

## IRAQ, SYRIA, ISIS AND THE KURDS: GEOSTRATEGIC CONCERNS FOR THE U.S. AND TURKEY

*Michael M. Gunter*

*Dr. Gunter is a professor of political science at Tennessee Technological University.*

The rise of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq as well as the ongoing insurgency of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and now peace negotiations with the Turkish government have empowered the Kurds and challenged the existing political map of the Middle East. On July 19, 2012, the previously quiescent Syrian Kurds — largely under the leadership of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), closely associated with the PKK — also suddenly emerged as a potential game changer in the Syrian civil war and what its aftermath might hold for the future of the Middle East. In an attempt to consolidate an increasingly desperate position, government troops were abruptly pulled out of the major Kurdish areas.<sup>1</sup> The Kurds in Syria had suddenly become autonomous, a situation that also affected neighboring Turkey and the virtually independent KRG in Iraq. Indeed, the precipitous rise of the Kurds in Syria could become a factor in changing the artificial borders of the Middle East established after World War I by the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement.<sup>2</sup>

This article looks at what both the traditional state and non-state actors have at stake since Syria's Kurds gained their autonomy in July 2012. In particular, it looks

at what this could mean for the United States, Turkey, the PKK and the KRG, and how this could affect the region in general. I consider the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL or the Islamic State, IS) as one of the other main factors changing the Middle East political map. ISIS, of course, has become an existential threat to both the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds as well as potentially to other actors in the Middle East.

Thus, ironically, both the Syrian (and Iraqi and Turkish) Kurds, on the one hand, and ISIS, on the other, although arch-enemies, are playing key roles in the changing Middle East political map. Both ISIS and the Syrian Kurds claim to be post-state entities that supersede Westphalian definition. ISIS purports to have established a trans-state caliphate, while the Syrian Kurds claim to have instituted PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's philosophy of democratic autonomy — bottom-up rule largely cut loose from the concept of what Ocalan sees as the oppressive nation-state.<sup>3</sup>

What has caused the traditional state and with it the Middle East political map to weaken and potentially change so much? From the perspective of early 2015, it appears that there is a wide range of political, sociological, economic and mili-

tary factors, among others. However, the bottom line is the virtual collapse of the traditional state system in Syria and Iraq, due to their civil wars, and the resulting absence of institutional legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> As *The Economist* recently concluded: “Across the Middle East non-state actors increasingly set the agenda, challenging governments, overthrowing them or prompting them to retrench behind increasingly repressive controls.”<sup>5</sup> Some have even argued that only two-and-a-half states remain in the region: Turkey and Iran, with Egypt as the fraction.

In addition to the artificiality of the remaining states, other factors are also at work. Frequently, the region’s weak, sometimes minority-dominated governments fail to integrate their populations into any sense of inclusive nationality. At the same time, important political ideologies such as Arab nationalism, political Islam, jihadism<sup>6</sup> and Salafism<sup>7</sup> transcend state borders. Existing state governments also frequently fail to provide public services such as functioning courts, schools or hospitals. Citizens look to non-state religious groups and charities for the services that successful states are supposed to provide. Furthermore, the civil wars in former Iraq and Syria have resulted in horrendous numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and even more international refugee problems for Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the KRG in Iraq, among others. These problems have heavily contributed to the destabilization of the existing state system.

Tribal loyalties also have been reactivated; we now can refer to tribes or even to gas stations with flags. In addition, the

age-old Sunni-Shia split has further torn Iraq and Syria apart. Thus, the seemingly chaotic violence and power of ISIS is largely a symptom of the collapsed state system. Stronger states would have quickly prevented the rise of ISIS.

