



## The Islamic State, or Jihad 2.0

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Le Chef de bataillon Stéphane SIMON

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Histoire & stratégie

**Battalion Commander Stéphane Simon considers that, even stronger than its fighters and territorial conquests, the communication of the terrorist organisation known as the Islamic State, over and above that of Al Qaeda, which it has outdated, aims to impose globally a perfectly established state project with no more and no less than the objective of "changing and saving the world".**

Even stronger than its fighters and its territorial conquests, the communication of the terrorist organisation known as the Islamic State, going beyond that of Al Qaeda, which it makes outdated, aims to impose globally a perfectly established state project having no more and no less as its objective than to "change and save the world".

This Sunni terrorist organisation is not the first to claim to be inspired by the Prophet and to practise a form of ultra-rigorous Islam against a backdrop of violent jihad against the "unbelievers". However, because of its unparalleled power of attraction among a non-negligible (and worrying) proportion of volunteers throughout the world, it constitutes a first in large-scale terrorism, a "revolution".

### **A real state-building project**

#### **- An Islamic proto-State**

Pierre-Jean Luizard[1] considers that, by its architecture, the Islamic state is indeed a state under construction and "could well be the first Salafist state to come into being". It has, it is true, the attributes of a state governed by the rule of law with a certain number of regalian functions. It has no legislative power, since it relies on Koranic law as its source of

law, but it does have executive power, embodied by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a self-proclaimed Caliph, and by consultative assemblies made up of local notables. The Islamic organisation has also been beating its own currency<sup>[2]</sup> with the "golden dinar" since the summer of 2015 in order to establish its state legitimacy.

On the question of borders, the definition of a state under strict international law<sup>[3]</sup> is somewhat upset because the so-called caliphate does not have one at the moment. At the very least, there are no decrees and even fewer recognized by the international community. It is therefore a hybrid geographical entity that is constantly evolving.

## **- A strategy far removed from nihilism**

Globalization, which is affecting all societies (cult of the individual, of personal success, globalization, instrumentalization of doctrines, sectarian attitudes, rejection of all imperialism...) is a breeding ground for the IA, which "captures" a fringe of the population that can no longer find its place within its own community or within the majority community because it no longer sees any social and religious evidence<sup>[4]</sup>. 4) In this configuration, neo-fundamentalism corresponds precisely to the phenomena of contemporary globalization: the destructuring of traditional societies, the re-founding of imaginary communities based on the individual, with Jihadism providing the territorial dimension on which to base its military, religious and, more generally, societal actions.

Scott Atran<sup>[5]</sup>, drawing on the studies conducted by his anthropological research team among young people from disadvantaged suburbs of Paris, London and Barcelona, as well as in interviews with former members of the terrorist organisation, warns that the Daesh phenomenon and its application of a radical Islam must be treated with great seriousness, because it conceals a real project for society that has no other will than to "change and save the world", according to its own rhetoric. The so-called Caliphate does not therefore aim at the annihilation of the world, but at a new order based on today's culture. Atran quotes Abu Musa, E.I.'s press officer in Raqqa: "We are not sending people back to the time of the carrier pigeons, but on the contrary, we will take advantage of new developments as long as they are not contrary to religion. In this respect, the project of the Islamic state is therefore more "attractive" than that of Al Qaeda, which has never meant anything other than a jihad against the West [6].

6) This quest for a social identity that would give their lives, as Atran<sup>[7]</sup> puts it, "meaning and a glorious destiny", resonates with the "dark side of globalization". Traditional "vertical" means of transmission (schools, places of worship, parents) are being replaced by new "horizontal" vectors (NICTs, targeted literature, etc.) that allow each person to forge his or her own religiosity, sometimes with the extreme deviations that make a terrorist organisation successful.

## **The communication strategy, a vector of its ideology**

The communication of the Islamic State begins with the autosuggestion it imposes, first locally, then to the world and to all the media. The communication of the Islamic state begins with the autosuggestion it imposes, first locally, then to the world and to all the media, by deciding to call itself in turn the Islamic state in Iraq (2006), then the Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant (E.I.I.L.), which will give the English acronym ISIS and the

Arabic acronym DAECH, and finally in 2014 the Islamic State (I.S.). It implies that the organisation tacitly endorses its brand, its label and its very existence to its detractors through the use of its name or acronym in newspapers and by politicians. Today, in the English-language press, the acronym ISIS is unanimously used to designate the terrorist group.

