

Fighting the Symptoms

Why There Is a Long Way to Go
to Defeat the So-Called Islamic State (IS)

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The so-called Islamic State (IS) is under military pressure on the battle grounds of Syria and Iraq. However, offensives to recapture IS strongholds are difficult to coordinate; IS has succeeded in gaining a foothold in more of the region's countries and a high risk of terrorist attacks in Europe remains unchanged. The international community is fighting the symptoms of IS, while the causes of the rapid rise of the terrorist state still persist.

Two years after its rapid incursions and the proclamation of its caliphate on 29 June 2014, the so-called Islamic State (IS) is under military pressure on the battle grounds of Syria and Iraq. However, the offensives to recapture the IS strongholds of Raqqa and Mosul are advancing only at a faltering pace. Furthermore, the threat of terror attacks in Europe – as shown, for example, in Nice and Ansbach – is still high and IS has succeeded, among other things, in gaining a foothold in Libya, Egypt and Afghanistan. Since September 2014, Germany has participated in a U.S.-led international coalition with 65 other nations in the fight against IS,¹ and has found itself forced to pursue a security policy that only several years ago was regarded as unthinkable. Thus, for the first time Germany is supplying weapons and equipment to the Iraqi Kurds as a party directly involved in the conflict; the German *Bundeswehr* performs military training on Iraqi soil and deploys combat aircrafts – even if only for reconnaissance – in Syrian and Iraqi airspace. And in order to confront the terror threat in Germany, the capacities and powers of the German intelligence services and police have been reinforced.

The fight for the international coalition today is focused particularly on the symptoms of the multifaceted problem of IS. However, the coalition was scarcely successful in tackling the root causes which led to the rise of the organisation that can eventually be traced back to an al-Qaeda branch in Iraq; those causes include primarily the collapse of the Iraqi state, the civil war in Syria as well as the sectarian conflicts in both countries. This fact becomes glaringly obvious with regard to the challenges of planning and prepara-

tion for the liberation of Raqqa and Mosul. The partners on the ground are disunited and – if at all – only suited conditionally to hold, administer and govern the areas recaptured from IS. Sunni Arabs in the IS-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq continue to lack a political alternative. The result after two years of fighting IS is certainly mixed. The question is whether the earlier efforts of the international coalition are sufficient, how resistant IS still is in Syria and Iraq and the organisation's potential beyond its core areas.

1. The Military Dimension: A Tedious Fight to Counter Symptoms

The Coalition's Approach

From the outset, the coalition's guiding principle for devising a strategy was to minimise the deployment of its own ground troops. Hence, in September 2014 the U.S. government introduced its anti-IS strategy on the basis of three essential components.² Firstly, coalition airstrikes are aimed at eliminating IS personnel and depleting material capacities. Secondly, local partners should be put in the position of defeating IS forces with troops on the ground and pushing back the territory of the caliphate. Thirdly, as part of a political initiative, the structural causes in Syria and Iraq that facilitated the rise of IS should be eradicated in order to remove the breeding ground for IS over the long term.³

Since September 2014 the U.S.-led coalition has carried out more than 14,000 airstrikes against targets in Syria and Iraq to destroy the infrastructure of IS and to support the advances made



Peshmerga mortars: Kurdish *Peshmerga* fighters head-to-head with IS in the north of Iraq. They have been receiving training from the German army for almost two years now. Source: © Ahmed Jadallah, Reuters.

by its local partners.⁴ In addition to the airstrikes conducted, special forces from the U.S., Great Britain, France and several other countries have been active against IS in Northern Iraq. These time-limited operations on the ground inside the IS-controlled area are intended to gather intelligence about objectives, to neutralise the opponent's key personnel and to release hostages.⁵ The German participation in anti-IS combat missions was a reaction to the 13 November 2015 terror attacks in Paris. The involvement concerns deployment of a frigate to protect the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, a refuelling aircraft and six Tornado fighter jets for aerial reconnaissance. However, the German contribution still lagged behind the expectations of its partners. Nevertheless, the already heated debate in German politics and media high-

lighted where the limits of the German capacities and willingness to accept responsibility in the fight against IS today lie.

The allies' support entails the provision of weapons, equipment and munitions as well as training and advice. In Syria, U.S. military aid is focused on the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which include the Syrian-Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), and operate from the predominantly Kurdish areas in the north-east of the country.⁶ Since October 2015, the U.S. has supported the SDF with weapons and 50 military advisors, and in April 2016 it deployed members of the Special Operations Forces units for direct participation in ground operations.⁷ In Iraq, during the past two years the coalition has provided 3,700 U.S. soldiers and about 2,000 soldiers

from other countries to train overall more than 30,000 members of the Iraqi security services and the Kurdish *Peshmerga*⁸ and supplied them with weapons and equipment.⁹ The German contribution is restricted to training the *Peshmerga*, and to this end about 130 German *Bundeswehr* soldiers operate a training camp in the Kurdish city of Erbil. In contrast to several NATO partners such as the U.S., Great Britain, France and Italy, Germany does not provide training in Iraq for members of the regular Iraqi army and police, nor does it participate in advising local partners with regard to planning and carrying out their operations.

