

RAMAN

FOR RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

رامان للبحوث والاستشارات

**Biden warns; "Iraq and Syria Mean More
Danger to America than Afghanistan"
ISIS Takes on al-Qaeda's Legacy**



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About the Center

Raman is a research and consultancy center that studies and analyzes political developments and phenomena in the Middle East. Raman relies on state-of-the-art research methods and tools in preparing its research papers that build up a solid knowledge base and contribute constructively to understanding key issues while solving local and regional problems. Our research principles stem from the need to understand local and regional disputes and offer perspectives that promote stability and progress. Raman also prioritizes contributing to the general knowledge base as the main goal for the center's research agenda.

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(This text was translated from its original Arabic version.)

Executive Summary

- The emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for nearly 13 years in its various names has brought about a change in how the United States and its allies address the security and military threat posed by the new organization.
- America's occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the elimination of stereotypical structures in both countries represented an opportunity for jihadist leaders to spread from Afghanistan to several countries.
- In Iraq, a situation of mutual benefit/alliance has emerged between jihadist organizations and the remnants of the regime of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.
- Whilst Al-Qaeda exploited the repression against Sunnis that began to form in Sunni cities as a result of the policies of Shiite organization leaders, at the same time it incited the supporters of the old regime against local communities and exploited the security and military vacuum in Iraq.
- Today, we face the fact that ISIS exists in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and it spreads to African countries. ISIS, unlike Al-Qaeda, plans and carries out cross-border operations. On the other side, the organizational link within Al-Qaeda cells, which exists across the world, is a stronger one.
- ISIS has controlled vast financial resources that enabled it to provide huge funds to those coming to its areas; and utilized the “crime against humanity in Mount Sinjar (Shingal)” as a means to

present captivity as a great opportunity for those who regard it as main ethics of jihad.

- The support provided by the US-led international coalition to the Syrian Democratic Forces as part of the US intervention in Syria has greatly strained the relationship between Washington and Ankara.
- There are rumours that there is an estimated \$3 trillion in wealth in Afghanistan, which in comparison to U.S. economic relationships with other countries is still a small figure.
- Russia was aware that Washington's presence in Afghanistan was more of a stabilizing factor for it than a threat to its interests.
- Leaked reports alleged that in 2005 Iran gave eight Taliban commanders more than one thousand seven hundred US dollars in donations for each Afghan soldier killed, and about three thousand five hundred dollars for each Afghan official who suffered the same fate.

Introduction

Many commentators underestimated the US president's statements that Syria and Iraq pose a greater danger to American interests than Afghanistan, as they ignored the reality of the changes on the ground since the entry of America into Afghanistan in 2001, as well as the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant under various names throughout almost 17 years after the entry of the United States of America into Iraq in 2003. It is necessary to evaluate the statement within the context of how the US administration deals with security and military issues, as well as the low degree of security threat represented by the new Taliban, instead of the one we knew 25 years ago. Currently, there is a cadre of the movement trying to establish diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, including China, India and Iran. Some of these countries had a tense relationship with the Taliban, both ideologically or religiously. That said, the Taliban is also trying to establish relations with Western countries by asking them to recognize it as the dominant force over the Afghan state. If we proceed from these facts, we can divide the truth of US President Biden's statement into several titles in order to provide ourselves an answer: "What is the meaning of the US president's statement of 'Iraq and Syria mean a greater danger to America than Afghanistan?'" Also, the headings can be divided further as ISIS taking up al-Qaeda's global legacy, and to analyze this both in terms of damaged alliances on the example of Turkey and in terms of American economic interests, as well as in terms of balances between Russia and China.

