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ARTICLE



# Anti-Militant Islamism and Self-determination in the Post-ISIS Era

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## ABSTRACT

Since 2017, multinational joint efforts to combat the terrorist organization 'Daesh' (ISIS) have achieved crucial victories. As a regional quasi-sovereign state, ISIS is almost finished. For a certain period, a power vacuum emerged due to the lack of effective authority after ISIS's reign. After the withdrawal of those cross-border extremists political elites have sought to design or modify their new regime based on reviewing and amending previous governance systems and political structures. In the postcolonial era and the post-cold-war era, religious nationalism has become an important impulsion of ethnic aggregation and group mobilization for self-determination. In the post-ISIS era, anti-militant Islamism and de-extremism have had to set up a political agenda for potential successful self-determination, secession to subsequent independent regime and widespread international recognition. The resulting dilemma is that the successors in the areas used to be controlled by ISIS, especially those insurgent forces, are deliberately constraining their external religious expressions in order to achieve their primary political goals, such as autonomy and self-determination. However, if the measures aiming at anti-militant Islamism were not followed by spontaneously development of indigenous religious consciousness, and if the accompanied by self-determination claimant ended in frustration, then constrained religious expression would accumulate in adherents' sentiment and then cause retaliatory militarization threat to regional security in the future.

## KEYWORDS

Hezbollah; Syria; Lebanon; Islamism; ISIS

## 1. Introduction

Under the suppression of international antiterrorism forces, the 'Daesh' (ISIS) has gradually lost its control over its major territories and population. ISIS has also lost its former political appeal and religious attraction. The MENA has entered the post-ISIS era. In those post-war narratives, stories happened in Mosul, once the largest city of ISIS. However, the follow-up of political issues brought by ISIS is far from completion.

ISIS' rule was undeniably atrocious and oppressive. Its vision of 'caliphate' has turned into utopia. Both al-Qaeda and the 'Islamic State' are rooted in the rise of

Islamism in the Arab World and the authoritarian politics of the regimes.<sup>1</sup> According to the analysis of nationalism research in the sense of politics, when the cultural and social environment of a certain group surviving in is different from the education and institutional environment promoted by the central bureaucracy, the emotional discomfort can only be eliminated through the process of assimilation, migration, genocide or redesigning new national boundaries.<sup>2</sup> Minorities' attempts at national self-determination to redesign boundaries and establish new self-governments have been carried out even before the post-ISIS era. With the emergence of the postwar power vacuum, it is not clear whether the independent forces that fought ISIS will combine with Islam, the dominant religion, and if the struggle for higher levels of autonomy fails, will a more extreme militant Islamism emerge? These questions will be explored and investigated in this article.

## **2. Power Vacuum, Independence and Religious Nationalism**

For the past few years, tens of thousands of Islamic extremists and activists from abroad have been recruited by ISIS, and were concentrated in its controlled areas. With the collapse of ISIS, those returning extremists and activists, who maintain their radical stance and continue personal jihad, will become strategic threats to the neighboring countries, European countries and the United States. Violence will contribute to conflicts and wars. As to those countries with weak central governments, militant Islamist violence will fuel unrest from domestic crime to civil war, leaving the region prone to ethnic and religious conflicts, and aggravating the complexity of the regional political situation.

### **2.1. Power Vacuum and Anticolonial Movement**

When ISIS was advancing, it substantively changed Syria's domestic political situation and destroyed the security mechanisms on the Iraqi and Syrian borders, causing massive displacement of ethnic-religious groups. The conventional interpretation of all these events draws in fact from the Sykes-Picot's conspiracy and the narrative of the 'Return to Islamic Principles.'<sup>3</sup> With the withdrawal of the ISIS, there is a temporary power vacuum in the former controlled areas.

ISIS is no longer a quasi-sovereign state; in the meantime, there are numerous problems that need to be addressed urgently. The question is how long will the power vacuum last, who will continue to interfere, who will win the leading power competition, who will be exiled, where will the groups' aggregation and mobilization come from, what will be the justification for seizing power, and so forth.

The power vacuum will engender reflections on the predominant political power and political system. The construction of a new political system will often depend on

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<sup>1</sup>B. Haykel, 'ISIS and al-Qaeda-what are they thinking? Understanding the Adversary', *The Annals of the American Academy* 668(1), (2016), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Ed. Book: Vernon Bogdanor, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Institutions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 411.