## ISIS

Although Turkey denies it, its early tacit support of ISIS, which allowed jihadists from all over the world to transit its

---

**Chechnya, long since radicalized by Islamic ferment and struggle, has been one of many important contributors to jihadist traffic [through Turkey].**

---

territory and cross into Syria, has been well documented.<sup>8</sup> Turkey’s motivation

was to enable the Syrian opposition to defeat Assad and the Syrian Kurds, who had declared a thinly disguised PKK protostate on the southern Turkish border. In addition, Chechnya, long since radicalized by Islamic ferment and struggle, has been one of many important contributors to this jihadist traffic.<sup>9</sup>

These jihadists, seeking to recapture the lost glories of a resplendent Islam, were bolstered by others whose motivations were more mundane, from a desire for adventure and wealth down to a pathological appetite for thrill-killing and rape. Drugs have been used to convince converts to launch suicide attacks, with the promise of immediate entrance into a paradise of worldly delights.<sup>10</sup> The beheading of their enemies is the most infamous of ISIS’s acts. The group interprets some verses in the Quran (especially in Al-Anfal and Muhammad) as justifying this deed. The Surah Muhammad, for example, in verse 47:4 states: “So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have

inflicted slaughter upon them, and then secure their bonds.”

Paradoxically, even some Christians and Kurds have joined ISIS, for adventure or for ideological reasons or to seek revenge against the United States or the West for perceived grievances. However, the totals of these two groups are probably low and should not be over-emphasized.

Still, that non-Sunnis and even non-Muslims have been recruited warns against facile explanation for the

---

**ISIS extremists were held side by side with those less radical, allowing U.S. coalition prisons in Iraq to become recruitment centers and even training grounds for ISIS recruits.**

---

strength of ISIS. Clearly there is much that we simply do not know.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, relevant to our understanding is a strict and uncompromising Wahhabi Islamic doctrine as well as finances from sympathizers in such states as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, among others.<sup>12</sup> Even more important, however, is the Baathist connection. Indeed, 19 out of the top 20 positions in the ISIS cabinet are held by former Baathists who were middle-level party members when Saddam Hussein fell in 2003. Thus ISIS is largely a home-grown, Sunni Arab organization in Iraq, while in Syria it consists more of foreigners. As for its apparently mindless violence, some have argued that actually ISIS “does not think so differently from the founders of many modern nation-states, who sought a congruence between state and culture as an assumed condition for a viable polity.”<sup>13</sup>

The United States has inadvertently helped what has now morphed into the Islamic State by lax policies that allowed many of its current leaders to escape from U.S. detention centers in Iraq.<sup>14</sup> The list

includes the caliph himself, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who spent almost five years imprisoned at Camp Bucca in southern Iraq, as well as Abu Muslim al-Turkmani, Abu Louay, Abu Kassem, Abu Jurnas, Abu Shema and Abu Suja. These extremists were held side by side with those less radical, allowing U.S. coalition prisons in Iraq to become recruitment centers and

even training grounds for ISIS recruits. Moderates who objected to being radicalized were harassed

or worse through so-called sharia courts that spread through the prisons. Limited resources to evaluate the prisoners effectively helped obscure what was occurring. Eventually, even prisoners with strong evidence against them were released because of the weaknesses of the Iraqi court system and the refusal of the United States to share classified information. In addition, some of the most extreme radicals who had been sentenced to death were freed by successful ISIS attacks on what were by then Iraqi prisons after the United States withdrew from Iraq at the end of 2011.

ISIS has clearly learned much from its travails about how to survive to fight another day. The organization burgeoned because of its perceived success, dynamism and sense of destiny. The Mosul victory in June 2014 reinforced these attributes by bringing vast amounts of captured funds<sup>15</sup> and some of the latest U.S. military equipment into the organization’s grasp. Although ISIS now seemed to be the enemy of everybody and had become the specific target of a hastily constructed U.S. alliance, its opponents’ strength was undermined

by mutual hatreds and lack of unity. The United States, for example, refused to admit Iran to its anti-ISIS coalition even though the Shia state was clearly one of the most effective potential opponents of ISIS. For the time being at least, ISIS could mobilize its potential strength to the maximum while its myriad opponents were divided and unable to strike back in unison.

