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ISIS – a Unifying Enemy?

Abstract

The establishment of the `Islamic State`, a self-proclaimed caliphate, in June 2014 drastically changed the political landscape of the Middle East. The jihadist organization which grew under al-Qaeda`s wing is now being considered a threat to all the parties involved, including both states in the region (like Iran and Saudi Arabia) and the external powers (like the United States and Russia). The best solution to such a problem would be the creation of a great coalition aiming to end `the Islamic State`s` activities. It seems, however, that having a common enemy is not enough for the states to put their differences aside and start to cooperate. This is mainly due to their conflicting interests in Syria and Iraq and the possibility that a military intervention against the jihadists could serve as an excuse to end Bashar al-Assad`s rule.

Keywords: *ISIS, Islamic State, Syria, Iraq, jihadists, Middle East, threat, United States*

Introduction

The Middle East has long been regarded as one of the least, if not the least, stable areas in the entire world. The bigger part of the last decade saw a political struggle between two unofficial region-wide alliances with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan on one side and Iran, Syria and several powerful factions in Lebanon on the other. Many believe that this fight for power and influence heavily contributed to the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring, a series of events which has already reshaped the Middle East and that is most likely going to have even more long-lasting effects, that are, as of now, still difficult to determine.

Yet, in the last few months a new phenomenon could be observed. The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham[1], or ISIS for short, has produced a powerful entity that both countries in the region and the external powers, such as the United States and Russia, regard as a threat to their interests and security. While there have been several causes that united most political actors (like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990), the existence of ISIS is the first instance in a very long time, when virtually all states involved in the Middle Eastern politics have a common enemy. Therefore, paradoxically, ISIS might be considered a blessing by some. As history has proven time and again, having a common enemy creates a framework for cooperation among rivaling parties, which in turn relieves tensions and gives hope for a brighter future. But can the fight against ISIS serve such a purpose?

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[1] Al-Sham is the traditional Arabic name for the region of Greater Syria, also known as the Levant.

The Rise of ISIS

ISIS is usually described as a terrorist group bent on spreading jihad all over the region and subsequently, the world. It was first founded as Jama`at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Group of Monotheism and Jihad) in 1999 by a Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (born Ahmad Fadeel al-Nazal al-Khalayleh). As a young man, al-Zarqawi had heard stories about the Afghan War of the 1980s, and had undergone a religious conversion. In 1989, along with several of his friends, he traveled to Afghanistan to participate in the fighting against the Soviets, but arrived too late as the occupants were already leaving. After the end of the war al-Zarqawi worked as a reporter for the Islamists. Soon after his return to Jordan he was arrested and imprisoned in the al-Sawwaqa desert prison in 1994. Al-Zarqawi was released 5 years later due to a royal amnesty[2]. Shortly after, he created JTJW, which soon grew in numbers.

It is worth noting that JTJW was often compared to al-Qaeda, another famous militant group rooting back to the Afghan war. However, as Aaron Y. Zelin rightly points out, from the very beginning there have been several major differences between the two, one of which was the socioeconomic backgrounds of their founding members. Usama ibn Ladin and his associates were a part of the upper middle class (in some cases, even more than that), while al-Zarqawi and his comrades came from the poorer parts of their societies. This factor had a major impact

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[2] Nimrod Raphaeli, `*The Sheikh of the Slaughterers*`: *Abu Mus`ab Al-Zarqawi and the Al-Qaeda Connection*, Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No.231, http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/1406.htm (accessed on 30.09.2014).