ISIS Takes on Al-Qaeda's Legacy And Spreads It Globally

The American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the elimination of the stereotypical ruling structures in both countries paved the way for the spread of jihadist leaders from Afghanistan to several countries including Iraq, where the state of mutual benefit/alliance between jihadist organizations and the remnants of the regime of Iraqi Baathist President Saddam Hussein emerged. Al-Qaeda took advantage of the security and military vacuum in Iraq, as well as the Sunni oppression that began to form in Sunni cities as a result of the policies of the leaders of the Shiite organizations, alongside inciting supporters of the former regime against local communities. The result was the emergence of the character called Zarqawi, who in 2004 was able to turn his military organization “Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad” into the representative of al-Qaeda in Iraq in no time. He pledged allegiance (Bay'ah) to Osama bin Laden, saying that “We, the Emirs and soldiers of Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, have conveyed the message of our allegiance to Osama bin Laden, the sheikh of the mujahideen, to hear and obey in everything that we like and dislike, in order to wage jihad in the way of Allah until there is no corruption left on earth and the Deen belongs only to Allah.”¹

Although Zarqawi’s life lasted only two years after this pledge of allegiance - he was killed in 2006 -, it was enough to bring about a

¹ Statement of Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, who united under the banner of al-Qaeda, announcing that its “Emir Abu Musab al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden, the Sheikh of the Mujahideen.”, Source: Palestine Network for Dialogue, Date: 17/10/2004, Link: <https://bit.ly/3MFLMRY>

change in the doctrine of jihadist organizations in the region on several levels, including extremism and murder to the point of calling Zarqawi “the prince of slaughterers.”² Another example is the change in Al-Zarqawi's organisational aims. Instead of targeting the interests of the United States and some of its allies in the region, he declared himself the representative of the Sunnis, thus took up the issue of the pure Sunni identity as the primary issue and plunged it into a kind of identity war against Shiites and other identities and affiliations, defining the Shiites in Iraq as the primary target of “jihad” and organizational actions.³ In particular, this approach itself led to disagreements between ISIL and al-Qaeda.⁴ Despite these differences between the organizations, al-Qaeda in Iraq did not give up on holding to the global al-Qaeda umbrella and the ‘legitimacy’ of its leader Osama bin Laden until 2013. And when the organization announced its transformation into the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant “ISIL/ISIS”, it also announced that Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria had joined it. This claim was rejected by the Jabhat Nusra and its Amir Muhammad Al-Jolani. Here, the increasing rift between the two tracks of ISIS and al-Qaeda appeared when the leader of al-Qaeda supported al-Nusra in its refusal to join ISIS and led to a confrontation between the two sides. Al-Zarkawi's step drew the map to achieving the “caliphate state.” ISIS saw that jihad had reached its goal by forming the caliphate state that al-Qaeda and

² Saif al-Adel (Head of Security Force Al-Qaeda) chronicles the biography of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, source: Library CIA Link: <https://bit.ly/3aW4shP>

³ ISIS splitting al-Qaeda, Source: BBC, published: 20/08/2014, Link: <https://bbc.in/3znQy1m>

⁴ “Biography” Reveals the Godfather of the Islamic State, Source: Al Jazeera Net, Date: 3/12/2018, Link: <https://bit.ly/3D5SihF>

its branches sought to reach, and the opportunity for Baghdadi's separation from al-Qaeda arose as a result of several incentives. These include the weakness of al-Qaeda in its stronghold in Afghanistan, the Arab Spring revolutions that enabled local jihadist organizations to attract thousands of local youths, and their ability to control huge financial resources, whether from direct donations or from their seizure of economic resources in the Arab countries that witnessed revolutions against the ruling regimes.

Today, we face the fact that ISIS exists in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, and it spreads to African countries. ISIS, unlike Al-Qaeda, plans and carries out cross-border operations. On the other side, the organizational link within Al-Qaeda cells, which exists across the world, is a stronger one, and there is a bank of goals that are adhered to according to the organization's central vision. As for ISIS, it conducts operations based on guerrilla warfare scattered in several remote areas of countries in the world, benefiting from anyone recruited to carry out lone wolf attacks in European and Western countries, in particular against civilian communities, making them direct targets indiscriminately aimed only at intimidation. We can also see the change in the alliance between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, as al-Qaeda ended in the form we know with the death of Osama bin Laden and the breakup of al-Nusra from the organization and its involvement in trying to create a "local model" for jihadist organizations in Syria. This opened the door to a new phase of al-Qaeda's life, such as it changed its cross-border rhetoric, and adheres to the national borders of the countries in which it is located.

The separation of ISIS from al-Qaeda and its declaration of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” also had a direct impact on the nature of al-Qaeda, as ISIS is active and competitive within its populist breeding centres. Thus, unlike the situation in al-Qaeda and similar jihadist organizations, ISIS was able to attract civilian Muslims, including young men, women, and even the elderly, from different parts of the world who dream of living under the auspices of “religious texts in their literal sense”.

