

ISIS: The 21st Century Investment

Samy Tolaymat

Diablo Valley College

### Abstract

On 29 June 2014, ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, announced their establishment over Iraq and Levant Countries. Over 30 countries are fighting ISIS without being able to at least stop the rapid growth of it. Meaning that not only one government is involved in the rise and growth of ISIS, and this proclaimed fight is definitely serving a lot of countries interests. After researching the reasons why ISIS came into being, the data shows that the realism theory is the clearest one to explain the presence of ISIS, and to explain the proclaimed war against ISIS. This essay will prove, through books, documentaries and internet articles, how the presence of ISIS serves the interests of each country proclaims its enmity to ISIS, as well as how some countries are involved in creating ISIS.

### Introduction

ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, is the most successful and dangerous jihadist militant group the world has ever seen. Many have analyzed the way this group has grown up. However, there is no doubt that the instability and turmoil caused by the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 looked desirable to any terrorist group like ISIS to take over the country. Bunzel says in the book *From Paper State to Caliphate the Ideology of the Islamic State*, “While the Islamic State had hoped for this level of zeal from its 2006 founding, its initial efforts failed. Sectarian turmoil in Iraq and Syria has given the group a new lease on life, and allowed it to pursue its original caliphate vision. On February 2, 2014, al-Qaeda issued a statement officially dissociating itself from the Islamic State. The statement asserted that al-Qaeda was “not responsible for [the Islamic State’s] actions,” (Bunzel2015). However, whether it was related or not, there is no doubt that they both, ISIS and al Qaeda, serve their creators and supporters interests. Bunzel added “The true nature of the groups’ relationship, according to Adnani, was that the Islamic State acted independently within Iraq while deferring to al-Qaeda’s leadership beyond” (Bunzel, 2015).

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the U.S. has gained much during its occupation of Iraq, which in turn may have a major factor in the rise of ISIS. Furthermore, the destabilization and instability caused by the conflict between al Assad and his opponents, has a lot to do with the rise of ISIS. ISIS has become a threat to Arabs as they would rather now be governed by their dictator regimes than to be ruled by a terrorist group like ISIS. On September 2014, ten of the Arab countries joined the US in their war against ISIS. However, the longer this proclaimed war against ISIS continues, the stronger ISIS becomes. Meaning that not only one government is involved in the rise and growth of ISIS, and this proclaimed fight is definitely

servicing a lot of countries' interests. A country with a government that views the world through the lens of realism is a country who exploits any conflict to serve their interests with the respect to its alliances' ones. Therefore, all countries, who announced the fight against ISIS, are benefiting from ISIS presence. The more ISIS prevails, the more these countries will benefit.

### **Islamizing the Syrian Conflict is What Created the Syrian Part of ISIS.**

Arab uprisings, a hegemonic regime led by an Alawite dictator, and the arrest and torture of Daraa's kids on March 6, 2011, were enough to Syrians to start their peaceful revolution on March 18, 2011 against their dictator president Bashar al Assad. The wave of killings, arrests, and torturing against peaceful demonstrators in the first six months by the secret forces and the national army created more revengeful opponents to the regime. On September 6, 2011, Hussein Harnosuh was the first soldier to defect from the national Syrian army. He then went on to create the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Abouzaeid wrote in an article called "Syria: Cracks in the Armor" in *Time magazine*, "He had to defect...to take responsibility for protecting civilians in Jisr al-Shoughour" and that Harnosuh's only regret was that he "was late in taking this decision. 'I feel like I am responsible for the deaths of every single martyr in Syria'" (Abouzeid, 2011). The FSA, representing all Syria sects, announced protecting demonstrators and toppling the regime as their goals. Not only were Syrians optimistic that the FSA would topple al Assad regime, but other countries also started showing their optimism about the FSA, giving hope to Syrians. Jeffrey White, a military analyst with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, was optimistic about the FSA when it was first created. White said, "I believe the FSA is now one of the drivers of the situation. It is going to shape the outcome. It has changed the nature of the conflict with the regime, is becoming increasingly identified with the popular opposition within Syria, has shown resilience on the battlefield, and is growing in capabilities and numbers" (Blanford, 2012).