on their policies as well as ideology[3]. Consequently, in the late 1990s and early 2000s the relationship between JTJW and al-Qaeda was ambiguous at best. Even though the two groups worked together on several occasions, the amount of hostilities and the mutual lack of trust prevented them from creating an alliance.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington helped al-Qaeda achieve international fame (or rather, infamy) and led to the organization`s status at the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world. At the same time, however, the global public opinion was still rather unfamiliar with the existence of al-Zarqawi`s group, whose activities were up till that point mostly `local`. American invasion of Afghanistan and the events that followed, dramatically changed JTJW`s scope of operations. In early 2002 several operatives of the group were arrested in Europe, while al-Zarqawi himself spent much time traveling across the Middle East, recruiting new members and building his network. The 2003 war in Iraq only contributed to al-Zarqawi`s growth in power[4]. His brutal attacks on the coalition forces quickly moved him to top of the `most wanted` list. Though some believe that al-Zarqawi`s group`s activities in Iraq were coordinated by al-Qaeda from the start, it seems more likely that the close cooperation between the two began in late 2004, after al-Zarqawi ended his personal rivalry with ibn Ladin by

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[3] Aaron Y. Zelin, *The War between ISIS and al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement*, p. 1-2, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote_20_Zelin.pdf (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[4] M. J. Kirdar, *Al Qaeda in Iraq*, p. 3-4, Case Study Number 1, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2011, http://csis.org/files/publication/110614_Kirdar_AlQaedaIraq_Web.pdf (accessed on 30.09.2014).

vowing obedience to him[5]. JTJW was subsequently renamed Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (Organization of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia). More commonly, it was referred to as `al-Qaeda in Iraq`.

Despite their alliance, the differences between al-Qaeda and AQI soon began to grow again. Senior members of the former believed al-Zarqawi to be too radical and his actions too violent, which they believed hurt the jihadist movement in general and alienated its potential supporters among the Muslim people[6]. Even though AQI`s leader had been scolded several times, he did not change his tactics. In early 2006 AQI merged with several other Iraq-based Islamist groups to create an umbrella organization Majlis Shura al-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Shura Council), which was consolidated and renamed Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyyah (Islamic State of Iraq), following the death of al-Zarqawi from an American air strike a few months later[7]. While never explicitly stated, all of these actions were supposed to help the group differentiate itself from al-Qaeda and minimize the latter`s influence over its agenda and operations[8]. In the next few years ISI suffered major blows from the United States` and Iraqi military forces. Despite its losses, which included the deaths of several of its leaders, including Abu Omar al-

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[5] Zachary Laub, *Islamic State in Iraq and Syria*, http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state-iraq-syria/p14811 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[6] Zelin, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[7] Scott Monje, *The ISIS Story*, http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2014/07/03/the-isis-story (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[8] Subsequent leaders of ISI and ISIS never pledged their obedience to al-Qaeda or any of its senior members. Since al-Zarqawi`s pledge died with him, the group has not technically been a subordinate of al-Qaeda since 2006.

Baghdadi, in 2010[9], the organization never came close to a total defeat. It also never officially severed its ties to al-Qaeda – in its darkest hours, it actually tried to strengthen them and gain more support.

The Arab Spring brought new opportunities to ISI. In 2011, in the wake of revolution in Syria, the organization decided to send jihadists, Iraqi experts and top lieutenants of guerrilla warfare into the war-torn country, seeing it as a chance to regain its position in the regional affairs. This led to the foundation of Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham (The Support Front for the People of al-Sham) in 2012, which quickly became to be regarded as `the most effective` of all the opposition groups involved in the conflict[10]. The turmoil of Arab Spring coupled with the American disengagement from Iraq also resulted in the resurgence of ISI activities in the country itself. In April 2013, the new leader of ISI, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, officially admitted that the Support Front was a section of AQI operating in Syria, and announced the merger of ISI and the Support Front into a new organization named al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi Iraq wa al-Sham (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham). The very next day, however, the Support Front`s leader, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, publicly criticized the idea of a merger. While he acknowledged ISI`s contributions to the Support Front`s cause, he pleaded his allegiance to

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[9] Bill Roggio, *US and Iraqi forces kill Al Masri and Baghdadi, al Qaeda in Iraq's top two leaders*, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/04/al_qaeda_in_iraqs_to.php (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[10] Noman Benotman, Roisin Blake, *Jabhat al-Nusra. A Strategic Briefing*, http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/jabhat-al-nusra-a-strategic-briefing.pdf (accessed on 30.09.2014).