This is a polarization that contradicts the situation in which Al-Qaeda was working and active, as most civilian Muslims sympathetic to Al-Qaeda were committed to living in their homelands, while the elite jihadist ideologues and their families, in addition to a percentage of young people, preferred to “migrate to al-Qaeda areas”. And these percentages were often related to the state of war and direct battles between al-Qaeda and a country, like in the case of Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, Chechnya against Russia, or Iraq against NATO (especially the stage of al-Qaeda's control of Fallujah and Anbar). Regarding this point, Saif al-Adl, the security official in al-Qaeda force, speaks in his biography of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi about their weak presence in Palestine and Jordan until 2000, stating: “The information we had showed that al-Qaeda or its ideology had not many supporters in Palestine and Jordan, and the brothers agreed upon the plan to give importance to the presence and deployment in Jordan and Palestine”⁵

⁵ Previous reference: Saif al-Adl (security official in the army of al-Qaeda) chronicles the biography of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

If we take into account the Biden's statement on Afghanistan under the new Taliban rule, we will see that it is difficult for Kabul to turn into a committee of bliss for this class of Muslim societies, as ISIS has controlled huge financial resources that enabled it to provide huge funds to those coming to its areas. And through its “crime against humanity in Mount Sinjar (Shingal)” it provided those, who regard captivity one of the main ethics of jihad, the opportunity to apply the system of servitude to a society (Yazidis) lacking protection. These are factors that are absent in Afghanistan, additionally the Taliban is not in a good financial position to attract tens of thousands of jihadists from around the world, and the concept of mass targeting has not been part of the Taliban's ideology since its inception. Also, there are no opportunities for jihadist elements to enslave women and sell them in markets in Afghanistan, as it happened in Mosul, Hawija, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor.

Ending the Islamic State's control over urban areas in Syria and Iraq, limiting the bank of achievable goals, and spreading across larger but poorly accessible areas while turning ISIS into a decentralized model of the declared caliphate represent a different kind of danger. However, the experience of ISIS, which represents the success of a cross-border jihadist organization in establishing a state and a semi-integrated political presence, poses a significant danger in itself to international systems that have always feared it. Even though not admitted, establishing a state and a quasi-political entity is a success for a transnational jihadist organization. This aspect is of paramount importance in light of the collapse of important countries in the region such as Iraq and Syria, and in long term constitutes an entry point for extremist jihadist organizations to retry to establish a state

that adopts the ideology of jihad for its establishment, and who have the ability to benefit from all technological developments in the age of information, and to exploit the resources of national states very quickly to convert them into self-resources. This was difficult and absent among jihadist organizations in the last century. All these factors accumulate in parallel with the change in the nature of transnational jihadist organizations when considered in light of the US reduction of its direct intervention in the Middle East, especially with regards to Washington's alliance relations with regional powers that have sided with Washington throughout the entire Cold War, which prompted several American officials to assure Eastern countries that Washington has not abandoned its alliances. It will continue to support them in the face of various threats, as seen in the recent US President's visit to Saudi Arabia. However, the meetings and atmosphere that prevailed during the visit did not indicate a return to the previous level of warmth.

From The Standpoint of Damaged Alliances: “The Example of Turkey”

The US intervention in Syria has greatly strained Washington's relationship with Ankara as a result of the support provided by the US-led international coalition to the Syrian Democratic Forces. In this context, Turkey has always put the condition of Washington's abandonment of the Syrian Democratic Forces on the negotiating table. Since 2015, this has not been fulfilled at the level Turkey demanded, and thus led to rising disputes between the two parties. As a result, it has been witnessed that Turkey manages security, military and even economic equations with Russia and Iran.

Therefore, these new equations had their own necessities, such as Turkey's attempt to buy S-400 missiles, or to carry out large-scale military operations against the SDF based on bilateral or trilateral agreements with (Washington/Russia/Iran). These security agreements were not the result of friendly reasons between the mentioned parties, especially Washington and Ankara, rather, they resulted from an important tension in the structure of the historical relationship between the two allies, and this tension had a negative impact on the relationship of the two sides until it reached the stage of avoiding bilateral meetings between the presidency of the two countries, especially on the part of Washington in the new Biden era. Meanwhile, Turkey has been subjected to some sanctions. And, additionally Ankara faced the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act after it obtained Russian-made S-400 air defense systems. Moreover, many other files have very negatively affected the relationship of the two allies.