## - A reference work

Drawing its strategy from a book entitled *Idaratu-t-tawahhuchi* [8] (The Administration of Savagery), written in 2004 by a man named Abu Baker Naji and probably originally intended to to Al Qaeda, the Islamic state is following an orchestrated plan in three distinct stages designed to achieve the ultimate goal: the Islamic Caliphate.

- The first stage consists of spreading chaos and terror among the enemy on its soil in order to exhaust and demoralize it, but also indirectly to demonstrate its lack of faith in its own society and its values.
- The second step is to fill the void created by this chaos by building a state where the population, governed according to the laws of Sharia, has access to public services while continuing to be terrorized by the EI, including public executions.
- The third stage sees the finalization of the project with the establishment of the Caliphate.

The three stages were initiated with anachronism since the Caliphate is already self-proclaimed, the regions controlled by the EI are in the application of the second stage and the first stage continues with numerous attacks committed all over the world.

- **360-degree communication with a focus on modernity**

To enable it to enjoy an army of dedicated fighters, the terrorist organization has adopted a communication strategy that bases its attraction on the Caliphate and its mobilizing myth. It aims to enable the "extinction of the grey zone" [9], that is, the materialization of a zone where the majority of Muslims are located, between the Islamic Caliphate on the one hand and the world of the infidels on the other.

To this end, it makes full use of the new information and communication technologies (NICTs), which have proved to be extremely effective. Relying in particular on the use of social networks, the terrorist organisation "exports" itself in 24 languages, produces 90,000 tweets and posts a day from 70 ,000 Twitter or Facebook accounts and disseminates numerous written, audio or video communiqués.

According to Romain Caillet[10], its illustrious competitor, Al Qaeda, which also uses social networks, but in a more traditional way, E.I. wants to seduce a younger population and uses all the tricks of modern communication[11].

11] In its audiovisual communication, it uses an eye-catching visual approach, a nervous staging, video editing techniques derived from cinema with strong special effects and sound effects. We can mention for example the 55-minute propaganda film "Flames of War", which responds to the canons of Hollywood action films (and its caricature), even going so far as to be preceded by a Youtube teaser, in the manner of a classic film

release.

The flood of propaganda also materializes through the electronic press, which relies on two desks. The first is called al-Furqan Media and has existed since the creation of the Islamic state (when the organization was still called E.I.I.L.). It is in charge of most of the content produced. There is, however, a second vector, al-Hayat Media, more specifically intended for propaganda abroad. This office produces recurrent publications in all languages, including the French version of Dar-al-Islam and the famous and luxurious monthly Dabiq with a licked layout.e (which has nothing to envy to a monthly magazine such as Time Magazine), published in English and from which a lot of information is extracted and relayed by the international press.

The last propaganda vector is that of video streams that literally flood the Internet sphere. Greg Miller, a journalist at the Washington Post[12] , in a short report entitled "Why the Islamic State propaganda is more important than its fighters"(Pourquoi la propagande de l'12], talks about several hundred increasingly skilled people using cameras of all types (camcorders or GoPro), computers with sophisticated video editing and creative software. The volunteers to join the terrorist organization taking part in this vector have in a large majority of cases already proven skills in this field.

Miller goes on to emphasize the incredibly powerful influence these teams have on the daily lives of I.E. fighters. by forcing them (in the manner of a film director) to repeat this or that attitude until it is judged satisfactory and free of any defect of enunciation, for example in the context of an address in front of the camera.

It is worth emphasizing that the work done by these "publicists" has for some time been no longer amateurish, but professional work which sometimes requires weeks of post-production before being made public.

In the same concern to give an impression of seriousness and professionalism, the numerous videos produced by the vilayets [13] are subject to a real desire for corporatism with the establishment of a graphic charter obeying strict codes.

We can thus see that the cinematic system has the basic rules of staging shared by all the information offices. If we isolate a given sample, we can observe similarities in their construction. From the systematic presence of the basmala [14] "bismi-l-lahiar-Rahmaniar-Rahimi" at the beginning of the video followed by the logo of the office of the vilayet's information office logo, enjoying a very elaborate 3D animation, through the addition of foreign journalistic recordings, translated or not, highlighting the similarities in their construction. With a very elaborate 3D animation, the addition of foreign journalistic recordings, translated or not and highlighting the subject matter, or the staging of the speakers and the recurrent use of two cameras (one from the front and one from the side) to make the editing more dynamic, there is little doubt that the terrorist organization's desire to centralize its communication is a priority.