Ayman al-Zawahiri, the head of al-Qaeda[11]. What followed in the next few months was a series of conflicting and disputing statements from the most important figures in the jihadist movements as well as some actual physical confrontations between ISIS forces and the Support Front. In the wake of the ongoing split, many members and supporters of the organizations began to switch sides. A large number of operatives and jihadists from the Support Front as well as a few al-Qaeda backers joined ISIS, while some of the latter group`s activists denounced al-Baghdadi[12]. Eventually, in February 2014 al-Qaeda officially dissociated itself from ISIS[13]. Nevertheless, it seems that it was ISIS who was more satisfied with the outcomes of the split. In the spring of 2014 it undertook a new military offensive and in June its militants took control over Mosul, the second largest city in Iraq[14]. Just a few weeks later the organization announced the establishment of the `Islamic State`, a caliphate with al-Baghdadi as its leader[15]. There have also been several reports about a possible reconciliation between ISIS and the Support

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[11] *Al-Nusra Front*, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493#note9 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[12] Mary Habeck, *Assessing the ISIS - al-Qaeda Split: The Origins of the Dispute*, http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/193-assessing-the-isis-al-qaeda-split-the-origins-of-the-dispute-1 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[13] Liz Sly, *Al-Qaeda disavows any ties with radical Islamist ISIS group in Syria, Iraq*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/al-qaeda-disavows-any-ties-with-radical-islamist-isis-group-in-syria-iraq/2014/02/03/2c9afc3a-8cef-11e3-98ab-fe5228217bd1_story.html (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[14] Bill Roggio, *ISIS takes control of Mosul, Iraq`s second largest city*, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/06/isis_take_control_of.php (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[15] *Sunni rebels declare new 'Islamic caliphate'*, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/isil-declares-new-islamic-caliphate-201462917326669749.html (accessed on 30.09.2014).

Front[16]. As of September 2014, the `Islamic State` spreads over large areas in both Iraq and Syria. Some analysts believe it to be the size of Great Britain[17].

A common enemy

Though it would be rather unfair to argue that the rise of ISIS in the last few years was caused by the ignorance and the lack of determination of the West (especially the United States) and its allies in the Middle East, it must be said that they are largely to blame. The growing problem may not have been unnoticed, it was, however, definitely underestimated, a fact that it is now being admitted even by the top decision-makers in the world[18]. American disengagement from Iraq, which officially ended in 2011, happened at the worst time possible – in the midst of the Arab Spring. The Iraqi military force, which had to be recreated almost from scratch following the 2003 intervention, proved to be mostly ineffective and not yet ready to deal on its own with threats as powerful as ISIS. Moreover, jihadists drew their strength from the weakening of the Bashar al-Assad`s regime in Syria. While the

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[16] Martin Chulov, *Isis reconciles with al-Qaida group as Syria air strikes continue*, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/28/isis-al-qaida-air-strikes-syria (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[17] Ian Johnston, *The rise of Isis: Terror group now controls an area the size of Britain, expert claims*, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-rise-of-isis-terror-group-now-controls-an-area-the-size-of-britain-expert-claims-9710198.html?COLLCC=1932038884&;
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-rise-of-isis-terror-group-now-controls-an-area-the-size-of-britain-expert-claims-9710198.html?COLLCC=1932038884& (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[18] *Obama: Nie doceniliśmy siły Państwa Islamskiego*, http://www.wprost.pl/ar/471569/Obama-Nie-docenilismy-sily-Panstwa-Islamskiego (accessed on 30.09.2014).

Syrian president is definitely an autocratic leader, largely responsible for the death of almost 200,000 people killed during the civil war that started in 2011, there have been growing voices that tried to defend some of his actions, believing him to be the `lesser of two evils`[19]. For the majority of time, however, these were ignored – the West, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states all seemed to be bent on toppling al-Assad, which in turn, they hoped, would have severely weakened Iran, his closest ally. While it is not the aim of this article to criticize nor commend such goal, it has to be stressed that it was a mistake on their behalf to treat the Syrian opposition as a homogenous entity and not to recognize the threat of the jihadist involvement sooner.