However, the sectarian policy of the Islamophobic Alawite regime in targeting Sunni civilians, as well as the regime's trials in islamizing the revolution, were behind the rising of many un-united armed fighting groups, some of who are fighting in the name of the Syrian revolution while others are extremists fighting in the name of Islam. There is no doubt that these armed fighting groups were not all organic. A few months after the start of the revolution, al Assad's regime freed many of its old detainees; Zahran Alloush was one of them. On September 29, 2013, Alloush created Liwa al-Islam, an extremist armed group who proclaimed their opposition against al Assad. According to an article published by *The Long War Journal*, "Alloush, now military head of the Islamic Front, and previous head of the Army of Islam, a coalition of some 43 Syrian fighting groups with total membership earlier estimated at up to 50,000, is a Salafist who served formerly as head of the Liwa al-Islam. In late September, Liwa al-Islam joined with the Al Nusrah Front and a number of other powerful Islamist brigades in issuing a statement opposing the Syrian National Council and calling for the imposition of sharia in Syria" (Lundquist, 2013). On April 2015, Orient News, a Syrian opposition channel, released a video that shows how Alloush was showing off his army five kilometers away from the presidential palace without any trials to bomb or attack it, leaving a lot of people suspicious about why he did not do that since he opposes the al Assad regime.

According to Tarek Alghorani, who was sentenced in 2006 to seven years in jail for the contents of his blog, "There were about ten of us bloggers, around one hundred Kurds and the rest were just normal people. I'd say that, when they went in, around 90 percent were simply normal Muslims" (Cordall, 2014). Alghorani described the circumstances in the jail he was in, how there was a lack of water, food, and space, and how the everyday torture he and others experienced for seven years were what converted those moderate Muslims to "Salafists and in a

bad, bad way... Alghorani fellow prisoners were members of ISIS. Abu Muhammad al-Joulani, (founder of the Jihadist group, Jabhat al-Jabhat al-Nusra) was rumored to be there. Mohammed Haydar Zammam, (one of the organizers of the 9/11 attacks) was there. This is where the Syrian part of ISIS was born,' he [Alghorani] said, "From the first days of the revolution (in March 2011), Assad denounced the organization as being the work of radical Salafists, so he released the Salafists he had created in his prisons to justify the claim 'If you do not have an enemy, you create an enemy'" (Cordall, 2014). Professor J. J. Davenport, a professor of Philosophy and director of peace and justice studies from 2014 to 2016 at Fordham University, agreed with the story of Alghorani. He believes that the West's silence while al Assad was slaughtering Sunnis is what influenced some young Sunnis to think that joining groups like ISIS and al Nusra Front is the way to protect their Sunni sect (Cordal, 2014). Then Davenport suggested a plan to fight ISIS. "The key to stopping ISIS is to regain the support of the large majority of Sunnis in Iraq and Syria who do not want butchers like ISIS ruling their villages and towns" (Cordal, 2014). He concludes by suggesting that al Assad and ISIS should be fought together by supporting the moderate fighters represented by the FSA (Cordal, 2014). Al Assad actively participated in creating fake enemies like ISIS that would threaten the world after he realized that he was not able to hide his crimes against a peaceful revolution. Therefore, the media moved their attention from talking about his crimes to talking about ISIS crimes; as it threatens the world.

Al Assad, by paving the way in front of these radical Islamic fighting groups, moved himself from a position in which he was going to be convicted for his crimes to a position in which he would be negotiated with. John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, in an interview with CBS News, suggested what Syrians asked for when they first started their revolution: a political transition through negotiation. "Washington has long insisted that Assad must be replaced

through a negotiated, political transition, although the rise of a common enemy, hardline militant group Islamic State, appears to have slightly softened the West's stance toward him. We have to negotiate in the end," Kerry said when he was asked whether the United States would be willing to negotiate with Assad, and that "We've always been willing to negotiate in the context of the Geneva I process" (Wroughton, 2015). This political negotiation, through the lens of realism, means looking for mutual interests that would make both parties better off, regardless the number of casualties.