<sup>3</sup>A.N. Hamdan, 'Breaker of Barriers? Notes on the Geopolitics of the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham', *Geopolitics*, (29 February 2016), p. 606.

the strength of adjustment, unification and amendment of the former one. In the post-ISIS era, nationalist regional powers and outside powers fight for the dominant position. It should be acknowledged that after the withdrawal of oppressive power from its control area, like ISIS' nowadays, and the colonial masters in the past, religious nationalism tends to lay an important psychological foundation for the subsequent independent movement.

Religious nationalism is a combination of nationalism and religion; there are two kinds of religious nationalism: ethnic and ideological. The differences between religious nationalists lies in the degree to which religion is an aspect of ethnic identity and the degree to which it is part of an ideological critique that contains an alternative vision of political order.<sup>4</sup> In the context of nationalism, people and territory are crucial to national aspiration. The term self-determination leads to equal rights pursuing people's sovereignty, that is an international principle and legal criteria to govern state. To complete decolonization, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV), stipulates that, 'all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'<sup>5</sup> Thanks to the principle of self-determination, dozens of nations gained their independence after the World War II.

Religious nationalism played an active role in promoting national self-determination and independence from colonial, imperialist countries, and played a critical role in reconstructing national identities for fragile minorities in the post-Cold War era. For example, the Pilipino anti-clericalism movement resulted in the eventual end of the Spanish Catholic Church's intervention and the collapse of Spanish colonial rule. Another example is how the rising religious nationalism aggravated Yugoslavia's breakup in the last decade of the 20th century. Religious nationalism also played an important role in the process of Indian and Palestinian independence. In the 1920s, Mzabis political elites involving in Algeria and Tunisia anti-colonial and nationalism movements were also the elites of religious reform. They forged a combination of religious reform, pan-Islamism, pan-Ibadism, pan-Maghrivism, and Algerian nationalism, Algerian nationalism against colonialism.<sup>6</sup>

There are multiple faith-based pan-ethnic fronts in the MENA, like, for instance, pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism and pan-Turkism. At the same time, they also breed resistance to external powers, such as anti-Americanism and distrust of the United States. It is believed that religion, together with the special political structure of the Arab countries, is responsible for the MENA's anti-American orientation.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the explicit regional dominant power competition during the temporary power vacuum that ISIS's downfall left behind, it seems that external support for the establishment of a

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<sup>4</sup>M. Juergensmeyer, 'The worldwide rise of religious nationalism', *Journal of International Affairs* 50 (1), (1996), pp. 2-4.

<sup>5</sup>'Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples (Adopted by General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960)', UN, available at: <http://un-documents.net/a15r1514.htm> (accessed 15 February 2018).

<sup>6</sup>A. Ghazal, 'Tension of nationalism: the Mzabi Student Missions in Tunis and the politics of anticolonialism', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (1), (2015), p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>M. Lynch, 'Anti-Americanism in the Arab world', in Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 201.

new nation state in the plagued region has not been put on the international political agenda.

## 2.2. *Phantom of Religious Nationalism*

On the one hand, Benedict Anderson has made a metaphor:<sup>8</sup> if one tries to transform 'My Country, Right or Wrong' into 'My Religion, Right or Wrong,' and the oxymoron will make it easier to understand the dividing line between religion and nationalism. The reason is, in believers' spiritual life, adherents' own faith would never be wrong. On the other hand, the principle of national self-determination means that sovereignty belongs to the people, not God, or other gods.<sup>9</sup>

The theoretical debate over religious nationalism first focused on whether religion is attached to nationalist or nationalist convergences under the cloak of religion, that is, to determine whether religious nationalism involves its religious or ethnical features. General research regards religion as part of culture. For example, comparative politics and anthropology scholar Geertz analyzes the religion as a cultural system on his field-work in Southeast Asia.<sup>10</sup> Religious nationalism is more analogous to religious groups' religious obligations. In the contemporary international political context, the controversy over religious nationalism revolves lies in the mechanism of interaction between faith-driven nationalism with external political forces, states, and other transnational religious communities. That is discussion about the necessity of international interference motivated by religious nationalist activities. That is, a set of theories to analyze political legitimacy of religiously-oriented cross-border intervention and religious nationalism's conflict or cooperative relationship with other elements that make up the nation.

