

## FORMS OF RADICALISM OF THE ISLAMIC STATE CHALLENGES FOR THE MIDDLE EAST'S SECURITY

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### ABSTRACT

*THE PERSISTENCE OF MULTIPLE FORMS OF THREAT FOR THE SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST REGION IS NOT SOMETHING NEW AND IS NOT EVEN CAUSED BY THE ISLAMIC STATE'S EXISTENCE. THE EXISTENCE OF THE JIHADIST EXTREMIST GROUPS IN THE REGION IS NOT NECESSARY NEW, OR SINGULAR, BUT THE WAY THE ISLAMIC STATE EVOLVED AND ESPECIALLY HOW MUCH IT EXTENDED, BRINGS NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE REGION. FROM A SIMPLE GROUP, TO CONTROL FAIRLY IMPORTANT TERRITORIES TO AN OUT OF STATE ACTOR AND PARTICULARLY THE SUCCESS IN THE FRONT OF TWO COUNTRIES, FROM WHICH LOSS YOU CAN BUILD AN OWN STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY, CREATES A LOT OF QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT'S NEXT AND WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE PRESENT ARTICLE AIMS TO ANALYZE THE FORMS OF THE ISLAMIC RADICALISM WHICH DESCRIBE THE ISLAMIC STATE, IN ORDER TO OBSERVE THE CHALLENGES THEY LAUNCH FOR THE MIDDLE EAST'S SECURITY.*

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**KEY WORDS:** CHALLENGES, SECURITY, RADICALISM, THE ISLAMIC STATE, THE MIDDLE EAST

### INTRODUCTION

The name of the Islamic State is the last official name of this group. Its origins lie in the "once known group as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI from October 2006 to April 2013), Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS from April 2013 to June 2014), and the Islamic State (IS since June 2014)."<sup>3</sup> The rename in the Islamic State is not just a simple abbreviation of the name, it has a different meaning related to the context in which this rename was made. "On June 29, 2014, the first day of the holy month of Ramadan, the ISIL extremist group announced the restoration of the

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<sup>3</sup> Cole Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate: the ideology of the Islamic State” *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World: Analysis papers*, 19 (2015) 3.

Caliphate and the renaming of the organization in the Islamic State.”<sup>4</sup> If we consider what we mentioned in the introductory part, "the formation of an Islamic State with the form of a proto-Caliphate, whose duties are to extend itself through all the region until the instauration of the Caliphate, which will then follow its mission to expand into the whole world,<sup>5</sup> we can understand what this change means. It is actually the beginning of the proto-Caliphate that has as its main purpose the diffusion of its authority in the region. This is where we need to analyze the actions, the operations, the statements of the Islamic State.

For an even better understanding of the radicalism’s forms executed by the Islamic State, in order to explain why it acts in a certain way and to understand its purpose, it is necessary to make an incursion first, into the ideological concepts which represents its foundation.

Then, we can study much better its activity forms and the radicalism’s forms, as well as we can estimate the capacity of this group to represent a negative factor on the security in the region.

### **THE IDEOLOGY OF THE ISLAMIC STATE**

A predominantly Sunni jihadist group with the objective to directly threat any source of authority in the region in order to establish a caliphate, a single Islamic state, transnational, based on *sharia*,<sup>6</sup> the Islamic State is, besides its affiliation of terrorist group, a political and military organisation. All these three elements intertwine and are motivated by its ideology based on a radical interpretation of the Islam, through the political ideology of the religious perceptions that want argue and support the group's fight for extending its authority by force, both over the Muslim world, but also on the non-Muslim one, and for confirming the legitimacy of the group to be seen as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world.<sup>7</sup> Its ideology is built in such a way that the adherents of this group see themselves as the ones that practice the true islam<sup>8</sup>, and this situate them above the others and give them the right to use the extreme violence on the people considered unfaithful through a justification of their religious mission.