### **The Russian Airstrike Fulfilled al Assad's Protection to ISIS**

Al Assad tended to balance the power between the fighting groups by creating an actual enemy for the FSA, and a fake enemy for him while he and his allies remain the strongest. Reports by *Al-Monitor journal* recorded that "What's even more important was the fact that villages that had not been targeted for a considerable period of time were now bombed by the regime in conjunction with IS' attack on rebel forces in Tlalin, which had not been bombed since July 2014, and Herbel, which had been spared since August 2014" (Al-Khatieb, 2015). That indicates to a hidden alliance between the Syrian regime and ISIS, not to forget that they have the same enemy.

Furthermore, it seems that the sectarian war practiced by Hezbollah and the Army of the 'Guardians of the Iranian Islamic Revolution' against the FSA and Sunni civilians were not enough to suppress a revolution. Therefore, al Assad had to beg his strongest ally's pardon, Russia, to an official military interference. On September 30, 2015, the Russian airstrike started in Syria proclaiming their joining to fight ISIS. K. Shaheen wrote in *The Guardian journal* a week after the start of the Russian airstrike, "Russia has repeatedly targeted opposition groups who have fought both ISIS and the regime of President Bashar al-Assad since it launched its

military intervention in Syria more than a week ago. Russian warplanes have struck rebel positions in the province of Hama, where the opposition in recent months scored significant gains, advancing closer to the Assad regime's western strongholds" (Shaheen,2015). Then Shaheen added indicating to the failure of the Russian airstrike supported by al Assad army on the ground. "The aerial campaign paved the way for a ground offensive by the regime, though that has failed so far to win significant territory" (Shaheen, 2015). Russia satisfied al Assad's desire by fighting the moderate fighters and targeting civilians. B. Atassi reported to 'al Jazeera' about civilians' losses "In Idlib's Jabal al-Zawiya region, two children were among at least seven civilians killed in suspected Russian air strikes, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights" (Atassi, 2015).

The failure of the Russian airstrike in fighting the FSA led Russia to offer maliciously an alliance with the FSA to fight ISIS, according to Osama Abu Zaid, the FSA spokesman. Abu Zaid indicated, in an interview in RT channel few days after the Russian airstrike started, to al Assad/Russian failure as the FSA was able to destroy over 50 tanks and three helicopters in few days. Abu Zaid responded when the broadcaster asked him about the FSA position from the Russian offer and previous American offers regarding the FSA training plan, saying "the FSA decision cannot be made in Washington, Paris, nor London. The FSA decision is made on the battlefield that is destroying al Assad's forces and the Russian ones. Our refuse to the American plan is based on our belief in independence; unlike al Assad's regime that asked for the interference of Iranians, Lebanese, Afghani, and the Russian to help him. We, the FSA, refused the offer of an American training plan because it refused to topple al Assad or to target him. Because we, in the FSA, believe that al Assad is the source of terrorism, we decided to oust al Assad an al Baghdadi at the same time, which is not seriously offered by both Russia and the



US” (Abu Zaid, 2015). Then he ended his interview with the Russian channel saying, “it is revealed now that you, Russians, are exploiting the presence of ISIS to fight the Syrian revolution” (Abu Zaid, 2015). Abu Zaid perfectly showed why the revolution has not succeeded yet, simply because it would not serve any country’s interests.

### **The US Role in the War Against ISIS**

If the FSA was a perfect ally to the US, it would guarantee to the US a stronger hegemony than the Russian one, the US would have supported them before ISIS exists. As long as standing for the Syrian revolution will not guarantee any American interests, there will be no need to support it. However, the US did not show its opposition regarding supporting the FSA by offering a conditional childish training plan to the FSA fighters that includes training between 1000-1500 fighters a year. Khaled al Khoja, president of Syrian National Coalition, responded to the American training offer by saying in an interview at CNN. “It's very weak support. What we need is to have our own military equipment in order to defend the freed areas. Since we did not receive any kind of these sophisticated arms we cannot defend the people from the barrel bombs thrown by the Assad regime.” (Sciutto, 2015). This offer shows the American intentions in extending the conflict which gave fake hopes to Syrians. Not only did the US offered a childish training offer to the FSA, but also it stipulated that these weapons are only to fight ISIS. In the documentary made by Vice News, *Syria's Unending Rebel Conflict: Wolves of the Valley*, Mahmoud, a fighter in the FSA, revealed the intentions of the American support plan when he was asked about the training course length saying “It is one month, we stayed one week in Ankara for medical check-ups and three weeks in Qatar. Every month, a new group went there. There were one hundreds of us. We were trained for one week on how to use a Kalashnikov. And the rest of the two weeks we had learnt to use B9, Cannon, RPGs, and PKC machine guns” (Vice