As a complementary image of nationalism, patriotism outweighs ultranationalism. Patriotic love is in line with the spirit of republicanism, and is defensive in nature, while nationalism aggressively urges new power and unprecedented prestige.<sup>11</sup> The combination of non-state nationalism and patriotism will widen the measurements of the nation-state. The notion of national state means homogeneous and qualified inhabitants, rather than emphasizing certain ethnic groups and their religion. The more modernized a country is, the more likely it is to oppose the spread of nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

In order to gather self-determination's political capital, nationalists and their supporters will always advocate that the coming national state will give everything to the newborn regime, including the fact that people should become masters of the country, rapid economic growth, social equality, cultural regeneration, supremacy of nation's interests and the end of colonial or external authority.<sup>13</sup> However, a weak nascent central government and sophisticated nationalist elites who have ulterior motives

<sup>8</sup>B. Anderson, ed., *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 360.

<sup>9</sup>J. Fox, ed., *Bringing Religion into the International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup>C. Geertz, ed., *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>M. Viroli, ed., *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>E.J. Hobsbawm, ed., *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 59–60.

<sup>13</sup>C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 234.

make nationalism convincing leads to violent conflicts.<sup>14</sup> Empirical facts have proved that the independent movement with the support of ethnic sentiments and strong beliefs always ends in failure. The outcome would be mediocre or even tragically replaced by another extreme trend.

### **3. Militant Islamism in the Post-ISIS Era**

The multinational joint attacks against ISIS in 2017 proved to be effective, but the joint strikes did not provide a sufficiently strong alternative successor. Trump made it clear that he will increase deployment of the US military after the battle of Raqqa, and support Syrian Democratic Force (SDF) against ISIS. On the other side, Putin ordered voluntarily pullback of Russian troops from Syria after Iran declared the end of the Islamic State. While Russia maintains its military presence at Khmeimim air base and Tartus naval base in Syria, US stations troops in Tabaqa air base and al-Tanf military base. Quasi allies in antiterrorism against their mutual enemy, ISIS, part ways in the struggle for domination of the region.

#### **3.1. Repressed Militant Islamism**

Religious radicalism politics like extremist leftist politics activism is motivated by hatred. Militant Islamists, to some extent, like the early European extremists, established the regime through violence. Since the Afghan war in the 1980s, Jihad has been revived as a collective obligation to extreme militant Islamists.<sup>15</sup> The first manifestation of religious militancy's ideology is embodied in the ethnicity-related separatism, which is concentrated in the distortion of Jihad.<sup>16</sup>

As shown from a statistical analysis of the Lebanese Sunni Muslims' perception of the 'Islamic State,' the more devotion to Islamic creed the more likely they show their support for ISIS. In Lebanon's Sunni Muslim communities, especially those who adhere to the tenets of political Islam, ISIS's goal of restoring the original Islamic caliphate induces fundamental sympathies among Lebanese Sunni Muslims.<sup>17</sup> The MENA provides the grounds for Militant Islamism and there would be long-term potential support groups.

#### **3.2. Political Interests and Priorities of the Forces of Independence**

Wars create countries.<sup>18</sup> As ISIS vanishes, growing independent political forces expect to benefit from chaos.

<sup>14</sup>J. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 66.

<sup>15</sup>R. O. Keohane and P. J. Katzenstein, 'The political consequences of anti-American', in Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 280.

<sup>16</sup>D. Jun, ed., *A Study on Contemporary Islamic Moderation Thought* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2016), p. 212.

<sup>17</sup>S. Haddad, 'Accounting for Lebanese muslims' perspectives on the Islamic State (ISIS): religious militancy, sectarianism and personal attribution', *Defense & Security Analysis* 33 (3), (2017), p. 257.

<sup>18</sup>S. Tang, ed., *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 88.

Nationalism is a political principle that primarily advocates the unity of the political unit with the national unit.<sup>19</sup> At present, the main strategic goal of secessionist forces, especially those national independence forces, is achieving higher levels of autonomy over completely establishing an independent state. Independent state building takes precedence over unifying to orthodox ideology. An autonomous region is often a better medium-term goal for nationalism. In the struggle for national self-determination, nationalism and political units are symbiotic.

In the relatively calm early stages of fighting for national independence, Iraqi Kurdistan did not want at all to integrate Islam into national identity. From Iraqi Kurdish nationalists' perspective, democracy in Iraq has been divided by religious sectarianism. The Shi'ites vote for parties with Shi'ite backgrounds, while Sunnis support Sunni parties or the former Ba'ath party.<sup>20</sup> They declared that the Kurdish group believes that if the emphasis is laid on the establishment of an Islamic country, it will jeopardize the political interests of establishing the Kurdish nation-state. As Al-Marashi once mentioned: an Islamized country will hide the ethnic characteristics of the Kurds under the flag of Islam.<sup>21</sup>

