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WHAT COMES AFTER DAESH

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

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This report is based on the views expressed during, and short papers contributed by speakers for, a workshop organised by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as part of its academic outreach program, as well as Interaxions, the think tank of France's Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure. Offered as a means to support ongoing discussion, the report does not constitute an analytical document, nor does it represent any formal position of the organisations involved. The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House rule; therefore no attributions are made and the identity of speakers and participants is not disclosed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The workshop and its objectives.....	1
Executive summary.....	5
The current state of conflict in Iraq and reflections on a 'post-Mosul' future	11
The Syrian conflict: Towards an endgame?.....	23
The evolving structure and strategy of Daesh	31
Daesh's European campaign as the core of its global dynamics	39
Endnotes	49
Appendix A – Workshop agenda.....	53
Appendix B – Academic Outreach at CSIS.....	57
Appendix C – Interaxions	61

THE WORKSHOP AND ITS OBJECTIVES

On 16 February 2017, Interaxions, the think tank of France's Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), and the Academic Outreach program of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) jointly hosted a workshop to assess the potential consequences of loss of territory for the jihadist group known as Daesh.

Held under the Chatham House rule, the workshop was designed around the work of four researchers from the Middle East and Europe, and benefited from the insights of security practitioners representing a range of domestic and international experiences. The papers presented at the event form the basis of this report. The entirety of this report reflects the views of those independent experts, not those of the DGSE or CSIS.

The CSIS Academic Outreach program and Interaxions both seek to promote a dialogue between intelligence practitioners and leading specialists from a wide variety of disciplines working in universities, think-tanks, business and other research institutions in France, Canada and elsewhere. It may be that some of our interlocutors hold ideas or promote findings that conflict with the views and analysis of the CSIS or the DGSE, but it is for this specific reason that there is value to engage in this kind of conversation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The situation in Iraq leaves little room for optimism. It is true that some genuine, albeit slow, progress has been made towards retaking Mosul, but Daesh's effective, determined defence of the city has made the offensive difficult and forced the Iraqi government to deploy units from the other provinces of the country. This has undermined stabilising operations in some Sunni-dominated regions, particularly Anbar province, and given Daesh an opening to re-establish itself in others, particularly around Tikrit. According to one of the speakers, the liberation of Mosul will likely occur in 2017, but it will create as many problems as it will solve.

In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's regime, which seemed so vulnerable four years ago, is now in a better position than at any time since 2011 thanks to Russian and Iranian intervention. The Syrian government's major military weaknesses have been compensated by the superior firepower and airpower supplied by its external supporters. Furthermore, the opposition is disorganised and fragmented and poses no strategic threat to the survival of the Assad regime.

Following a period of expansion from 2014 to 2015, Daesh went into a gradual decline. The group faces many challenges in terms of funding, manpower and administration, primarily due to the pressure exerted by the US-led coalition.

Lastly, Daesh's "European campaign" predates the coalition's bombings, which began in August 2014. It is therefore premeditated, not retaliatory. According to one speaker, Daesh's global dynamics are shaped by four factors: the war on terror led by the United States; the counter-revolution launched by several Arab regimes since 2011; the weakening or disappearance of several Arab States; and the ability of Daesh to maintain its home base in Raqqa.

The other overarching theme of the workshop concerned the broad trends that are guiding the current political and security developments in Iraq and Syria and that are expected to continue for the next 12 to 24 months.

In Iraq, the threat posed by Daesh since 2014 has forced the government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government to temporarily set aside many of their differences. The downside is that the weakening of Daesh is straining ties between the central powers and Kurdish authorities, reviving the grievances that the two sides had, since 2014, more or less buried in the interest of fighting their common enemy. Some of the conflicts that have lain dormant for the past three years may therefore resurface in Iraq in 2017 and 2018, particularly between Kurds and Shias and between the two main Kurdish political parties.

In Syria, meanwhile, a number of trends are emerging. Mainstream rebel groups are increasingly divided, fragmented, often under-resourced and demoralised. In many ways, the rebellion is gradually morphing into a rural insurgency. It is also more and more dominated by Islamist extremist groups, some of which with links to Al-Qaeda. In addition, the Russian intervention has allowed Moscow to fulfill its objective of positioning itself as a key player in a potential political process in Syria. As a result, the conflict is becoming more and more regionalised: Russia and Iran are propping up the regime, while Turkey, Jordan and the US are backing several armed rebel groups. Despite the Assad regime's victories and the opposition's disarray, a political and military settlement remains unlikely. The conflict may therefore become frozen.

Daesh's territorial ambitions are on a downward trend. The group remains firmly entrenched in some regions, particularly eastern Syria, but that is due as much to the weakness of its local enemies as to its own strength. This trend is influencing the group's messaging. In 2014, when Daesh was at the peak of its powers, it boasted of the caliphate's prowess at capturing territory; today, it tends to emphasise its spiritual dimension.

The jihadist movement in Iraq and Syria is not operating in a vacuum. Daesh is not exogenous to Iraqi society; the changing political context in Iraq and Syria will have a significant impact on its future. However, the war in Syria and the political dysfunction in Iraq will continue

to provide a fertile environment for Sunni extremist groups to thrive, whether in the form of Daesh or a new incarnation.

Although Daesh is weakened, its European campaign seems likely to persist even after the fall of the caliphate. The group has succeeded in setting up sleeper cells on the continent that will outlast its territory-seizing campaign in the Middle East.

The workshop speakers and participants also examined some of the uncertainties surrounding the future of the region.

First, how will the fight in Mosul unfold? Although a military victory against Daesh in this northern Iraqi city seems highly likely in the coming months, there are many concerns about the city coming under the management of Iraqi authorities. What kind of Sunni leadership will fill the void left by the disintegration of Daesh in Mosul and more generally across Iraq? Who will constitute the legitimate and functional power in Mosul and in the other Sunni regions of the country? According to the speakers, these questions will likely remain unanswered over the next two years. The alienation of Sunni Arabs in Iraq and Syria, which was one of the main factors behind the rise of Daesh, seems likely to persist long after the group dissolves. Sunni Arabs will probably continue to be politically marginalised in both Syria and Iraq, making the Sunni-dominated regions of these two countries vulnerable to extremist groups, whether that means Daesh or a successor.

One speaker also highlighted the complexity of the situation in Tal Afar, a town in northwest Iraq. Parts of the Shia militias hastened to advance on the town as soon as the battle of Mosul began in the fall of 2016. What repercussions will result from the presence of these militias and consequently of their Iranian ally? What will be the reaction from Turkey, which does not look kindly on this presence?

Lastly, the participants noted that the approach that will be chosen by the new Trump administration in the US represents one final major uncertainty that will likely have a considerable impact on the evolution of the political and security landscape of Iraq and Syria.

CHAPTER 1

THE CURRENT STATE OF
CONFLICT IN IRAQ AND
REFLECTIONS ON A
'POST-MOSUL' FUTURE

More questions than answers

Daesh¹ has been responsible for many dangerous developments in Iraq and the wider region since its momentous and surprising capture of Mosul in June 2014. It has taken some time for Iraqi military forces to be assembled in the aftermath of the mauling inflicted upon both the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Kurdistan Region's peshmerga in the summer of 2014 but, by the close of 2015, ISF units commenced operations to retake the territories lost to Daesh. Ramadi was recaptured by the ISF in December 2015, with Fallujah being liberated in May of the following year².