News). Then Mahmoud added “They only give weapons to those who do the training. And they only give weapons to those who specifically fight ISIS. They are not giving us weapons to fight al Assad, they give us weapons to fight ISIS.” Recent reports show that the US is not targeting ISIS in their war against ISIS (Chossudovsky, 2015). Which also indicates to interests the US is trying to reach through the presence of ISIS as they used al Qaeda in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2003.

The US, as a country who views the world through the lens of realism, always tend to balance the power in any region by empowering the minorities and weakening the majorities. Which means that they would not tend to support a revolution, that represents a majority of Syrians. Furthermore, the US tended to strengthen Iran through a nuclear weapon deal that will make both countries better off as it will guarantee security to the US and will eliminate the economic sanction on Iran. And that will help Iran to extend its hegemony to more than the Shiaa Crescent limits that was announced and acknowledged by Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, in many of his speeches. According to Jerusalem center of public affair, an Israeli research institute and public policy, “Presumably, Iran would control or annex the Shiite sector containing the Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. In either case, ISIS would serve Iran as a useful tool for advancing its goal of achieving regional hegemony” (Inbari, 2015). Furthermore, the journal represented Iran’s motivation to support ISIS as it will serve the Iranian hegemonic interest in the middle east, “Going back to the 9/11 Commission Report, it has already been established that Iran even ‘facilitated the transit of al-Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, including future hijackers. Iran, according to the report, wished to conceal any past evidence of its cooperation with Sunni terrorists’ association with al-Qaeda,’ but these connections continued” (Inbari, 2015).

The indication that ISIS is a worldwide investment is the similarities ISIS has with each of the countries who proclaimed the fight against ISIS. For example, Russia is fighting the same enemy ISIS has, the FSA. There are also similarities between ISIS and the Syrian regime, as both enjoy killing civilians, the latter using chemical weapons and the former by killing them physically. One tends to hide its crimes stupidly while the other records them dramatically. Moreover, they both have the same enemy now, Hamas. Akram wrote in the NY times indicating to Hamas position against al Assad. "Hamas's prime minister in Gaza, Ismail Haniya, said during Friday Prayer, 'I salute all people of the Arab Spring, or Islamic winter, and I salute the Syrian people who seek freedom, democracy and reform'" (Akram , 2015). However, on July 1, 2015, ISIS threatened Hamas in a video published by Reuters warning Hamas that it will be overrun by the Islamists (Reuters, 2015). Which adds to the mutual enemies al Assad regime share with ISIS.

### **The Saudi Arabian Commonalities with ISIS**

Some analysts claim that Saudi Arabia is dreadfully involved in creating ISIS. In fact, ISIS and Saudi Arabia share a lot in common. According to Test Tube News, a Youtube channel, both ISIS and Saudi Arabia claim strong ties to Wahhabism, "There is no evidence linking the Saudi government directly to funding terrorist activities. But some Saudi Arabian citizens are funding groups like ISIS. Some experts argue that the citizens in question see funding radical groups as a way to gain a position of power and influence within the Islamic world. Other reports suggest that they might be using the strategy to limit Islamic extremism within their own country by sending young extremists abroad." (Testtube, 2015). Both studies make sense; however, the second study is more realistic. If some Saudis might practice their extremism against the Saudi government, the Saudi government would have the right to send them out of the country.

Nevertheless, the Wahhabi extremist Saudi regime is definitely responsible for raising ISIS's mentality in some Saudis. In addition, the revolutionary mentality the Arab spring has raised in some Arabs threatened other Arab regimes, especially the anarchy one. Therefore, those countries; i.e, the Arab gulf countries, would tend to fail any revolution. Which passively, would change their people's perspective regarding the Arab spring. That explains the huge support the Arab Gulf countries towards Egypt's new dictator, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. "Over the past two years, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have provided over \$20 billion in grants, oil shipments and support for the deteriorating reserve of Egypt's foreign currencies. The late King was also quick to support Egypt's position, officially declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a 'terrorist organization,' and a threat to Saudi security" (Dawoud, 2015). The Arab gulf countries bought their hegemony over a country where ISIS has lately created a threat that can only be defeated by Egypt's president.