Thus, when ISIS suddenly struck the KRG on August 3, 2014, its vaunted Peshmerga found themselves out-gunned due to inferior military equipment and initially without allies. Since the KRG was not yet independent, American aid could only legally be given through Baghdad, which hesitated to give too much, lest the Kurds use it to become independent. Only after an emergency appeal from KRG President Massoud Barzani for immediate U.S. aid<sup>16</sup> to stem the ISIS tide — a mere 20 miles from Erbil with its 1.5 million inhabitants — was ISIS brought to at least a temporary halt by U.S. air power based in the Iraqi Kurdish region. However, the U.S. declaration that it will not commit U.S. boots on the ground obviously encourages ISIS to believe that it can eventually triumph because of its enemies' lack of total commitment. On the other hand, ISIS attacks on the two rival Kurdish groups in Iraq (KRG) and Syria (PYD/PKK) have served to bring them together. Indeed, a new agreement between the two was announced in Dohuk on October 25, 2014.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the ISIS attack on the Syrian Kurds in Kobane has elicited nascent U.S. support for the PYD — to the chagrin of Turkey.<sup>18</sup>

For their part, the Iraqi Kurds (KRG) have become all but independent, as well as a model of economic success and even partial democracy. At the same time, the Kurds in Turkey seem to be headed toward some type of local self-rule or autonomy.

Furthermore, the raging civil wars in Syria since 2011 and now again in Iraq with the ISIS capture of Mosul on June 10, 2014, Sinjar on August 3, 2014, and continuing strikes near Baghdad itself may lead to the final breakup of both Syria and Iraq as originally created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of World War I.

The collapse of the poorly conceived Geneva II process for peace in Syria in January 2014 illustrates the bankruptcy of U.S. foreign policy when it ignores these changes, especially the rise of ISIS and the Syrian Kurds. The United States decided not to invite either the Syrian Kurds or Iran to Geneva II. One might ask how a formula for peace could be found when two of the main participants to the Syrian struggle were not even invited to the peace talks.

Furthermore, the U.S. refusal to acknowledge the important role the PKK played in helping to roll back ISIS and save the lives of thousands of Yezidi Kurds threatened by the genocidal campaign in August 2014 illustrates the changing Middle East political map. When the Kurds rallied against ISIS at Erbil with U.S. air support in August 2014, it was not just the KRG Peshmerga, but also the battle-hardened PKK militants from the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, and the Democratic Union Party (PYD)/PKK fighters from Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), who were closely associated with the PKK, who helped save the day. One month later it was again the PYD/PKK who successfully used U.S. air support to beat back the ISIS attack on Kobane in Syria. The U.S. aid to the PKK-related PYD showed how the changing political map in the Middle East was also making for strange bedfellows. The ISIS threat created even stranger associates by bringing U.S. air power together with Iranian ground forces

to recapture Amerli, an Iraqi city near the Iranian border, from ISIS in August 2014.

If the United States is serious about pursuing ISIS in its Syrian lair, it might also find itself working with Bashar

al-Assad's government in Syria as well as such al-Qaeda affiliates as Jabhat al-Nusra and Salafists/Jihadists as

the Islamic Front. With the sole exception of the Syrian Kurds, no meaningful moderate Syrian opposition exists for the United States to work with. In addition, the United States may also find itself cooperating with Iran, Hezbollah and Russia to bring down ISIS.

## TURKEY

At the same time, Turkey will surely come to rue its earlier support for Jihadists in Syria. The ISIS blowback against Turkey already had led to the capture of 49 Turks when it overran Mosul in June 2014. They were only released after three months. ISIS had threatened to attack targets in Turkey if possible. However, this did not prevent Turkey from passively watching ISIS try to destroy the Syrian Kurds holed up just across the Turkish border in Kobane during the vicious fighting for that city in September-October 2014. Again, the collapse of the traditional state system in Syria and Iraq has made for strange and confused bedfellows as the parties involved groped for new ways to understand the changing situation.

As Turkey saw it, however, support for the Syrian Kurds in Kobane would be tantamount to aiding the PKK, a terrorist

enemy that has been trying to dismember Turkey for more than 30 years. Helping the PYD would simply strengthen the PKK and its tacit ally Assad. In addition, why should Turkey get involved when the

United States would not do more? It suited Turkey that ISIS and the Kurds, two enemies, were weakening each

other by slugging it out. Turkey saw the Syrian Kurds and Assad as greater threats than ISIS.

Until recently, Turkey has taken an almost schizophrenic attitude toward the Kurds, fearing that their national claims would potentially destroy Turkish territorial integrity. Indeed, during the 1920s and 1930s, Turkey crushed three great Kurdish uprisings: Sheikh Said in 1925, Ararat in 1930 and Dersim (now called Tunceli) in 1938. All Kurdish schools, organizations, publications and religious institutions were closed. The label "Mountain Turks" served as a code term for these actions and a refusal to even recognize the existence of the Kurds.