The main explanation for the ideology of the Islamic State is the inclusion of this group in the *jihadist Salafism* movement. This orientation is based on the idea of a return to the pure form of practicing the islam, specific to the period of its founder, Mahomed. That is why there is a rejection of all that is innovation or what has been added to islam in time. For this reason their struggle is not only directed against non-Muslims, but especially against the Muslims considered heretics (*takfir*) which focus on forms considered deviated from the authentic islam.<sup>9</sup> Still, this movement is based on an extremist interpretation of the islam<sup>10</sup> and on the reject of the national modern states and of the states built in the colonial period.

Demanding the return to the Caliphate that contain the whole *ummah* (muslim nation)<sup>11</sup>, that pass the borders, the ethnicity and the different nationalisms, the Islamic State finds its

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<sup>4</sup> „From Paper State to Caliphate“ 1.

<sup>5</sup> „From Paper State to Caliphate“ 4-7.

<sup>6</sup> Zachary Laub, Jonathan Masters ”Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Elliot Friedland ”The Islamic State” *Clarion Project*, May, 2015, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Friedland ”The Islamic State”

<sup>9</sup> Friedland ”The Islamic State”, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Yosef Jabareen ” The emerging Islamic State: Terror, territoriality, and the agenda of social transformation” *Geoforum*, 58, (2015), 52.

objective in the way of organisation and leading of the first Caliphate which followed the Mohamed's death in 632.<sup>12</sup> The importance of the recreation of this *ummah* is visible because it believes that this "didn't submitted to anyone except from Allah"<sup>13</sup>

From here we can understand why the Islamic State does not recognize the secular regimes established in the Muslim states, and that's why it tries to overcome the existing national borders. In its vision there must not exist such boundaries or distinctions between the nations of the Muslim states, all these will represent *ummah* at the moment when the Caliphate's instauration will be completed. This sort of distinctions will no longer be relevant because they will be the nation of the Universal Islamic State, its authority being taken over by a caliph "considered a successor of Mahommed from the point of view of the political authority"<sup>14</sup> It is known the fact that all the territories under the authority of the Islamic State are administrated according to the islamic law, *sharia*.<sup>15</sup>

The central ideology of the Islamic State counts on the idea " of a new beginning by returning into the past"<sup>16</sup> This idea is the meeting point between the two ideological dimensions that influence the Islamic state. First of all, it's about the dominant dimension, of the islamic fundamentalism that regains its contemporary application in the Salafist movement, as we have analyzed above and which "claims legitimacy for its violence saying that all its actions are made with the aim of re-launching the islam in its pure, primordial form, uniting the Muslim world under the true islamic belief."<sup>17</sup> Under this interpretation, the fight is firstly against the Muslims who have adopted modified approaches of the islam. That is why the fight must first be a local / regional one, carried by the proto Caliphate against the heretics. Only when the whole Muslim world will be brought to the true belief, it will be possible to establish the true Islamic Caliphate which will then fight against the non-Muslim world. The second ideological dimension is *Ba'athism* that influences the Islamic State, especially from the perspective of the political organization, because it seeks to achieve a pan-Arab state with only one leadership, even if its perspective is secular.<sup>18</sup>

It must be also taken into account the favorable context of the principles developed and sustained from the last century by the Muslim Brotherhood (a political Sunni movement founded in 1928 in Egypt).<sup>19</sup> Resuming, its contribution is noticed by the fact that "the islam demands that the Muslim community to unite around a leader, the leader of the Islamic State, and forbids the division of the Muslim community between states."<sup>20</sup> The *Wahhabi* movement has a very important contribution to the ideological foundation of the Islamic State. This movement is a subcategory of the *Salafism*, developed in Saudi Arabia. This movement was used here to carry a jihad against those considered heretics. Among its main tactics we can find the destruction of the graves and of the altars and the enforcement of some appropriate religious rituals, as well as the elimination of any influence of Shia from islam.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Jabareen, " The emerging Islamic State"

<sup>13</sup> Jabareen, " The emerging Islamic State"

<sup>14</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Analyzing the timeline *The Rise of the Islamic State (ISIS)*.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Barrett "The Islamic State" *The Soufan Group*, (2014): 19.

