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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

VIOLENCE AS A FORM OF POLITICAL CONDUCT: THE CASE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE

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Abstract

Following Hannah Arendt's approach, which distinguishes power and violence and claims that violence appears when power is threatened or fails, this paper argues that the use of violence by Islamic State (IS) is a result of its inability to establish a stable power base in the Middle East. It argues, however, that violence has become a form of political conduct for this organisation, which challenges to Arendtian perspective rejecting any role violence plays in politics and has many repercussions in Middle Eastern societies and politics. This paper notes that local people feel hatred and rage against certain developments in the region, such as their countries' colonial past, the Iraqi invasion and their failed administrations. Analysing how these reactions are directed in the form of violence by IS against some local groups, the paper examines further the regional consequences of the IS' use of violence.

Keywords: Islamic State, ISIS, Violence, Middle East politics, Arendt

BİR SİYASİ DAVRANIŞ BİÇİMİ OLARAK ŞİDDET: İSLAM DEVLETİ ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Hannah Arendt'in güç ile şiddeti birbirinden ayıran ve güç tehdit edildiğinde veya başarısızlığa uğradığında şiddetin ortaya çıktığını iddia eden yaklaşımını takip eden bu makale, İslam Devleti'nin (İD) şiddet kullanmasının, Ortadoğu'da istikrarlı bir iktidar kuramamasının bir sonucu olduğunu ileri sürüyor. Bununla birlikte, çalışma, şiddetin, siyasette oynadığı her türlü rolü reddeden Arendt'in yaklaşımına meydan okuyarak, bu örgüt için bir siyasi davranış biçimi haline geldiğini ve Orta Doğu toplumları ve siyasetine pek

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çok yansımaları olduğunu savunuyor. Bu makale, yerel halkın, ülkelerinin sömürge geçmişi, Irak'ın işgali ve başarısız yönetimleri gibi bölgedeki bazı gelişmelere karşı kin ve öfke duyduğunu belirtiyor. Bu tepkilerin nasıl İslam Devleti tarafından bazı yerel gruplara karşı şiddet olarak yönlendirildiğini inceleyen makale, İD'in şiddet kullanmasının bölgesel sonuçlarını da ele alıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: İslam Devleti, IŞİD, Şiddet, Ortadoğu politikaları, Arendt

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic State (IS), since appearing as an organisation, has been using violence as a means of reaching its aims in the Middle East. Based on an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam, the ideology of Islamic State is accompanied and dominated by violence-oriented activism. Rather than engaging in ideological debates, IS has preferred to spread its influence and attract supporters through activism based on brutal tactics.

Following Hannah Arendt's perspective, which distinguishes between power and violence and claims that violence appears when power is threatened or fails (Arendt, 1970: 56), this article argues that the use of violence by IS is a result of its inability to establish a stable power base in the Middle East. It notes that IS takes advantage of the sense of victimisation or exploitation felt by people that dates back to the colonial past of their countries, and promises to restore a radical Islamist order against the West and Western values, and against local inhabitants who are not accepted as Muslim by the organisation. In other words, IS directs the anger and hatred of the effects of their colonial past, the American invasion of Iraq and their failed governments towards other targets. Moreover, it has turned violence which is by nature instrumental (Arendt, 1970: 51) into a form of political conduct, which challenges to Arendtian approach rejecting any role violence plays in politics. Taking this perspective, this article explores the use of violence by IS and its totalitarian attitude. A further examination is made of the repercussions of the IS' use of violence on the local inhabitants of the region and Middle East politics.

2. VIOLENCE FROM ARENDT'S APPROACH

Although she presents no systematic political theory, Arendt has an original way of thinking (Canovan, 2002: 2, 5, 7; Villa, 2006: 1) that is based on her interpretation of political events and experiences. On the one hand, she tries to conceptualise actual political experiences, and in each of her works she provides different aspects of a concept, and uses one concept to substantiate another. Her goal is to explore the relationship between concepts such as freedom, violence, power and action. On the other hand, her methodology is based on storytelling. In each of her works she narrates different stories of actual political experiences. Arendt writes about actual events as a political theorist, basing her reflections on actual political events. She substantiates the basic concepts she uses by trying to understand actual political experiences (Canovan, 2002: 2, 5,7).