Naturally Turkey also closely monitored Kurdish activities across its borders. That Khoybun — the first transnational Kurdish political party — backed the Ararat rebellion of 1927-30 from its base in Syria reinforced the Turkish fear of the Kurds. Although the Treaty of Saadabad in 1937 and subsequently the Baghdad Pact (formally known as the Middle East Treaty Organization) in 1955 were both on paper fashioned to contain Soviet expansion while also acting as non-aggression agreements, both conventions also implicitly

---

**It suited Turkey that ISIS and the Kurds, two enemies, were weakening each other by slugging it out. Turkey saw the Syrian Kurds and Assad as greater threats than ISIS.**

---

obligated Turkey, Iran and Iraq to cooperate on the Kurdish issue. This collaboration included measures to prevent cross-border communication and support among the Kurds and, in general, sought to prevent any joint, transnational Kurdish action that might challenge the international boundaries set up following World War I. Syria was certainly a silent partner in both endeavors; its Kurds were a silent victim.

In August 1944, Mount Dalanpur, where Turkey, Iraq and Iran converge, was the site of a famous meeting of Kurdish delegates from those three states as well as Syria. The participants signed a treaty known as *Peyamiani sei Sanowar* (Treaty of the Three Boundaries), in which they pledged mutual support, the sharing of resources, and the restoration of the Kurdish language and culture. Although this meeting did not result in any practical Kurdish unity, it did illustrate the existence of transnational Kurdish aspirations, and thus, threats to the states in which Kurds lived. Nearly 70 years later, in September 2013, another pan-Kurdish conference was scheduled to take place in Erbil, but was postponed due to internal Kurdish disputes. Given the Kurds' growing empowerment, it will be interesting to see what the transnational results will be, if and when this pan-Kurdish gathering finally does occur.

It was not until 1926 that Turkey conceded what is now northern Iraq, or Mosul, the Ottoman name for the province, to Iraq.<sup>19</sup> Even so, Turkey subsequently has intervened militarily many times into northern Iraq because of the Kurdish situation, most recently in 2011. It is only very recently that Turkey has come to see the possibilities of cooperation with the KRG; it even began formal negotiations with the PKK in January 2013.<sup>20</sup> These initiatives already have had important effects on the

Kurds in Syria by leading Turkey to take a somewhat less hostile attitude toward the PKK-affiliated Democratic Union Party (PYD), although at the same time hesitating to offer support during the battle for Kobane.

Ankara has played a key role in assisting the opposition in the Syrian civil war. The Syrian National Council (before it was succeeded by the Syrian National Coalition in November 2012) was founded and is largely based in Istanbul. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) maintains its nominal headquarters in southeastern Turkey. In its strong anti-Assad stance, Turkey also has been implicitly aiding Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS, armed groups associated with al-Qaeda at one time or another that are part of the Syrian opposition, but opposed to the Syrian Kurds.

The PYD, founded in Syria in 2003 by the PKK, as already noted, has been enjoying de facto autonomy just across the border from Turkey since July 19, 2012. Although it might be one latent reason why Turkey finally decided to open negotiations with the PKK in 2013, the resulting situation in Syria wrought havoc in Turkey. However, if Turkey intervenes against the PYD, it risks getting bogged down in a quagmire. In addition, the al-Qaeda-affiliated groups mentioned above that are implicitly supported by Turkey have already fallen into conflict with the PYD. In March 2012, Murat Karayilan, the PKK military leader holed up in his Qandil Mountain sanctuary on the Iraqi-Iranian border, declared that "if the Turkish state intervenes against our people in western Kurdistan, all of Kurdistan will turn into a war zone."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the PYD already had clashed on numerous occasions with the Turkish-backed al-Qaeda militants referred to above in Kurdish-populated ar-

east of Syria before the battle for Kobane.<sup>22</sup>

In July 2013, these battles intensified as Turkey's policy toward Syria and the PYD lurched toward crisis.<sup>23</sup> Fearing the effect on its own disaffected Kurds, Turkey has also repeatedly warned the Syrian Kurds, who have raised the PYD flag only 50 meters from the Turkish border, not to declare autonomy.<sup>24</sup> Turkey's then foreign minister, now prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, declared, "We expect three basic things from the Kurds in Syria.... Firstly for them not to cooperate with the regime.... The second is for them not to form a de-facto foundation based on ethnic or religious bases.... The third is for them not to engage in activities that could endanger the security of the Turkish border."<sup>25</sup>