## - Recurring themes

In its claims[15], among which those claiming that Islam is pure and must be defended by the sword, that Muslims are persecuted, that they must leave the "grey zone" and join the Caliphate under the orders of a single leader (caliph), that they must convert or kill the "apostates", lead the jihad to enter paradise..., the Islamic state expresses with this rhetoric

a global, planetary vision, and is not limited to territorial conquest. This vision is a first in global terrorism. It is a radical and international call for an uprising.

The Islamic state has a particularly elaborate strategy. With a true plan for a global society and modern communications using all imaginable marketing possibilities, the organization is spreading a message that can seduce, intimidate, threaten, persuade and legitimize its actions at the same time.

Its ideology, abandoning any ethnic character and falling within the new practices of a globalized Islam [16], no longer refers absolutely to Arab belonging. The latter is concealed in favour of the Muslim notion, the egalitarian notion of brotherhood (the combatants are all brothers). It recalls the words of Khaled Kelkal, a terrorist member of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the main instigator of the 1995 attacks in France, who was shot dead that same year by the forces of law and order: "I am neither Arab nor French, I am Muslim".

A semi-direct officer, Battalion Commander Stéphane SIMON chose the engineer's weapon. After commanding his company in 2010 at the 31st Engineer Regiment of Castelsarrasin, he then served at the School of Engineering from 2012 to 2015 as a tactical instructor. Winner of the 2014 War School competition, he successfully completes a Master 1 in Arabic language at INALCO in 2015-16. He is currently a War College intern abroad at the Fouad Chehab Command and Staff College in Beirut, Lebanon.

1] In the article: <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2015/02/23/actualite/pierre-jean-luizard-letat-islamique-pourrait-bien-etre-le-premier-etat-salafiste-voir-le-jour-11565285/>

2] Cf. the site Les échos.fr: [http://www.lesechos.fr/18/11/2015/lesechos.fr/021488799359\\_L-etat-islamique-bat-sa-monnaie.htm](http://www.lesechos.fr/18/11/2015/lesechos.fr/021488799359_L-etat-islamique-bat-sa-monnaie.htm)

3] Or a sovereign State delimited by established territorial boundaries, where its laws apply to a permanent population, and constituted of institutions through which the State exercises effective authority and power.

4] Roy O., (2002), "L'Islam mondialisé", Paris, Seuil, 209 p.

5] <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>

6] Kepel G., (2015), "Jihad", Paris, Gallimard, Coll. Folio/Actuel, pp. 454-495.

7] <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>

8] Ab? Bakr N?j?, (2004), "Id?ratu-t-tawa??uši" (The administration of savagery), Syria, Islamic Studies and Research Centre, 113 p. Distributed for a time on Amazon, then withdrawn from sale. Easily found in digital pdf format on the internet.

9] Atran: <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>

10] Romain Caillet is a researcher at the French Institute of the Near East and a specialist in Salafism.

11] As shown in figure 2, the poster and the slogan: "Keep calm and say baqiya": "Keep calm and say baqiya":

[http://religion.info/french/articles/article\\_653.shtml#.VwK8slgOJyO](http://religion.info/french/articles/article_653.shtml#.VwK8slgOJyO)

12] Presence of a video in which the latter expresses himself on the propaganda tool of the EI: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html)

13] Administrative unit, in some Muslim countries, especially in the Ottoman Empire (Larousse).

14] The basmala (Arabic ?????) is a word in the [Arabic language](#) that represents all the words of the formula bismi Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim 1.2. "[In the](#) name of the merciful and merciful God", notably used at the beginning of each of the suras of the Koran, with [the](#) exception of sura [IX](#)3. The first two words of this sentence are bismillah (Arabic ??? ?????), meaning "In the name of God".

[15] <http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/ICCT-Schmid-Challenging-the-Narrative-of-the-Islamic-State-June2015.pdf>

16] Cf. the eponymous book by Olivier Roy, (2002), Paris, Seuil, 209 p.

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