The establishment of an independent nation-state may not necessarily be the center of all nationalist political programs. In many cases, the nationalist elites simply used the political goal of establishing a nation-state as a bargaining chip to negotiate with other political forces and gradually realized the goal of expanding the scope of self-government and narrowing the scope of the central government's dictation. Currently, the establishment of an independent state is a political stunt to rally common interests in the name of the nation.<sup>22</sup>

To avoid repeating ISIS' notoriously brutal religious extremist tyranny, all competitive parties active in the field that ISIS previously controlled have to not only sustain and expand their own interests, but also circumvent recurrence of pro-Islamism. Actually, militarization has not only happened in Islamism, it also appeared in other organized religions. Militaristic Buddhism appeared in Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar,<sup>23</sup> and Southeast Asian radicalism has emerged after the fall of the communist regimes.<sup>24</sup>

### **3.3. Nationalists' Measures Against Islamic Extremism**

In the post-ISIS era, the attempts of nationalists fighting for national self-determination to anti-Islamic extremism both are voluntary in response to external anxiety about Islamic extremism. It would not be difficult to reach a consensus if the international political players are only involved in the spirit of anti-extremism and antiterrorism. The short-term consequence of contemporary nationalists' anti-Islamic extremism measures should be effective to curb the spread and spillover of Islamic extremism in the region

<sup>19</sup>E. Gellner, ed., *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>W. Bo, ed., *Research on the Kurds Issues in Middle East* (Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2014), p. 103.

<sup>21</sup>I. Al-Marashi, 'Iraq's Constitutional Debate', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9 (3), (2005), p. 156.

<sup>22</sup>Ed. book: David Miller, et al., eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 352.

<sup>23</sup>M. Jerryson, 'Introduction', in Michael Jerryson, Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 4–9.

<sup>24</sup>B. Anderson, ed., *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 285.

and help reduce the impact of religious terrorism as well. However, the long-term consequence will have some negative effects on preserving the characteristic of their national identity.

1. National independence forces in the ISIS-controlled zone have been consciously preserving their military forces. In fact, the strategy of sending troops to join the war coalition with great powers to achieve decolonization and independence is common in history. The Kurds consciously proclaim that they are moderates, emphasizing mainly their devotion to Sufism. In fact, all moderate Muslims seeking external support for national self-determination consciously or unconsciously demonstrated their moderation by emphasizing close relationship with Sufi communities to make an obvious distinction from Islamic fundamentalism. For example, in the process of independence, Albanian Muslims living in Kosovo stressed the social influence of Sufism in Kosovo.<sup>25</sup> The paradox is that even Sufi sects have historically been associated with militarization and violence.<sup>26</sup>
2. In terms of self-determination, ethnic activists promote a higher level of autonomy by removing the internal ideology that republic or federal union shared before. Extremist dogma is the dominant label of ISIS. Independent successors need to deliberately de-radicalize and conceal the group's religious symbols. In fact, religious nationalists also showed some extremism when they rebelled against ISIS, like killing ISIS captives without mercy. In response to the revival founding state demands, the major powers expressed reservations. They prefer to give priority to regional autonomy and reduction of separatist forces' religious sentiment rather than recognition of independence.
3. The story of the Kurdish female soldier is another example of Kurdish successful propaganda. Among numerous media reports, the heroic warrior with no headscarf and a gun attracted attention. It seems that those people who fight for the liberation of their own nation and break stereotypes of MENA Muslims are open, brave and reliable. The transformation of information technology and innovated communication technology have helped increased the numbers of rebel groups, rebel behaviors and global jihadi groups in Muslim countries, marking the character of the early 2000s civil wars.<sup>27</sup> Even ISIS is an indisputably successful pioneer in using visual and digital technology to expand soft sovereign in digital times.<sup>28</sup> It should be noticed that in the violent Islamic radical narrative, feminine images are eye-catching as well. More and more young people, including some adolescent girls and young mothers, have also joined the militant Islamic organizations, then challenged the political order in their home countries like Europe and the United States at the cost of their lives.

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<sup>25</sup>G. Duijzings, ed., *Religion and Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 168.

<sup>26</sup>G. Schlee, ed., *How Enemies are Made: Towards a Theory of Ethnic and Religious Conflict* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 124.

<sup>27</sup>B.F. Walter, 'The new civil wars', *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, (2017), p. 469.

<sup>28</sup>R. Euben, 'Spectacles of sovereignty in digital times: ISIS executions, visual rhetoric and sovereign power', *Perspective on Politics* 15 (4), (2017), p. 1007.



