMarsili1> Google+: [google.com/+MarcoMarsili1](https://google.com/+MarcoMarsili1) YouTube: [Marco Manuel Marsili](#) Academia.edu: [Marco Marsili](#) Zenodo: [Marco Marsili](#) ORCiD ID: [Marco Marsili](#) ResearcherID: [Marco Marsili](#) ResearchGate.net: [Marco Marsili](#) DeGóis Platform: [Marco Marsili](#)

# **The Islamic State: A Clash within the Muslim Civilization for the New Caliphate**

Marco Marsili\*

Center for International Studies (CEI-IUL), University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal

## **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the political reasons that allowed the Islamic State to expand successfully in Syria and Iraq, by enabling to 'franchise' worldwide, and the role of the regional governments in this issue. The essay provides a different explanation from the classic approach of the "clash of civilizations" theorized by Samuel P. Huntington, ascribing responsibility for the growth and expansion of the Islamic State to the complex framework of geopolitical alliances within the Muslim civilization and the Arab world. The paper highlights the attempt by Turkey to establish itself as a regional power and guidance of the Islamic world, by resurrecting the Caliphate, and, based on this, explains the contrast with the Islamic State, which goal is the foundation of a globalized Caliphate. The plans of the Turkish President Erdoğan for a Great Turkey, allied with Egypt, have foundered with the coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood from power. The study relates the connection of Ankara with the Kurds, regarding the management of the crisis in Syria and Iraq, and the Turkish liaison with regional powers (Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel) and other powers (Russia, Cina and USA).

Address correspondence to Marco Marsili, Center for International Studies (CEI-IUL), University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal. Email: [info@marcomarsili.it](mailto:info@marcomarsili.it).

## **Introduction**

Formerly known to Western governments at least since 2004 as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)<sup>1</sup>, the Islamic State has been established in 2006, when the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), a sunni umbrella organization, joined with several smaller Iraqi insurgent groups opposing the US military presence, giving birth to the first version of the organization called "Islamic State of Iraq" (ISI).

By taking advantage of the "Arab Spring" of 2011 in Syria, which pushed the opposition to the regime of Bashar al-Assad to revolt against the government of Damascus, the Islamic State infiltrated the demonstrators, changing the genetic nature of the conflict, and militarisation of the conflict.

Two years later, the organization, which brings together Iraqis and Syrians mujahideen, changes the original name in the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (formally the "Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham"), and only then it is identified as a terrorist organization under that name<sup>2</sup>. The move is opposed by Al-Qaeda, which until then held the undisputed leadership among the *jihadists*. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a formidable competitor to Al-Qaeda, both in financial terms, because of the resources that can catalyze and collect, distracting from those available to the organization led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, both by the human resources, the fighters, which ISIL is able to enlist removing them from the availability of the latter.

In June 2014, the organization proclaimed itself to be a Worldwide Caliphate, and took its current name of "Islamic State". This decision, which provides a political and religious vision on a global scale, caused a wave of memberships by groups of Muslim fighters spreaded across the planet.

The military successes of the IS, together with a communications strategy winning, have placed it into direct competition with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and even in Afghanistan, a stronghold of Taliban and Al-Queda. The trademark of the Islamic State ('the franchisor'), with its black flags, its efficient and multi-channel communication, and its parastatal organization, has spread globally as a sort of 'franchise'.

Affiliations to the brand IS ('the franchisees') follow one another all over the planet: in July 2014, Abu Sayyaf declares itself associated in the Philippines; in February 2015 the

majority of Ansar al-Sharia in Yemen dissented from al-Qaeda and pledged allegiance to ISIL, followed in March by Boko Haram - which gives ISIL an official presence in Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon - by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and by the sharia senior official of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, Abdullah Al-Libi, who defected with a number of fighters.

With the escalation of the war in Iraq and Syria, it is likely that these two countries will collapse under the advance of the *jihadists*, and this pushed sixty countries to form a Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant<sup>3</sup>. How can the IS achieve so many successes in the military?

### **The Struggle for the Caliphate**

Contrary to the argument by Samuel P. Huntington in his 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine<sup>4</sup>, which later expanded in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), we are not in front of a plain "clash of civilizations", but rather a "clash within the Islamic civilization" or within the "Muslim civilization", as we can call it.

According to Berman, conflict arises because of philosophical beliefs various groups share (or do not share), regardless of cultural or religious identity<sup>5</sup>. In the present day do not exist distinct cultural boundaries, and there is no "Islamic civilization" nor a "Western civilization", especially when considering relationships such as that between the United States and Saudi Arabia<sup>6</sup>. The classic Huntington approach omits the dynamic interdependency and interaction of culture which now exists between the West and Islam.

Anyway, leaving out the classic and simplistic approach of Huntington, the struggle for supremacy in the Muslim world represents, for the IS but a prelude to a "global clash of civilizations": this conflict is part and parcel of wider Islamic State objective aimed at the ultimate establishment of a globalized Caliphate.