From The Standpoint of American Economic Interests

Surely the U.S. could have used its time in Afghanistan to make economic investments. However, the reason for its orientation towards the Middle East is the threat that Washington and its allies and relations in the Middle East face. These are countries that have stable economic relations and interests with America and make large purchases of most American goods. For example, there is a wealth estimated at \$ 3 trillion in Afghanistan⁶, which in comparison to Saudi-American economic relations is only a small figure. The arms

⁶ "Wasted" minerals worth \$ 3 trillion in Afghanistan. Why was it not exploited?, Source: Al Ain News, Date: 18/08/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3SlrP4c>

deal signed by Trump with Saudi Arabia alone, in addition to the other investments that accompanied it, approached one trillion dollars, in addition to the generous Saudi participation in US bonds that are approximately \$ 230 billion, and when we calculate the financial bloc and economic interests that bind the Gulf countries and the rest of America's allies in the region and compare it with the amount of the estimated \$ 3 trillion for the wealth in Afghanistan, the figure of \$ 3 trillion turns into a low figure in the face of America's fixed investments in the region. Of course, it should be noted that any real investment in Afghanistan required great stability per se, despite the cessation of strong battles against the Taliban in recent years, but this matter was the result of the actual entry of the two parties in negotiations on America's withdrawal, which has been going on for several years. Therefore, the situation that preceded America's withdrawal from Afghanistan cannot be considered a case of real security and military stability. Also, the Taliban movement as an organization was not taking the decision of a comprehensive confrontation with America and preferred to withdraw from cities in exchange for conducting a guerrilla war and attrition against the American and NATO forces. And there was a high probability of a strong return of the Taliban to clashes in the event of the collapse of negotiations with Washington. US President Joe Biden's statement from an economic angle about the danger of the situation in Iraq and Syria to America has emerged more important than Afghanistan.

From The Standpoint of Balance with Russia and China

While Afghanistan represented a resurgence of Soviet defeat during the Cold War, only this time against the United States, Russia recognized that Washington's presence in Afghanistan was a

stabilizing factor for it rather than a threat to its interests. In fact, the United States was able to control the security and military situation in a country that had turned into a committee of international jihadists, a bloc that Russia fears their presence on its borders since its wars in Afghanistan in the 80s, and against the Chechen people in Chechnya at the end of the last century. Russia was also aware that Washington's presence in Afghanistan is an inauthentic presence and lacked the possible tools of stability, from a real government on the ground, a trained army that believed in the national faith, and a people tolerant of the American/foreign presence in their country, which emerged due to the complete collapse of the Afghan government and army in the face of the Taliban as soon as Washington withdrew from the country.

Each of Washington's allies surrounding Afghanistan had its own calculations, whether by supporting the Taliban or utilizing it to weaken the opposite party, such as India and Pakistan, which enjoy a strong relationship with Washington. However, they (separately) also suffer from crises related to Indian technical development, the size of its human mass, Washington's need for it to stand against China in East Asia, in addition to the absence of central institutions in Pakistan. The state continues to weaken at the border areas, especially at the border with Afghanistan, in light of historical differences between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and over the Islamic bloc in India, which suffers from racist practices against it.

The Taliban's control of Afghanistan represented a new driver of Chinese policy in Central Asia, given China's desire to take advantage of Afghan geography to extend its network of roads within