The regional powers Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey play a key role in fighting IS. In October 2014, Turkey joined the U.S.-led coalition and, in spring 2015, by closing and reinforcing security along its border with Syria, it substantially contributed to sealing off IS-controlled areas. For a long time, Ankara allowed the border with Syria to be permeable as an indirect means to support IS as an instrument against the Syrian Kurds and the Assad regime. The closure of the border deprived the terror organisation, which is landlocked, of its resupply chain of personnel and materials or equally of exporting goods for sale. Iran is part of a coalition initiated by Russia



Devastation: Hundreds of thousands have died in the Syrian Civil War since its onset in March 2011, leading to one of the greatest refugee crises in modern history. Source: © Goran Tomasevic, Reuters.

against IS, and since August 2014 it has given immense support to the Shiite militias in Iraq and the Assad regime in Syria.¹⁰ Saudi Arabia plays a central role not only in battling IS ideologically, but also in blocking monetary sources in the Gulf States and as a regional rival of Iran in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, however, which was set up by Riyadh in December 2015, has so far scarcely emerged as a military actor and seems to serve the Saudis more so as a counterweight to Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region.¹¹



The Military Situation of IS

Since the proclamation of the caliphate, IS has had to accept considerable losses of personnel and material resources, and most recently surrendered significant areas of territory, yet without losing its capability for action. This can be traced back to the hybrid nature of IS, its partial support among the local population and flexible leadership structures. The organisation's warfare is based both on conventional military tactics as well as elements of guerrilla fighting that draw on the experiences of former officers in the Iraqi *Baath* regime and the old head of the IS-forerunner organisation known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).¹² Its mutability allows IS repeatedly to escape the attacks of its opponents and to undermine their control of recaptured areas. The organisation remains a formidable military opponent and it will require substantial efforts to defeat it.

Since its vast expansion in the spring of 2015, IS has lost about one third of its territory, but still it continues to control huge areas in Syria and Iraq including the million-strong city of Mosul. The previous territorial losses primarily included areas in which Sunni Arabs form a minority and the Kurdish and Shiite-Arab militias can rely on the support of the local population. This factor does not hold in the fight for the Sunni-Arab core area of IS, and thus it is to be anticipated that prolonged battles will continue especially with regard to the recapture of territory around Mosul and Raqqa. The heavy losses incurred during the "liberations" of the comparatively small cities of Ramadi and Fallujah were merely a foretaste in this context. Moreover, even after the recapture of these areas by the coalition partners, IS will be able to continue the fight by terrorist means.

A series of IS "cabinet" members – including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's deputies in Syria and Iraq, Ali al-Anbari and Muslim al-Turkmani – have been killed in the past two years. However, the organisation has functioning rules of succession for all levels of its hierarchy, and according to the model of the former *Baath* regime, it is built on



Preliminary exercise: With U.S. backing, Afghan security forces were able to push back IS into a small territory in the east of the country. Source: © Parwiz Parwiz, Reuters.

leadership structures balancing each other out.¹³ On the lower echelons, the commanders largely have a great deal of autonomy, thereby making it easier to replace them in the event of their death.¹⁴ Even after the elimination of half of its leadership – as rumoured by the U.S.¹⁵ – IS has shown itself as capable of action as it had been before.

Sources within the security services estimate the strength of IS' core units – after losses of about 25,000 fighters solely as a result of the airstrikes during the past two years¹⁶ – at 20,000 to 40,000 fighters.¹⁷ In 2015, the number of newcomers among the foreign fighters¹⁸ fell on average from 2,000 to 200 per month due to

the loss of access routes for reinforcements and the deterrent of permanent airstrikes.¹⁹ In terms of its numbers, IS is clearly inferior to its opponents. However, poor training, internal conflicts and inadequate coordination ultimately reduce the strength of over 200,000 fighters of the coalition's local partners on the ground.²⁰

In 2014 and 2015, the advance of IS in Syria and Iraq could be stemmed by military means and partly revised. If success should emerge in recapturing the entire territory of IS, a plausible scenario would be a renewed metamorphosis of the organisation back to an underground movement. How quickly the comprehensive recapture of IS-controlled areas could take place, and

whether the regression from “state” to terror organisation can succeed substantially depends on the local partners of the coalition and the ongoing political developments in Syria and Iraq.

2. The Political Dimension: Civil Wars and State Collapse as Deep-Rooted Causes

The Raqqa Offensive in the Context of the Syrian Civil War

More than five years after the start of the Arab Spring, the civil war in Syria continues, and no timely political or military outcome is in sight.²¹ The Assad regime, which is supported by Russia, Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, as well as the rebel movement mainly comprising Islamist groups supported by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are confronted with a military stalemate situation. Although the U.S. and Russia continue to jointly call for a political solution, the peace negotiations in Geneva have hitherto failed. In this conflict-ridden environment and the resulting humanitarian disaster it is difficult to undermine the support among the local population for IS, which despite its reign of terror, has brought about some degree of stability in north-eastern Syria. Even more so, as the current offensives against areas around Raqqa, which are occupied by a majority of Sunni Arabs, are led by the Kurdish YPG. Their numbers dominate the SDF, and there have been repeated conflicts among SDF ranks between Arabs and Kurds.²² A recapture of the areas by the army of the Assad regime, which started an offensive in Raqqa province at the same time as the SDF, is bound to be met by serious mistrust. Without the support of the local population, the advances risk driving the local people further into the grip of IS.