The proclamation of the Caliphate, if on one hand triggered a series of political affiliations at global level, on the other hand alarmed Muslim states, which see in the self-proclaimed Islamic State a threat to their independence and sovereignty. The Caliphate, by its nature, is a theological state, syncretically understood as political and religious unity. The challenge for the recovery of the Caliphate is a challenge on two fronts: to Muslim states, on

the strictly political and military, and to the Muslim religion, on the theological–confessional. Thus, the Caliphate is in direct competition, both in terms of “statehood,” both in terms of religion, with the existing entities, as Sunni Muslims developed the belief that the caliph is a temporal political ruler, appointed to rule within the bounds of Islamic law (Sharia)<sup>7</sup>. Organized and run as a true state, with a cabinet of advisers and local governors, actually IS controls territory in Iraq, Syria, Sinai, and eastern Libya, and has also members in Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Israel and Palestine, but claims to extend its power in Libya, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan<sup>8</sup>.

The IS is a Salafist movement within Sunni Islam<sup>9</sup>, aiming to return to the early days of Islam, rejecting all innovations in the religion, which it believes corrupts its original spirit. It condemns later Caliphates and the Ottoman Empire for deviating from what it calls pure Islam<sup>10</sup>, and seeks to revive the original Wahhabi project of the restoration of the Caliphate governed by strict Salafist doctrine<sup>11</sup>. Following Salafi-Wahhabi tradition - a Sunni doctrine distinguished by its literal reading of Islam which rejects any form of social modernity<sup>12</sup> - ISIL condemns the followers of secular law as disbelievers, putting the current Saudi government in that category.

Many Muslim states, almost all of them hereditary monarchies, have claimed to be caliphates<sup>13</sup>. The last Caliphate recognized in most of the Sunni world was that of the Ottomans<sup>14</sup>, but for Shia scholars caliphate was "the flagship institution" of Sunni, not Shia, authority<sup>15</sup>. The last Ottoman Caliph, Abdülmecid II - the successor of Mehmet VI, which, besides being the hundredth Caliph of Islam, was once the thirty-sixth and last sultan of the Ottoman Empire - was revoked by a special assembly held in Ankara on 3 March 1924 on the instructions of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk: Turkey took the path of building a secular republican state.

### **The Kurdish Identity**

Turkey, if on one hand is the guarantor of the secular state, having abolished the caliphate "resurrected" by the IS, on the other hand is involved in part by the issue of the Kurds, a total population of about 30–35 million, mostly inhabiting a contiguous area spanning adjacent

parts of southeastern Turkey, western Iran, northern Iraq, and northern Syria<sup>16</sup>, calling for self-determination and for the establishment of a fully independent Kurdistan.

The Kurds, which are Sunni Muslims, and abhorred the radical secularization of Turkey and centralization of authority, which marginalized them<sup>17</sup>, were victims of ethnic cleansing<sup>18</sup>. The Kurds are a rough estimate of 14.5 million in Turkey (18 percent of 81.6 million), 6 million in Iran (10 percent of 80.8 million), about 5 to 6 million in Iraq (15-20 percent of 32.6 million), and less than 2 million in Syria (Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7 percent of 17.9 million), which adds up to close to 28 million Kurds<sup>19</sup>. According to higher estimates 25 percent of Turkey is Kurdish<sup>20</sup>, which would raise the population figure by about 5 million. The political representation of the Kurds, both in Turkey and in neighboring Iran and Syria, is diverse, and reflects different choices and viewpoints.

At the Turkish general elections held on 7 June 2015 the pro-Kurdish party Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi or HDP) crossed the 10 percent electoral threshold and emerged as a potent force in national politics after taking more than 13.12 percent of the vote, equivalent to 6,058,150 ballots<sup>21</sup>. Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP) lost its parliamentary majority after thirteen years in power. The opposition HDP found itself in the position to scuttle President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's plans to change the constitution to give presidency much stronger executive power.

As it was not possible to form a government that could obtain a vote of confidence, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Justice and Development Party, Ahmet Davutoğlu, returned the mandate to President Erdoğan<sup>22</sup> who called early elections blaming HDP for "incidents, which caused 50 deaths" and accusing the opposition party of being "backed by the separatist terrorist organization" PKK<sup>23</sup>.

The tension between the Turkish president party and the Peoples' Democratic Party resulted in heavy accusations: responding to the HDP Co-Chairperson Demirtaş's allegations about the Suruç attack, Erdoğan accused him to be "the main person responsible for the massacre on October 6-7-8 that resulted in 50 death"<sup>24</sup>.

The HDP chose, with success, to undertake a political struggle within Turkey, unlike the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or PKK), a nationalist

organization based in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, listed as a terrorist organization internationally by the European Union<sup>25</sup> and many governments, including the US<sup>26</sup>, UK<sup>27</sup>, Australia<sup>28</sup>, New Zealand<sup>29</sup>, Canada<sup>30</sup>, Japan<sup>31</sup>, and Germany<sup>32</sup> among the others. In the past PKK was backed by Iraq, Iran, and Syria<sup>33</sup>. These latter perceive the Turkish accession to European Union<sup>34</sup> as a threat, just like the presence of Ankara within the North Atlantic Alliance<sup>35</sup>.