The Mosul Operation to retake Daesh's northern stronghold and the seat of the caliphate began in mid-October 2016. Unlike in Ramadi and Fallujah, progress has proved to be slow, with Daesh mounting a sophisticated defence that made the advance of ISF units into eastern Mosul (the 'left bank') more arduous than initially anticipated. Combat in west Mosul (the 'right bank') was predicted to be more challenging than that experienced in the east, due to the geography of the city and its greater population density. The reality has proved to be more complex.

The fighting has been brutal, in the extreme, but Iraqi forces—this time largely constituted of units from Ministry of Interior forces, and in particular the Emergency Response Division (ERD), rather than the ISF Counter Terrorism Service (CTS)—succeeded in taking significant sectors of west Mosul from 19 February. This led to increased hope that the Daesh resistance would be weaker than it had been in the east. This was not to be case, however. The assault faced even stronger and more organised resistance as Iraqi forces entered the central part of west Mosul, and especially the old city.

Worse was to come for the Iraqi forces and their Western allies as air strikes on the Jadida neighbourhood of Mosul, on 17 March, reportedly killed at least 150 civilians, forcing the Iraqi government to suspend the offensive³. The weeks ahead promise to be extremely difficult, as surrounded Daesh fighters, who are now mainly from Mosul and Nineveh, fight to the bitter end against an Iraqi enemy

that is determined to not only defeat them, but also eradicate their presence. It is, nevertheless, difficult to imagine Mosul not being liberated some time in 2017, perhaps by the summer.

This future liberation, however, is already generating more questions than answers. What does it actually mean to 'liberate' Mosul? What does the defeat of Daesh look like? How will Daesh react to the loss of the city? Who will govern in Nineveh and other parts of the former 'Islamic State' in the months and years ahead? And, perhaps most important of all, what does the liberation of Mosul and the defeat of Daesh, however defined, mean for the future trajectory and stability of politics in Iraq and ultimately the future of Iraq itself?

The calm between two storms

It would be naive to believe that the post-Mosul setting will represent a neat, new episode in Iraq's political development. Until recently, arguably, this has been the somewhat glib hope of Western countries and their observant media outlets, that have tended to view Daesh in particular as an organisation somehow exogenous to Iraqi Sunni society, much as the Al-Qaeda Iraq (AQI) organisation of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was⁴. And, logically, the removal of Daesh would then allow Iraqi political life to return to 'normal'. But this belief presupposes two important assumptions, both of which are counterfactual. The first is that Daesh is exogenous to Iraqi society, and the second is that Iraqi political life was somehow normal, in terms of relationships between ethnic and sectarian groups, between regions, between the state and other power groupings and between the centre and the periphery. Therefore, rather than Iraq being 'reset' following the trauma generated during the period from 2014 to 2017, the political and security framework of the post-Mosul environment is set to become a continuation of the tumultuous 2010-2012 period. However, the dangerous and unstable dynamics of this earlier period will now be magnified by the developments that occurred as Daesh took, held, and lost its territory, and be augmented by the empowerment of the Kurds, as well as the new struggle for political leadership among the Shia parties and organisations that have manifested themselves since the transformative summer of 2014⁵.

When considering the current state of conflict in Iraq and what may happen next, the adage ‘be careful what you wish for’ seems to be increasingly appropriate. To be sure, Daesh posed a terrible threat to Iraqis, and not just to Shia and Kurds, but to Sunnis as well. Without resolute action by Western powers and Iran in support of Iraqi and Kurdish forces in Iraq, on one hand, and, on the other, Western powers, Iran, and Russia in (conflicting) support of the Syrian regime, Syrian opposition or Kurdish forces in Syria, the transformative effect of a Daesh advance and consolidation could well have threatened countries beyond Iraq and Syria, and redraw the region’s boundaries. But the effect of having Daesh more or less contained in Iraq, at least from the winter of 2014, actually instilled some sense of calm across the rest of Iraq, albeit not for those living in the territory declared an ‘Islamic State’ by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in July 2014. A peculiar period, or interregnum, then started that is ongoing today. During this interregnum, the politics of Iraq took on a new character. The Shia parties in Baghdad and the south became far more introspective and, until 2016, largely chose to ignore the question of defeating Daesh and liberating those parts of Anbar, Nineveh, Salahadin, and Diyala provinces that lay under the control of Abu Bakr and his lieutenants. The Shia community also became far more militant and sectarian in its outlook which was an understandable reaction to the devastation wrought on the largely Shia military forces that had been destroyed by Daesh in 2014 and before. Moreover, the influence Iran exerted over the institutions of the government of Iraq became unparalleled while its hold on core security functions was strengthened by the expansion of militias under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilisation Units (*Hashed al-Sha’bi*), and with many of the units being the direct proxies of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC).

...the political and security framework of the post-Mosul environment is set to become a continuation of the tumultuous 2010-2012 period.

The Kurds arguably benefited even more than the Shia following the fall of Mosul. Having survived their own near-death experience in

August 2014, when a multi-fronted Daesh assault very nearly saw Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, fall, the Kurds then emerged much stronger. Initially with Iranian protection, then with significant Western support, the Kurds' interests, for perhaps the first time in their history, directly aligned with those of Western powers. From being seen as a destabilising influence in the politics of Iraq, constantly agitating for greater autonomy as a precursor to seceding from the state, and nearly entering into open conflict with the Maliki government before the fall of Mosul in 2013 over their contested export of oil, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was now a valued ally in the fight against international terrorism and was the 'front-line' entity against the so-called Islamic State. For Western states that were prepared to deploy their armies to Iraq to liberate Mosul, the existence of some 150,000 Kurdish soldiers (*peshmerga*) turned the Kurdish leaders into highly valued partners that could now be nurtured, supported and protected.

The relationship between Erbil and Baghdad also improved markedly, and not least because they did not share a common border for some time after 2014. With a shared enemy in the form of Daesh, and with pressure now exerted from Western powers to focus on the threat posed by Daesh rather than their own internal disputes, Erbil and Baghdad began to find short-term solutions to problems that had stymied their relationship since 2003. With Nouri al-Maliki replaced by Haider al-Abadi in September 2014, the Kurdish leaders at last had someone with whom they felt they could engage constructively as well. During this period, agreements were reached over the export of oil from Kirkuk, through the Kurdistan region's pipeline into Turkey, with the direct support of Western militaries to the *peshmerga* and even the tacitly implied possibility of Kurdish independence in the future, however remote. Sensitivities remained, of course, but the fact remained that Daesh's presence created new realities among and between Iraq's Kurdistan region and the government of Iraq—those were positive, attractive realities compared to what had existed before the fall of Mosul. Not only were the inter-regional relations better, but the internal politics of the regions were more stable, as the often fractious internal contestation was calmed in

acknowledgement of Erbil and Baghdad being, in effect, on a war footing. From the perspective of the Kurds in particular, but also of Shia leaders such as Abadi (if not Maliki), a world without Daesh would bring far more challenges, concerns, instability and potentially conflict than one with Daesh sitting in Mosul.