Collapse of the Iraqi State and the Mosul Offensive

The situation in Mosul is even more complicated; this is the ideological center and real stronghold of IS. In Mosul, two major problems manifest the collapse of the Iraqi state: weak central government as a result of ethnic and confessional power struggles and the margin-

alisation of Sunni Arabs. The recapture of the second largest Iraqi city is therefore of extra-ordinary significance as far as domestic policy is concerned.

The Iraqi anti-IS coalition has clearly been weakened by rivalry among the leading actors in domestic politics – the Shiite militias, the central government in Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurds – as well as the regional powers of Iran and Turkey seeking influence in the country. In mid-April 2016, battles flared up between the *Peshmerga* and the Iranian-backed Shiite militia *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* in the south of Kirkuk.²³ The Iraqi Kurds object to the militias’ participation in the Mosul offensive. The ongoing conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over disputed territories, transfer payments and Kurdish efforts to gain independence goes as far as both sides taking unequivocal positions on Mosul. Still, there is no continual communication between their forces, thereby rendering a coordinated attack far more difficult. To counterbalance Iran’s influence in Iraq, contrary to the will of the government in Baghdad, Turkey has stationed more than 1,200 soldiers in Northern Iraq to train and support almost 6,000 fighters of the Sunni-Arab militia *al-Hashd al-Watani* during the recapture of Mosul.²⁴ Additionally, there are conflicts between the units of the various Kurdish parties along the front north-west of Mosul.

The coalition could not destroy the underlying conditions facilitating the rise of IS.

The continued marginalisation of Sunni Arabs in the Iraqi nation and society continues to make it difficult to push back IS. In 2014, its advance was welcomed by many Sunnis as a release when compared with the sectarian and brutal politics of the Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. In September 2014, the accession of the more moderate Shiite Haidar al-Abadi as Prime Minister has done little to change this. This is primarily related to Abadi’s misguided reform program,

which could hardly implement any measures to improve the integration of Sunni Arabs, and to address the complicated role of the Shi'ite militias in fighting IS. The Shi'ite militias are regarded as an extended arm of Iran and have evidently committed several war crimes against Sunni Arabs in the areas recaptured from IS²⁵ though they are nonetheless integrated into the Iraqi security apparatus.²⁶ This has led to many Sunni Arabs continuously regarding IS as the lesser evil. Particularly in Mosul a majority of the population continues to support the terror organisation.²⁷

As a result, the coalition has not succeeded in ameliorating the underlying political and social conditions that first facilitated the rise and persistence of IS in Syria and Iraq. The organisation cannot be permanently defeated without winning back the local population. Meanwhile, IS has further advanced the expansion of its structures in other countries by exploiting civil wars and state failure.

IS Provinces in Libya, Egypt and Afghanistan

In 2014 and 2015 the organisation claimed a total of 20 new provinces (*Wilayat*) in areas of Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Russia. The majority of the groups, which have joined with IS during the last two years, are local jihadist organisations such as Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Islamic Movement of Central Asia of Uzbekistan.²⁸ In most cases the leaders or individual commanders of such local groups have sworn allegiance to al-Baghdadi,²⁹ yet, to date they are hardly integrated into the leadership structures of the core organisation. Even if, until today, the branches only exert marginal territorial control, the nominal existence of provinces outside Syria and Iraq is important for IS, both for ideological and propaganda purposes, because of its aspiration to establish a worldwide caliphate. Simultaneously, they represent a growing danger for Europe. Several of the branches that operate in these provinces offer IS safe havens that can also be used to prepare attacks on European targets. Due to their geo-strategic location, military strength and political relevance, in particular the

branches in Egypt, Afghanistan and Libya are vitally important for European security interests.

The *Wilayat Sinai* in Egypt, which emerged in 2014 from the organisation *Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis* (ABM), is in the immediate vicinity of the strongholds of the Palestinian Islamists in the Gaza strip, the proclaimed IS-target of Israel and the maritime eye of the needle, the Suez Canal. The group comprises only a few hundred jihadists, yet it currently benefits from the return of Egyptian fighters from Syria and Iraq.³⁰ Another latent danger is that IS could recruit among the high number of frustrated Islamists the Egyptian state has produced through its military's repressive approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood since 2013. Until the merger with IS, the attacks by ABM were directed against institutions of the Egyptian security forces. Since then the group primarily launches attacks on tourist targets such as against a Russian passenger jet in October 2015.³¹

The greatest and potentially most dangerous IS branch in Libya now incorporates 11,000 fighters.