While the Kurds fought to liberate by the IS the territories in which they live, until the attacks of July 2015 Ankara did not take more forceful action to combat IS, as this would involve assistance to the Kurdish militants. However Turkey agreed to support the Peshmerga forces of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. Ankara's move had the aim to strengthen the moderate government of Barzani, in strong contrast to Baghdad, and in this way weaken the extremist fringes of Kurdish nationalism. Moreover the Turks seek to strengthen their role as a European hub for hydrocarbons, thanks to agreements with the government of Erbil, thus making Ankara the crossroads of energy resources from Asia and the Middle East.

While maintaining a good relationship with Turkey, the Kurdistan Regional Government could take advantage from the current situation in Iraq, increasing its independence from Baghdad. Relations between the KRG and the Federal Government of Iraq are stretched because of tension regarding the oil policies implemented from Erbil in relations with Turkish and Iranian<sup>36</sup> neighbors. After having dealt with Tehran for supply of heavy weaponry and military training to fight IS militants - the relations between Kurdistan Region and Islamic Republic of Iran are described as "good and positive"<sup>37</sup> - KRG has turned to Ankara<sup>38</sup>, now worried as the Iranian influence in Kurdish territories continues to escalate thanks to the Syrian crisis. Eventually Ankara provided military assistance to the Kurdistan Region, as IS poses as a threat to Turkey as well.

The Turks are able to contain Iranian influence in the region, thanks to their role in the market of oil and gas: "Turkey buys 90-95 percent of Iran's natural gas export", that's "the most expensive natural gas from Iran", and also buy electricity from Tehran, demonstrating "the depth of [Turkish] solidarity" said President Erdoğan in a joint press conference with President Rouhani<sup>39</sup>.



Budget cuts by the Iraqi central government and attacks by the Islamic State caused severe economic crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan. To overcome the crisis, the KRG made an oil export agreement with the Federal government of Iraq which Baghdad failed to pay the KRG<sup>40</sup>, causing the economic crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan to worsen<sup>41</sup>.

While Baghdad is opposing KRG agreements, Erbil takes every opportunity to stress that "the [Iraqi] federal Constitution gives primacy to regional law"<sup>42</sup> in oil and gas policies, and that "All oil contracts in the Region fall within the KRG oil and gas law" according to the law passed by the Kurdistan parliament in 2007 "and fully in line with the relevant provisions of the [Iraqi] permanent Constitution"<sup>43</sup>.

Iraq currently is a parliamentary republic in which Islam is the state religion<sup>44</sup>. The administrative division consists of 18 governorates (or provinces). Any single province, or group of provinces, is entitled to request that it be recognized as a Region with wide autonomy<sup>45</sup>. These provisions have not yet been implemented, but the country's future Regions to be established could be: the three Kurdish provinces in the north of the country, already autonomous since the first Gulf War of 1991, will form a confederation of this kind; it is very likely that their example will be followed by nine Shiite provinces in the south, while the political and administrative fate of the six central provinces (three of which are in strong majority Sunni, while the other three - including the capital Baghdad - are mixed) appears uncertain.

After the Second Gulf War of 2003, the country has not yet been stabilized and there is an ongoing low-intensity war which opposes the foreign troops, the army of the new Iraqi government and the militias of some factions (especially the Kurds and some Shiite political parties, which represent more than half of Iraq's population) to heterogeneous groups, composed mainly of Sunnis (already in power under the previous regime and now partially excluded from key government).

In the Shiite south any attempts to rebellion were repressed by the central government and most of the political leaders, with strong ties to Iran, had to flee into exile.

Many Sunnis, who represented the Iraqi elite since the independence of the country until the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, which constituted the military cadres, established armed groups both secular (former Ba'athists) and religious (Islamic). Such

groups have often allied with *jihadists* from abroad belonging to clearly terrorist groups such as Ansar al-Islam (Partisans of Islam), formed in 1998 as a breakaway faction of Islamist Kurds, splitting off from a group, the, splitting off from a group, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK), ruled by al-Zarqawi<sup>46</sup>, and improperly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Ansar fighters clashed with Kurdish fighters from the PUK, one of the two mainstream Iraqi Kurdish parties<sup>47</sup>.

The Kurds, represented by relatively secular parties - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or PUK, who expressed the last two presidents of the country, both non-Arab, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, or KDP, which is in power in Kurdistan Regional Government - and by Islamic parties, are the most loyal US allies in Iraq, although they were forced to give up their aspirations for full independence, content to a wide autonomy from Baghdad as a "regional authority"<sup>48</sup>.

The government of Erbil advantage of the situation that had arisen following the actions of the IS in Iraqi territory, to occupy disputed territories outside of its administration<sup>49</sup>, such as Mosul, Sinjar, Zummar and Kobani (a town in Syrian Kurdistan lying immediately south of the border with Turkey), to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Turkey granted passage for the Peshmerga to travel through its territory to Kobani to fight IS militants<sup>50</sup>. After the liberation of the town, Peshmerga forces returned home, according to KRG's Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs. Although officially there is no record of agreements in this regard with Turkey, it is likely that this was a condition imposed by Ankara to authorize the transit of troops of Erbil on its territory. The Turkish government has provided a 500 USD million loan to the Kurdish Regional Government to be paid back through Kurdish crude oil exports<sup>51</sup>.