The status of the Mosul Operation

As mentioned, ISF units have largely taken control of the areas of eastern and northern Mosul, to the Tigris River. Some internally displaced persons have begun to return home to eastern Mosul, indicating that security has been restored. However, the fight to liberate eastern Mosul seems to have been intense, and also largely conducted according to a rhythm and pattern dictated not by the ISF and their Western allies, but by the field commanders of Daesh. The defence of eastern Mosul seems to have been conducted in a highly coordinated and effective manner, indicating that Daesh possesses a well-ordered and integrated command-and-control capacity. It has also become apparent that Daesh forces spent the period since 2014 preparing for the defence of the city, with an extensive network of tunnels and houses with internal walls removed so as to facilitate quick and undetectable movement. Far from being an inchoate, demoralised force, Daesh in Mosul seems to be well prepared, and they appear to have a detailed, effective tactical plan that they are following closely. This does not bode well for when fighting extends across the river into west Mosul.

The setting of west Mosul caused some degree of trepidation among Iraqi military planners. West Mosul is traditionally the old Arab heart of the city, compared to the newer, eastern side. Far more reminiscent of an older, more organically formed city, west Mosul is characterised by a complex and densely formed urban area that is ideally suited for defenders in urban conflicts, and poses considerable problems for those entering these areas. Furthermore, this half of the city is where the central Daesh facilities, organisations and symbolic centres exist, and so the fight was set to be even more intense.

Compounding these problems is the fact that the ISF units involved in the current assault, and particularly core units of the Counterterrorism Service (CTS, or the 'Golden Division'), as well as the 16th and 9th Army Brigades have taken an inordinately high number of casualties⁶. This then forced Prime Minister Abadi to agree to the deployment of further CTS and army units from Baghdad and out of training programs to the north to provide reinforcements. This left exposed the stabilisation operations that had been ongoing in the Euphrates Valley, as well as Anbar and Salahadin provinces. These movements did not go unnoticed by Daesh. By the end of January 2017, Daesh operations had begun to re-establish themselves around Tikrit, in Diyala province, and back in the Euphrates Valley, perhaps in preparation for a push to unite with Daesh forces that were concomitantly expanding their control over Deir ez-Zor, further up the valley, in Syria.

The response of the Iraqi government has been to replace the ISF CTS and Iraqi army divisions that had been deployed to liberate eastern Mosul, and particularly 16th Division and the 9th Armoured Division, into the eastern side, consolidating their positions but not deploying them into west Mosul. Here, the main units that have now been sent into battle are from the Federal Police 3rd, 5th, and 6th Divisions, and the Emergency Response Division (ERD). This is a significant change. These units have not been the recipients of Western states' training and remain equipped with old Iraqi and Soviet equipment. They are also headed by the Minister of Interior, Qasim al-Araji, who is also a Commander of the Badr Organisation, a Shia militia. This is of considerable importance to the post-Operation aftermath, as it will be non-ISF forces, associated with the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) and directed by a known PMU leader that will be the occupying force in liberated west Mosul.

A further problem for the beleaguered prime minister was his inability to control the PMUs, or *Hashed al-Sha'bi*. Although well aware of the problem of having Shia militias fight Daesh in Mosul, few observers understood that parts of the *Hashed* were far more fixated on attacking the town of Tal Afar, to the west of Mosul, while it would also seem

that the IRGC coveted control of the significant airbase near the town. The movement of *Badr* militia forces to Tal Afar in late October 2016 was met with significant opposition by Ankara, which took upon itself the role of protector of the Sunni Turkmen community that constitutes a majority population in the town. Suddenly, Abadi was faced not only with the problems of liberating Mosul from Daesh, but also a potential tripwire that could see Turkey take direct military action, or indirect military action by using Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) peshmerga, against Iraqi *Hashed* forces that were themselves supported closely by Iran. In order to calm the situation, Abadi again had to deploy more ISF units to Tal Afar to give the military gathering some semblance of being genuinely 'ISF', rather than 'militia'. This again meant that the ISF deployment was pulled away from the pre-arranged plans, and the forces in the east of Mosul would struggle to be properly reinforced. The situation in Tal Afar remained highly unstable in February 2017, with *Badr* forces poised to enter, and with Turkish military units at a high state of preparedness at the border.

The evolving Daesh strategy in Iraq and Syria

Daesh is a learning organisation, and it has always moved with considerable fluidity, taking advantage of every situation, even the most trying ones. Today is no different. It would seem, for example, when analysing Daesh media, that a view emerged some months ago that Mosul might be lost. Daesh's rhetoric on this subject has now become noticeably muted and focused instead on protecting the so-called caliphate against all aggressors, as well as the long-term elements of Daesh's endeavour. If the group might have given up on Mosul in a strategic sense, it still has a tactical game to play: to brutalise the Iraqi forces arrayed against them and to further damage the credibility of both Western powers and Russia. Events like the bombing of Jadida illustrate this.

It seems that the group's leadership left Mosul, and probably Raqqa, too, some time ago to regroup in the towns of the mid-Euphrates, in Iraq and Syria. They need to further stretch the forces of Bashar

al-Assad and ensure that the Kurdish YPG is kept under pressure by a possible Turkish intervention against them, thus ensuring that they keep control of some territory in mid-Syria. Meanwhile, in Iraq, the opportunity to use asymmetric tactics in the run-up to municipal elections in 2017 and parliamentary elections in 2018 remains attractive for committed Daesh fighters and their many future recruits that will emerge from Nineveh, Anbar, Diyala and Salahadin in the aftermath of the Mosul Operation. Summer 2017 could be a hot and dangerous one.

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Unresolved political problems

The military picture may be complex and worrying, but the political picture is of even greater concern. It is often said that there is a lack of Sunni Arab leaders in Mosul, but the fact is that there are many leaders, but no leadership. It remains unknown who will emerge from within the ranks of the population of Nineveh and Mosul to take up positions of leadership, and also whether the liberating forces will allow local leaders to come forward and take control of the situation.

This question is also compounded by Kurdish aspirations. With Nineveh housing significant Kurdish and Yezidi populations, Kurdish President Massoud Barzani is keen to ensure that the Kurds loyal to him have a role to play in the future of the city, while also moving to take ownership of significant swathes of Nineveh province, namely Sinjar and Zummar districts to the west and north, and possibly Hamdaniyya district to the east.

Furthermore, no-one, whether Iraqi, Kurdish or from Western powers or international organizations, seems to be addressing the basic questions about the provision of public services in Mosul, and also preparations for transitional justice that would surely need to be in

place to manage the retributions that will surely be commonplace in such a traumatised place.

Lastly, and perhaps most important, there seems to be no national discussion about resolving the problem that led so many Sunnis to support Daesh even if passively in the first place, and that is the nature of the political engagement between the government of Iraq and Sunni communities. While Sunnis in Iraq remain marginalised and fearful of a Shia-led government in Baghdad, and suspicious of the intentions of a Kurdistan government to their north, the environment of the Sunni-dominated provinces of Iraq will remain conducive to the return of aggressive jihadist or nationalist groups in the years ahead.

CHAPTER 2

THE SYRIAN CONFLICT:
TOWARDS AN ENDGAME?

Since late 2015, the fundamental dynamics of the Syrian conflict have played in favour of the once-beleaguered regime of Bashar al-Assad. It is now in a better domestic and regional position than at any time since 2011.