the Silk Road. Although China and Afghanistan share a short border of 76 kilometers, Afghanistan acquires two important cities located on the initiative road that was formerly called the Silk Road, namely Kabul and Nangarhar (an important archaeological site of the Buddhist civilization). Afghanistan is an important country in China's initiative, as it is the shortest route between Central Asia and South Asia, and between China and the Middle East. In 2007, Beijing obtained the concession to exploit the giant copper mine in Ainak (the second largest copper reservoir in the world) near the Afghan capital, for \$ 3 billion, and Beijing and Kabul signed a memorandum of understanding in 2016. Beijing has pledged to fund the country with at least \$100 million. In September 2016, a direct freight train was launched from China to the Afghan border town Herat and an air corridor linking Kabul to the Chinese city of Ürümqi was established⁷. Maintaining stability after decades of war in Afghanistan is one of Beijing's top priorities as it seeks to secure its borders and investments in strategic infrastructure in neighbouring Pakistan, home to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. For this reason, and as a result of the Taliban's desire to benefit from China's ongoing investment, it confirmed its intention to remove all fears of Beijing during a meeting in Kabul with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on his first visit to Afghanistan since the Taliban came to power⁸. China wants to maintain a peaceful relationship with the

⁷ “The Belt and Road.” How did America put the fate of the most important Chinese project in the hands of the Taliban?, Source: Al Jazeera Net, Published: 17/08/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3cw3edI>

⁸ Taliban vow to dispel 'all fears' of China, Source: France 24, Published: 24/03/2022 Link: <https://bit.ly/3OijKju>

Taliban in order to achieve several goals, including maintaining its economic interests, taking advantage of Afghanistan's position in the conflict with America⁹, balancing Indian influence in the region. Additionally, China's fears that Afghanistan might become a centre for jihadist Islamic organizations, which would enable it to carry out military operations within China, especially with regard to the Chinese policy towards the Uyghur Muslim minority in China, Xinjiang (East Turkistan).¹⁰

Iran is An Ally through Threat

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 formed the basis of the relationship between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. And soon Iran was engaged in a devastating war with Iraq, a war in which the two sides did not achieve tremendous victories but continued in a way that led to the destruction of an important part of the military power and infrastructure of both sides. The facts on the ground have varied since the mid-90s. With Iran's expansion in Lebanon through Hezbollah and after the US war on Iraq in 2003, Iran witnessed a new leap to become a major regional military power. In light of its gradually increasing control over Iraq, which was crowned in 2010 by the withdrawal of the Democratic American administration from Iraq. Later Iran's strategic power increased a fold through the Iranian Nuclear agreement with the P5+1, which enabled it to access huge sums of money, in addition to

⁹ The fall of Kunduz to the Taliban: a blow to Chinese influence in northern Afghanistan?, Source: Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, Publication Date: 30/09/2015, Link: <https://bit.ly/3RTnt5h>

¹⁰ 3 Objectives behind China's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, Source: Sky News, Published: 19/09/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3Bcq9VL>

opening the door for their further spread in neighbouring countries. The agreement with the P5+1 agreement came as a strong blow to the Saudi military intervention in Yemen, as the agreement came within the same month (March, May 2015), which is the launch of the intervention of the “Arab coalition in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia” under the name (Operation Decisive Storm), against the attack of the Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis on March 25, 2015 on the temporary capital Aden. These U.S.-Iranian differences, whether direct or through allies, have always favoured Iran's strengthening in the region. The most recent was the withdrawal of US support for the Daraa front or the southern front in Syria in 2018, as Iran was able to control, along with Russia, the most important opposition positions on the borders of the Syrian capital and all the way to the Syrian-Israeli border.

Iran's growing influence in the region has increased for nearly four decades, with which the United States has helped in one way or another. In the past decade, this influence has turned into a direct threat to American interests in the region from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean through direct Iranian interventions in Syria, direct control over Iraqi and Lebanese decision-making, full support for the Houthi militias, a threat to the balance of power in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, interference in Bahraini affairs, and even a change in the nature of the relationship with the Taliban itself. Iran received many al-Qaeda leaders in Iran, and in 2010 secret US military documents leaked by WikiLeaks to three American, British and German newspapers. The British newspaper The Daily Telegraph said - according to the documents that were revealed - that Tehran

gave generous financial gifts to the leaders of the resistance for every soldier killed in Afghanistan. The leaked reports said that Iran allegedly gave eight Taliban commanders more than one thousand seven hundred United States Dollars in the form of a donation to eight Taliban commanders for each Afghan soldier killed and about three thousand five hundred dollars for each Afghan official who suffered the same fate.¹¹ There were also reports of cooperation between the Taliban and Iran in 2015 organized by the General Qassem Soleimani aimed at preventing ISIS elements present in Afghanistan from approaching the Iranian border.¹²

While it is not possible to judge the extent of the development of Iran's relationship with the Taliban with regard to Afghanistan, Iran will use any tool that can reduce stability in the region, including increasing the recruitment of Afghan Shiite elements in countries such as Syria and Iraq in exchange for the Afghan Shiites not causing any real problems for the Taliban government, and in exchange for increasing its tools in the face of any American pressure on it in the future, which to some extent has reached the stage of posing a threat to all geographic areas of strategic importance to the United States.