In her book entitled "On Violence", Arendt discusses the political events of the Cold War period (Arendt, 1970: 3). In this work she discusses the violent 20th century, which she claims was characterised by acts of mass violence. Distinguishing between power and violence, she claims that while they can be considered related concepts, they are not the same (Arendt, 1970: 41-42). She argues that: "… power

corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (Arendt, 1970: 44). However, violence is distinguishable by its instrumental character. According to her, violence appears when power is threatened (Arendt, 1970: 56), which is an important point for this paper, as given IS' inability to rule, its weakness manifests as violence. Arendt's distinction between power and violence serves as a useful framework for understanding the factors of IS' violence.

Arendt asserts that the 20th century was dominated by violence (Arendt, 1972: 105), which, she claims, has no place or role in a political sphere. Since violence is used against both internal and external enemies as a last resort when attempting to maintain the power structure, it can be seen as a prerequisite of power (Arendt, 1979: 47). Opposing this framework, she underlines the impossibility of the political realm where there is violence, arguing that the aim of politics is to realise freedom. In fact, opposing the idea that violence has a role or a place in the political arena is important, since this refers to a deconstruction of the traditional violence/politics/power relationship. As Altunok points out, Arendt writes on violence as "writing against violence", which in itself does not mean that violence is an illegal, irrational or inhuman act. In fact, considering violence as an irrational, ahistorical and unprecedented manifestation in a totalitarian or other form of government leads to violence becoming something inconceivable and incomprehensible (Altunok, 2012: 124-126). From this perspective, we can say that in the 21st-century violence is also dominant, and moreover, is a threat to the political sphere. Actors who cannot gain power legitimately try to take power through the use of violence as an instrument, and IS has been a striking example in this regard. However, IS' violence becoming over time a form of political conduct and its consequences in the Middle East have been challenging to Arendt's conception of violence as an instrumental and non-political notion.

Another very important perspective that Arendt provides for this paper is her reflections on totalitarianism. In her first book, entitled 'The Origins of Totalitarianism', while trying to extract the historical conditions that paved way for its emergence, she argues that totalitarian rule represents a totally different kind of government, opposing all traditional political categories. Arendt provides us with important instruments for observing the totalitarian character of IS and the totalitarian power it tries to form in the territories it occupies. According to Arendt, totalitarianism realises an absolute malignancy (evil) by surpassing the human perceptions of good/evil. Along with its associated mass crime and violence, this absolute malignancy is built on its challenges to the political sphere and the presence of the individual. IS' attacks in the Middle East against Christians, Kurds and Shiites in the region may be assessed as attacks against freedom, diversity and plurality, which Arendt refers to as political possibilities of human life (Arendt, 1976: 268-273). This viewpoint thus provides us a useful framework for the definition and discussion of the violent acts of IS.

According to Arendt, it would be inappropriate to say that totalitarian rules are lawless regimes because, for her, totalitarianism does not function without the guidance of a law or in an arbitrary way. On the contrary, in this kind of regime, the law exists at another level in terms of its functioning and meaning. Traditional political regimes make positive laws that are based on religious, moral or secular sources.

For totalitarianism, lawlessness is unnecessary, since totalitarian power considers itself above all laws, claiming to be "a higher form of legitimacy", like natural law or historical law. In a totalitarian system, individuals come under threat, since totalitarian rule always faces new enemies, and considers them to be an obstacle in the way of the natural/historical process. In this context, terrorism has become a part of a totalitarian conduct (Arendt, 1973: 461-462), and from this perspective, we can say that IS, in its controlled areas, aims to form a totalitarian functioning government that is based on the leader's supreme authority.

Based on Arendt's reflections on violence and its conceptualisation, this article will attempt to examine the basic determinants of the violence perpetrated by IS before focusing on the impacts of this violence on the local people, actors and policies towards the Middle East.