The Assad regime now solidly controls all the main urban centres in western Syria, along with most of the critical infrastructure, remaining industrial capacity, key roads and airports. It is now focused on reducing residual resistance around the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, and in the Deraa, Homs and Hama provinces. It uses a combination of force, sieges and tactical accommodation to break and divide rebel forces and civilians.

The Russian intervention that began in September 2015 has ended the military seesaw between the regime and the opposition that lasted from 2012 to 2015, and restored the fortunes of the Assad regime in the medium term. Despite early US assessments of failure and a coming quagmire, it has landed greater-than-expected returns for Russia at the reputational, security, political and strategic levels. Moscow is now at the centre of the diplomatic game around Syria and a potential partner of the Trump administration against Daesh and other jihadist groups.

Russian and Iranian commitment guarantees the Assad regime's dominance against its internal and external foes. Russia has successfully deterred any Western, Turkish or Arab counter-reaction, and in effect has obtained Turkish and Jordanian acquiescence. This has neutralised Saudi and Qatari financial and weapons conduits to the rebel groups they respectively sponsor.

The Assad regime's significant manpower shortages have been compensated by sustained and superior firepower and airpower, and remedied through the development of local paramilitary forces as well as the deployment of a large number of foreign Shia militiamen. Coordinating and harmonising the role of these actors operating in parallel with conventional forces will determine in part the fate of the regime's consolidation and stabilisation strategy.

The mainstream⁷ rebellion, in its Islamist and nationalist forms, no longer poses a strategic threat to the survival of the Assad regime. It has no military or political path to achieve its stated political and military goals, and struggles to defend and manage the shrinking areas it still holds.

Military setbacks, internal infighting, a decrease in regional support, and US dithering and focus on fighting Daesh have adversely affected the cohesion, morale, military capability and standing of the mainstream rebellion. It is morphing into a rural insurgency able to harass but not defeat regime and allied forces. It is also more vulnerable to jihadist coercion or enticement.

Now lacking a national purpose, rebel groups are transforming into proxies for regional actors. Several Arab factions have aligned with the US-backed Kurdish Defence Units (YPG) against Daesh. Many Islamist and nationalist factions in northern Syria have joined the Turkish offensive against Daesh, meant in large part to contain Kurdish ambitions. In southern Syria, the factions forming the Southern Front serve as a border guard for Jordan and de facto Israel; they are expected to contain and, in a later phase, combat Daesh and Al-Qaeda's affiliates.

In times of war, survival comes first for most people and dictates choices. Additionally, people follow winners. As a result, support or acquiescence (forced or de facto) for the Assad regime has increased, as it is seen as the victor. Most Syrian internally-displaced people have moved to regime-held areas, where they are not exposed to regime bombings and where they can obtain assistance denied to Syrians still living in rebel areas.

Assad is engaged in a delicate game of balancing between his external supporters—Russia and Iran—whose interests currently align but may differ overtime. He benefits from not being wholly beholden or dependent on a single external patron. At the same time, Russia and Iran do not have the resources to help him fully recover and rebuild Syria.

Russia is now in a position to shape diplomacy over Syria. By engaging Iran and Turkey, it has created a framework to manage regional rivalries over Syria that relegates Gulf states, European governments, the United States and the UN to smaller or powerless roles. The Astana process is in part meant to redefine the terms of a political settlement by moving away from the need for a transition and towards a set of arrangements that would formally dilute the powers of the presidency while maintaining Assad in power. This process is also an opportunity to weaken the Syrian opposition by exacerbating its internal divisions, and to bring the so-called loyal opposition into the talks.

A political settlement under UN or Russian auspices remains unlikely but a satisfactory goal for most parties is to delay the discussion about Assad's fate, freeze the conflict, lower violence and establish zones of control.

The military setbacks and political disarray of the opposition have forced its regional supporters to rethink their approach. Bruised and faced with Western fatigue or abandonment, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have no common purpose or strategy in Syria anymore. Turkey prioritises the fight against Daesh and the containment of Kurdish ambitions over Assad's ouster. Saudi Arabia, overextended regionally and mired in a costly intervention in Yemen, has downgraded Syria. Qatar, reeling from regional setbacks, is licking its wounds.

The Assad regime is engaged in regional and international signalling, calculating that its military successes, Russian backing and the Trump administration's focus on combating Daesh may clear the way towards international normalisation. Such normalisation is essential to secure financial assistance for reconstruction. The challenge for potential donors will be to extract enough concessions from the regime so as not to appear to be funding Assad's counter-insurgency and stabilisation strategy.

The Assad regime largely ignored Sunni jihadist groups out of benefit, convenience and competing priorities until the summer of 2014. Mainstream rebel groups and defections posed the greater threat to

the regime's existence. The rise of Daesh, Jabhat al-Nusra and other extremist groups validated the regime narrative about the uprising; alienated large segments of Syrian society from the opposition; altered Western calculations and priorities; secured Russian, Iranian and Shia support; entangled rebel groups that cooperated with these jihadist factions; and eventually divided rebel ranks. This *quid pro quo* ended in 2014, although the regime continued to prioritise the fight against mainstream rebels who posed a more immediate threat.

Implications for the jihadist landscape in Syria

While Daesh has dominated headlines and driven policy, the Sunni jihadist universe in Syria is broad, diverse, fragmented and fluid. It does not exist in isolation from the dynamics detailed above, but rather is profoundly shaped by them.

The priority given to Daesh since 2014 is understandable: the jihadist organisation poses a unique challenge given its brutal theatrics, genocidal behaviour, territorial ambitions, hegemonic approach and global reach. The fight against Daesh has become the cornerstone of international engagement in Syria and Iraq. Significant military resources and political capital have been invested in rolling back and eventually defeating the group. Loss of territory, leadership, fighters, resources and prestige are debilitating for Daesh. That said, the fixation on Daesh has come at the cost of ignoring or downgrading significant trends affecting the rebel, Islamist and jihadist universes, of under-appreciating how the fight against Daesh would shape the battlefield and the macro-environment, and of developing viable policies aimed at stabilising Syria.

Daesh is now widely reviled among Syrian oppositionists for its brutal rule, for causing splits in the rebellion, for diverting resources once aimed at weakening Assad, and for forcing a shift in international and regional policy that benefits Assad. As a result, Daesh is unlikely to benefit from the weakening of rebel and Islamist forces, and finds itself isolated politically and militarily. Once it loses Al-Bab, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, Daesh will likely survive in a weakened form in the

Syrian and Iraqi desert, but is unlikely to be a prime shaper of the Syrian order.

Instead, the primary beneficiary of the weakening of Daesh and the existential crisis of the mainstream rebellion has been Jabhat Al-Nusra—which twice rebranded itself, first as Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham (JFS) in summer 2016, then as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) after swallowing several Islamist and jihadist factions in early 2017. The jihadist group and Al-Qaeda affiliate has used northwestern Syria as a prime base to entangle, lure, co-opt and defeat other Syrian rebel groups. By seemingly prioritising the fight against Assad and local governance over a formal state-building project, it has cultivated a positive image among local Syrian communities, creating a layer of societal protection and legitimacy. However, it has also faced local resistance across Syria.