The *Wilayat Khorasan* in the Afghan-Pakistan border region was proclaimed in January 2015, following the declaration of allegiance to IS that was already made by several Afghan and Pakistani Taliban middle-ranking commanders in autumn 2014. Clearly, there are widely divergent estimates about the current strength of IS personnel in Afghanistan, which can be traced back to territorial losses during recent months.³² After IS was on the verge of gaining a foothold in several Afghan provinces the Afghan security forces have, with U.S. support, succeeded in pushing back the *Wilayat Khorasan* to a small zone in the Eastern Afghan Province of Nangarhar. Nevertheless, IS remains a serious threat in Afghanistan, as became obvious in the recent July 2016 attack that killed almost 100 people in Kabul. If IS is to carry on in Afghanistan in

the long term, this would further diminish the mixed outcome of the Western intervention in the country.

The IS group in Libya represents the most important branch of the organisation and maintains the closest structural ties with the leadership in Syria and Iraq. In light of this and because of geographical proximity, this branch – apart from the core organisation – represents the greatest potential terror threat for Europe. IS has deliberately exploited the state vacuum in Libya after the military intervention in 2011, and since 2013 it began to establish itself in the country. To consolidate the branches, IS strategists first transferred Iraqi commanders and 800 experienced Libyan fighters from Syria and Iraq to Libya.³³ Afterwards, the flow of Western fighters was diverted to the new province and jihadists were deliberately recruited from the Maghreb and Sahel zone.³⁴ This has allowed IS to expand in Libya from less than 1,000 fighters at the end of 2014 to currently up to 11,000 fighters.³⁵ Until August 2016, IS' territorial control was restricted to about 200 kilometres along the coastline around the Northern Libyan town of Sirte. Meanwhile, backed by the U.S., the Libyan army has succeeded in recapturing these areas. However, this does not amount to a victory over IS in Libya, since the terror organisation maintains cells in Benghazi, Tripoli and other parts of the country and therefore continues to represent a source of risk not to be underestimated.

3. The Police and Intelligence Dimension: The Long Arm of IS

The Potential and Capabilities of IS in Europe

The control of large areas in Syria and Iraq and the continuous set-up of branches give IS safe havens to carry on largely undisturbed with the recruitment and training of terrorists and the preparation of complex attacks in Europe. Following its claim for global domination in 2012, IS concentrated on the expansion of its terror activities in Europe; since the end of 2013 it has put them into practice.³⁶ The strategic goal is to carry out attacks against Western targets to

plant the seeds of discord between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe, to instrumentalise the debate about refugees, thereby spreading discord among EU states and, as an ultimate consequence, to demonstrate the superiority of the Islamic caliphate.

IS resorts to two jihadi concepts that follow a fundamentally different logic. The first category comprises the so-called lone wolf attacks carried out by individuals who have been independently radicalised by IS propaganda – often on the internet – and have no direct link to IS. Generally, these lone operators have never fought for IS in Syria or Iraq and, moreover, they have not undergone terrorist training. IS spokesman Abu Mohammed al-Adnani laid the foundation for their indirect recruitment on 22 September 2014 with a call to all European Muslims to kill their non-Muslim fellow citizens; this was renewed at the start of the Ramadan month of fasting in June 2016. As a result, since 2014 there has been a wave of attacks by lone perpetrators in Europe, above all in France. The attacks carried out were often characterised by their restricted scope, poor preparation and inadequate weaponry, and above all, they largely led to low numbers of victims. However, the attacks on a nightclub in Orlando on 12 June 2016, where almost 50 people were killed, as well as in Nice on 14 July, where 85 people were killed, have proved that even lone operators are increasingly in a position to carry out attacks with high numbers of victims. Such attacks, which are almost impossible to prevent, enable IS to sustain a constant climate of fear without any long-term or sophisticated planning and to demonstrate its continual presence in Europe.

An even greater danger is represented by purposefully established terror cells. Here, IS deliberately selects individuals with combat experience and – if possible – the corresponding local knowledge and language skills of European countries; it trains them and sends them to Europe. This incorporates both European foreign fighters, who return to their countries of origin, in addition to fighters from countries in the Far and Middle East who are disguised as refugees

and infiltrate into Europe. For example, this was the pattern of the devastating attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 and in Brussels on 22 March 2016. Out of more than 5,000 European citizens, who have fought in Syria and Iraq for IS, about 1,200 have already returned to Europe.³⁷ Security sources assume that these include at least 400 individuals whom IS deliberately chose and deployed to prepare attacks in Europe.³⁸

IS is skilled at exploiting weak points in the police and intelligence services' work of EU member states.

The European returnees constitute the largest threat, because they can act as facilitators and virus-like afflict their surroundings by recruiting and setting up terror cells here. Moreover, mainly due to the protection of their existing social networks in Europe they can easily avoid surveillance.³⁹ For example, the Bakraoui brothers, who committed suicide by detonating their explosive belts in the Brussels attack, had never fought for IS, but they came from the vicinity of returning fighters like Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who was behind the attacks in Paris. When forming new cells the European fighters resort to IS networks that previously served for recruitment for Syria and Iraq and are now used to plan the attack in Europe.⁴⁰ The jihadists infiltrating into Europe as refugees are either integrated into existing cells – as in the case of the two Iraqi attackers in Paris⁴¹ – or form their own attack structures. In early June 2016, for example, an IS cell was broken up in Düsseldorf that consisted of four Syrian refugees.