In a surprise visit to Ankara on July 26, 2013, Salih Muslim, the leader of the PYD, assured Turkish authorities that the Syrian Kurds continued to see themselves as part of Syria and posed no threat to Turkey's territorial integrity. However, he did add that the Kurds in Syria needed to establish "a temporary-serving administration until the chaos in Syria is over."<sup>26</sup> Shortly afterwards, however — and to the disapproval of Turkey, which did not want what it viewed as a proto-PKK state on its Syrian border — the Syrian Kurds (PYD) formally established three autonomous cantons: Hasaka (Jazira), Kobane (Ayn al-Arab) and Afrin (Kurd Dagh).

What does Turkey want now? During the ISIS siege of Kobane in September-October 2014, Turkey demanded, as the price for its intervention against ISIS, a buffer and no-fly zone to insulate itself from ISIS and the PYD, upon both of whom Turkey looked with equal apprehension. Turkey also probably viewed such a zone as a protected base from which to allow the Syrian opposition to attack Assad with impunity.

In addition, Turkey wanted the PYD to end its implicit alliance with Assad and join the Syrian opposition to overthrow him. Only if the PYD agreed to these terms would Turkey enter the fray against ISIS.<sup>27</sup>

## THE UNITED STATES

The United States has not formulated a grand foreign-policy strategy towards the Kurds, due to their living across four different countries. The Kurds also caused problems for Washington when it dealt with these more important states. Nevertheless, given its interest in Middle East stability as well as human rights, the United States has come to accept that it does owe the Kurds a certain amount of attention and even protection. This has been true in Iraq particularly given how the Iraqi Kurds supported the United States in the 2003 war against Saddam Hussein. Turkey held back at that time. Indeed the virtually independent KRG in Iraq largely owes its existence to the United States. This was illustrated once again in August 2014, when U.S. air strikes helped save the KRG from ISIS. Turkey, the KRG's supposed new ally, made clear that it was not going to enter the fray.

Despite its support for the Iraqi Kurds, however, the United States opposes their independence on the grounds that this would lead to the partition of Iraq and thus greater instability in the Middle East. The U.S. position on this point is all the more adamant, given the attitudes of other states in the region that oppose Kurdish independence as a threat to their own territorial integrity. The United States does tentatively support the KRG as a way to maintain the political unity of Iraq by satisfying the Kurds. This position, of course, can be inherently contradictory and is a very fine line to implement successfully, especially

given the new de facto Turkish-KRG alliance.

On the other hand, rightly or wrongly, the Turkish Kurds are often perceived in the United States as too closely tied to the PKK, which the United States considers to be a terrorist organization. As a result, the cause of the Turkish Kurds in the United States has not prospered as well as that of their brothers and sisters to the south. This is all the more so given the longstanding U.S. alliance with Turkey. The United States has paid even less attention to the Kurds in Iran, although they might someday serve as a potential ally against the Iranian regime in much the same way as the Iraqi Kurds did against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. As for the Kurds in Syria, they were clearly off the radar until Kurdish autonomy occurred in July 2012. Subsequently, however, the United States showed little interest in the Kurds of Syria because of its deference to Turkish sensitivities and its vision of a united Syria contributing to stability.

The Syrian Kurds are keenly aware, however, of the all-important U.S. role and would dearly like to win American support. Now that the United States seems committed to attacking ISIS in its Syrian base, Washington will probably have to work more closely with the PYD and its senior partner, the PKK, as occurred during the failed ISIS siege of Kobane during September-October 2014. Indeed ISIS's attack on Kobane focused attention on new U.S.-Turkish geostrategic differences.

As noted above, the United States supported the besieged Syrian Kurds (PYD) with indispensable air strikes coordinated with the Kurds. However, Turkey declined to offer any military aid to a Kurdish group it considered a mere extension of the PKK, its longtime terrorist enemy.

