

## **ISIS: Not by Terrorism Alone**

**James Petras**

### **Introduction**

The global growth and survival of ISIS, in the face of opposition by governments, armies, intelligence agencies and police forces from nearly a hundred countries, requires analysis. We understand 'ISIS' as the organized, militant, violent Salafist movement sometimes funded by the royal family of Saudi Arabia.

### **The Opposition**

Those generally opposed to ISIS, in many cases, have pursued a dual and contradictory approach. For example, the United States has, at different times and places, opposed or supported 'ISIS'.

For example, Washington supported ISIS against the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan; the secular nationalist government of Libya under President Gadhafi; Moscow in Chechnya; the Baathist government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Bashar Assad in Syria; several Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Hezbollah in Lebanon; against the People's Republic of China fighting Uighur terrorists in Xingjian; against the Houthi nationalists in Yemen.

At various times, and especially today, the US attacked ISIS when it moved against Washington's allies and vassal regimes.

The US opposed ISIS attacks on its 'clients and allies' in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and when it launched terrorist attacks against the European Union, Australia and Canada. The US opposed ISIS attacks against US-backed regimes in Somalia, Libya, Tunisia and Iraq.

ISIS has also provoked armed responses from other major powers: Russia has attacked ISIS-liked terrorists in the Caucasus, Syria and in its own cities.

Iran has waged war against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon and within its own borders.

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Israel, like the US, have pursued a dual approach to ISIS. On the one hand, they have financed and provided arms and medical treatment to ISIS as part of their 'regime change' strategy against President Assad in Syria, while waging war against ISIS when it threatened their own territorial or political ambitions in Syria.

Turkey found itself fighting ISIS when it sought to annex border regions of Syria in order to neutralize the national ambitions of the Kurds.

### **ISIS: A Global Power**

ISIS, despite facing the world's greatest powers and their allies, has managed to survive in a state of continuous warfare in five continents for nearly two decades. Despite lacking a single warplane or a navy, ISIS has

threatened numerous regimes. ISIS attacks have forced NATO to spend tens of billions of dollars on security measures to protect its own citizens. ISIS brutality has contributed to the flood of hundreds of thousands of refugees into Europe, a major destabilizing factor for the European Union. In brief, ISIS has become a global power without a single airplane or submarine!

### **What Makes ISIS a Global Power?**

Western analysts focus on ISIS terrorism, which is the tactical underpinnings of its power and global reach.

Terrorism is a major part of ISIS training, discipline and militant ideology. It is a system of political, economic, cultural and religious education which explains ISIS survival and expansion.

ISIS fuses a value system exalting ethno-religious supremacy with careful tactical regional alliances.

ISIS military leaders have forged alliances with an expansionist Turkey, trading oil for arms, financial resources and logistical support to further their advances in Iraq and Syria while fueling Ankara's regional hegemonic ambitions. ISIS obtained extensive military and financial support from the Saudi monarchic dictatorship in exchange for ISIS waging terrorist wars against Riyadh's regional rival Shia regimes.

ISIS pursued many forms of tactical alliance with the US, supporting Washington in its campaigns of 'regime change' in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Iraq, in exchange for arms, money and territory.

The tactical alliances have been transitory. In Iraq, ISIS switched from attacking Saddam Hussein to waging an unremitting terror campaign against the subsequent US vassals; from defeating Russians in Afghanistan to attacking the US and its local puppet regimes; from cooperating with the US and Turkey against President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, to absorbing or exterminating the so-called 'moderate' mercenaries openly backed by Washington and Ankara.

Tactical alliances have been unstable forms of mutual manipulation. They were terminated when ISIS gained the upper hand in the initial alliances. The US counterattacked with its US-Kurdish-Iraqi Regime alliance forcing ISIS to retreat in Iraq. In Syria, the alliance among Damascus, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah decimated ISIS. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has routed ISIS.

The retreat of ISIS in the Middle East has been relative. It has retained its leadership and battle hardened cadre. ISIS expanded with a series of individual terrorist attacks in the heart of the EU, US and Turkey. ISIS has lost only portions of its financial and military supply lines and has not suffered a strategic defeat. ISIS strength resides in its ideology and the quality of its leaders and members and their political-military commitments.

ISIS ideology is based on its belief in the superiority and exceptionality of its value system. ISIS ideology is, therefore, the mirror image of Western Imperialist and Israeli beliefs, which justify military conquests over vast populations of subjugated and degraded people.

Western and Israeli elites stress the superiority of their value systems and indoctrinate true believers into committing atrocities against all 'others'.

ISIS's ideology is backed by its members' deep commitment to its goals and tactics. ISIS political strength is measured by the quality and depth of its supporters' willingness to kill and die for its strategic goals.

It is the ISIS belief system, and not any cult of the personality, that drives hundreds of ISIS fighters and activists to engage in suicide bombings aimed at strategic military or 'soft' civilian targets with high publicity value.

While NATO and Russian powers have superior air and maritime bombing capacity, ISIS has unrivaled human suicide bomber power. ISIS suicide bombers match the high tech bombers of the West in their capacity to terrorize peaceful civilians and create chaos.

## **Conclusion**

ISIS has converted its former tactical alliances with the West and Turkey into strategic weapons against them. ISIS terror bombings in the West are detonated by overseas sympathizers, 'self-radicalized' supporters

or returning fighters. Decentralized terror is derived from commitments to the centralized battlefields.

ISIS borrowed its overseas operations from the well-documented practices of Western secret services. They place bombs in airplanes and other public venues while arranging the assassination of overseas officials. While ISIS does not have the global resources and complex organizational reach of the multiple intelligence and military structures of the West, it excels with its cadre of followers willing and able to engage in suicide missions - something only a few of their Western terrorist counterparts have been willing to pursue.

The worldwide war between ISIS and the major powers is likely to continue far beyond territorial victories and losses. The only hope of defeating ISIS lies in Western civilians successfully forcing their governments, namely the US and NATO, to end their invasions, occupations and withdraw from the Middle East.

Without Western armies of occupation and detested client regimes, ISIS could no longer claim to defend national and Islamic ideology. ISIS, in essence a foreign ideology, would face popular liberation armies, which draw their strength from the people's commitments and beliefs in their historic nations, including secular and religious defenders of democratic rights and socialist values.