<sup>17</sup> Barrett "The Islamic State".

<sup>18</sup> Barrett "The Islamic State".

<sup>19</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 9.

The jihadism or the jihadist school are relevant to the ideology of the Islamic State because it promotes a radical, revolutionary vision of what the Muslim Brotherhood is pursuing, "its contribution being the long-term influence of a generation of radical and violent groups."<sup>22</sup> This means that while the activism promoted by the Muslim Brotherhood speaks of the need to establish the Islamic Caliphate, when the necessary conditions will be fulfilled, the jihadism seeks to immediately eliminate the existing regimes from the Muslim states and to replace them with Islamic states. This ideology was supported by al-Qaeda, only that the precondition for the establishment of the Islamic State is related to the attack of the United States<sup>23</sup> and not to the elimination of the secular governments from the region.

Thus, the *jihadist salafism* which represents the ideological basis of the Islamic State, gives it the opportunity to pursue its objectives by all means, no matter how violent they are, while also offering a religious motivation under which is hidden this violence. The *Salafism-jihadist* is the opportunity by which this group can pursue political objectives by bringing together all the Muslims under a single leadership, that of the Caliphate. The necessity that *ummah* to be organized after the early perceptions of the islam, brings a religious legitimacy, making the political objective to be seen as a simple instrument to reach the religious goal. The types of violence that are allowed against other muslims seem to be instruments to reach the religious purpose because the final objective is to eliminate such developments of the islam that do not correspond to the perception of the muslim's primordial community.

Last but not least, the *jihad* as a tool to eliminate any other form of existing authority is motivated by the need to overthrow the authorities so that the Islamic State can take over this authority in order to have the space, the territory necessary for the instauration of the Islamic Caliphate in the Muslim world.

### **RADICAL FORMS OF THE ISLAMIC STATE'S ACTIONS**

For the beginning, we will briefly summarize the major actions in which the Islamic State was involved. In Iraq, after the 2003 American invasion, the Islamic State, which was then connected to the Iraq al-Qaeda, was involved in the fight against the USA Army and against the new regime set up to establish an authority under the Islamic law. In 2011, with the outbreak of the riots against the Assad regime in Syria, the ISI involved in the conflict, through campaigns against the government forces, using brutal tactics such as decapitations, and they applied *sharia* in the territories where they gained control. Winning more territories, the ISI has moved on to attacks against other rebel groups in the region.<sup>24</sup> The struggles with other groups is a tactic that actually supports the objective pursued by the group, the elimination of the existing and potential sources of authority in order to establish the unique authority of the Islamic State.

It can be said that the radicalization of the Sunni groups in Iraq can be recovered since 2003 with the American invasion, due to the creation of a feeling of self-defense justified by *jihad* instruments.<sup>25</sup> The success of such actions was limited, its violent manifestation being somehow stopped by the presence of the American troops in the territory. However, the USA retreat managed

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<sup>22</sup> Tarek Fatah „Chasing mirage: the tragic illusion of an Islamic State, Canada: Wiley, (2008): 247.

<sup>23</sup> Fatah „Chasing mirage“.

<sup>24</sup> \*\*\* ”The Evolution of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): Relationships 2004-2014” *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, June, 2014, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Analyzing the timeline *The Rise of the Islamic State (ISIS)*.

to represent a very favorable framework for the group, which quickly expanded its influence in the western region of the country. Taking advantage of the opportunity that the Syrian civil war had in terms of recruiting and mobilizing the popular support, ISI involved in riots. In 2013, it joined its forces with the Syrian Islamist group, Jabhat al-Nusra, the new alliance being the foundation on which ISIS started to control several territories at the border between the two states, which allowed the proclamation of the Caliphate in 2014.<sup>26</sup>