The relations between Turkey and KRG witnessed significant progress over the past few years. The interdependence between Ankara and Erbil, while for the more radical militants is a compromise that could jeopardize the achievement of an independent Kurdish state, on the other hand may be seen as an efficient means of "energy diplomacy" as a kind of "soft power".

Ankara proved reluctant in front of the American initiative to support the Syrian fighters which face the Islamic State, knowing that among them there are many members of

the PKK that, once ceased the conflict, can put the training and weapons at the available to the struggle for the establishment of the state of Kurdistan. According to KRG until now 16 countries had sent weapons and ammunition and military aid to the Kurdistan Region and that ten countries have military advisors present in the Kurdistan Region<sup>52</sup>. While the United States sees radical Sunni Islam as the threat in the form of ISIL and al-Qaida, Turkey sees that threat as secondary to their worries about Assad and the Kurds, as training can bolster the Syrian opposition which has no interest in fighting the Islamic State. For the Turks "the problems in Syria and Iraq" are not questions "between Sunnis and Shiites"<sup>53</sup>.

Turkish President Erdoğan stated he was troubled by the advance of Kurdish forces in the Tal Abyad region of northern Syria, saying that this could lead to the creation of a structure that threatens Turkish borders<sup>54</sup>. Erdoğan has repeatedly expressed concern about the West's bombing the Arabs and backing Kurdish forces - the Syrian Kurdish group the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), of which Ankara considers the first an expression in Syria - saying it could lead to PKK domination of northern Syria.

The agreements signed between KRG, on the one hand, and Turkey and Iran on the other, lead to think that the government of Erbil is considered a valid interlocutor to stem more radical Kurdish nationalism. Tehran, which has always opposed Baghdad, takes advantage of political friction between the Kurdish Regional Government and the Federal Government of Iraq.

Ankara also believes that supporting Erbil is the best way to disarm the Kurdish nationalism in Turkey, and, at the same time, to counter the threat of the IS, whose advance has caused a wave of refugees to its borders: 217,000 from Syria and 81,000 from Iraq by September 2014, with numbers expected to grow to 100,000 by year-end<sup>55</sup>. According to Turkish authorities the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Turkey in 2015 is expected to rise to nearly 1.9 million, including 1.7 million Syrian refugees. The exodus of Syrians to Turkey is less extensive than the one which has poured on Syria a million and two hundred thousand Iraqis, mostly Sunnis in 2007, when of the estimated two million Iraqis refugees sheltered in neighbouring states, at least 1.2 million to 1.5 million sought protection in Syria<sup>56</sup>.

Relations between Ankara and Damascus, held out for a long time, due to the territorial dispute over Hatay, had entered a phase of detente in the late '90s. The Syrian crisis, border incidents, and the wave of refugees that has poured in Turkish territory, have deteriorated this friendly relationship. Turkey, where the laity have lost the government of the nation, could benefit from the fall of the secular regime of President Bashar al-Assad, now considered a bloody dictator, which does not allow the establishment of confessional parties.

The *ihadists* of the Islamic State could move undisturbed for a long time, along the Turkish-Syrian border (the "Gateway to *Jihad*"), thanks to the complaisance of the authorities of Ankara, at least until the attack with two car bombs exploded in the town of Reyhanlı, Hatay Province, Turkey, on 11 May 2013. At first all suspects were Turkish nationals that Ankara believed were backed by the Syrian government, but when ISIL accepted responsibility for the attack, Ankara turned his troops against the *ihadists*, launching airstrikes on Syrian territory.

Turkey has been accused of complicity with IS<sup>57</sup>, even if the government declared that "that Turkey has no relations with the terrorist organization Daesh or any other terrorist organization"<sup>58</sup>. According to a research paper by David L. Phillips, Director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights, "allegations range from military cooperation and weapons transfers to logistical support, financial assistance, and the provision of medical services"<sup>59</sup>. Exporting oil from siezed oilfields is a major source of funding of IS, and this activity can take place only through the Turkish territory. Without having any evidence, it cannot be said that Ankara is an accomplice of the Islamic State in the sale, through Turkish pipelines, of Syrian oil extracted in the areas occupied by *ihadists*, but it is clear that, if the *ihadists* finance themselves in this way, the oil must somehow get out of Syria, even if Ankara categorically rejects claims of supporting *ihadists*<sup>60</sup>.

Following the 20 July 2015 terrorist attack in Suruç, Turkey, and the separate 22 July attack in Ceylanpinar, for which the PKK has claimed responsibility<sup>61</sup>, the strategy of Ankara changed. After a phone call between Erdoğan and the US President Barack Obama<sup>62</sup>, the Turkish government allowed the use of the Incirlik air base to conduct counter-ISIL operations in support of "Operation Inherent Resolve"<sup>63</sup>. The decision seems to be more due

to the will to fight Kurdish nationalists of the PKK rather than *ihadists*. For the Turkish government "Daesh, PKK, DHKP-C [...] are all terrorist organizations. Their names or differences do not change anything [...]"<sup>64</sup>.