3. VIOLENCE INSTEAD OF SPEECH

For Arendt, being political necessitates the dominance of words as a means of persuasion and excludes force and violence (Arendt, 1958: 26-27). Violence, which was considered, in the beginning, instrumental by IS, at the expense of words and persuasion, turned into a form of political conduct that was aimed at gaining IS status as a sovereign actor in the Middle East. The characteristics of this organisation support this framework.

Islamic State is a radical Islamist organisation which was founded with the following stated objectives: to ensure the withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq; to overthrow the Iraqi government; to render ineffective those who collaborate with the United States; to neutralise Shiite forces; and to establish an Islamic state based on Sharia law (Byman, 2015). Its roots can be traced back to the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who established al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). IS in Iraq (ISI) was formed by AQI as an umbrella organisation following Zarqawi's death in 2006. After Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi became the leader, the organisation was restructured. In a new wave of violence, ISI started attacking non-Sunni targets, and joined the insurgency against the Assad regime in support of the al-Nusra Front, which can be considered the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, formed in January 2012. The organisation renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), and announced the uniting of their forces in Syria. It is worth noting that the leaders of Al-Qaeda central and al-Nusra did not recognise the new organisation, although many fighters from these organisations pledged their allegiance to Baghdadi, and the organisation grew very rapidly in a short period of time. The organisation finally revised its name to Islamic State in 2014.[1]

IS as an organisation came about after, and as a result of, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Following this invasion and overthrow of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the Sunni parts of the Iraqi society faced exclusion by the newly established regime in Iraq. In fact, while the Kurds and Shiites, who had suffered repression under the previous regime, became the dominant actors in the new political life in the country, Sunni groups found themselves excluded from state institutions and political processes. Under the Maliki government, which followed very sectarian and violent policies, the Sunni members of society felt more excluded and insecure than before. Moreover, amid the chaos in Iraq that followed the US invasion and the subsequent internal conflicts, it is thought that more than 1 million Iraqi people

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[1] See 'What is Islamic State?, BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144, (20 September 2016).

died. After the withdrawal of US forces, the conflicts did not end, and ethnic and religious conflicts continue still today. The growth of IS can be attributed to the loss of power and strength of the Sunni parts of society, and can be assessed as a struggle to re-establish Sunni hegemony, and in particular, their version of Sunni sectarianism. In short, IS was able to grow and develop for two main reasons: in response to the oppression and political exclusion of some parts of society following the US invasion of Iraq; and as a reaction to the corruption, misrule, and the politically and economically underdeveloped situation in the Middle East, which can be said to be in part a result of Western colonialism.

IS emerged and gained notoriety as a totalitarian organisation. A closer look at the IS' organisational structure reveals its institutional structure and internal rules. As Hassan Abu Haniyeh claims in his article,[2] the caliph is at the top of the organisational structure, and has absolute power over all religious and worldly affairs after being chosen by the Shura council. It was Abu Omar al-Baghdadi who devised IS' basic structure, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who developed the structure into one based on allegiance and obedience, thus solidifying the centralisation of power. There are many parts to the organisational structure under the leadership of the caliph, including the Shura Council, Sharia Council, Media Council, Security Council, Military Council as well as Department of Finance, Administrative Units and Ahlul Hal Wal Aqd (a large group of commanders and emirs), and the roles and responsibilities of these councils are very well defined. The Shura Council is an important structure that offers the caliph advice on his decision making in various areas. This council recommends candidates for certain positions, and monitors and controls whether the other councils and units are in conformity with Sharia. Finally, in the event of the death of the caliph, this council recommends new candidates for the position. The council having six members is headed by the caliph.

The Sharia Council issues guidebooks and messages, and it has been reported that this council prepares the caliph's speeches and monitors media coverage. This council handles litigation and mediates in disputes, and is also tasked with preaching, guidance, recruitment and propagation.