Not until the takeover of Mosul did the global public opinion realize how complicated the situation in Iraq and Syria truly was. Due to the lack of solid information, it is difficult to give even approximate estimations of ISIS true power. Colin Clarke, an associate political scientist at the Rand Corporation, believes that its fighting force consists of 10,000-20,000 militants, although other analysts place that number as high as 80,000. It is also incredibly well organized and equipped with professional weapons, such as sniper rifles, mortars, heavy machine guns, anti-tank weapons, RPGs, tanks, Humvees and air defence systems

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[19] See for example: Doug Bandow, *Choosing between Two Evils in Syria*, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/choosing-between-two-evils-syria-7292, Jasmine D. Smith, *Lesser of Two Evils: Syrian Activist Would Support Assad*, http://borgenproject.org/lesser-two-evils-syrian-activist-support-assad, Georgi Ivanov, *Syria Civil War: Why We Should Reconsider Kicking Bashar Assad Out, and Consider the Russian Stance on Syria*, http://mic.com/articles/15469/syria-civil-war-why-we-should-reconsider-kicking-bashar-assad-out-and-consider-the-russian-stance-on-syria (accessed on 30.09.2014).

– MANPADs[20]. Moreover, it is far more self-sustaining than Al-Qaeda as it is not dependent financially on external funders. The `Islamic State` also possesses an excellent managerial personnel and well trained functionaries. The territories it has taken over are actually properly administrated[21] – the jihadists collect taxes, run schools etc[22]. ISIS also grows richer selling oil from the conquered oilfields. Some analysts estimate its oil revenues to actually reach $2 million a day[23]. It should also be noted that the jihadists profited greatly from the capturing of Mosul – they seized over $400 million from the city`s central bank, which allowed ISIS to become the richest terrorist group in the world[24]. The `Islamic State` quickly became infamous in the Western media for its activities that have been described as `barbaric`[25]. They include, among others, brutal executions of foreigners and torturing people.

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[20] Mark Gollom, *ISIS by the numbers: How big, strong and rich the militant organization may be*, http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/isis-by-the-numbers-how-big-strong-and-rich-the-militant-organization-may-be-1.2746332 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[21] Ironically, al-Zarqawi`s first organization, JTJW, was very poor when it came to institution-building. Its capacities in that regard were heavily developed under the guidance of al-Qaeda after 2004, to the point where, colloquially speaking, the student actually outgrew his teacher.

[22] Patrycja Chomicka, *Koszmar kalifatu – czyli dlaczego Państwo Islamskie należy traktować jako poważne zagrożenie*, http://notabene.org.pl/index.php/koszmar-kalifatu-czyli-dlaczego-panstwo-islamskie-nalezy-traktowac-jako-powazne-zagrozenie (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[23] Suleiman Al-Khalidi, *How Islamic State uses Syria's oil to fuel its advances*, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/19/syria-oil-idUSL6N0RJ4FQ20140919 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[24] Terrence McCoy, *ISIS just stole $425 million, Iraqi governor says, and became the 'world's richest terrorist group'*, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/06/12/isis-just-stole-425-million-and-became-the-worlds-richest-terrorist-group (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[25] Salman Shaikh, *Succeeding Against ISIS Requires a U.S. Strategy for Syria*, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/iran-at-saban/posts/2014/09/14-obama-isis-success-rests-on-syria (accessed on 30.09.2014).

While the `Islamic State` certainly poses a threat to the Western world (as well as to other powers, such as Russia), one must first consider the ramifications and the impact of the organization`s policies and its conquests on the stability of the Middle East itself. As mentioned before, ISIS is an enemy to virtually every state in the region. However, as far as decision-makers in the Muslim countries are concerned, the problem is less about the sole fact that the `Islamic state` succeeds, and more about why it succeeds. Many have observed that the group draws its power from the discontent of the Sunni people in Iraq and Syria. One must not forget about the complicated religious and tribal divisions in both of these countries. In Iraq, Sunni Muslims constitute only 30% of the population[26], but under the Ba`ath Party`s rule they were the cornerstone of the country`s administrative structure, while the Shiite Muslims were discriminated. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and especially under the rule of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, the Sunni people have lost their privileges and it is now them who feel oppressed[27]. In Syria, the situation is vastly different. There, the Sunni Muslims are a majority – 70% of the country`s population[28]. But under the al-Assad family`s regime, it is the Shiite, mostly Alawits, who are in charge.