¹¹ Iran supports the Taliban and bin Laden alive, Source: Al Jazeera Net, Date: 28/7/2010, Link: <https://bit.ly/3VAQ3Kq>

¹² Not to be exposed to Afghan Shiites in return for continued Iranian support. Details of an agreement between Tehran and the Taliban revealed, Source: Arabi Post, Date: 26/08/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3CQW6SK>

The Syrian regime, which was dominated by the by the Iranian side over an important part of its decision¹³, was the party that used Salafi groups the most during the American war on Iraq and opened training camps for them. The same scenario occurred in Iraq with the Maliki regime strengthening the security grip on Sunni cities at the expense of escaping the grip on jihadist organizations, in addition to weakening the Iraqi army and Peshmerga forces, which led to the control of ISIS on Mosul and half of Iraq, and the emergence of the Popular Mobilization Force and strengthening it more than official state institutions. And through these steps the regimes in the two countries portray themselves as regimes fighting extremist groups that threaten the security of neighboring countries and the security of the world.

Several reports have been issued indicating the existence of collusion between these regimes and the emergence of extremism in Syria and Iraq. Among them Anadolu Agency Persian channel stated the following: “The pro-Iranian government of (former Iraqi Prime Minister) Nouri al-Maliki prevented 30,000 members of the Iraqi army in Mosul from fighting ISIS and facilitated the group's seizure of \$20 billion in weapons, bank coffers, and billions of dollars in cash, and ISIS occupied about half of Iraq in a matter of days without being bothered by the Iraqi Air Force.” Al-Qaeda members from around the world also left for Iraq after the U.S. invasion. According to some conservative activists in Najaf, religious and militant groups

¹³ Qaani fears a “new invasion of ISIS” if the Iraqi Shiite house disintegrates, Source: Asharq Al-Awsat: Published on: 10/02/2022, link: <https://bit.ly/3B845vb>

affiliated with Iran did not oppose al-Qaeda in Iraq. Also the mentioned militants provided Al Qaeda with financial support and weapons. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq and the godfather of ISIS, was twice transferred to Iran for treatment. A few months after the Syrian revolution, the Assad regime and Maliki released thousands of former Al-Qaida members from prisons¹⁴, like Sadnaya, Abu Ghraib and Tajar. There are many signs and evidence for this cooperation on the Syrian front.

The publication of the sanctions list issued by “the European Union, which included for the first time the name of a person named George Haswani in March 2015, who was then identified as the mediator between ISIS and the Assad regime, a Syrian Christian with Russian citizenship, who owns a contracting company”¹⁵ is one of these proofs. The scope of the threat of extremist organizations goes beyond the borders of Syria and Iraq. Iran is utilizing Afghan Shiites in its multiple wars to a huge extent, in addition to utilizing ISIS attacks against Shiite shrines and mosques in Iran as a gateway to enter and influence Afghan politics. And Iran had an old relationship with the Northern Alliance, and also with general Shiite Hazara, which represents a strong card in its hand.

The commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Esmail Qaani, stressed in a secret session of parliament on September 7, 2021, that “Afghan Shiites are also very important

¹⁴ Iran; The biggest obstacle to establishing resilience and stability in Iraq, Source: Anadolu Agency, Published: 21/03/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3omTV28>

¹⁵ The malicious alliance.. an inventory of the cooperation between Assad and ISIS, Author: Ali Hussein Bakir, Source: Al Jazeera Net, Publication Date: 9/5/2016, Link: <https://bit.ly/3vth1IH>

to Iran; and Tehran has full control over the affairs of Afghanistan”, according to the Iranian website Radio Farada¹⁶.

