

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5069>



Iraq

# The reasons for the rise of Daesh

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV510 - July 2017 -

Publication date: Wednesday 19 July 2017

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved**

---

**The origin of Daesh or the so-called "Islamic State" can be traced to the creation of al-Qaeda following the US and British military invasion of Iraq in 2003.**

Its current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, began his experience as a jihadist after the invasion, when he joined the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda under the command of the Jordanian al-Zarqawi. In 2010, he became the head of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which replaced al-Qaeda in Iraq.

## The invasion of Iraq in 2003

The US and British military invasion was the decisive element in the initial expansion of the jihadist group. The destructive consequences of the invasion resulted in the death of one million Iraqis and the forced displacement of four million others after more than ten years of inhuman sanctions. The US occupation policy created the conditions for the development of Daesh: fierce repression of all political opposition to the occupation, forced introduction of neo-liberal policies and repression of independent trade union movements, destruction of institutions (military, administration, university system, etc.), and establishment of a political system based on religious denominations.

Not forgetting the policy of "debaathification" implemented by the US occupation forces after the invasion of Iraq, which led to a profound marginalization of the Sunni population. With these measures, anyone who had been a member of Saddam Hussein's Baath party was immediately dismissed, excluded from the public sector and lost their pension. The marginalization of Sunni populations was also accompanied by frequent attacks by the US occupation forces against Sunni towns and villages. Tens of thousands of prisoners were incarcerated in prisons run by the US, where isolation, torture and the "Taylorized bureaucracy of detention" were regularly used to consolidate the occupation.

These policies fostered religious tensions and led to a terrible war between Shiite and Sunni extremist groups between 2005 and 2008, with a monthly average of 3,000 deaths and the displacement of populations of several million people.

Successive Iraqi governments dominated by the Shiite fundamentalist movement Da'wa continued and even intensified the policies of marginalization and oppression of Sunni populations. Shiite fundamentalist militias, with the help of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also consolidated their power during these years. These militias are detested by large sections of the Sunni populations of Iraq because of their abuses and their denominational discourses and practices.

In this context, a number of former officers of Saddam Hussein joined the ranks of the Islamic State. This dynamic was also linked to a process of Iraqisation of the command of al-Qaeda in Iraq in the mid-2000s, but also to the policies of Islamization of the Baathist regime from the early 1990s, involving all sectors of the state apparatus, including the military and intelligence services, and of society in general.

## The Revolutionary Processes

## The reasons for the rise of Daesh

---

The second phase of expansion of the Daesh took place after the beginning of the revolutionary processes in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-2011. Daesh played no role in popular uprisings and mass actions such as strikes and civil disobedience. On the contrary, the jihadist group regarded these movements with suspicion because of their democratic and social demands. After the fall of the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, Daesh issued a statement denouncing secularism, democracy and nationalism, calling on the Egyptians not to replace the best by the worst.

The fierce and massive repression of the old regimes and the inability to fulfill the demands of social justice have gradually allowed the expansion of Daesh in some countries; the organization fed on popular frustrations and the radicalization of certain sections of the population. Daesh and other jihadist groups are symptoms of the retreat of revolutionary processes.

In this context, the involvement in the Syrian revolution from the end of 2011 through Jabhat al-Nusra (which at the time was a branch of the Islamic State, funded massively by it and made up of many organizations) allowed Daesh to expand again massively. The fighting in Syria has provided it with unprecedented training and learning opportunities, as well as the control of large areas of territory. The war of the Assad regime against the Syrian people and the democratic aspirations of the popular movement have greatly contributed to its expansion.

At the same time in Iraq, the repression of popular demonstrations in the Sunni areas in February 2011 and 2013 revived Daesh. The Iraqi army, rebuilt on a community basis and undermined by corruption, was increasingly perceived as an occupying army in Sunni majority regions. The intensification of repression and the continuation of the government's sectarian policies prompted sections of the population to join Daesh, which had almost disappeared in Iraq in 2010.

Daesh thus experienced unprecedented progress following the crushing of popular movements, feeding on the massive repression perpetrated by authoritarian regimes, in Syria and the region, and on religious hatreds generated by the instrumentalisation of religious denominations.

This article was first published in *L'Anticapitaliste*, issue 391, June 6th, 2017.