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[26] *Sasnal: Irak. Rozpad państwa?*, http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/rozmowa-dnia/20140711/sasnal-wsrod-scenariuszy-dla-iraku-jest-tez-rozpad-panstwa (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[27] *Maliki's Actions Continue to Antagonize Iraqi Sunnis*, http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/malikis-actions-continue-antagonize-iraqi-sunnis?print (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[28] Primoz Manfreda, *The Difference Between Alawites and Sunnis in Syria*, http://middleeast.about.com/od/syria/tp/The-Difference-Between-Alawites-And-Sunnis-In-Syria.htm (accessed on 30.09.2014).

It is clear that ISIS activities directly tie into, feed from and reinforce the growing tensions between the Shiite and the Sunni people. Taking into consideration the massive unrests during the Arab Spring, a larger-scale, potentially even regional, conflict between the two groups (who, in turn, comprise of many smaller sectarian groups, making the situation even more complicated) is no longer an impossible scenario. Nevertheless, it is still a distant concern. The short term problem, however, is that ISIS will probably continue to exploit the dissatisfaction of certain groups (as long as they fall into its guidelines and strategy) in other Muslim countries to recruit new members. What is also dangerous for the countries in the Middle East is the fact that ISIS is far more radical than al-Qaeda ever was. While the latter organization`s goal was more about fighting the external, mostly Western, `threat`, the former`s top priority is `purifying` the Muslim world from anything it does not consider `truly Islamic`, thus making none of the other Muslim countries safe. Additionally, the self-proclaimed status as the caliphate means that the `Islamic State` demands other countries in the region to surrender to its rule. It is obvious that none of them would be willing to do so. ISIS and its expansion are even more worrying for Israel, the only non-Muslim country in the Middle East. The jihadists do not try to hide the fact that one of their chief intentions is to destroy `the Zionists`[29].

The interests of external powers are also in danger. A further deterioration of the situation in the Middle East would be a nightmare scenario for the United States, who have been trying to play the role of

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[29] Allen West, *ISIS plans to destroy "Zionist regime" in Israel – with nukes if necessary*, http://allenbwest.com/2014/06/isis-plans-destroy-zionist-regime-israel-nukes-necessary (accessed on 30.09.2014).

a stabilizer in the regional matters since the end of the Cold War. Additionally, after the execution of James Foley, an American journalist, in August 2014[30], which made numerous headlines in his home country, Washington`s struggle against ISIS became almost `personal`. The `Islamic State` is also a menace to Russia, another superpower involved in the region. Firstly, it weakened Bashar al-Assad, one of the Kremlin`s key allies in the Middle East. Secondly, it is now threatening to `liberate` Chechnya and Caucasus and to incorporate these regions into the caliphate[31]. Another key player is the European Union. The organization is concerned about the possible destabilization of the neighboring region as well as the fact that many of the ISIS recruits come from European countries, which makes said countries easier to be infiltrated by jihadists.

Conflicting interests

As presented above, every single country involved in the Middle Eastern affairs opposes the `Islamic State`s` practices. The level of danger it poses is obviously not the same for everyone, but some countries already perceive it as a direct threat. While having a common enemy could allow said countries to put their differences aside, form a coalition against it and, in long term, learn to cooperate in certain other areas, there are very little chances of that actually happening.

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[30] Tim Walker, *James Foley 'beheaded': Isis video shows militant with British accent 'execute US journalist' – as hunt begins for killer*, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/british-islamic-state-jihadist-beheads-american-journalist-james-foley-in-chilling-video-9679827.html (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[31] *ISIS threatens to 'liberate' Chechnya and Caucasus*, http://rt.com/news/184836-isis-putin-kadyrov-syria (accessed on 30.09.2014).