The terror cells form a European-wide network and largely act independently of the IS leadership in Raqqa. IS uses a tactic of issuing an order where the target and timescale of an attack is defined, yet the modalities of performing it are handed over entirely to the terror cell. The network involves both attack cells and support cells, which are not informed about the overall operation, and are exclusively responsible for build-

ing the bombs, procuring weapons and other supporting activities. If an IS cell is destroyed, this only has minimal effects on the operational capacity of the network as a whole in Europe. Through cross-border activity, IS is skilled at exploiting weak points in the police and intelligence services' work of the EU member states, whose information sharing to date was only used inadequately within the open border Schengen zone area. IS attacks in Europe are becoming increasingly complex and simultaneously unpredictable.

Threat Situation and Counter Terrorism Measures in Germany

For a long time, Germany was regarded as a transit country as well as a safe haven for Islamist terrorists. However, with the attacks in Würzburg and Ansbach, the IS terror has also arrived in Germany. IS has called for attacks on targets such as, for instance, the Federal Chancellery and Cologne-Bonn airport, and moreover endeavours to send back German IS fighters in Syria and Iraq in order to focus on setting up cells. More than 800 individuals from Germany, according to the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), have joined IS and travelled to Syria and Iraq and so far about 260 of them have returned.⁴²

As a reaction to the terror threat, in 2015, the federal government tightened anti-terror legislation, increased personnel and funding for the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Verfassungsschutz*), BKA, Federal Police and the Federal Intelligence Service, and has campaigned within the EU for an improved assessment of terror threats and information sharing. The federal government's new counter terrorism package, which was passed in June 2016 by the German *Bundestag*, envisages more intensive cooperation between the Federal Intelligence Service and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution with foreign intelligence agencies, the use of Federal Police undercover investigators to prevent threats and the presentation of ID papers to purchase prepaid cards for mobile phones. These measures are further supplemented by the nine-point plan





Commemoration: The November 2015 Paris attacks, for which IS claimed responsibility, constituted the worst in ten years. Source: © Philippe Wojazer, Reuters.

for the prevention of terrorism that the Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, introduced after the attack in Ansbach. Among other things, this plan envisages the operation of the German *Bundeswehr* in the event of major terror attacks, faster deportation of asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected and improved European and international information sharing. Recently, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière unveiled plans for a further reinforcement of the capacities of the Federal Police, BKA and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. To date, the provision of 4,600 extra jobs for the federal security authorities has been approved and 3,250 of these jobs will be allocated to the Federal Police.⁴³

These measures are an important first step towards counter terrorism measures in Germany and are to be further accelerated. German security authorities assume that 1,100 individuals belong to Islamist terror groups with about 500 of them being categorised as immediate threats and perceived as capable of carrying out an attack in Germany at any time.⁴⁴ Based on this statistic, the number of officers from security agencies able to carry out surveillance is well below the European average. The security services only know the whereabouts of 40 to 60 per cent of the 800 individuals who travelled to Syria and Iraq and partly returned as jihadists.⁴⁵ According to the federal government, 76 Islamists have disappeared without

a trace and a warrant has been issued for their arrest.⁴⁶ However, even if the whereabouts are known of those who represent a threat, due to a shortage of personnel there is no possibility for round-the-clock surveillance; thus, priorities must be identified based on the threat potential. About 80 per cent of the tip-offs, which led to the destruction of Islamist structures or even to the prevention of imminent attacks, were passed on to the German security services by foreign security agencies.⁴⁷ The extra personnel and material resources for the German security forces therefore continue to have high priority. This is even more urgent as many of the almost one million refugees in Germany have initially only been inadequately processed and checked. Furthermore, Germany should reinforce its efforts with regard to the development of a comprehensive prevention strategy to counteract the trends for radicalisation over the longer term.

Action is required in the areas of personnel, prevention and the exchange of information at the EU level.

It is also important to act with respect to the legal situation. For example, generally it takes several weeks to process a G10 application (restriction of the privacy of correspondence, post and telecommunications) by the G10 Commission of the German Bundestag.⁴⁸ Since the application is related to devices and not individuals, those who pose a potential threat can easily switch their telephones during this period. In April 2016, the Federal Constitutional Court also declared important anti-terror powers of the BKA as unconstitutional.⁴⁹ Many provisions for surveillance are regarded by Karlsruhe as too far-reaching and in the opinion of the justices represent unconstitutional intervention in citizens' basic rights. Until June 2018, the legislator must now improve the law; meanwhile, numerous Federal Constitutional Court guidelines are in force to ensure that the legislation can continue to be applied.