The outside world, especially the western world, inevitably assumes an ambiguous attitude on religious nationalism. On the one hand, before the 20th century, humanitarian intervention through force was closely related to the protection of Christians.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, because the modern Western, secular state had fought religious authority, Western society has been cautious about religious nationalism since the establishment of the Westphalian system. For, if a well-functioning nation-state can also be established through religious nationalism, this means that the entire Westphalian system, which is legitimated by secularist ideologies of the nation-state, would become illusory.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. De-Radicalization, Postwar Independence Movements and Potential Crisis

US-based leftist media, such as Huffington Post, prefer to view the KRG in northern Iraq as a political ideal paradise under the shadows of militant Islamism. In their early narrative, the KRG managed to create a 'peaceful, democratic and economically prosperous part' of the turmoil in the MENA and be seen as an example worthy of emulation. They call on the international community to encourage and help Kurds as a stable society.<sup>31</sup> However, in the post-ISIS era, Kurds have urged the erection of an independent Kurdistan, not just to meet the needs of a stable sample for the outside world. To establish a new nation state and in order to win more external support, nationalists are eager to abandon the negative image of Islam and dilute the religious qualities of this group. After the war against ISIS, the absence of an effective government will likely breed an alienation of national self-determination.

##### 4.1. Expectations and Disappointment

Violation of the formation and development principle of de-radicalization, especially deliberately eliminate excessive religious expression, demonize specific religious nationalism may help separatists win sympathy abroad, but ruin common religious bond with neighboring countries causing hostility from neighbor holding same religious root. When separatists and nationalists have to avoid being direct military interference, religion may not be separatists' most important identification tag at that time.

When answering the question of why religious nationalism rose after the Cold War, Juergensmeyer wrote in his book, *New Cold War?*,<sup>32</sup> that after the end of the Cold War, Western liberalism did not fulfill a series of promises, such as economic freedom, thus opening the space and opportunities for the rising religious nationalism. Michael Mann's *The Dark Side of Democracy* gives a more pessimistic answer about ambitious nationalism for the malfunctions of modern democracy. He argues that although

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<sup>29</sup>M. Finnemore, ed., *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2003), p. 57.

<sup>30</sup>M. Juergensmeyer, ed., *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State: From Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>31</sup>M. Norell, 'Militant Islamism: a strategic threat', Huffpost, (7 August 2014), available at: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/maganus-norell/militant-jihadism-a-strat\\_b\\_5546469.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/maganus-norell/militant-jihadism-a-strat_b_5546469.html) (accessed 16 February 2018).

<sup>32</sup>M. Juergensmeyer, ed., *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 35.

democracy means rule by people, but the People concept has two definitions: *demos* (the ordinary people/the masses) and *ethnos* (one ethnic group). The institution of citizenship, democracy and welfare could be manipulated to exclude and discriminate against other groups. The underlying crisis would result in ethnic cleansing.<sup>33</sup>

Some scholars whose research focuses on Islamophobia in the Christian world hold the view that Islamic groups took a cultural initiative when the Caliphate was historically assertive of prosperity and power, and they were totally ignoring the West, until the arrival of the colonial era ended it all. Then, when westernization or *westoxification* did not bring about the expected development to the Islamic world, Islamic world turns to resistant and boycott the Western order. While those resistance and boycott retroact to the western world, forming the Islamophobia. Spiraling negativism grows from generation to generation, and 'the new generation of Islamists are becoming extremely radicalized.'<sup>34</sup>

This logic is not difficult to understand. The ally of right-wing extremists, religious radicals and populists would rise when patriotism and morality fail during political transformation. It is called 'backlash politics.'<sup>35</sup> The brutal killings of Muslims by al-Qaeda and ISIS undermined the attraction of Jihad to many Arabs, but they did not undermine the appeal of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was originally like nationalism in the post-Cold War era, especially when an ethnic group was ideological, based on particular religious beliefs.<sup>36</sup>

#### **4.2. Militarized Religious Revenge**

The fight for national independence is the politics of recognition.<sup>37</sup> The politics of recognition means turning from honor to dignity and then to universalism, but if the recognition efforts fail, in that case, the second option emerges, that is, the politics of difference. When society collapses, as an alternative source of cohesion, the nation plays the safeguard of people. The threat of violent conflict arises when the peaceful self-determination movement fails to gain international recognition as an independence nation-state.

The two concepts of Militant Islamist Ideology and violent extremism overlap with correlation in some extent. Islamic fundamentalism refers more directly to Salafism. In turn, Salafism can be subdivided into Jihadi Salafism and quietist Salafism. Some scholar believe that nationalist Islamism is a description of organizations similar to Hamas.<sup>38</sup> Militant Islamists are concerned as a great challenge to western countries' national security in the 21st century. Scholars like Daniel Pipes believe that 'Militant

<sup>33</sup>M. Mann, ed., *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 55.