Following the rebel defeat in Aleppo, a long-awaited great ‘sorting out’ within the non-Daesh jihadist and Islamist world is occurring. Driven by differences in ideology, strategy and regional alignment, factions in Idlib and western Aleppo province are coalescing around two rival poles: HTS and Ahrar Al-Sham, a powerful Salafist group operating in a grey zone and that includes jihadist elements in its leadership and ranks.

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HTS, which was once central to the rebel’s military performance and led a successful if short-lived attempt to break the siege of Aleppo in the summer of 2016, has argued that a lack of ideological purity and dependence on foreign sponsors are key reasons behind the rebel demise. The uncompromising jihadist outlook of HTS exposes it to Assad-led, Russian, Iranian and Western attacks. HTS opposes rebel participation in political talks with the Assad regime under Russian or UN auspices.

In contrast, Ahrar Al-Sham is increasingly dependent on Turkish support and aligned with Turkish priorities. Smaller rebel and Islamist groups are bandwagoning with it, seeking protection and access to Turkish resources. Ahrar Al-Sham, under Turkish guidance, has endorsed the diplomatic process. The group suffers from the perception that it is a proxy subordinating Syrian interests to those of external powers that have abandoned the revolutionary cause.

The weakening of Daesh is accompanied by the resurfacing and exacerbation of old and new fault lines. For the various groups combating the jihadist group, the fight is primarily about advancing their interests and often serves as a guise. The various factions (the Kurdish YPG, Assad's forces, Shia militias in Syria, rebel groups in Syria, Kurdish peshmergas, Shia militias in Iraq, Iraqi security forces, and Sunni tribal forces in Iraq) are already competing over territory, grievances, prestige and power. This competition is exacerbated by the involvement of external actors (the US, Iran, Turkey, Russia), all of which have been eager to defeat Daesh but unable to align their interests and strategies. The potential for clashes in northern Syria as these forces compete to seize Daesh territory is high; this will test the strength of the Russian-Turkish arrangement and their influence on their respective allies and proxies.

The concentration of rebel, Islamist and jihadist forces in northwestern Syria creates a unique challenge. Turkey is keen to contain HTS through its local proxies but does not seek its total defeat to counter-balance Assad. The latter intends to recapture the whole of Idlib, thus denying remaining rebel forces access to Turkey. Russia, whose help would be essential, is actively bombing targets there but seems less keen to mount a complete takeover, in part because it would threaten its accommodation with Turkey. The US increasingly sees HTS as an urgent threat and is conducting attacks against its leadership. The prospect that Idlib would turn into a 'free-for-all' fire range is serious.

CHAPTER 3

THE EVOLVING
STRUCTURE AND
STRATEGY OF DAESH

The ultimate aspiration of the group known as Daesh is the establishment of a state, specifically an Islamic caliphate ruled solely by Islamic law. This project requires governance and an administrative system. These concepts emerged in the first iteration of Daesh's state-like structure: the Islamic State of Iraq, whose creation was announced in October 2006. The Islamic State of Iraq formed two cabinets of ministries, the first in 2007 and the second in 2009. The latter suffered heavy losses in the wake of the Sahwa⁸ movement, when Sunni Arab tribesmen and former insurgents countered Islamic State in Iraq with US support from 2007 to 2009. These ministries had little meaning on the ground in terms of governance and administration. This, in part, was a consequence of the Islamic State of Iraq not controlling enough contiguous territory firmly then to pursue its objective—the need to hold territory to achieve a political project is known as *tamkin* in Arabic. Instead, the group became entrenched in Mosul, where it primarily thrived as a criminal network, extorting from businesses and institutions.

The beginnings of more substantive *tamkin* and evolution into a more complex bureaucratic governing structure would come with the formal expansion of the group into Syria as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or Daesh) in April 2013, as leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi attempted to subsume the Syrian jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusra, which he had helped create with manpower and funds in 2011.

The initial expansion strategy in Syria relied on gradual acquisition of territory and influence, partly by working alongside other insurgent factions in offensives against regime bases and positions to acquire weapons, but also by taking bases in insurgent territory. These bases were partly secured through defections from Jabhat al-Nusra to Daesh, even if Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri ruled against Daesh and ordered it to disband and return to Iraq. Daesh nevertheless worked to move into new areas and grow its footprint. Two key institutions that came with this expansion in 2013 were the Dawa⁹ Office, engaging in proselytising and religious outreach, and the Islamic Court. The acquisition of new bases created for Daesh a self-perpetuating

dynamic, leading the group to seek more recruits, gather intelligence on rival factions, assassinate opponents, and attempt additional take-overs, including northern Syria border towns like Azaz, Jarabulus and al-Dana.

The most prominent centre of Daesh power to emerge in Syria became Raqqa, as deliberate choice of Daesh leaders, even as a dissenting line argued that Aleppo City should play that role in light of its military and industrial assets, its more strategic position and its larger population. It is not yet possible to determine precisely when the decision was taken to make Raqqa the group's 'capital', but the city's prominence in Daesh's plans became apparent during the latter half of 2013, with numerous *dawa* billboards on display advertising Daesh ideals on dress for women and promoting sharia instead of other types of law.

The general approach to expansion changed in light of a wider move against Daesh by the Syrian insurgency at the turn of 2014, with clashes beginning in the northwest of Syria and spreading throughout the north and east of the country. These clashes led to a Daesh withdrawal from several areas (including Idlib and Latakia provinces in their entirety), but also to a consolidation of contiguous territory under Daesh control centred on the city of Raqqa and territory in eastern Aleppo and Hasakah provinces. That consolidation allowed for the development of a more elaborate system of governance through the first half of 2014, with the expansion of administrative services, including public services—which in 2013 had only existed on a limited scale in a few 'emirate' strongholds in northern border towns—alongside a budding attempt at providing services in Aleppo City through co-optation.

Large-scale advances in Iraq, foremost illustrated by the capture of cities like Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014, likely provided the main impetus for declaring a so-called caliphate and changing the entity's name from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to Islamic State only; propaganda celebrated the abolition of borders between Iraq and Syria. Following the caliphate's proclamation on 29 June 2014, a series of *diwans* (administrative departments) were formally established.

Not unlike recognised governments, these *diwans* have a central presence within the Daesh administration as well as at the regional level in the numerous *wilayats* ('provinces') of Daesh. There are currently nineteen such *wilayats* within Iraq and Syria and sixteen in other countries, as Daesh tries to entrench its global appeal.

Examples of *diwans* include the *Diwan al-Ta'aleem*, which deals with education, the *Diwan al-Siha*, which oversees healthcare, and the *Diwan al-Hisba*, which enforces Islamic morality in public. Apart from the *diwans*, other administrative bodies have come into existence since the announcement of the caliphate, including the *Hay'at al-Hijra* ('Hijra Commission'), which deals with migration, and the *Idarat al-Wilayat al-Ba'ida*, that manages relations between core Daesh in Iraq and Syria and the *wilayats* outside the region. Daesh's propaganda underscored the sophistication of its bureaucracy in a video entitled 'The Structure of the Caliphate'¹⁰.