The hundreds of thousands of casualties, and the millions of refugees ISIS and some governments have caused have nothing to do with the realism theory principals. Morals do not exist when interests exist. ISIS is a long time investment that will balance the power in the Levant countries, empower some countries, destroy others, and increase the hegemony of certain governments. Syrians and Iraqis are the oil of this investment; an investment that will end whenever ISIS starts to threaten its creators and supporters.

## References

- Abu Zaid. O. (2015, October 13). RFS Media Office. Retrieved on October 1, 2015 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLouYJXLOb8>
- Abouzeid, R. (2011, June 27). Syria: cracks in the armor. *Time*. Retrieved on September 2, 2015 from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2078022,00.html>
- Akram. F. (2012, February 24). In Break, Hamas Supports Syrian Opposition. *New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/hamas-leader-supports-syrian-opposition.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/world/middleeast/hamas-leader-supports-syrian-opposition.html?_r=0)
- Alloush. I. (2015, April, 30). Exclusive scenes for a large military parade for the Army of Islam, just five kilometers from the presidential palace. Retrieved on October 14, 2015 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9ggtLQu\\_ZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9ggtLQu_ZQ)
- Al-Khatieb. M. (2014, April 17). Why Assad may be helping Islamic State's offensive. *Al Monitor*. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/syria-aleppo-regime-army-assad-support-isis-marea-tlalin.html>
- Atassi. B. (2015, October 2). Russia accused of striking civilian targets in Syria. *Aljazeera*. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/russia-accused-striking-civilian-targets-syria-151002072135928.html>
- Blanford, N. (2012, Jan. 30). Free Syrian army: better tool for toppling Syria's Assad than UN? *The Christian Science Monitor*. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/0130/Free-Syrian-Army-Better-tool-for-toppling-Syria-s-Assad-than-UN>
- Bunzel, C. (2015). *From paper state to caliphate the Ideology of the Islamic state*. <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>

Chossudovsky, M. (2005). Twenty-six things about the Islamic State (ISIL) that Obama does Not want you to know about. *Global Research*.

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/twenty-six-things-about-the-islamic-state-isil-that-obama-does-not-want-you-to-know-about/5414735>

Cordall, S. S. (2014). How Syria's Assad helped forge ISIS. *Newsweek*.

<http://www.newsweek.com/how-syrias-assad-helped-forge-isis-255631>

Dawoud, K. (2015, August 11). Egypt and Saudi make a public show of support. *Real Clear Defense*.

[http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/08/11/egypt\\_and\\_saudi\\_make\\_a\\_public\\_show\\_of\\_support\\_108347.html](http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/08/11/egypt_and_saudi_make_a_public_show_of_support_108347.html)

Inbari, P. (2015, June, 19). ISIS: Iran's instrument for regional hegemony. Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs. <http://jcpa.org/article/isis-irans-instrument-regional-hegemony/>

Lieberman, M. (2015 Feb. 9). Test tube channel. *What Do ISIS and Saudi Arabia Have in Common*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=staMI7DoO-E>

Lundquist. (2013, November, 23). Analysis: Formation of Islamic Front in Syria benefits jihadist groups. *The long war journal*.

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/yesterday\\_a\\_new\\_isla.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/yesterday_a_new_isla.php)

Sciutto, J. (2015, May, 7). U.S. training of Syrian rebels set to begin.

*CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/06/politics/khaled-khoja-free-syrian-army-u-s-support/>

Shaheen, K. (2015). ISIS seizes ground from Aleppo rebels under cover of Russian airstrikes.

*The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/10/russian-airstrikes-help-isis-gain-ground-in-aleppo>

Wroughton, L. (2015, March). Kerry says Syrian transition would have to be negotiated with Assad. *Reuters*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/16/us-syria-crisis-kerry-idUSKBN0MB0JK20150316>