The presence of a Media Council is a strong indication of the importance attributed to propaganda in the organisation to gain more supporters. The Media Council manages the media production institutions of IS, such as al-Furqan and al-Etisam, and publishes a number of magazines in Arabic and English, such as Dabiq and al-Shamikhah. It also set up local radio stations in Mosul and ar-Raqqah. Its media productions are translated into various languages, and it operates a number of websites providing information about the IS ideology, its recruitment methods, its battle tactics, bomb-making and all jihadists need to know about their jihad. It published many videos showing beheadings, including one showing the beheadings of two British hostages, and the first, showing the beheading of US journalist James Foley entitled "Message to America",[3] which was followed by a video of the beheading of another American journalist Steven Sotloff.[4] The organisation gives messages to allies of the United States with

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[2] See Hassan Abu Haniyeh, 'Daesh's Organisational Structure', Aljazeera, http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/dossiers/deciphering-daeshoriginsimpactandfuture/2014/12/201412395930929444.html, (13 July 2016).

[3] See 'Outrage over Isis beheading of US journalist James Foley', The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2014/aug/20/iraq-crisis-outrage-over-isis-beheading-of-us-journalist-james-foley-live-updates, (20 August 2014).

[4] See 'Islamic State 'beheads US hostage Steven Sotloff', BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29038217, (3 September 2014).

videos entitled "Message to America's Allies". Besides these brutal beheading videos, there are also many showing the IS' battle to capture Syrian and Iraqi territory.

The Department of Finance of IS is an effective financing committee that is based on a network of fundraising activists who collect funds from individual businesspeople and donations in mosques, both in wealthy Gulf States and in Europe. All of the financial affairs of this, the wealthiest jihadi organisation in the world, are managed by this department, which has members who are responsible for controlling revenues coming from different sources, either from individual sources, or from oil or other natural resources. The organisation also collects taxes in the areas under its control. It is noteworthy that IS also has significant agricultural revenues, since it controls large agricultural areas in both Syria and Iraq.

The Military Council is an important entity within this organisation. It is reported that the number of members on the council changes in line with the power of the overall organisation, which changes over time, although membership tends to vary between nine and thirteen. This council incorporates various bodies, including a general staff, special commandos, suicide officers, logistic forces and sniper forces, and is charged with overseeing all military issues.

The Security Council deals with all issues related to security and intelligence within the organisation. Working in coordination with the Military Council, it also controls some of the key units, such as suicide bombers and undercover agents.

Ahl al-Hal wal Aqd, which refers to those qualified to elect or depose a caliph on behalf of the Muslim community,[5] can be considered as a parliament, with members and prominent people from within the organisation, including leaders, emirs and politicians. They both appoint and pledge allegiance to the caliph.

The caliph, who is the leader of the IS, and the most important figure in the organisation, is overseeing this well-developed and organised structure. The caliph has absolute power over all religious and worldly affairs by erasing any distinction between private and public spheres and has the absolute obedience of his followers after being chosen by the Shura Council and those who hold binding authority within the organisation. This is indicative of IS' totalitarian character, showing that the system is based on power and authority. The organisation has become more centralised over time, and the caliph holds direct authority over all of the so-called councils that are accepted as the central pillars of the IS. The leader has the power to appoint and remove the heads of these councils, and may choose to consult the Shura Council in such matters, although its role is strictly advisory.

Another particularity of the organisation that can be considered a result of its totalitarian character is its appearance as an organisation that gives priority to activism rather than ideological debates. In fact, it can be said that ideological debates have become a secondary issue within IS, which distinguishes it

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[5] See http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e73, (10 November 2016).

from other radical Islamist movements (al-Qaeda, al-Shabab etc.). IS' ideology is based on an extreme interpretation of Islam known as Wahhabism, which is the philosophy promoted by 18th-century warrior-jurist Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab, which constitutes a reference point for Salafists. Salafism is a religious approach that wants Islam to be practiced in a more authentic and pure way, arguing that Islam has been malpracticed after the prophet Mohamed. However, IS' ideology can be linked, in particular, to jihadi Salafism (Bunzel, 2015: 7-8), which regards humanity as a duality, comprised of those who are Salafists and who practice real Islam, and those who do not obey them and their rules. This has brought them into conflict with other Muslims, since in their categorisation, many of those who consider themselves Muslim are not real Muslims who are accused of not practicing "true Islam". Since their harsh tactics and interpretations of Islam have never been a widely accepted and effective religious ideology among Muslims, IS emphasise a great deal on violence and violent attacks, hoping to gain political power by terrorising their enemies.