<sup>34</sup>A. Ameer, 'From Islamophobia to Westophobia: the long road to radical islamism', *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* (3), (2016), pp. 1–2.

<sup>35</sup>S.M. Lipset, ed., *Consensus and Conflict: Essays in Political Sociology* (London: Routledge, Inc., 1985), p. 267.

<sup>36</sup>E. J. Hobsbawm, ed., *Nation and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 175.

<sup>37</sup>C. Taylor, 'The politics of recognition', in A. Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 32–37.

<sup>38</sup>R. Paz, 'Jihadists and nationalist Islamists: Al-Qa'ida and Hamas', in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, eds., *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic and Ideological Fissures* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 203.

**Table 1.** War, Terrorism and Crime

		Wide-scale violence	Small-scale violence
Disciplined Combatants	Conventional war Clausewitzian Regimental	Irregular war Primitive war Guerrilla war Rebellion people's war	Terrorism
Phrase 3		Phrase 2	Phrase 1
Miscellaneous Troops		Bandit Warlord Mercenary Pirate	Crime  Theft Robbery Organized crime Riot

Islam is the problem, but moderate Islam is the solution.<sup>39</sup> Anti-Militant Islamism needs a coalition with moderate Islam, to compete with a jihadist, terrorist, suicidal version of Islam.

Armed forces with military capabilities fall into two major categories: disciplined combatants and miscellaneous troops. Because of their participation in the war against autocracy and ISIS, the level of militarization of armed ethnic groups has intensified. According to the conclusion of *The Remnants of War* (Table 1),<sup>40</sup> war may not be necessary, but from small-scale crime to formal conventional war, there varied manifestations of violence. Rebellion and the people's war are only a transition between terrorism and war. Under an ideal, mature military and political system, the stronger voice the professional military officers have, the more powerful realism, and the chances of clash are even smaller.<sup>41</sup> However, it is hard to argue that the armed independent force and combatant personnel in the post-ISIS era are disciplined professional troops, and the volatile political environment is far from mature. Some people believe that there is no clear definition of conflict or restraint in Islamic doctrine.<sup>42</sup> At the very least, militarized Islamism, which does not give up its use of arms, has both the capacity and the willingness to reach all sorts of violence.

Although in Aboul-Enein's book, *Militant Islamist Ideology*, the author insists that Islam is peaceful. He writes, 'Islam is a source of values that guide conduct rather than a system that offers solutions to all problems.' But his book is also full of arguments that Islamism has the potential of 'alternative to Militant Islamist Ideology.'<sup>43</sup> The book's examples on many occasions show that when peace did not meet the Islamists' political needs, they took up arms and, even more regrettably, those who took up arms did not repent. For the most effective way to bring groups together for a long time is 'blood sacrifice'<sup>44</sup> of violence, that is war.

<sup>39</sup>J. Tassel, 'Militant about 'Islamism'', Harvard Magazine, (January–February 2005), available at: <https://harvardmagazine.com/2005/01/militant-about-islamism.html> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>40</sup>J. Mueller, ed., *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>41</sup>S.P. Huntington, ed., *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 409.

<sup>42</sup>A. Sen, ed., *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), pp. 81–82.

<sup>43</sup>Y. H. Aboul-Enein, ed., *Militant Islamist Ideology: Understanding the Ideology and the Challenge to America* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), p. 90.

<sup>44</sup>C. Marvin and D.W. Ingle, eds., *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1–5.

Muhammad Badi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, once made the following remark: 'Muslims should fight for a government that can develop into a caliphate and eventually win the dominance of the world;' 'Strive for a government evolving into a rightly guided caliphate and finally mastership of the world.'<sup>45</sup> While, the possible turning from internal sectarians' competition of independent forces to violence has not gone.

Anti-Semitism has become an essential part of modern Islamic fundamentalism, somehow fueled by Wahhabism. This reflects the anti-Semitism prevailing in the secular Muslim world, just like state-backed Egyptian intellectual elites easily become the most influential preachers of anti-Semitism in the Arab world. No matter what happens between Israelis and Palestinians, anti-Semitism may still be at the forefront of a faithful Muslim identity.