Although the United States had also listed the PKK as a terrorist organization, it did not put the PYD in the same category; U.S. aid delivery was much criticized by Turkey. Since the PYD and PKK are closely associated, implicit in the U.S. support for the PYD is the possibility that Washington might come to recognize that the PKK is also no longer a terrorist organization. Such U.S. action would be a disaster for Turkey and might even threaten its NATO membership.

Furthermore, Turkey's refusal to aid the PYD has seriously threatened the Turkish-PKK peace process. More than 40 people died in demonstrations against Turkey's refusal to support the PYD, the first real Kurdish violence in Turkey since the long-stalled and now threatened peace process begun in March 2013.<sup>28</sup> Thus the collapsed state systems in Syria and Iraq have not only caused serious policy differences between Turkey and the United States, but also threatened the Turkish-PKK peace process.

## CONCLUSION

As of the beginning of 2015, it is clear that the changing political map of the Middle East will call for a new paradigm to classify and understand the changing geopolitical realities. Turkey and the United States have been slow to comprehend this fact, as illustrated by their continuing insistence on trying to maintain the artificiality of what should be called former Iraq as well as former Syria. Neither state any longer comes close to meeting Max Weber's famous definition of a state as being an entity that commands a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its territory. Instead, new types of entities are emerging before our very eyes. Ironically, two bitter enemies, the Kurds and ISIS, are the main

beneficiaries of this situation. A variety of political, sociological and economic factors are operating in addition to the more visible military ones. The United States has also been slow to understand and fully implement Clausewitz's famous dictum

that war is often politics by other means. U.S. military action should be wisely used in conjunction with intelligent political and diplomatic policies that conform to the new geopolitical realities the Middle East.

<sup>1</sup> For a much fuller analysis, see my just-published *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War* (Hurst Publishers, 2014); as well as the many relevant chapters in Mohammed M.A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter, eds., *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds* (Mazda Publishers, 2013); David Romano and Mehmet Gurses, eds., *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Ofra Bengio, ed., *Kurdish Awakening: Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland* (University of Texas Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> See in the special issue on World War I, Mustafa Aksakal, "Introduction," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (November 2014): 653 for the reference to "the momentous changes [in the Middle East] set in motion by the events of World War I."

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, *Prison Writings III: The Road Map to Negotiations*, trans. by Havin Gunesser (Cologne: International Initiative Edition, 2012). For further thoughts on these ideas, see Joost Jongerden and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, "Democratic Confederalism as a Kurdish Spring: The PKK and the Quest for Radical Democracy," in Ahmed and Gunter, eds., *The Kurdish Spring*, 163-185.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the prescient writings of Jonathan Spyer, "Do 'Syria,' 'Iraq,' and 'Lebanon' Still Exist?" *The Tower*, February 19, 2014, <http://www.meforum.org/3715>; Jonathan Spyer, "The Defense of Kobani," *Jerusalem Post*, September 27, 2014, <http://www.meforum.org/4832>; and Ofra Bengio, "Kurdistan Reaches toward the Sea," *Haaretz* (Jerusalem), August 3, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> "The Rule of the Gunman: Why Post-Colonial Arab States Are Breaking Down," *The Economist*, October 11, 2014, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Jihadism in the sense used here has come to mean a commitment to violent struggle against the perceived opponents of Islam. Frequently it involves transnational actions that tend to break down existing state borders, among other results.

<sup>7</sup> Salafism is a movement critical of what it considers to be misguided additions to Islam such as grave visitation, saint veneration, and monument preservation. The doctrine calls for abolishing these unwanted accretions and returning to the actions of the original followers of the Prophet Muhammad, the *salaf* or predecessors. Sometimes, but not always, hand-in-hand with Jihadism, Salafism too involves transnational actions that tend to breakdown existing state borders.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, David L. Phillips, "Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey List," *Huffington Post*, November 9, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke\\_b\\_6128950.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/research-paper-isis-turke_b_6128950.html), which cites numerous sources. In addition, see Amberin Zaman, "Syrian Kurdish Leader: Ankara Supporting Jihadists," *Al-Monitor*, September 3, 2013; Amberin Zaman, "Syrian Kurds Continue to Blame Turkey for Backing ISIS Militants," *Al-Monitor*, June 10, 2014; and Liz Sly, "Biden Issues Second Apology, to United Emirates, over Comments," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2014, among many others. Amberin Zaman has been the Turkish correspondent for the prestigious British-based *The Economist* for the past 15 years.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas A. Ollivant and Brian Fishman, "State of Jihad: The Reality of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," *War on the Rocks*, May 21, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com>.