Although the video is superficially impressive, nuance is required to assess the true nature of Daesh's bureaucracy. There is a gap between the tidy image of precisely organised offices and the reality on the ground. Based on documentary evidence, there can be variations in names by area; functions overlap between different *diwans*, and some administrative bodies are simply not mentioned in the video. One example is the *Diwan al-Aqarat wa al-Kharaj* (Real Estate and Land Tax Department), which handles requests for residency and use of property as bases. One would think from the video that the 'department of justice' (*Diwan al-Qada wa al-Madhalim*) deals with such matters, as the department is said to have been involved in confiscation of property for various reasons.

As the US-led coalition's campaign continues through its third year, it is evident that the Daesh project faces many challenges in terms of funding, manpower and administration: these challenges have forced adaptation in a number of ways. Disruption to Daesh administration appears in the documentary evidence. For example, documents show that Daesh responded by transferring some functions related to tax administration and education to al-Bab, which had become Daesh's most important stronghold in Aleppo province

after the loss of Manbij to the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces. Documents also attest to the disruption of Daesh governance through airstrikes. For instance, the Ninawa province office of the Distribution of Natural Resources Administration—responsible for supervising the trade of oil and gas and managing three oil markets in the Ninawa *wilayat* (including Mosul)—reported to office official Abu Mus’ab al-Iraqi at the beginning of October 2016 that overall production for the office had declined by up to a third as a result of continued coalition airstrikes on the Mosul oil market.

Moreover, given the number of high-ranking Daesh personnel killed in airstrikes and raids, the organisation seems penetrated by foreign intelligence. Daesh has responded to this by reducing Internet access for the population it controls, to the point of an outright ban documented in Mosul prior to the beginning of the campaign to retake the city. It appears Internet access is still allowed, but only through ‘Internet halls’ licensed by Daesh. Financial problems have also become apparent in the reduction of ‘perks’ for fighters, such as electricity access, salaries and rents.

In the long run, the trend is not favourable to Daesh. Some areas, notably the Daesh holdings in Deir ez-Zor province, look set to remain uncontested for the foreseeable future because of the lack of local actors to challenge Daesh. Recent developments, like the recapture of Palmyra by Daesh and the struggle to retake al-Bab from it, put emphasis on serious weaknesses among Daesh’s enemies rather than highlight the group’s strength: namely, manpower shortages for the regime and the problem of poorly trained rebels that are divided into far too many factions.

In the long run, the trend is not favourable to Daesh.

However, these issues do not alter the picture that is emerging. In both external and internal discourse, Daesh has tried to refute the idea that the loss of territorial control will lead to the collapse of the caliphate. The message was stressed by Daesh spokesman Abu

Muhammad al-Adnani in his last recorded speech in May 2016. Al-Adnani mocked the idea that the recapture of Sirte (Daesh's main stronghold in Libya), Mosul and Raqqa would mean the end of the Caliphate. Al-Adnani invoked as a historical precedent the losses of the Islamic State of Iraq: "Were we defeated when we lost the towns in Iraq and resided in the desert without a town or land?" These words were featured in an excerpt from an internal publication released by the *Diwan al-Da'wa wa al-Masajid* in the Tal Afar area, entitled "The Caliphate Will Not Vanish". It is asserted, in the excerpt, that "many have forgotten that the Islamic State is not a state of land or geographical areas".

Such messaging is somewhat at odds with the heavy propaganda emphasis on statehood and life under the caliphate during much of the 2014-2015 period, something that definitely played a role in the spike foreign fighters recruitment following June 2014. With the ability to bring fighters into Syria and Iraq now severely restricted, the hope is that foreign fighters and other supporters of Daesh will serve as soldiers of the caliphate within the West. Thus, the *Diwan al-Da'wa wa al-Masajid* publication quotes a certain Abu Talha al-Maghrebi of the Daesh Shura Council as saying that "they [the West] have forgotten that the generations of the caliphate have been brought up today in their embraces, and are growing up and preparing for the battle in the depth of their abodes, for today there is a Caliphate in Iraq and al-Sham, and tomorrow in the White House, as they do not realise by what sword they are struck".

On the ground in Iraq and Syria, one already sees what a post-Daesh collapse might usher in. In Diyala province, for example, where Daesh lost formal territorial control in early 2015, there are still regular reports of operations by Daesh cells, whether in the form of bomb attacks, assassinations, raids on security forces, the running of so-called *madhafat* (guest houses), covert infiltration of fighters from other areas, etc. Such operations on enemy territory are described as *amiliyat amniya* ('security operations'). This is a much simpler and more primitive form of resistance than the army-like structure that was created by the caliphate in the form of the *Diwan al-Jund* (Soldiers

Department). Yet Daesh's new modus operandi can be effective in an environment riven with ethnic and sectarian fault lines; more generally, it can also exploit poor security caused by the proliferation of militias across Iraq and Syria. This means that Daesh will remain a serious terrorist and insurgency threat for years to come.

CHAPTER 4

DAESH'S EUROPEAN
CAMPAIGN AS THE CORE
OF ITS GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Daesh was first proclaimed in April 2013 in the Syrian city of Raqqa, having driven out the revolutionary groups that had themselves wrested the city from pro-Assad forces a month earlier. Scarcely a year passed before Daesh inaugurated its “European campaign” with an attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, killing four. This shows that its “campaign” was under way long before the US-led coalition began bombing Daesh in Iraq in August 2014 and in Syria in September 2014.

It is important to emphasise that the grisly attacks that have since ripped through Paris, Brussels, Nice and Berlin were not intended as jihadist “retaliation” for Western operations. Rather, they represented the fruits of a premeditated campaign that the coalition has been unable to completely thwart. Daesh’s offensive powers have been palpably battered, but the organisation is still extremely dangerous.

Daesh’s objective in Europe is twofold: first, to prove that coexistence with “infidels” is impossible (particularly targeting France and Germany, the former because it is home to the largest Muslim and Jewish communities in Europe, the latter because of its generous refugee policies); and second, to use that notion to encourage recruits to mount jihad attacks from Europe. Daesh welcomes European recruits not just for their propaganda value, but also for intimidating local populations, in Syria much more than in Iraq.

When assessing the global dynamics of Daesh, there are two criteria that should be treated with extreme caution: the number of losses officially caused by the coalition, and the percentage of territory that has been “retaken”. As well as being open to debate, the first criterion has the disadvantage of being “static” and therefore failing to take into account fluxes and trends. The second criterion overlooks the symbolic importance of certain captures, however temporary (such as the Golan Heights for the Daesh-affiliated “Khalid bin al-Walid army”). Most importantly, it disregards the contrast between the swiftness of certain Daesh incursions, particularly in Iraq in June and July 2014, and the slow pace of the “retaking” operations.

On top of the misguided belief in a counter-terrorism bloc that imagines itself to be on the offensive on all fronts, there is a persistent inability, rooted in a certain politico-military culture, to grasp the radical novelty of Daesh. Daesh is like an Al-Qaeda (which means “base” in Arabic) that has succeeded in developing both a “base” of territory and a “base” of transnational data. The transnational aspect feeds off the territorial aspect and vice versa, in a dialectical relationship that places less emphasis on strictly geographic approaches (the worst attack in Baghdad closely followed the “victory” in Fallujah in July 2014 and coincided with an unprecedented assault on Medina). Daesh is not inflicting these attacks as “revenge” for battlefield setbacks: rather, it is conducting its operations on both the territorial and transnational fronts simultaneously.