In a context in which the Iraqi government led by Maliki, a member of the majority of Shiite from Iraq, led to a corrupt society, this government was also accused of promoting some sectarian politics that directly target the Sunni's minority.<sup>27</sup> The Sunnis, who had a feeling of marginalization, began to protest for the reform in the Anbar region in 2012. Their protests were violent by the execution of coordinated attacks that led to the deaths of dozens of Shiite Iraqis. In April 2013, the violence intensified again because of the expansion of the group into Syria. In this series of violence were used car bombings, suicide bombings, with over 7,000 deaths in the year 2013.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the extension of the territories in which the two states lost their authority, led to the establishment of *sharia* and certain repressive politics against non-Muslims, such as the introduction of a tax for the possibility of manifesting their confession.<sup>29</sup>

The actions made by the Islamic State are under the islamic extremism's sign, ideology that sustains that the political domination belongs to Allah, the interpretation of the religious perceptions by them equivalent to *sharia* must be the law of the state, being also the Muslims's duty to try to create an islamic state ment to reflect these principles. For this struggle or the armed struggle, through *jihad* is transformed into *jihadism* that refers to the violence of an out of state actor with political or military instruments to support the cause of the islam, meaning, the politically cause of the islam. For this, it is common to use terrorism as a form of violence, through which the Islamic State wants to produce a political change.<sup>30</sup>

In Iraq, al-Qaeda and then ISI there was a terror campaign characterized by the kidnapping and the decapitation of foreigners, they targeted the Shiite's majority as the aim of some suicide actions in order to generate internal instability and chaos.<sup>31</sup> In the civil war in Syria, Islamic militants who fought here under the "flag" of the Jabhat al-Nusra grou, became the most effective rebel group. Success determined the ISI leader to declare in 2013 that Jabhat al-Nusra is absorbed in the new Isis group ISIS by expanding into Syria, an aspect denied by the leader Jabhat al-Nusra, which generated violence between the two groups. Its level of extremism is also visible in the fight with another extremist group, as in this case, which led to the execution of other jihadists by ISIL.<sup>32</sup>

The formation of the Islamic State and the Caliphate's declaration in 2014 "differentiate IS from other jihadist groups because this organization not only claimed a large territory between Syria and Iraq, but it also proclaimed the first truly Islamic state under the name Caliphate."<sup>33</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup> "The Evolution of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)".

<sup>27</sup> Bunzel, „From Paper State to Caliphate“, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Zachary Laub, Jonathan, "Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria" *Council on Foreign Relations*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan, "Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria".

<sup>30</sup> Erin Marie Saltman & Charlie Winter "Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism, November 2014", *Quilliam* 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Saltman, Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face", 29.

<sup>32</sup> Saltman, Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face", 30.

<sup>33</sup> Saltman, Winter, "Islamic State: The Changing Face", 31.

this controlled territory, the main violence forces are represented by the suicidal attacks<sup>34</sup> that don't have the purpose to subordinate the population of the territories, there is a predisposition of it to accept the authority of the Islamic State considering that it offers a certain degree of stability, which missed in the last period. They are directed either against the Shiite heretics or against the non-Muslims, yet there are situations where they are fighting against other jihadist groups that they see as a threat to their authority which must be singular. In addition, numerous attack campaigns were lead, with access to weapons and having a mobile strategy "they needed only 800 fighters to capture the city of Mosul, proving a great strategic and tactical ability."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, it is considered that its military component has tactics such as the acts of terrorism, the insurgency actions or conventional military actions. The fighters of the Islamic State follow a certain logic when using these tactics over an established target. Firstly, this one is weakened by a terrorist attack, which is followed by infiltration in some areas of strategic importance that allow to gain the control over the entire target.<sup>36</sup>

There appears a problem regarding the forms of violence made by the Islamic State, an extremist violence such as terrorist acts is the way in which hostages are executed. The "public" decapitations of some non-Muslims, coming from Western states, that are filmed and posted on social media capt the attention through their cruelty and also confirm the extremist nature of the group's strategies. What is representative in this direction is the activity of so-called Islam State's executioner, Jihadi John, who executed several such hostages.