Ultimately, there is a lack of effective intelligence sharing at the European level, and among police authorities in particular. As a reaction to the terror attacks, a European Counter Terrorism Centre was set up at Europol where 40 to 50 experts gather information from European security agencies. However, there is a continued failure to share intelligence due to the lack of willingness to cooperate by many police authorities of EU member states: 90 per cent of the information supplied to Europol come from five countries, including Germany. Different technical standards in the member states and varying definitions of "Islamist potential agitators" also frustrate the data sharing. The various sources of information – such as details of visas, flight movements, refugee flows and the "Schengen information system" – continue to be inadequately linked, and there is no standardised European database about terror suspects.

Conclusion: Fighting the Causes!

The rise and continuity of the so-called Islamic State results in a terrorist threat for Europe and the U.S. and represents a greater complexity than has been the case since the end of the 1990s in view of the operative capacities of al-Qaeda. There is a real risk for the Federal Republic of Germany and its citizens arising from the territorial area of IS on Syrian and Iraqi soil. This is fundamentally different from the threat that emerged for Germany from Afghan soil after 2011, because no caliphate existed there.⁵⁰ Today's IS terrorists have almost perfect opportunities for recruitment in Syria and Iraq as well as safe havens and the right conditions for training. Furthermore, they are able to exploit the refugee crisis, during which hundreds of thousands of people initially rushed unchecked into Europe and Germany between August 2015 and January 2016 to allow the infiltration of potential attackers. Furthermore, IS has selected Germany as one of its preferred targets, thereby confronting German counter terrorism agencies with additional challenges.

The Western community of states addresses the symptoms of this phenomenon in two respects.

In the context of the coalition, it attempts to destroy the physical growth of IS in Syria and Iraq through military intervention, which has been manageable so far; furthermore, it strives to catch the attackers sent from there with the resources of the police and intelligence agencies in Europe. To minimise the risk of attacks by IS in Europe over the longer term, the strategy must start by tackling the radicalisation, training and early preparatory phase of attacks. Since these steps take place in Syria and Iraq, and by its very existence the caliphate represents a magnet that generates supporters throughout the world, it is incredibly important to defeat IS' physical capacity here in the very near future.

The key to defeating IS lies in Iraq.

Supporters of the present strategy justify the limited military intervention and slow pace of action against IS in Syria and Iraq on the basis of the (still) absent political solutions for a rapidly emerging post-IS scenario. This can be countered by the observation that efforts to end the civil war in Syria and to stabilise Iraq since the victory of IS in summer 2014 were faltering and were confined to the local situation. The West's policy on Syria, following years of half-hearted initiatives, has only acquired a definitive form again after the Russian interventions in September 2015. However, until today there are no tangible successes to show for this. Since IS is first and foremost an Iraqi organisation, the key to defeating the caliphate lies here. However, with Iraq particularly in focus, the new kind of phenomenon posed by IS is not countered by new military and political approaches, but rather with a retrospective policy entirely characterised by the legacy of the last Iraq war. Hence, U.S. policy in Iraq is not oriented towards the political and military realities in the country but primarily follows President Obama's mission statement of bringing home all American troops. Washington's view of the situation in Iraq is in this context particularly clouded by the negative experience of the

comprehensive military intervention post-2003 and the failed state building. Great Britain associates a trauma with Iraq due to the "war lie" of its own government, the heavy military losses and the high economic cost. Germany's and France's Iraq policy until summer 2014 was characterised by the rejection of the option for intervention in 2003 and the resulting non-intervention course in the country. However, the 2015 refugee crisis and the present terrorist threat in Europe have clearly shown that Germany and other European states are more heavily affected than the U.S. by the consequences of civil war, state collapse and IS presence in Syria and Iraq. Europe's military and political efforts – in particular, also in Iraq – must deal with this fact in the future.