Is the same Turkish President Erdoğan who stresses the competition with the Islamic State: "I do not use the name ISIS, because it would mean recognizing a terrorist organization as a state while disrespecting Islam"<sup>65</sup>. Turkish officials always speak of "Daesh" referring to the organization led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Ankara's move to support the United States-led coalition, pushed ISIS to urge Turkish Muslims to rise up and overthrow "Satan" [President Recep Erdoğan] and to conquer Istanbul<sup>66</sup>. In a video addressed to Turkish people, urging them uprising, an ISIS militant said that "Turkish people should refuse to accept democracy, secularism, human laws, and all types of other evils"<sup>67</sup>. The *ihadist* added that "Whoever follows the path of Atatürk and disregards Sharia, allegedly become Satan themselves by befriending the Crusaders, apostates and atheists"<sup>68</sup>.

### **Asymmetrical Interactions between Regional Actors**

The year of the Iranian Revolution and the intervention of Russia in Afghanistan (1979), stands out for the appearance of radical Islamic Shiite movements (e.g., Hezbollah in Lebanon) and Sunni movements ( Hamas, Al Qaeda and other organizations). The arrival on the scene of the United States in the funding of Afghan fighters (Talibans), in response to the intervention of the Soviet Union in Vietnam, marks the beginning of the support to some Islamic fundamentalist movements, which, in the following years, will become "uncomfortable", and hard to crack down. As late as December 1979 Soviet leaders remained hesitant about sending armed forces into the mountainous region of Southwest Asia. Gromyko, Andropov, and Ustinov endorsed an invasion of Afghanistan only when they were convinced that they had no choice other than to protect Moscow's dominance in the area against growing Islamic influence.<sup>69</sup>

Iran, an Islamic theocracy ruled by Shiites, where Arabs account for only 2 percent of the population<sup>70</sup>, sees a danger in the fundamentalist Sunni Islamic State, as it represents a challenge to the leadership within the more fundamentalist Muslim world. It is estimated that

87-90 percent of the world's Muslims are Sunni and only 10-13 percent (154-200 million) are Shia<sup>71</sup>.

The United States and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the powerful grouping of Sunni Arab Gulf monarchies<sup>72</sup>, accused Tehran of "destabilizing activities in the region"<sup>73</sup> and "affirmed their commitment to continue to support Syria's neighbors"<sup>74</sup>. According to the US Department of State, Iran is a "State Sponsors of Terrorism", providing financial, material, and logistical support to Iraqi Shia militant group, and other overwhelmingly Shiite organizations like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Sunni group like the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Gaza<sup>75</sup>.

The Islamic State regards the Palestinian Sunni group Hamas<sup>76</sup> as apostates who have no legitimate authority to lead *jihad* and it regards fighting the Islamic Resistance Movement as the first step toward confrontation with Israel, even if Hamas and Hezbollah - the fighting in Syria has reignited long-simmering tensions between Sunnis and Shiites - maintain a strategic partnership against Tel Aviv<sup>77</sup>.

Tehran is backed, both politically and militarily, from Moscow, which strongly defends the Assad regime<sup>78</sup>: on 13 April 2015 the Russian President Vladimir Putin lifted the UN ban and authorized the export of the S-300 air defence missile systems to Tehran<sup>79</sup>, and it has been reported that the Russian Federation invited a delegation of Hamas to visit Moscow<sup>80</sup>.

Support from Tehran for Hamas and Hezbollah<sup>81</sup>, and for forces operating in Yemen<sup>82</sup>, as well as the supply of arms to Iran by Moscow<sup>83</sup>, and the axis between the latter two on Syria, concern Israel, which also feels threatened by the Iranian nuclear talks with Washington<sup>84</sup>.

While US President Barack Obama says that the agreement "will make our country, our allies, and the world safer and more secure"<sup>85</sup>, the Israeli government opposes "a bad deal" that "leaves Iran with a formidable nuclear infrastructure, which is unnecessary for peaceful energy production", accusing Tehran of supporting "worldwide terrorism"<sup>86</sup>.

According to Tel Aviv "The deal prematurely eases the pressure of sanctions on Iran" freeing "Many billions of dollars" which "will flow into Iran's coffers [...] to expanding Iran's

worldwide terrorism, its regional campaign of conquest and aggression in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon – as well as the terrorism it sponsors on Israel's borders".

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu defined the agreement "an historic mistake for the world" as "Iran will receive hundreds of billions of dollars with which it can fuel its terror machine and its expansion and aggression"<sup>87</sup>. Netanyahu said that "The world is a much more dangerous place today than it was yesterday", undelining the role of Tehran as "sponsor of international terrorism", and calling the government a "terrorist regime" which wants "to destroy Israel"<sup>88</sup>. Israeli Prime Minister defined Hezbollah "Iran's terrorist proxy".