The videos with the execution of the hostages are not just simple documentaries of some war atrocities, but they are powerful propaganda tools, with a great impact, of the terrorists for whom have been committed the murders.<sup>37</sup> The videos draw the attention through media and they are available for the whole world on YouTube and other sites. They are the product of a deliberate rational calculation that aims to create a maximum impact on the different target groups and at the same time to achieve a political goal that the directors of such actions would not obtain because of their minority status in what they proclaim and sustain. Therefore, such videos become "a communication strategy and not just another act of violence."<sup>38</sup>

These videos are full of symbolis. From the colors that dominate, to the English speaking, direct to the Western powers. The ISIS executioner named "Jihadi John gives his statement in English with a British accent." The political leaders and the audience from the hostages' countries are explicitly addressed. The videos mention the abundant political decisions and the military actions of these nations. In an introductory part, the videos contain an edited segment of TV news about the Western political leaders or parliamentary decisions, fitting everything into a clear political context.

Extreme violence is considered to reach a very high level, as the actions of this group are largely translated, besides decapitations or suicide attacks, by "crucifixion, stoning, massacre, burial of living victims and religious and ethnic cleansing."<sup>39</sup> The integration of these actions into

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State" *The Soufan Group*, (2014): 40.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State" 35.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Barrett, "The Islamic State" 36.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Tinnes "A Backgrounder on IS Hostage Videos – August - December 2014" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 9, (2015): 77.

<sup>38</sup> Tinnes "A Backgrounder on IS Hostage Videos", 75.

<sup>39</sup> \*\*\* "Islamic State. Can its savagery by explained?", BBC News. Accessed in June, 15, 2015,

the extremist ideology of the group it is necessary and easy to explain if we consider the ideological foundations that represent the base of this group and that we have analyzed in the previous section. The violence is justified through the mission that its ideology gives it, of instauration of the Caliphate in which to establish the Islamic law and the return to the authentic faith promoted by the Prophet Muhammad. With this purpose, the violence can be exerted against anyone who is against this mission, against the Shiites who must be brought on the true way of the islam, against the non-Muslims, whose interference must be removed from the Middle East in order not to oppose the process of establishing the Caliphate, even against other jihadist groups, with the same ideology in order to eliminate any potential alternative source to the unique authority of the Caliphate.

### **THE ISLAMIC STATE'S CHALLENGE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST'S SECURITY**

The persistence of multiple forms of threat for the security in the Middle East region is not something new, and neither due to the existence of the Islamic State. The existence of the jihadist extremist groups in the region is not new or singular, but the way the Islamic State evolved and especially how it managed to expand, brings new challenges for the region. From a simple group to the control of quite significant areas for an out of state actor, and especially the success in front of two states from whose loss to form an own structure of authority, it raises many questions about what's next and what kind of negative effects it has.

The first threat for the security we can identify is human, individual, through the exaggerated violence committed by the leaders of this movement over the possible ideological opponents, over those considered heretics and ment to be brought to the true islam, over the strangers to send a message to their countries regarding the new authority that claims to be legitimate representative of the authentic Muslims. In other words, the main threat for the human security is felt by the Shiite Muslims, the most prominent opponents of the ideology of the Islamic State, the campaigns directed against them, the violence that leads to purge sustain the fact that the Islamic State brings an argumentation of the threat for the security in the region.

The expansion of the Islamic State at the border between the two states, Iraq and Syria, directly threatens their security, but also the whole region. The incorporation of the Sunni areas from Iraq and Syria, as well as the support of other jihadist groups from the Muslim states, raise the issue of the even greater expansion of the Islamic State. The greatest threat does not come from gaining territories and establishing a new authority, since, at least in the case of Syria, the instability was much greater due to the civil war, than after the region was subordinated to the Islamic State, but from its ideology.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the alarming threat is the perspective of extending the ideology and the practices of the Islamic State to other parts of the region, which would lead to an increase in violence and hence instability, already high after the Arab Spring.