That said, IS does use ideology for internal political consolidation, acting first and then justifying and legitimising its violent actions later with Islamic references. They argue that they are simply and solely guided by the Qur'an, Sunnah and hadith. Their interpretations of the Qur'an do not take into account its historical, social and political context, and likewise, they "cherry-pick" verses to justify their violent acts. While there are some harsh and threatening statements about non-Muslims in Qur'an, one should keep in mind that in those times, Mohamed and his forces were at war with those who did not obey their hegemony or rules. In particular they refer often to the Prophet Mohamed's statements praising those who kill non-Muslims and guaranteeing them a place in heaven for them, while also quoting the 12th verse of the Surah Al-Anfal, which promotes the beheading of those who are known as *kafir* (non-Muslim). It is argued that they do not follow the Qur'an in a holistic way, in that it includes also many peaceful verses, and some have claimed that they confuse metaphors with reality.[6]

Beyond these discussions, it is obvious that some important Islamic notions such as *takfir, jihad,* and *hijra* are being reinterpreted by IS.[7] Unlike other jihadist organisations, the organisation described itself as a caliphate state, and the then leader of the organisation, al-Baghdadi, proclaimed himself caliph in 2014 without submitting to a vote of the people within the ongoing power struggle, and claimed himself to be representative of the Islamic world.

As Arendt says, if people doubt that they can change their living conditions and believe that their conditions may never change, rage arises. Violence, therefore, comes from rage, which is considered and perceived to be the only way to achieve justice (Arendt, 1970: 63). A similar perception is apparent in IS, however, as Arendt indicates, rage and violence may turn irrational when directed against substitutes rather than the true sources of their problems (Arendt, 1970: 64). When looking at IS from this perspective, it is apparent that the hatred and reaction to the Western colonial rule in the Middle

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[6] See 'DAİŞ'in Temel Felsefesi ve Dini Referansları Raporu', Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2015, http://webdosya.diyanet.gov.tr/anasayfa/UserFiles/Document/TextDocs/b7ca135a-c08f-4ee5-892b-4c181663630a.pdf, (1 January 2016), p. 16.
[7] See 'DAİŞ'in Temel Felsefesi ve Dini Referansları Raporu', p. 19.

East, to US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent corrupted administrations are being directed towards all Western actors/citizens and the values, and local people who are considered to be defenders of or collaborators with Western actors.

On the other hand, it is apparent that violence is also used by IS as a manipulation tool. Arendt argues that people can be "manipulated through physical coercion, torture, or starvation" (Arendt, 1970: 28); for example, IS uses videos and violent attacks to spread its influence. Its crimes against the Yazidis, who are part of Iraq's Kurdish community and believers in an ancient religion derived from Zoroastrianism, can be interpreted in this regard as an instrument for instilling fear among the local people.

Unlike other jihadist organisations, IS declares that almost everyone who does not accept their rules or hegemony as *kafir,* condemning all those who do not accept the sacred texts of Islam that are considered sources of revelations. On the other hand, IS calls Muslims to migrate to Syria and Iraq to be away from *kafir* and to be with Muslims in its journal entitled *Dabiq,* which reveals its totalitarian attitude towards the differences even within Islam.[8]

Within such an exclusive framework, jihad has become a notion that is considered a raison d'etre for this organisation. According to the organisation, Muslims have a duty to fight until an Islamic State is founded and has gained dominance, and those who are against this "dawa" should be defeated. Unlike other jihadist organisations, IS interprets jihad as being not only against non-Muslims, but also some other Muslims.

Just as Arendt says of totalitarian rule, IS views itself as above all law and considers itself to be a part of the natural historical course of events, and in this regard, its laws are undeniable and non-reputable. However, in such a totalitarian atmosphere there is the potential for the recreation of "new enemies" who are considered obstacles in the way of this natural historical process, and as a result, violence becomes a part of the attempts to gain and consolidate totalitarian power.

