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Kommentare ( 0 )

# From Resistance to Rule: Islamic State's Order of Violence

*by Holger Marcks*

Teil XV unserer Serie zum „Islamischen Staat"

Asymmetric conflicts in which rule is contested by non-state actors are often interpreted as a destabilization of order. This also holds true for the case of IS. Indeed, it cannot be denied that its transnational "jihad" has contributed to destabilizing a whole region. On the other hand, it has been repeatedly noted that IS has – within the territory it controls – established an alternative order offering stability. At least for those who fit in the worldview of the wannabe-caliphate. As reported by inhabitants of its powerhouse Raqqa, IS does not only create obedience by force but also by providing administration, workplaces and public services. Or as Benham T. Said put it, some few Arabs "associate an Islamic state with notions of justice, stability and prosperity".

The organization's name says it all: "It`s a state, and not a group. We aim to build an Islamic state to cover every aspect of life." This programmatic ambition described by an IS press officer has been roughly actualized in IS-controlled territory. The organization has established a pyramid of power with the self-proclaimed caliph at its top and provincial governors and ministerial councils subordinated to him. As seized IS documents reveal, these institutions try to simulate an executive that manages the daily business of the state-to-be, including fiscal, legal, security, social and media policy. To pervade society comprehensively, an apparatus has been created, which enforces their orders not only in public institutions, such as courts, schools and hospitals, but also in private and commercial life (see generally here and here).

IS is zealous to present itself as patron of the people by (re-)building infrastructure and distributing relief supplies. However, it can be doubted that the estimated 8 million residents on IS territory really benefit from such measures since they are employed just occasionally and locally. Rather, it has been reported that IS has lately struggled with general supply shortfalls. Further, the mentioned provision of workplaces and social services, on which IS spent considerable resources, are exclusively for the recruits of its bureaucracy, security apparatus and militias. Specifically this provider function seems to be what attracts young Muslims suffering from precarious conditions in their homelands (cf. Weipert-Fenner's contribution to this series).

However, this system of acquiring loyalists to enforce the jihadists' order among the local population is floundering. IS' liquidity and capacities of distribution rest to a large part on booties and confiscations in the course of conquest and ethnic cleansing. Since the strategy of permanent expansion – inspired by the policy of raids introduced by religious founder Muhammad – has bogged down, IS is looking for new sources of funding, mostly criminal ones. Already previously, it generated funds through outrageous practices

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such as the trade with women or protection rackets.

From this perspective, many measures of enforcement may seem as an expression of the (political) economy of war. Nevertheless, they contribute to the formation of state-like structures, a process that can be called "war making and state making as organized crime" (Charles Tilly). This "war-making–state-making nexus" can also be described as "order of violence" (Jutta Bakonyi/Stephan Hensell/Jens Siegelberg). Such orders often develop when armed rebels control a territory, though they are mostly instable and fragmented ones ("warlord figuration"). However, if rebels are able to build up a territorially consistent base, this can be accompanied by structures of centralization serving as the foundation of a "quasi-state".

As Jutta Bakonyi put it: If rebel groups gain power, and "if power transforms into rule, in everyday life this is always reflected in terms of administration." And, indeed, IS controls administrative structures as well as the means of coercion to penetrate the workings of society. As a result, it actually practices rule, even if not internationally recognized. However, the problem for IS is to convert the administration's military nature into a political one. Its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi seems to be aware that his fighters are not competent enough for governing, expressed by his call to Muslim judges, scientists and clerks all over the world to assist IS in state building.

This, finally, points to the strategic dimension of the fundamentalist quasi-state. If we take Fouad Hussein's account of Al-Qaeda's long-term strategy seriously, IS can be seen as its enforcer since it is near to the strategic goal of establishing a caliphate. According to Hussein, this state should, by turning the conflict into a more symmetrical one, serve as a springboard for contesting the international order more effectively. In this sense, IS' order of violence reveals a dialectic: The transition from transnational resistance to national rule is also a transition to international resistance. War, then, is not only the continuation of politics (Carl von Clausewitz), but politics is also the continuation of war (Michel Foucault).

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Tags: al-Qaida, IS, islamic state

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