Russia and China - allies in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) group - voted against the formal UN Security Council condemnations of the Bashar al-Assad government, since 4 October 2011, expressing four times the negative vote on Middle East-Syria resolutions<sup>89</sup>. Until now Moscow, which has its only Mediterranean naval base for its Black Sea Fleet located in the Syrian port of Tartus, opposed any sanctions or intervention against the Syrian government, using its veto power to block any action against the Assad regime.

The Russian government admitted that have "long supplied Syria with weapons and hardware" and that "There are Russian military experts who help Syrians"<sup>90</sup>. According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs "two thousand Russian citizens are fighting on the side of extremist formations in Syria and Iraq". Russian President Putin said Moscow wants "to create an international coalition to combat terrorism and extremism", and that he personally discussed this over the telephone with the President of the United States, President of Turkey, the leaders of Saudi Arabia, the King of Jordan, the President of Egypt and other partners<sup>91</sup>. The "broad coalition that President Vladimir Putin has urged to establish [...] should include units of Syrian moderate opposition, Kurdish self-defence forces and major international regional players that are aware of the extremely serious threat emanating from the ISIS and other terrorist groups"<sup>92</sup>. Putin told that Russians are backing their "friends" and "providing Syria with significant support anyway, both in equipment and armaments and in personnel training"<sup>93</sup>.

Between Ankara and Tel Aviv, whose prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been accused of "Islamophobic attitude"<sup>94</sup>, distances remain large because of Palestinians killed in

Israel's offensives in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Turkish President Erdoğan condemned "the atrocities of Israel" and "the occupation and the aggressive policies of Israel" and called for "a sovereign and independent Palestinian state [...] with east Jerusalem as its capital"<sup>95</sup>.

Turkey, "which has always been one of the strongest defenders of the Palestinian cause"<sup>96</sup>, emphasizes its "full support for Palestinian people and state"<sup>97</sup> and "will continue to stand by its Palestinian brothers"<sup>98</sup>. President Erdoğan said that "Protecting Jerusalem and Al Haram Ash Sharif is the duty of all Muslims, not only of Palestinians. Turkey will continue to fight against the unlawful and unrestrained acts of Israel in cooperation with the Muslim world [...]"<sup>99</sup>.

Turkey is playing a game alone, without allies, against the blockade of powers formed by Russia, Iran and China, and against Egypt, another regional secular government, with which Israel maintains a very friendly relationship.

The Egyptian Revolution of 2011, part of the Arab Spring, which saw the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak, led to fears in Israel about the future of the 1979 peace treaty between the two countries<sup>100</sup>, until the Egyptian Army took power on 11 February 2011. The fear of Tel Aviv was that the new Muslim government would transform Egypt into a new Iran. These fears dissolved in 2012, when the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) declared their devotion to the Camp David Accords, respecting the peace treaty.

The situation in Egypt suddenly changed in July 2013, when the secular military ousted Muslim Brotherhood from power. The new balance of power changes the relationships within the Arab world.

Mohamed Morsi, at that time President of the Muslim Brotherhood, sworn in as fifth and first democratically elected President of Egypt, and served from 30 June 2012 to 3 July 2013 when was removed by then Defense Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. El-Sissi run for presidential elections 2014, held without the participation of most political parties, and won over his sole opponent.

Morsi as well as high-echelon MB leaders were charged with "terrorism and plotting with foreign militants against Egypt" while the MB was officially classified by the government as a terrorist group in April 2014<sup>101</sup> implementing a decision by the Court of Urgent Matters in February<sup>102</sup>. The only countries designating the MB as a terrorist



organization are: Russia - on 12 February 2003 the Supreme Court of Russia banned the Muslim Brotherhood, labeling it as a terrorist organization, and accusing the group of supporting Islamist rebels who want to create an Islamic been in the North Caucasus; Syria (21 October 2013), Egypt (25 December 2013), Saudi Arabia (7 March 2014) and United Arab Emirates (UAE; 9 March 2014). Saudi Arabia has listed the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation along with two al-Qaeda-linked groups fighting in Syria: Jabhat al-Nusra, which is al-Qaeda's official Syrian affiliate, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which has been disowned al-Qaeda, as "terrorist organisations"<sup>103</sup>.

The countries that have entered the Muslim Brotherhood in the list of terrorist organizations are those that praised the crackdown against Islamists, put in place by el-Sissi, who came to power after the military coup d'état that deposed the legitimate President Morsi. Egypt urged the European countries "not to deal with illegal entities affiliated to the terrorist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) group"<sup>104</sup>, as the European Union<sup>105</sup> and many governments, including the USA<sup>106</sup>, UK<sup>107</sup>, Australia<sup>108</sup>, New Zealand<sup>109</sup>, Canada<sup>110</sup>, Japan<sup>111</sup> and Germany<sup>112</sup> among the others, does not recognize it as such.

In recent years the Muslim Brotherhood changed its strategy and has always condemned as "criminal and unjustifiable" any attack, rejecting and denouncing all kind of violence.<sup>113</sup> This position is shared by Hizb Al-Hurriya Wal-'Adala (the Freedom and Justice Party), founded in 2011 by the Muslim Brotherhood, and banned and dissolved formally by order of the Egyptian Supreme Administrative Court on 9 August 2014, after the MB organization's activities have been banned by an Egyptian Court in September 2013<sup>114</sup> and afterwards by the government<sup>115</sup>.