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- 1 Many countries involved in the coalition are not joining in the military operations, but only in the humanitarian, legal and police measures against IS. Cf. further McInnis, Kathleen 2016: Coalition Contributions to Countering the Islamic State, Congressional Research Service, 13 Apr 2016, in: <https://as.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R44135.pdf> [17 Aug 2016].
- 2 The strategy incorporates further elements such as the use of U.S. intelligence services, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters and funding, propaganda counter-measures and humanitarian aid. Cf. The White House 2014: Strategy to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), 10 Sept 2014, in: <http://go.wh.gov/vEgQqx> [17 Aug 2016]. On the (self-)funding of IS cf. Shelley, Louise 2016: Dirty Entanglements. Global Terrorism and Organised Crime, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 83–94, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.44739> [15 Sep 2016].
- 3 In December 2015, the U.S. government made adjustments to the strategy by deploying additional Special Operations Forces that directly participated in operations on the ground to fight IS. Cf. The White House 2014: Address to the Nation by the President, 6 Dec 2015, in: <http://go.wh.gov/JntW3Q> [17 Aug 2016].
- 4 Cf. U.S. Department of Defense 2016: Operation Inherent Resolve – Targeted Operations against ISIL Terrorists, in: http://defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve [17 Aug 2016].
- 5 Cf. Cooper, Helene / Schmitt, Eric / Schmidt, Michael S. 2016: U.S. captures ISIS Operatives, Ushering in Tricky Phase, The New York Times, 1 Mar 2016, in: <http://nyti.ms/1RF9VFm> [17 Aug 2016].
- 6 The YPG is regarded as a branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is categorised by the EU and the U.S. as a terror organisation. This shows how far Washington is prepared to go in choosing its partners on the ground. Cf. Stein, Aaron / Foley, Michelle 2016: The YPG-PKK Connection, Atlantic Council, 26 Jan 2016, in: <http://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-ypg-pkk-connection> [17 Aug 2016].
- 7 Cf. Gibbons-Neff, Thomas / Sly, Liz 2016: First Images Emerge of U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Fight to Retake Raqqa, The Washington Post, 26 May 2016, in: <http://wpo.st/wQYs1> [17 Aug 2016].
- 8 Cf. Mills, Claire / Smith, Ben / Brooke-Holland, Louisa 2016: ISIS/Daesh: the Military Response in Iraq and Syria, in: House of Commons Briefing Paper, 24 May 2016, pp. 22–25.
- 9 Germany supplied the Kurdish *Peshmerga* with more than 1,300 tons of military material, including anti-tank MILAN weapons. Cf. Bundeswehr 2016: Der Einsatz im Irak, 3 May 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2cQjC5h> [17 Aug 2016].
- 10 This so-called 4+1 coalition, which alongside Russia and Iran also includes Syria, Iraq and the Lebanese Hezbollah, was set up in September 2015 with the aim of joint intelligence-sharing of the security services about IS. To this end, two operation centres were established in Damascus and Baghdad. However, until now the 4+1 coalition's campaign has primarily focused on Syrian rebel groups.
- 11 The most important members of this coalition include Turkey, Jordan, Egypt and Pakistan.
- 12 Cf. Barfi, Barak 2016: The Military Doctrine of the Islamic State and the Limits of Ba'athist influence, 19 Feb 2016, in: CTC Sentinel 9: 2, pp. 18–23.
- 13 Cf. Reuter, Christoph 2015: The Terror Strategist: Secret Files Reveal the Structure of the Islamic State, Spiegel Online International, 18 Apr 2015, in: <http://spon.de/aetVm> [17 Aug 2016].
- 14 Cf. Schmitt, Eric / Hubbard, Ben 2015: ISIS Leader Takes Steps to Ensure Group's Survival, The New York Times, 20 Jul 2015, in: <http://nyti.ms/1JsIk3x> [17 Aug 2016].
- 15 Cf. The Daily Star 2015: Kerry: Iraq Coalition has Killed 50 Percent of ISIS leaders, 22 Jan 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2b1nD4X> [17 Aug 2016].
- 16 Cf. Rosenberg, Matthew / Cooper, Helene / Kulish, Nicholas 2016: ISIS Expands Reach despite Military and Financial Setbacks, The New York Times, 12 Apr 2016, in: <http://nyti.ms/1SxZjWC> [17 Aug 2016].
- 17 These statistics relate to professional fighters, who are permanently integrated into IS' military structures and are deployed flexibly. Beyond this IS has considerable mobilisation potential. For example, in Mosul estimates are of up to 80,000 local supporters who could give support to IS in case of an attack.
- 18 At the end of 2015, there were about 30,000 foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and a high number of them had joined IS. Cf. The Soufan Group 2015: Foreign Fighters – An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, December 2015, in: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf [17 Aug 2016].
- 19 Cf. Gibbons-Neff, Thomas 2016: Number of foreign fighters entering Iraq and Syria drops by 90 percent, Pentagon says, The Washington Post, 26 Apr 2016, in: <http://wpo.st/GcYs1> [17 Aug 2016]. On the situation in Tunisia as an important country of origin for foreign jihadists cf. Ratka, Edmund / Roux, Marie-Christine 2016: Jihad instead of Democracy? Tunisia's Marginalised Youth and Islamist Terrorism, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 64–82, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.44290> [15 Sep 2016]. On the motives of European foreign fighters cf. Eichhorst, Kristina 2016: The Return of the Terror Tourists. Foreign Terrorist Fighters as a Challenge for Germany and Europe, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 50–63, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.43804> [15 Sep 2016].