Firstly, one must not forget that the rise of ISIS did not happen `out of nowhere`. Quite the contrary, it was a direct effect of the power struggle between the opposing camps in the region and their allies. Therefore, the `Islamic State` is an enfant terrible of the proxy wars policy, but still considered more of a rare accident rather than the typical result. Consequently, its existence, at least in the eyes of current decision-makers, does not undermine the necessity and efficiency of said strategy. Additionally, the fact that the rise of ISIS was at least partially caused by their rivals` behind-the-scenes activity should make the idea of cooperation even less viable for some countries.

Secondly, the conflict with ISIS cannot be `excluded` from the context of the present situation in the region – Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and the United States still oppose Bashar al-Assad`s regime. Therefore, Damascus and its allies have the right to suspect that a military intervention against ISIS could potentially be used to also oust al-Assad himself. It was not long ago that NATO forces instrumentally used the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 to topple Muammar Gaddafi in Libya[32]. Concerns about history repeating itself have already been expressed by the Kremlin. In September 2014 Russia`s foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, criticized the Americans for a series of airstrikes aimed at ISIS positions, which were carried out in the preceding weeks. He stressed that such operations should be conducted in accordance with

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[32] See: Niels Rijke, *Intervention in Libya: A Crime of Aggression?*, ICD Brief, March 2014, http://www.internationalcrimesdatabase.org/upload/documents/20140318T104818-ICD%20Brief%204%20-%20Rijke.pdf (accessed on 30.09.2014).

the international law and need to be consulted with Damascus beforehand[33].

Thirdly, there seems to be little willingness of the countries in the Middle East to create a region-wide coalition. The Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. may be more open about the idea, but countries like Qatar and Turkey are not[34]. Moreover, negative connotations with the rhetoric used by the Western decision-makers, which is very reminiscent of George W. Bush`s `war on terror`, may discourage prospective participants from joining. There may still be a glimmer of hope, as Iran declared its readiness to join such a coalition, but only if the West makes serious concessions in the nuclear talks[35]. However, the Western leaders` response is likely to be negative.

Fourthly, a simple military intervention against ISIS is not going to be enough to stabilize the situation. As mentioned before, much of its power is drawn from the discontent of the people. Even if the organization is weakened from the attacks, it will still manage to regrow (or be replaced by a new one) unless an alternative is presented to its supporters. That, however, would require a grander socioeconomic and power-balancing strategy for Iraq, Syria and other areas, a strategy no one is ready to come up with, let alone persuade others to back it up.

Conclusion

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[33] *Ławrow krytykuje ataki sił USA na pozycje islamistów w Syrii*, http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,16712661,Lawrow_krytykuje_ataki_sil_USA_na_pozycje_islamistow.html (accessed on 30.09.2014).

[34] Shaikh, *op. cit.*

[35] Benny Avni, *Iran Says It's Willing to Fight ISIS, for a Price*, http://www.newsweek.com/iran-says-its-willing-fight-isis-price-273939 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

The existence of the `Islamic State` presents a serious danger to the stability of the Middle East and the security of the countries located in the region. Even though all the state actors involved in the situation seem to agree that ISIS should be eliminated, conflicting interests and the lack of strategy or mutual trust prevent them from building a broader coalition, which could serve as a possible basis for future cooperation. While ISIS is a substantial threat to everyone`s interests in the Middle East, it is still not serious enough to become a `unifying enemy`. The countries are more willing to fend for themselves rather than give support to their rivals.

With ISIS power on the rise, it is really difficult to predict what the future might bring. A lot depends on the American approach. The superpower may either enter another long-lasting military conflict in the Middle East almost on its own, as it has done in the past, or concentrate on diplomacy and trying to build a consensus among the countries in the region concerning possible solutions. The Muslim countries involved in the rivalry also need to start thinking long-term and unite to combat a threat that is giving Islam a bad name.

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1. *Al-Nusra Front*, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/493#note9 (accessed on 30.09.2014).

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