Russia has supported Sisi's actions since day one, including his presidential bid, and reportedly offered Egypt a huge military weapons deal after the United States suspended some military aid and postponed weapons delivery to Egypt<sup>116</sup>. The USA - which have not listed the Muslim Brotherhood among the terrorist organizations<sup>117</sup> - took an ambiguous position, avoiding to define the action of the Egyptian Armed a coup d'état, but decided to frozen military aid. Many foreign governments see el-Sissi as a bulwark against Islamic extremis in the region. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have given more than 20 billion USD to help Egypt since Morsi's overthrow<sup>118</sup>.

As reported, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was the first international head of State to send a message of congratulations to interim Egyptian President Adly Mansour: "We strongly shake hands with the men of all the armed forces, represented by General Abdel Fattah el-Sissi"<sup>119</sup>. Foreign Minister of UAE Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said that his government was "satisfied" with the developments in Egypt. Al Nahyan also praised the Egyptian army as a "strong shield" and a "protector"<sup>120</sup>.

El-Sissi's standing makes him also an ally of Israel against the Islamic movement Hamas, "a Palestinian offshoot of the parent Muslim Brotherhood"<sup>121</sup>. At the end of 2014, Egypt's Prosecutor General filed a lawsuit against Hamas' military arm Ezzedin Al Qassam, intending to declare Hamas a terrorist organization and outlaw its activity. Hamas claims that the directive to the Prosecutor General originated from Egyptian President al-Sisi himself<sup>122</sup>. The move comes after a series of terror attacks in northern Sinai. Former members of the dissolved Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, who established the Sinai Province of ISIL or Wilayat Sinai, claimed responsibility, but according to Egyptian intelligence, Hamas was actively involved in the terror attack by smuggling explosives and its fighters through Gaza's tunnels<sup>123</sup>, even if the Islamic Resistance Movement denied connection to any attack in the Sinai Peninsula<sup>124</sup>.

Ousted President Morsi and the majority of the Brotherhood leaders have been imprisoned and referred to criminal court by prosecutors for different charges. In Egypt<sup>125</sup> a wide and vaguely-defined range of terrorism-related offenses not necessarily resulting in death are punishable by death<sup>126</sup>. The new anti-terror law adopted in August 2015<sup>127</sup> has been criticized by a number of countries and foreign human rights organizations<sup>128</sup>. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry remarked criticism: "There is no universally agreed definition of terrorism" as "It is therefore up to every domestic jurisdiction to develop its own definition" said Spokesman Ahmed Abu Zeid<sup>129</sup>. The Ministry highlighted that "Legislators also referred to many anti-terror laws in a number of countries" such as the US Patriot Act, the UK Terrorism Act (2000) and the series of counter-terrorism laws adopted by France and the *Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism*, adopted by the League of Arab States in 1998.<sup>130</sup> Many African countries such as Tunisia<sup>131</sup> adopted new counterterrorism law which erodes basic rights, undermining freedom of expression and opinion throughout.

In June 2015 Morsi has been sentenced lifetime imprisonment for espionage and 16 Muslim Brotherhood leaders have been sentenced to death in a trial for jail break<sup>132</sup>. According to the Court ruling the Muslim Brotherhood planned "to form terrorist organizations for armed interference in Egypt" in cooperation with Hamas e Hezbollah. The Cairo Criminal Court indicates a link between the "leaders of the MB international organization who are associated with Hamas movement, Hezbollah and Iran", stressing that the Libanese group "is associated with the Iranian revolutionary guard"<sup>133</sup>.

Turkey has been the only country to react strongly to the death sentence against "the democratically elected President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt"<sup>134</sup>, issued on 16 May 2015 by an Egyptian court, for his role in the Wadi el-Natrun prison break during the 2011 revolution<sup>135</sup>. "Egypt is returning to the old Egypt"<sup>136</sup> said Erdoğan. He called it "a punishment targeting the ballot box"<sup>137</sup>, and attacked el-Sissi, defined "a coup-maker"<sup>138</sup>. The Turkish President criticized the silence of the West, and stated that "If Morsi is executed, I believe and hope he won't be, he will reach the rank of martyrdom in his fight against terror"<sup>139</sup>. The Head of the Turkish Republic "do not accept Sisi as the President of Egypt", recognizing still in office Morsi, who "was elected with 52 percent of the votes"<sup>140</sup>. "To me, the President of Egypt is Morsi, not Sisi"<sup>141</sup> stressed Erdoğan.

Turkey aims to "be much more powerful in 2023"<sup>142</sup>, according to the political vision described is a list of goals released by the party of then Prime Minister Erdoğan, to coincide with the centenary of the Republic of Turkey in 2023<sup>143</sup>, and the loss of power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt wrecks the dream of an Islamic confessional bloc able to influence the regional policy: a new Caliphate.