4. REPERCUSSIONS OF IS' USE OF VIOLENCE

The violence perpetrated by IS and the struggle against the expansion of this organisation have turned the Middle East into a very unstable and insecure place for all local inhabitants. First of all, IS' violent acts have deepened the current perceptions of the insecurities and threats that exist in the region. The violence implemented by IS has become a determining factor in the policies towards it. The videos depicting the beheadings of Western aid workers and journalists disseminated by IS, particularly since 2014 and their showing by different media channels, as well as the speeches against IS by politicians, reveal how this violence has become a strategic weapon for IS. In these videos, the images of kneeling orange-clad hostages can be considered as a reference to the prisoners held by the United States in Guantanamo Bay. Using the brutal treatment of these hostages as a weapon, IS militants try to take revenge on their enemies. IS makes and broadcasts these videos for different reasons, such as to raise fear among local people, to obtain ransoms, to hamper foreign investment, to recruit supporters or

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[8] See 'DAİŞ'in Temel Felsefesi ve Dini Referansları Raporu', p. 23.

to provoke policy responses (Friis, 2015: 726, 729, 731), with the ultimate goal of increasing fear and the perception of threat both among the local inhabitants and Western actors. By doing this, the organisation is sending the message that IS is a powerful and challenging foe of the powerful Western actors, hoping therefore to gain more supporters (Gerges, 2014: 342).

Second, IS' violence in the region has brought new insecurities for local people, and the issue of forced migration has come to the forefront. The living conditions and the problems faced by people who fled the IS invasion and violence in the region emerged as important issues. As indicated earlier, IS' refusal to accept Shiites as Muslim and labelling them as "apostate", as well as the condemnation of Kurds and Christians as infidels and collaborators with Western actors, increased the feelings of fear and the insecurities in the region under invasion.

The forced migration that resulted from the actions of IS in the region has had a negative impact on the security perceptions and conditions of the people, whose basic citizenship rights and freedoms have been violated. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), nearly 1.7 million Iraqi people had been displaced in 2014. Approximately 93 percent of these people had been attacked by IS, including Ninevah, Anbar and Salahuddin, and it is estimated that 750,000 Iraqi people took refuge in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region. Following the IS' attacks against Yazidis, it is reported that 372,000 Iraqi Kurds (91% of whom are Yazidi) fell victim to the forced migration, along with nearly 56,000 Christians, who having been forced to leave their homes, went to the Kurdistan Autonomous Region (Thibos, 2014: 11). According to a January 2015 report penned by the Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, over 130,000 Kurdish Syrians from Kobane and the surrounding areas were forced to flee to Turkey under pressure from IS, and thus deprived of their basic rights and freedoms, alongside a growing lack of food, healthcare, protection, housing and education.[9]

Since there is no likelihood that they will be compensated for their loss and damages within this controversial war context, their exclusion and insecurity remain unresolved issues in the short term. Like all those who have been forced to flee their home, people exposed to forced migration keep living in the suburbs of the cities to which they have migrated. If they are not housed in camps, they live in more unfavourable conditions, but even in the camps they face difficulties in meeting their basic needs, and international support continues to be insufficient.

Nevertheless, the struggle of the Kurds against IS has made them important actors in the conflict, as another consequence of the violence perpetrated by IS. Their successful resistance against the expansion of this organisation has paved the way for public support from the West in their fight against IS, and as their struggle is accepted as legitimate, the Kurds have come to be seen as strong actors that should be taken into consideration in the anti-IS war.

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[9] See 'Refuge&Hope in the Time of ISIS', A Report of the Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, January 2015, https://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/upload/Refuge-and-Hope-in-the-Time-of-ISIS.pdf, p. 5.

Following the Arab uprisings, the Kurds in Syria organised around the PYD *(Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat-*Democratic Union Party), which is considered to have been established by PKK *(Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan-*Kurdistan Workers' Party) militants of Syrian origin in 2003. With the rising conflict in Syria, clashes broke out between the Al-Nusra Front, which was formed in 2011, and PYD militants. The Kurds organised independently of the Syrian opposition who were fighting against the Assad government. In January 2014, they declared the establishment of an autonomous administration called Rojava in the northern part of Syria, but very soon afterward they began to face violent attacks from IS.

