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Iraq

“Islamic State”, the lethal state

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“Islamic State” (Daesh) traces its origins to the formation of an Iraqi kernel of Al Qaeda following the US invasion. The self-proclaimed caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi joined the latter, when it was led by the Jordanian al-Zarkawi. In 2006, the consultative council of the Mujahedeen in Iraq proclaimed “the Islamic State in Iraq”. It was by involving themselves in the Syrian revolution, fighting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) more than the Assad regime, particularly from 2013, that the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (Daesh) was able to expand, competing with Al Qaeda and its Syrian franchise, the al-Nusra Front (or Jabhat al-Nusra).

Many regimes closed their eyes to the activities of Islamic State, because of short-term considerations. At the beginning of the revolution, the Syrian regime knowingly released imprisoned Syrian jihadists and it refrained until recently from combating Islamic State, seeing it as a conjunctural counter-revolutionary ally. Daesh benefited from the facilities granted by Turkey in order to weaken the Kurdish forces. The army of Islamic State has certainly been financed by private donors from Gulf countries. It has financed itself through control of oil wells, grain silos in Syria, Iraqi bank funds, antiquities in Syria and Iraq, rights of passage at its check points, ransoms and the sale of women. It also levies taxes on the traffic of oil and its derivatives (notably resold to the Syrian regime) or tobacco (Syria). It has taken over the old Iraqi tax structure and even plans new “taxes” targeted at Christians. No matter what happens, Islamic State’s income assures from the outset a certain independence from the populations subjected to it.

Islamic State is today a state based on a war economy, a centralized rentier state, seeking short-term profit, having “nationalized” the income from its plunder and redistributed wealth in order not to alienate the poor of the occupied areas that it has not decided to eliminate: free electricity and a 50% cut in rents in Mosul for the poor, distribution of food during Ramadan in Syria. It is assisted in this management by the alliance woven with former Baathist cadres.

Islamic State controls an area rich in resources and inhabited by around nine million people. These areas are more a vast spider’s web than a homogeneous territory. However, in August it was in full control of Mosul, Sinjar, Raqqa and Tikrit. It will not venture into areas that are not conquered (Shiites). As for the minorities, it persecutes them (Christians) or exterminates them (Yezids, Shia Turkoman, Sunnis refusing to give it allegiance and so on).

The small number of military personnel with regard to the size of the conquered territories leads it to execute men and sell women or exile them, rather than imprisoning them. It does not have too much infrastructure in the areas newly conquered.

A hierarchical army which relies on “flying” units, a minority of which is made up of inexperienced foreigners, all this reinforces the hierarchical aspect and decreases the risk of insubordination, not to mention the use of child soldiers. Women are assigned to other tasks such as the recruitment of women to marry the military leaders, finding and preparing captives for sale and so on.

Islamic State now has control of military equipment taken from the Syrian army. It has also gained control of a quarter of the stock of the Iraqi army (Humvees, missiles and other heavy weaponry) often of US manufacture and abandoned by the bloated Iraqi army in Mosul. In weapons and in men, it is superior to the forces of the Kurdistan region.

Islamic State provides a livelihood its combatants, mostly down at heel youth, or mercenaries from all over the world. The porosity of its recruitment suggests a strong infiltration.

The Emirate has become a Caliphate, a monarchy by divine right. The self-proclaimed caliph is a spiritual and temporal leader. The discourse of its spokesperson, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, reveals its ultra-reactionary character: “Muslims, reject democracy, secularism, nationalism and other litter of the West, return to your religion”. It has global ambitions and summons all jihadi groups to give allegiance.

Material factors alone do not explain the crimes of Islamic State. If they have not yet generalized courts, the prisons or cemeteries and do not have time to kill civilians before burying them, they have the time to rape women, decapitate the dead after shooting them, display their heads, put children in these macabre scenes, film them broadcast them on the internet. This reflects as much if not more a logic of terror than a purely economic one, the effects of the first compensating for the shortcomings of the second.

The Charter governing life in Mosul is a series of bans and not a social project. Non-compliance is punishable by “execution, crucifixion, amputation of the arms and legs or exile”. The banks are reopening in Mosul only for individuals that are not part of the old state apparatus and are not members of a minority.

Officially dropped by the Gulf States, Islamic State is recognized by Boko Haram. It is a competitor to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, that of the Caucasus or Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Islamic State is implanted only in Iraq and Syria. Demonstrations of support have been held on several occasions in Jordan recently (Maan, Al Zarqa, Yajouz).

In essence bourgeois and parasitic, ultra-reactionary in its ideology and counter-revolutionary in practice, Islamic State is in the final, but also in the first analysis “a band of armed men”, in the definition of the state proposed by Lenin and Engels.