<sup>10</sup> One does not have to subscribe to the analyses of Daniel Pipes, who sees these violent attributes inherent in even mainline Islam, to admit that historically the very English word "assassin" is said to stem from the secretive Islamic organization that employed hashish to drug its adherents into launching suicide attacks against Crusader enemies more than 1,000 years ago and that the Quran promises earthly sexual rewards for its fallen

warriors. For a recent example of Daniel Pipes' work, see his "Explaining the Denial: Denying Islam's Role in Terror," *Middle East Quarterly* 20 (Spring 2013): 3-12.

<sup>11</sup> For further examples, see Alireza Doostdar, "How Not to Understand ISIS," *Jadaliyya Reviews*, October 2, 2014, <http://reviews.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/19485/how-not-to-understand-isis>.

<sup>12</sup> For background, see Josh Rogin, "America's Allies Are Funding ISIS," *Daily Beast*, June 14, 2014; Martin Chulov, "How an Arrest in Iraq Revealed ISIS's \$2bn Jihadist Network," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2014; and Glen Carey, Mahmoud Habouch, and Gregory Viscusi, "Financing Jihad: Why ISIS Is a Lot Richer than Al-Qaeda," *Bloomberg News*, June 26, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Joost Jongerden and Bahar Simsek, "Turkey, the Islamic State, and the Kurdistan Liberation Movement," *E-International Relations Publishing*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.e-r.info/2014/11/24/turkey-the-islamic-state-and-the-kurdistan-liberation-movement>.

<sup>14</sup> See Andrew Thompson and Jeremi Suri, "How America Helped ISIS," *International New York Times*, October 2, 2014, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Terence McCoy, "ISIS Just Stole \$425 million, Iraqi Governor Says, and Became the World's Richest Terrorist Group," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2014. However, others later expressed doubts about the authenticity of this event. See Borzou Daragahi, "Biggest Bank Robbery That Never Happened — \$400m ISIS Heist," *Financial Times*, July 17, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Goodenough, "Kurdish Gov't Alone in Fight against ISIS, Appeals for Airstrikes and Urgent Aid," *CNSNews.com*, August 7, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Wladimir Van Wilgenburg and Vager Saadullah, "Syrian Kurdish Factions Unite over Islamic State Threat," *Middle East Eye*, October 24, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa Gurbuz, "US-PYD Rapprochement: A Shift in Washington's Strategy?" *Rudaw*, October 24, 2014, [Http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/241020141](http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/241020141); and "War-war, Not Jaw-jaw: Turkey and the Kurds," *The Economist*, October 18, 2014, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Peter J. Beck, "A Tedious and Perilous Controversy: Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918-1926," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (April 1981): 256-76.

<sup>20</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "Reopening Turkey's Closed Kurdish Opening?" *Middle East Policy* 20 (Summer 2013): 88-98.

<sup>21</sup> Jon Hemming, "Kurd Militants Threaten Turkey If It Enters Syria," *Reuters*, March 22, 2012. I published an earlier version of this paper in "The Syrian Kurds: Out of Nowhere to Where?" *Turkish Review* 4 (January-February 2014): 16-25.

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Lang, "Turkey's Counterterrorism Response to the Syrian Crisis," *Terrorism Monitor* 11, no. 14 (July 12, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Semih Idiz, "Turkey's Syria Policy in Shambles over Support for Jihadists," *Al-Monitor*, July 23, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "Turkey Warns Syrian PYD against Seeking Autonomy," *Today's Zaman*, July 20, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> "The Kurds Should Not Be Left Out of the Opposition," *Sabah* (Turkey), July 26, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> "How to Deal with Syria's Kurds: Turkey and the PKK," *The Economist*, October 4, 2014, 59.

<sup>28</sup> "Kobane: Air Strikes Help Syria Town Curb IS," *BBC*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29526783>.