After taking over Mosul, in early August 2014, IS attacked and took control of the Kurdish towns of Sinjar and Zumar, forcing thousands of Yazidi to flee their homes. Following these attacks, the US administration declared that they had launched airstrikes against IS in Iraq in defence of the Yazidi people.[10] IS revealed its most brutal side in response, beheading American journalist James Foley and broadcasting it on the Internet. Following the capture of the entire Raqqa province, IS released many other videos showing the beheadings of other American and British citizens.

In September 2014, IS attacked the Syrian Kurdish border town of Kobane, causing thousands of people to flee to Turkey,[11] although IS met with fierce Kurdish resistance in the town. That same month, the United States launched air strikes in support of the Kurdish people against IS. As a result of the combined efforts of the Kurdish Peshmerga and the United States in the defence of Kobane, the course of the war between IS and the Kurds changed, and in January 2015 the Kurdish fighters were able to force the IS militants out of the city. While the successful defence of Kobane increased the importance of the Syrian Kurds, the IS aggression against the Kurds has never abated.

IS' attacks against the Kurds can be considered as a challenge to US policies towards the region over time. In other words, IS sees its attacks against the Kurds as a means of beating the United States, which it considers its "far enemy". Accordingly, each US intervention in support of the Kurdish struggle against IS is answered with a counterattack by IS. Since Kurds are a people without a state, they are seen as an easy target by IS, revealing a strategy that is based on attacking the "near enemy" rather than the "far enemy". By targeting Yazidis as "near enemies" (Celso, 2015: 23; Byman, 2015), IS aimed to show its "far enemies" that it has the power even to defeat them. Moreover, from their totalitarian point of view, attacking the Kurds has become a means of gaining support for their armed struggle from those in local conflict with the Kurds. There has been a long-standing anti-Kurd position in the region among the important regional actors due to the Kurdish population's expansion within different countries, including Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. The Kurdish question sometimes unifies these actors around an anti-Kurd position, although sometimes it causes conflict among the same actors. That said, it is apparent that the anti-Kurd position has come to contribute to the continuity of the reciprocal relations among local states. The appearance of the Kurdistan Regional Government following the US invasion of Iraqi in 2003 and its enforcement over the time, the regime change in Iraq, the fact that a Kurdish person

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[10] Timeline: How the Syria conflict has spread', BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28850956, (21 August 2014).
[11] 'Turkey opens border to 45,000 Kurds fleeing Isis militants in Syria', The Guardian, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/20/turkey-opens-borders-45000-kurds-fleeing-isis-syria, (21 September 2014).

became Iraqi president, and the social and political transformations that occurred following the Arab Uprisings have, to a large extent, harmed the implicit anti-Kurd collaboration. Despite this, the anti-Kurd position continues to be a determining factor in the policies of such regional actors as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. In fact, it is worthy of note that Turkey, due to its own conflict with the Kurds, maintains its reluctant attitude in engaging in the US-led military operations against IS, fearing a Kurdish PYD unification, Kurdish independence or their gaining of power within the region. IS benefited from this conjecture, and attempted to unify different actors against the common enemy, directing its most violent attacks against Kurdish targets.

As a final remark, the brutal acts and policies of IS have contributed to a reproduction and continuation of the dualities such as civilised/ barbaric and friend/enemy (Friis, 2015: 731). It is well known that there has been a rise of anti-Americanism in the Middle East following the US invasion of Iraq and the lack of success of US policies. As a result, the United States began to take an indirect role in local matters, aiming to realise its regional targets through local actors. This can be thought of as "indirect orientalism" (Karakoç, 2013: 223-243; Karakoç, 2014: 597-606) in that an orientalist dogma based on the superiority of the West over the Orient and a civilised/barbaric duality was maintained through such local actors as Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia. This policy has been based on an anti-Iranian, Sunni-oriented and Israel biased perspective, while Turkey was promoted by the United States as a "role model" in the region. The Israel-oriented policy has long been used by the United States to perpetuate the West-Orient duality, since the United States considers Israel to be representative of Western values in the region. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, was viewed by the United States, along with Turkey, as an important actor for the sustainability of its Sunni-based policy, which aims to create dualities between Sunnis and Shiites.