¹⁶ For more information, please refer to the article on the Washington Foundation for Near East Policy website, entitled: Deals with ISIS: An Par Excellence Iranian Approach, Author: Omar Al-Raddad, Date: 20/12/2017, Link: <https://bit.ly/3yZP1NG> . Also you can find more information in the news published by Al-qabas and titled “Taliban rejects Iran's offer of assistance against ISIS: The Iranian delegation asked Taliban leaders to agree to give the Fatemiyoun Brigade the protection of Shiite mosques, stressing that Tehran would adopt the financing and arming of the brigade, under the supervision of the Taliban, in exchange for facilitating traffic, economic and trade relations between the two countries. Publishing Date: 21/10/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3B3QIMv> . In the same direction you may visit the article on Sky News website titled: 4 scenarios: ISIS opens the door for Iran to Afghanistan, Link: <https://bit.ly/3Q23mQH>

Conclusion

The Director of the United States National Intelligence Agency, Avril Haines, reiterated the position regarding Afghanistan's position among the threats to American security, and that it is no longer at the top of her country's concerns with regard to the international terrorist threats.¹⁷ These threats are in large part due to the change within the jihadist movement in the Middle East, its separation from al-Qaeda, its acquisition of legitimacy within its breeding centres despite this separation, the adoption of extremist ideas by ISIS more than al-Qaeda, and its decentralization based on the quantity of its members, not their quality, and the fact that ISIS was able to bring about a change with regard to families and women from around the world joining the caliphate, unlike al-Qaeda, which was largely limited to male “mujahedeen”, who were recommended by well-known people in the jihadi milieu.

Muhammad al-Maqdisi, “one of the most prominent ideologues of the Salafi-jihadi movement”, described al-Zarqawi's case by saying, “Failure to follow the rules of jihad set by reference sources will lead to the emergence of a people who will continue to fight uncontrollably. And they will rise up against the Ummah without distinguishing between good and evil, without weighing their interests against the evil.” Another jihadist ideologue, Abu Qatada al-Filistini, thinks that in the case of al-Baghdadi, ISIS undermined the “jihad project” in two aspects: firstly, it divided the [jihadist] project; and secondly, it directed the conflict towards inwards, to the

¹⁷ US intelligence considers 4 Arab countries more dangerous than Afghanistan, source: Arabi 21, date: 15/09/2021, Link: <https://bit.ly/3PsaUfo>

extent that within six months its rivalry with al-Nusra moved from a rivalry over the emirate to a doctrinal conflict, because ISIS regarded itself not as a community consisting of Muslims, but as a “caliphate” in the sense of a “community of Muslims.”¹⁸

In this context, a window can be opened to discuss the danger of ISIS for the United States of America and the nation-state system in the world, because it represented a “return to the rule of the Islamic Caliphate” (regardless of the actual assessment of the extent to which it represents an Islamic Caliphate in doctrine and application). And in this context, those, who hold an extremist ideology, were able to achieve a “dream” of the return of the Islamic Caliphate for the first time in nearly a century. And this point is exploited today by ISIS within its breeding centres to portray to them the existence of an “occupied Islamic Caliphate.” And this phrase appeared during several interviews with the organisation’s women held in al-Hawl camp in Syria's Hasakah province.

US President Biden's statement about “higher levels of danger posed by Syria and Iraq” to US security and interests, of which Afghanistan is also a part, comes within the framework of the impact of the Middle East and its pivotal countries on US interests, no matter how much the United States try to reduce their direct military involvement or play the role of the region's policeman. America's relations with the countries of the region goes back for decades, in which most of Washington's allies in the region relied

¹⁸ "Islamic State": Intellectual Structure and Complexities of Reality, Source: Al Jazeera Net, Publication Date: 23/11/2014, Link: <https://bit.ly/3RQaeC6>

on it in matters of security and maintaining systems of governance. Thus, any increased American withdrawal will have an impact on its strategic depths, and on increasing the number of Washington's rivals, especially within China. The US is trying to open a gateway through arms deals or huge loans in order to control the countries that are struggling with payment difficulties. On the other hand, it would be in America's interest if the Taliban's centralized control and weakness in the periphery make some extremist Tajik organizations and others active against the countries of the region that form a security belt for Russia and China.

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