The position to be adopted on the matter of the Muslim Brotherhood splits the Arab world. Between the Wahhabi Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar there are strong clutches, right on the position to be adopted over such organizations as the Muslim Brotherhood, which the government of Doha continued to back, denouncing what the Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani described as a 'military coup' that had taken place in Egypt in July 2014<sup>144</sup>. The crisis between the the Gulf Cooperation Council lead to the withdrawal from Doha of the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Bahrain in March 2014<sup>145</sup>. Both Saudi Arabia and Qatar has been accused of financing and supporting

terrorist groups through private donors and charity organisations, even if no evidence were found<sup>146</sup>.

In July 2015 the government of Riyadh arrested 431 people accused to be part of a "network of cluster cells linked to the terrorist ISIS organization"<sup>147</sup>, but, after the death of King Abdullah, his successor, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz, seems to make a break through in the internal and external Saudi policies toward Islamists: Khaled Meshal, leader of Hamas political bureau and member of Muslim Brotherhood since 1971<sup>148</sup>, met the new king<sup>149</sup>, and visited the country<sup>150</sup>. The news of Meshal's visit to Riyadh came a few days after president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Saudi Arabia and met with King Salman<sup>151</sup>. A few days before Erdoğan received the Head of Hamas Politburo. at the Presidential Complex in Ankara<sup>152</sup>.

Saudi Arabia is engaged in Yemen, where leads the Arab coalition, including UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait, to support the forces loyal to the government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi against the fighters of the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. In Yemen members of Ansar al-Sharia had pledged allegiance to ISIL, entering into direct competition with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), threatening the Saudi borders. As happened in Syria, and somehow in Iraq and Libya, the IS takes advantage of of inter-state conflicts to gain positions and control territory. In Yemen the Arab countries are allied with the United States and Turkey: all they fear the destabilization of the area. Moreover, the location of Yemen is strategic for controlling the entrance to the Gulf of Aden, through which passes the Persian Gulf oil. This makes it a point geographically vital for world economy.

## **Conclusions**

The situation that arised with the advance of the Islamic State sees asymmetrical alliances: on one side, Russia is an ally of Turkey and Iran in supporting the regime in Damascus; on the other Russia is an ally of Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate in considering the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, with Ankara and Doha strongly contrasting the current regime in Cairo. Many foreign governments see el-Sissi as a bulwark against Islamic extremis in the region.

The military coup d'état at Cairo, while resealed the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt to the advantage of the security of Israel, has dismissed the dream of the rebirth of a modern 'legal' Caliphate led by Turks and Egyptians. If it's true that "Egypt is returning to the old Egypt", Turkey is returning to old Turkey, too. Islamic Turkey seeks to gain regional leadership, taking advantage of the advance of the *jihadists* in Syria and Iraq. Ankara formed an alliance with the KRG to weaken the Baghdad government and overshadow Kurdish nationalists, which recorded a huge success at the recent Turkish general elections, depriving Erdoğan of the parliamentary majority needed to change the constitution to empower his role.

In the meantime the interests of Moscow and Tehran, allied with Beijing in support of Damascus, converge in an anti-Turkish and anti-Saudi path. The further enlargement of the EU, with the entrance of Ankara, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is a threat to the influence in the region of Russia, Iran, and China, which already must counteract Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies. To Moscow and Tehran, Turkey is also an antagonist, because of the role that Ankara is taking on as a European energy hub. In the background, the contrast between IS and the Muslims 'traitors' who strayed from the Sharia and the Caliphate that also Ankara would resurrect. The political struggle thus takes the form of a contrast between the current strong man in Cairo, el-Sissi, and Turkish President Erdoğan, as well as involving religious differences between Shiites, Sunnis and Wahhabis.

While Washington opposes Tehran's nuclear program and the expansive policy of Moscow in Ukraine, is allied with Russia and Iran to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, although it can not count on the vote of these for the approval of resolutions by the UN Security Council. In the background are the relations between Tel Aviv and Washington, and the struggle for the regional leadership.

Creating a deep rift between the Muslim countries, the Islamic State suits Israel, which however sees the *jihadists* advancing in the Gaza Strip, where the latter are opposed by Hamas, now openly backed also by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the Russian Federation. It is a conflict entirely within the Islamic world. The *jihadists* are too busy fighting Arab foes, to deal with the Zionists. Even Hezbollah, Tehran's historic ally and enemy of Israel, pledged support the Assad regime and support the government in Baghdad. Israel is therefore in the position of a 'free rider': its security is ensured by the clash within the Muslim world.

Riyadh is also committed to fighting the *jihadists* of the Islamic State, and seeks to maintain leadership between the Gulf countries, and to remain the main ally of Washington in the region, while the new Saudi king redesigns alliances in the Arab world. The fear of the Saudis, as well as that of the Israelis, is that the negotiations between Washington and Tehran on the nuclear bring to reshape alliances in the Middle East: King Salman is approaching the 'turkish block' linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, in terms of preventive containment of Iran and Hezbollah, while Russia and China play on both tables, and the Egypt, isolated, remains the only 'independent' ally of Washington and Tel Aviv. In the background, the remains of Syria, Iraq and Libya to be divided among the contenders. In midst of all this the Islamic State prospers and franchises worldwide.

## ORCID

Marco Marsili <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1848-9775>

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