However, by changing the dynamics in the Middle East, the appearance and development of the IS throughout the region came to challenge these dualities, through which actors such as Syria and Iran have been excluded. The rise of IS made US regional policies questionable. Despite its considerable losses since 2019 and former US president Donald Trump's announcement claiming the collapse of IS caliphate, IS continues to challenge the United States' Sunni-based policy which has been practised locally through support for Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Preserving the Sunni-Shiite duality through these states has always been important for the United States, aiding it in its efforts to pursue its interests in the region. However, IS is considered an ideological and security threat by Saudi Arabia, which has been one of the pillars of the United States' Sunni-based policy. The Saudi Arabian authorities fear that IS could be representative of an ideology based on Wahhabism, the philosophy of the 18th-century warrior-jurist Mohammed Ibn Abdul Wahhab, which constitutes a reference point for Salafists. On the other hand, IS fuels fears in the Saudi authorities, who are anxious of a possible overthrow of their monarchy by the organisation.[12] Due to these perceived threats, Saudi Arabia has, from the beginning, lent its support to the US-led anti-IS coalition force, deploying 30,000 troops to provide security along its border with Iraq in July 2014. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, by hosting Iran's deputy foreign minister, revealed that it

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[12] See James Dorsey, 'Islamic State: Ideological Challenge to Saudi Arabia', Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/islamic-state-ideological_b_5757208.html (3 September 2014).

could cooperate even with its regional rival against IS.[13] This point is very important, in that it shows that the dualities between regional states are being challenged as a result of these developments. On the other hand, the tension between Syrian Kurds and Turkey, based on the Turkish anti-Kurd position as an expansion of its unresolved Kurdish question, constitutes another rift in the struggle against IS.

Furthermore, it can be said that the basic determinants of US policy towards the Middle East have now become invalid. The initial aim of the United States to overthrow the Assad regime and thereby weaken Iran as a regional actor seems to be hard to achieve. Meanwhile, the actions of the United States related to the Syrian civil war are actually strengthening Iran's position in the Middle East. The US anti-IS coalition has led Iran to gain power while Iran's ally Assad and other Shia actors in the region have also benefitted from Western states' efforts.

The violence-based activism of IS continues to contribute to the reproduction of the traditional orientalist perception of Middle Eastern actors among those in the West that are engaged in regional politics. Totalitarian violence implemented by the IS has caused a re-emergence of the clichés that are often applied to Middle Eastern societies that depict them as barbaric and against a civilised world, and while IS is seen as a representative of barbarism, the barbaric acts, deeds and policies of other regional actors and their supporters are being ignored. In this context, the participation in the anti-IS coalition became sufficient to avoid being labelled "barbaric". As a consequence, the IS' violent videos and its strategy based on the dissemination of these brutal images has paved the way for a reproduction of such dualities as civilised/barbaric, friend/enemy and Western/Eastern in Western public opinion, a result of which is that the violence-dominated atmosphere and situation becomes legitimate and ordinary.

5. CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the violence perpetrated by IS in the region has paved the way for the reproduction and dominance of a violence-oriented framework in the Middle East. Although IS lost most of its territorial control following the anti-IS coalition-backed military assault and decided to revert a guerrilla warfare, its attack on Al-Sina prison in the city of al-Hasakah in Syria's northeast in January 2022 to free its militants shows that it has still an organizational strength to resume such an offensive.[14] This attack also reveals the fact that the multi-partite military operations against IS have been ineffective in impeding the rise of radical Islamism in the region. Since every government that contributed to the US-led operations has its own agenda, a solid, intact and complete opposition to all radical Islamist organisations in the region remains elusive. While some are protected or supported by regional or external actors, others can be seen as a threat to the private agendas of countries. Accordingly, it can be said, that the policies of the external actors engaged in Middle Eastern politics are produced and implemented in line with the differences (whether ethnical or sectarian) and various interests of local actors, and that this constitutes one of the most important reasons for the instability and conflicts in the region. Moreover, the failure of governments to rule based on a political Islam approach in the region has resulted in Islamist organisations seeing violence as a form of political rule.

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[13] 'Islamic State: Where Key Countries Stand', BBC, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29074514 (16 September 2014).
[14] Taim Al-Hajj, "The Insurgency of ISIS in Syria", https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/86643, 15 March 2022.

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