- 20 The SDF in Syria incorporate about 42,000. In Iraq, IS confronts, apart from the Iraqi army, about 160,000 Kurdish *Peshmerga* and 120,000 primarily Shiite *al-Hashd al-Shaabi*.
- 21 On the position of IS in the Syrian civil war and in Iraq cf. Gaier, Malte 2016: From Local Actor to Global Threat. The So-Called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 8–24, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.44734> [15 Sep 2016].
- 22 Cf. Chulov, Martin 2016: ISIS at Real Risk of Losing Territory for First Time since ‘Caliphate’ Declared, *The Guardian*, 2 Jun 2016, in: <http://gu.com/p/4k5cz/stw> [17 Aug 2016].
- 23 Cf. Bradley, Matt / Adnan, Ghassan 2016: Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, Shiite Militia Clash in Northern Iraq, *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 Apr 2016, in: <http://on.wsj.com/1SDoQ3C> [17 Aug 2016].
- 24 Cf. Mansour, Renad 2016: The Sunni Predicament in Iraq, Carnegie Middle East Center, März 2016, p.22, in: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_59_Mansour_Sunni_Final.pdf [17 Aug 2016].
- 25 Cf. for example the 2015 Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Iraq in the Light of Abuses Committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Associated groups, A/HCR/28/18, 27 Mar 2015, in: http://ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session28/Documents/A_HRC_28_18_ENG.docx [17 Aug 2016].
- 26 The *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* are under the control of the Teheran-oriented Iraqi Interior Ministry; they are funded by the Iraqi state and receive massive and active support from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.
- 27 Cf. Mansour, n. 24, p. 3.
- 28 On the connection of Boko Haram to IS cf. Sambe, Bakary 2016: From Protest Movement to Terrorism. Origins and Goals of Boko Haram, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 25–37, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.44736> [15 Sep 2016].
- 29 This is also the case for Abu Sayyaf, cf. Seemann, Benedikt 2016: Bandits or Terrorists? The Abu Sayyaf Group between Economic Interests and Religious Ideals, in: KAS International Reports 32: 1, 4 Apr 2016, pp. 38–49, in: <http://kas.de/wf/en/33.44738> [15 Sep 2016].
- 30 Cf. Gold, Zack 2015: Wilayat Sinai Risks Backlash after Metrojet Bombing, in: CTC Sentinel 8(11), pp. 19–22, here: p. 20.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 The strength of IS in Afghanistan is estimated by U.S. institutions at 1,000 to 3,000 active fighters, by Afghan sources at up to 8,500 fighters, including supporters. Cf. Johnson, Casey / Karokhail, Masood / Amiri, Rahmatullah 2016: The Islamic State in Afghanistan – Assessing the Threat, USIP Peace Brief 202, Apr 2016, p. 2, in: <https://usip.org/sites/default/files/PB202-The-Islamic-State-in-Afghanistan-Assessing-the-Threat.pdf> [17 Aug 2016].
- 33 Cf. Porter, Geoff 2016: How Realistic is Libya as an Islamic State “Fallback”?, in: CTC Sentinel 9(3), pp. 1–5, here: p. 1.
- 34 Ibid., p. 2.
- 35 Cf. El Amrani, Issandr 2016: How Much of Libya Does the Islamic State Control?, *Foreign Policy*, 18 Feb 2016, in: <http://atfp.co/1TpalBy> [17 Aug 2016].
- 36 Cf. Callimachi, Rukmini 2016: How ISIS built the Machinery of Terror under Europe’s Gaze, *The New York Times*, 29 Mar 2016, in: <http://nyti.ms/22JEIJO> [17 Aug 2016].
- 37 Cf. Jones, Sam 2016: Intelligence Agencies Fight to Unravel ISIS Network in Europe, *Financial Times*, 27 Mar 2016, in: <http://on.ft.com/2d2xa0L> [17 Aug 2016].
- 38 Cf. Ashour, Omar 2016: ISIS Strategy in Europe, Middle East Institute, 7 Apr 2016, in: <http://mei.edu/content/article/isis-terror-strategy-europe> [17 Aug 2016].
- 39 Cf. Jones, n. 37.
- 40 The IS cell in Molenbeek, which was responsible both for the attacks in Paris as well as Brussels, was set up especially around the Islamist organisation *Sharia4Belgium*, which played a key role in sending Belgian jihadists to Syria and Iraq.
- 41 Cf. Faiola, Anthony / Mekhennet, Souad 2016: Tracing the Path of Four Terrorists Sent to Europe by the Islamic State, *The Washington Post*, 22 Apr 2016, in: <http://wpo.st/piYs1> [17 Aug 2016].
- 42 Cf. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2016: Verfassungsschutz beobachtet 90 Moscheen, 2 May 2016, in: <http://faz.net/-gpf-8glbz> [17 Aug 2016].
- 43 Handelsblatt 2016: De Maizière will Tausende neue Bundespolizisten, 11 Aug 2016, in: <http://handelsblatt.com/13999758.html> [17 Aug 2016].
- 44 Cf. Bewarder, Manuel / Flade, Florian 2016: Deutschland sucht 76 Islamisten mit Haftbefehl, *Die Welt*, 11 Apr 2016, in: <http://welt.de/154166774> [17 Aug 2016].
- 45 Interview with German security experts in Berlin in April and May 2016.
- 46 Cf. Bewarder / Flade, n. 44.
- 47 Interview with German security experts in Berlin in April and May 2016.
- 48 A G 10-application must be submitted by all German intelligence services, if intervention is required with regard to the basic rights, which are protected by Article 10 of the German Basic Law. This relates, in particular, to telecommunications surveillance.
- 49 Cf. Süddeutsche Zeitung 2016: BKA-Gesetz: Verfassungsgesicht schützt Bürger vor zu viel Überwachung, 20 Apr 2016, in: <http://sueddeutsche.de/1.2957792> [17 Aug 2016].
- 50 After 2001 – apart from this – the core organisation of al-Qaeda around bin Laden and Aiman az-Zawahiri operated particularly from Pakistan.