There is a possibility that the future Kurdish nationalists will turn to militant mass movement, exactly as Palestinian resistance movement decades ago. In Gaza, 2017, Hamas, the dominant Islamist party, constantly faces challenges from internal Islamist rivals, both old and new, for political space and power. This competition that takes place among Islamists is not only about the ruling power competition, but also involves the competition for the legitimacy of religious ideology. Hamas' Islamic opponents are salafi-jihadis and global jihadis who abuse violence more than Hamas, such as the Soldiers of God's Compassion/Jund Ansar Allah, Army of Islam/Jaysh al-Islam, Army of Unity and Jihad/Jaysh Tawheed wa Jihad, God's Soliders/Jundalla.<sup>46</sup> As the secular representative of Palestinian national liberation organizations, Fatah even blames Hamas for not effectively preventing Jihadist penetration in Gaza.

#### **4.3. Is it Safe for the National Consciousness to Reject the Expression of Faith?**

In terms of the origins of the nation, whether formed by relatively new integration or really with long history, nation is often imagined old.<sup>47</sup> Religion is an imagined community considered immemorial. Nationalism can also be qualified as a quasi-religious phenomenon. When contingent reality-state-is made absolute, nationalism is quasi-religion.<sup>48</sup>

If the notion of nation-state's narrative has been interpreted organically, then as Geertz and Latino scholars, the culturalist scholars of comparative political science, have tried to prove that: the social system is not rigid, and those subsystems can provide powerful internal dynamics; external pressure grows and can put changing pressures on subsystems and ultimately on the entire social system. The equilibrium state of a harmonious social system requires that each subsystem coordinate and adjust the concerns that it values and prefers.<sup>49</sup> The religious system is such a subsystem.

<sup>45</sup>C. May, 'Militant Islamism, Islamism, Islam', Townhall, (19 January 2012), available at: <https://townhall.com/columnists/cliffmay/2012/01/19/militant-islamism-islamism-islam-n922971> (accessed 16 February 2018).

<sup>46</sup>B. Milton-Edwards, 'Islamist versus Islamist: rising challenge in Gaza', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, (2014), p. 268.

<sup>47</sup>S. Reicher and N. Hopkins, eds., *Self and Nation: Categorization, Contestation and Mobilization* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 25.

<sup>48</sup>J.E. Smith, ed., *Quasi-Religions: Humanism, Marxism and Nationalism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup>D.D. Latin, ed., *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 175.

Religions are deeply rooted in believers and faith groups, both physically and spiritually. For example, within a multinational country, statistical analysis based on religious beliefs shows that even in a country as secular as China, strong religious ethnic minorities have a higher fertility rate than the irreligious Han nationality.<sup>50</sup>

The way in which religion affects politics is not only through ideology, such as religious terrorism and extremism. Religion is also influential on the political and conflict landscape through ethnic conflicts, international conflicts, international interventions, genocide, ethnic cleansing, totalitarianism, population, public diplomacy, human rights, social welfare, public education, globalization, political culture, nationalism, and many other forms.<sup>51</sup> The most important impulsion behind much Islamic violence relates to deep and firm religious beliefs. The paradigm of blaming Islamic radicalization due to brainwashing, poverty, or unemployment has proven to be wrong. An excessive worship of the attractiveness and charisma of individualism and secularism would downplay the religious motivation hidden behind conflicts.

National self-determination and independent state building are international issues, and nationalist behaviors always release signals to convincing abroad their harmlessness. Since globalization, the concept of 'Revival' has been repeatedly mentioned, as 'Cultural Renaissance' and 'Religious Resurgence.' Revival is a historical transformation inspired by current needs. It is full of fears of resurrection, reinterpretation and re-creation of the past.<sup>52</sup> When it comes to Islamic realms, if it is not of natural development, the artificial de-radicalization denying the original endogenous religion in the community in order to obtain political resources of self-determination cannot stop the regeneration and revival of extremism. That is the revenge of religion.

According to the attitude towards violence, the social movements dedicated to revolution that overthrew the past in their pursuit of political goals are always divided into two branches: radicalization and moderation. Then, in terms of activism in the Islamist movement, it splits into radical Jihadism and moderate Islam. Some research argues that compared with global Jihadist al-Qaeda, nationalist Islamists (eg the Muslim Brotherhood) and non-Jihadist fundamentalism (mainstream Salafism) can be considered less radical because, they either dismissed their abolitionist goals in favor of political integrations, or reject terrorism as a means to enforce abolitionist goals. However, both the nationalist Islamist and the jihadists devote themselves to break the old order without denying violence, including political violence. Differences only lay in their objectives as to whether the struggle was to seize the political power to achieve political change or to completely destroy the political system and create Salafi theocracy.<sup>53</sup>

In the study of Iraqi Ba'ath regime, scholars tend to believe secular nationalists might lose the fruits of victory in their cooperation with the religious trend.<sup>54</sup> The danger is that the religious trend will achieve power after it has removed the incumbent regime.