The possibility of the expansion brings another alarming problem. As is the case with the occupied territories between the two states, the Islamic State choose the abolition of any form of authority from the state, establishing the Islamic law and its authority. The perspective of the expansion to other territories also includes this issue and creates worries because the state's

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<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29123528>

<sup>40</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, Carla E Humud, "The Islamic State crisis and U.S. policy", *Congressional Research Service*, June, 15, 2015, 1.

‘authorities can be abolished<sup>41</sup> and their legitimacy transferred to the Islamic State. But this group is an out of state, extremist group with terrorist activities, whose legitimacy is not recognized internationally. In such a context appears the question of how to negotiate with such authority, which has self-proclaimed its legitimacy to be a representative of the Sunni Muslims, and how to reach an agreement to end the violence when the Islamic State is not actually a state in the larger meaning of this word.

The issue of negotiation, of dialogue, and the agreement for stopping the violence is irrelevant to the Islamic State through its refuse to stop the violent actions considered justified in the name of the cause that it pursues. The Islamic State does not accept the negotiation with the existing political authorities considered as deviations from the Islamic law, it can not have a dialogue with the Shiites whom it consider to be heretics and must be brought on the right way, does not accept agreements with the non- Muslim, Western authorities because the goal of the Islamic State is to eliminate the interference of the Western powers from the region, essential for the Caliphate expansion.

An important element that must be taken into account in any strategy of defeating the Islamic State is "the will and the capacity of the Arab Sunni community from Iraq and Syria, which are under its control, to reject the Islamic State, and then to join the states of Iraq and Syria, reformed."<sup>42</sup> It is inevitable to ask how this is going to work, considering that, besides the fact that the Islamic State "is under the command of a military force that tries to govern the cities under its authority [...] the measures used in this direction are also of a coercive nature, but also include the provision of services to the population from there."<sup>43</sup> It is difficult to estimate how the overthrow of the Islamic State control will succeed when it enjoys the support of the Sunni Muslim precisely because it provides social services, offering a better situation than what the two states offered when they had control of these areas.

The general challenge for the security in the Middle East region is due to the extreme level of violence that can be reached. The use of violence on the distinction made between the Sunnis and the heretics encourages a sectarian war that significantly increases the degree of violence. However, the holy mission of establishing the Caliphate increases the possibility of violence against anyone who opposes this mission, what is relevant here is the fight between the Islamic State and other Sunni jihadist groups that represent a possible threat for the authority of the former.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Islamic state represents a new danger to the security of the Middle East region, especially because of the extremist ideology which stays at its foundation. The threats to the security in the region are due to its violent methods, which increases the insecurity level of the individual, especially of those who can be considered enemies. There is also a perpetual threat regarding the expansion of the group in other parts of the region through its connections with other jihadist groups from the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore, the threat translates into the possible removal of some political authorities which have legitimacy and their replacement with the out of state authorities of the Islamic State, which directly affect the dialogue and the

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<sup>41</sup> Kimberly Kagan, Frederick W. Kagan, & Jessica D. Lewis "A strategy to defeat the Islamic State", *Middle East Security Report*, 23, (2014), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Kagan, Lewis "A strategy to defeat the Islamic State", 7.

<sup>43</sup> Kagan, Lewis "A strategy to defeat the Islamic State", 18.

cooperation in the region, both of other international actors involved, but also on the Suniti-Shiite dichotomy.

The increase of the threat for the security of the Islamic State has been highlighted after the actions and successes obtained by this group in the last years, especially in the initiation of the Arab Spring. Basically, this group managed to defeat the security forces of two states and to establish its "own state" at the border between the two. The rapidity with which the group has achieved all these successes has drawn the attention to the fact that its threat is not one that can be undermined, but one that needs to be taken into account because the Islamic State has already shown that there is no limit to force it to temper its actions and operations, and therefore to reduce its violence level.

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