On these two closely linked fronts, 2016 brought only two pieces of good news from Europe’s perspective: first, the fall of the jihadist bastion of Sirte in Libya, and second, the launch of Operation Euphrates Shield by Turkey and its allies in Syria. The first incident eliminated a Daesh stronghold on Europe’s southern flank, and the second finally severed the (two-way) transit corridor between the Syria-Iraq theatre and Europe.

More generally speaking, the four wellsprings feeding Daesh’s global dynamics are far from running dry, as a former diplomat would euphemistically put it:

1. George W. Bush’s “global war on terror”, which allowed the matrix of Daesh, the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda, to take root in the heart of the Middle East, gave way in September 2015 to Vladimir Putin’s “global war on terror,” which is proving to be just as fruitful for Daesh’s ongoing establishment and expansion efforts (in fact, by ignoring local dynamics, this globalisation of the war on terror actually fosters the globalisation of jihadist terror).
2. The Arab counter-revolution, which was launched in response to the popular uprisings of 2011, is receiving material and military reinforcement from this counter-terrorism movement,

a term that in practice means anti-Islamist in Egypt and Libya and anti-Sunni in Syria and Yemen. However, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the indirect competition that the violent “marshals” Abdelfattah Sissi and Khalifa Haftar represent to the establishment of local chapters of Daesh, and on the other, the direct collusion that the Assad regime and followers of Ali Abdallah Saleh, which hold military dominance over Sanaa, may have agreed upon with local jihadists.

3. The Arab states have faded into the background on the Middle Eastern scene (a particularly cruel illustration of this phenomenon in Syria was recently provided by the Astana conference, which had three sponsors: Russia, Turkey and Iran). This has enabled Daesh to champion a twisted form of “Arab nationalism”, exacerbated by the polarization of Sunni and Shia Muslims that is being encouraged everywhere by Tehran’s growing power. As historians may recall, not since pre-Islamic times has there been a Persian presence in Aleppo, much less Yemen.
4. Raqqa, the crucible of Daesh and the base used for its overall planning, continues to be spared by the parallel decisions of the United States and Russia to mobilize against and focus on Mosul and Aleppo respectively.

The four processes listed above are mutually reinforcing. The Obama administration was unable to overcome their effects, but at least it managed not to aggravate them, whereas the new US government appears to be strongly tempted to do the opposite. It will be some time before the new US approach can be evaluated. However, all signs point to a military escalation, which in turn will fuel a terrorist escalation, with territorial “gains” that will only amplify Daesh’s global dynamics.

At this stage, the situation in the Syria-Iraq region remains dire: despite not even being present at the battle of Aleppo, Daesh seems to have emerged as its main victor, having exploited that opportunity to retake Palmyra (which therefore remained “liberated” for just eight

months), tighten its hold on Deir ez-Zor, and establish itself in the two border triangles (between Israel—specifically the occupied Golan Heights—Jordan and Syria, and between Iraq, Jordan and Syria). Being firmly entrenched in west Mosul, Daesh has been able to go back on the offensive in Tikrit, in the province of Diyala, and even in the Euphrates Valley, for example in Ramadi.

These developments in the Syria-Iraq region carry serious consequences for Daesh's international recruitment and global dynamics. The anti-jihadist rhetoric used by Western decision-makers and media shows signs of a troubling syndrome known in social sciences as "cognitive dissonance", and this denialism only buttresses a propaganda that is based on disturbing yet inarguable truths. In this context, how can the conspiracy theories that are so popular on the jihadist Web be avoided when "fake news" and "post-truth" are the order of the day on both sides of the Atlantic?

It is impossible to overstate the extent to which the unending stream of hateful stereotypes against Islam and Muslims actually works in Daesh's favour. The same is true for the international community's complicity, whether active or passive, in abandoning the Arab and Sunni Aleppians to their persecutors. What is the use of trying to counter the arguments of jihadist recruiters by invoking universal values and humanitarian rights when these same values and rights are so blatantly withheld from Muslims? In the same vein, the impact of allegations of genocide of Burmese Rohingyas on helping Daesh thrive in Southeast Asia cannot be underestimated.

These observations are far from a trivial aside: they speak directly to the heart of these global dynamics. The inability of the West to make its words line up with its actions in the Arab-Muslim world is quite simply devastating to its campaign against Daesh. Its vilification will only be exacerbated by the growing tendency to whitewash Bashar al-Assad as "the lesser evil" and the extremely real possibility of Nouri al-Maliki returning to power in Baghdad. At present, Daesh has firmly installed "affiliates" in Sinai and Yemen, but the selection of a Haftar "strongman" would give it an entrée to Libya, where the jihadist commandos driven out of Sirte are currently living as nomads.

Lastly, the importance of the extremely troubling developments revealed by three recent attacks must not be minimized. First, the fact that Anis al-Amri, the jihadist who attacked a Berlin Christmas market on December 19, 2016, was able to travel through Germany, the Netherlands and France before being killed in Italy suggests, at the very least, the existence of trans-European support networks. Second, Abdulgadir Macharipov, the perpetrator of the massacre at Istanbul's La Reina night club on New Year's Eve 2017, managed to elude Turkish security forces for a full two weeks. It is still too soon to know whether the massive counter-terrorism operation conducted nationwide across Turkey on 5 February 2017, succeeded in dismantling the clandestine networks that provided support for the execution and aftermath of this attack.

Macharipov's entry into Turkey via Iran, after undergoing training in Afghanistan, also opens up the possibility of a triangulation between Afghanistan, Turkey and Syria, which would represent a serious threat in the medium term. We are also unable to know yet whether the third attack, which involved a machete being brought into the Carrousel du Louvre shopping mall on 3 February 2017, portends another equally ominous form of triangulation between the Gulf (more specifically Sharjah), an Arab country (which could be either Syria or Egypt), and France.

Aside from these operational triangulations, Daesh's European campaign could persist beyond the downfall of the caliphate because of two types of practices it follows that make it especially resistant to infiltration, prevention and neutralisation by security services. The first is the use of sleeper cells that are dedicated to logistical support, enabling them to potentially fly under the radar. Collusion with organised crime can be undertaken on a one-time basis or openly, particularly to obtain weapons or explosives. Anis al-Amri's travels through multiple European countries has already been mentioned, but there is also the case of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the man behind the Nice terror attack in 2016, whose support networks have yet to be fully identified.

The second is the emergence of “remote-controlled” terrorists who have not passed through Syria and thus could evade detection by security services. These Daesh supporters are recruited via social media and take their orders from a commander through various encrypted messaging systems. One example is Rachid Kassim, a Daesh propagandist from Roanne who was implicated in at least one attack and one foiled plot in France. For this jihadist organisation, the one major downside of remote-controlled terror is that it can lead unprepared novices to take action, as was seen in Ansbach attack in July 2016, in which the only fatality was the terrorist himself.

However, it is important to bear in mind that Daesh’s prime objective in Europe is not a military goal, but rather is driven by political, media and symbolic considerations. The myth of the lone wolf, which bolsters belief in an omnipresent threat and justifies all escalations of repressive measures, plays right into that dynamic. Furthermore, it is clear that the combination of remote-controlled terrorists and sleeper cells not only allows terrorists to compartmentalise their activities, but also lends credence to the corrosive illusion that “they are everywhere”.

...Daesh’s prime objective in Europe is not a military goal, but rather is driven by political, media and symbolic considerations.

In the same way that Daesh chose 14 July for an attack in France and targeted a Christmas market in Germany, the upcoming elections in France and Germany in 2017 may herald new terrorist threats. For the moment, the French and German people seem to be holding firm in the face of terrorist blackmail and resisting the politics of hate and the creep of demagoguery and racism. The Collective Against Islamophobia in France, a non-governmental organisation with a decidedly critical slant, actually reported a 36 per cent decline in anti-Muslim acts in 2016. Furthermore, neither France nor Germany has suffered an attack like the one that took six lives in January 2017 in Quebec City.

Today, retaking Raqqa is an indispensable condition for successfully mobilising the international community against Daesh, yet increasingly it is not enough. The longer the delay to drive Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's organisation out of Raqqa, the more the benefits of that expulsion to the war on terror will be uncertain. Furthermore, if the "liberation" of Raqqa is carried out not by Arab and Sunni forces, but by Kurdish or Shia troops—or, worse, by a foreign army—then the cure could turn out to be worse than the disease.

All things being equal, the global dynamics of Daesh are set to either continue or develop further, which can only encourage the jihadist terror campaign in Europe.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Daesh is the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).
- 2 Shehab Khan, “Ramadi ‘liberated from Isis’, Iraqi military spokesman says”, *The Independent*, 28 December 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraqi-forces-take-full-control-of-central-ramadi-in-key-victory-against-isis-a6787921.html>; Kareem Shaheen, “Iraqi troops seize control of districts of Fallujah from ISIS”, *The Guardian*, 30 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/30/iraqi-forces-enter-fallujah-in-attempt-to-drive-out-islamic-state>.
- 3 “Iraq suspends Mosul offensive after coalition airstrike atrocity”, *The Guardian*, 25 March 2017.
- 4 While its violently exclusionist behaviour has rendered detailed research on Daesh nearly impossible to undertake, several analyses of the group have emerged in the months following the taking of Mosul. Some of the most insightful of these early attempts to make sense of Daesh include: Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. London: Verso, 2014; Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State”, *Analysis Paper*, No. 13, Doha: Brookings Doha Center, November 2014; Charles Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State and the Evolution of an Insurgency*. London: Hurst & Co, 2015; Ahmed S. Hashim, “The Islamic State: From Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, Winter 2014, pp. 69-83; Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York: Regan Arts, 2015; Jessica Stern and J M Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*. London: William Collins, 2015; William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015.
- 5 See Gareth Stansfield, *Iraq: People, History, Politics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity, 2016, for an account of these periods of Iraq’s recent history.
- 6 See Campbell MacDiarmid, “The battle to retake Mosul is stalemated”, *Foreign Policy*, 22 December 2016; Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, “The battle for Mosul: ‘I have never seen such hard fighting like this’”, *The* “The battle for Mosul: ‘I have never seen such hard fighting like this’”, *The Guardian*, 1 February 2017.
- 7 The author prefers the use of the term “mainstream” to “moderate” when discussing the rebellion, as the latter represents an implicit reference to outside observers’ own system of values, often Western.
- 8 Awakening.
- 9 Proselytising.
- 10 <http://jihadology.net/2016/07/06/new-video-message-from-the-islamic-state-the-structure-of-the-caliphate/>.

APPENDIX A

WORKSHOP AGENDA

WHAT COMES AFTER DAESH?

A joint, closed-door workshop organised by the Academic Outreach program of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and Interactions, the think tank of the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE)

16 February 2017

PROGRAM

- 9:00 - 9:15 Objectives and context of workshop
- 9:15 - 10:45 **Module 1 - Iraq and Syria: taking stock of the conflict**
- 10:45 - 11:15 Break
- 11:15 - 12:45 **Module 2 - The many lives of Daesh**
- Evolution of Daesh's structure and strategy
 - Foreign fighters: impact on the West, global dispersion?
- 12:45 Adjourn

APPENDIX B

ACADEMIC OUTREACH
AT CSIS

Intelligence in a shifting world

It has become a truism to say that the world today is changing at an ever faster pace. Analysts, commentators, researchers and citizens from all backgrounds—in and outside government—may well recognise the value of this cliché, but most are only beginning to appreciate the very tangible implications of what otherwise remains an abstract statement.

The global security environment, which refers to the various threats to geopolitical, regional and national stability and prosperity, has changed profoundly since the fall of Communism, marking the end of a bipolar world organised around the ambitions of, and military tensions between, the United States and the former USSR. Quickly dispelling the tempting end of history theory of the 1990s, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, as well as subsequent events of a related nature in different countries, have since further affected our understanding of security.

Globalisation, the rapid development of technology and the associated sophistication of information and communications have influenced the work and nature of governments, including intelligence services. In addition to traditional state-to-state conflict, there now exist a wide array of security challenges that cross national boundaries, involve non-state actors and sometimes even non-human factors. Those range from terrorism, illicit networks and global diseases to energy security, international competition for resources, and the security consequences of a deteriorating natural environment globally. The elements of national and global security have therefore grown more complex and increasingly interdependent.

What we do

It is to understand those current and emerging issues that CSIS launched, in September 2008, its academic outreach program. By drawing regularly on knowledge from experts and taking a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach in doing so, the Service plays an active role in fostering a contextual understanding of security issues for the benefit of its own experts, as well as the researchers

and specialists we engage. Our activities aim to shed light on current security issues, to develop a long-term view of various security trends and problems, to challenge our own assumptions and cultural bias, as well as to sharpen our research and analytical capacities.

To do so, we aim to:

- Tap into networks of experts from various disciplines and sectors, including government, think-tanks, research institutes, universities, private business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Canada and abroad. Where those networks do not exist, we may create them in partnership with various organisations;
- Stimulate the study of issues related to Canadian security and the country's security and intelligence apparatus, while contributing to an informed public discussion about the history, function and future of intelligence in Canada.

The Service's academic outreach program resorts to a number of vehicles. It supports, designs, plans and/or hosts several activities, including conferences, seminars, presentations and round-table discussions.

While the academic outreach program does not take positions on particular issues, the results of some of its activities are released on the CSIS web site (<http://www.csis-scrs.gc.ca>). By publicising the ideas emerging from its activities, the program seeks to stimulate debate and encourage the flow of views and perspectives between the Service, organisations and individual thinkers.

APPENDIX C

INTERAXIONS

Interaxions

Knowledge has become increasingly complex and fragmented despite the increased availability of information in the digital age. In an international environment where crises, risks and actors proliferate, it has become critical not only to understand the dynamics underpinning global developments, but also to try to foresee them.

The think tank of the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), Interaxions is a convening platform to interact with academics, universities and the private sector, and whose activities are driven by the most exacting research standards.

Individual experience and knowledge are valuable assets, and everyone offers a complementary view into some of today's most puzzling challenges. Interaxions seeks to break down the proverbial stovepipes by fostering a dialogue among various strategic thinkers to provide impartial and objective assessments for decision-makers.

Interaxions operates at the crossroad of multiple streams of advanced knowledge to better understand the present and anticipate the future.