<sup>50</sup>L. Feng, 'Does religious belief influence fertility? Based on CGSS2010', *Studies in World Religions* (3), (2017), pp. 32–34.

<sup>51</sup>J. Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 through the Millennium* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 25–26.

<sup>52</sup>M. Brint, *A Genealogy of Political Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), p. 172.

<sup>53</sup>A. Armbrorst, 'Radicalisation and De-radicalisations of Social Movements: The Comeback of Political Islam?' *Crime, Law and Social Change* 63 (3), (2014), p. 254.

<sup>54</sup>A. Baram, 'From militant secularism to Islamism: the Iraqi Ba'ath Regime 1968–2003', *Woodrow Wilson International*

## 5. Conclusion

From a historical or psychological point of view, there is only a narrow step between religion and nation.<sup>55</sup> In the past, an empire organized its domestic various nationalities, prevented disintegration of the country by providing ethnic-cultural autonomy. The ethnic-cultural autonomy/national community was integrated within the imperial framework in the form of autonomous unit or sovereign collective organization, while not offering the land of permanent residence.<sup>56</sup> The lack of fixed territory reduces the possibility of political antagonism between empire and ethnic groups. However, the power vacuum caused by the collapse of ISIS brings about land that is beyond the control of the authoritarian forces.

When we talk about anti-militant Islamism in the post-ISIS era, it is ironic that despite the existence of worldwide anti-discrimination laws, those laws precisely reinforce the existence of border for ethnic groups or specific religion, which is equivalent to the recognition of ethnic and sectarian differences. After getting rid of ISIS rule, probably the national independence of the anti-extremist and anti-militant Islamism will be equivalent to re-recognize and re-intensify the radicalization and militarization of Islamism.

Today's anti-Islamic radicalism has been simplified to the pattern that reduces the number of enemies through rhetoric alarm, using safe-type Islamic group to replace radical ones. By joining the fight against ISIS with international antiterrorism allies, Kurds are regarded as a safe ethnic group. However, the security situation in the post-ISIS is wavering, so does the recognition of real enemies.

There are always fears that religion will inevitably tend to support irrational radical politics, especially in the context of continued Islamophobia in the international community. There are multi-dimensional elements that make religious groups militarized and violent, such as sectarian interests, emergencies, political ecology, the extent of external intervention and so forth. It should be acknowledged that in the MENA countries with repeated conflicts, for non-combatant groups, religions intensified their identification through public religious activities, and information flow to promote the militarization in houses of worship. Gathering information has become so convenient that for those interested in particular sects have no need to participate in physical religious activities to expose themselves.<sup>57</sup> The differences among different Islamic sects involve almost all aspects, from abstract perspectives of life and death, peace and war, civilization and paganism, to the status of current politics, ethnic self-determination, sovereignty, international law, attitude toward the United Nations, and to details status of life, sexual freedom, etc. There may be tons of conflicting positions and opinions.<sup>58</sup> The analysis of military Islam cannot be generalized either.

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Center for Scholars, (October 2011), p. 8, available at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/From%20Militant%20Secularism%20to%20Islamism.pdf> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>55</sup>H. R. Isaacs, ed., *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1975), Chapter 9, p. 171.

<sup>56</sup>M. Löwy, ed., *Fatherland or Mother Earth? Essays on National Question* (Virginia: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 68.

<sup>57</sup>M. T. Hoffman and E. R. Nugent, 'Communal religious practice and support for armed parties: evidence from Lebanon', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61 (4), (2015), p. 894.

<sup>58</sup>W. Phares, ed., *The War of Ideas: Jihadism against Democracy* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 39.

When the Mustapha Kamel Attaturk carried out the nation-building project in Turkey, the left-wing party put forward plans for a socialist Turkey, while the Kurdish activists proposed the right of self-determination. To balance the dispute among all parties, Islam is given the expectation as key centripetal force.<sup>59</sup> In fact, despite being a nation, the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria never form a united political movement for common Kurdistan national self-determination, nor have they had a truly unified political community based on the Kurdish ethnic group. Chinese scholar Wang believes that for today's Kurds, the real expectation, even the ultimate expectation, is simply to win the national rights of living in the country and strive for equal ethnic status.<sup>60</sup> A qualified country needs to protect civilians and provide security. Failure to defeat other armed threats, including terrorism, will also mean the failure of that country. The form of nation-state is the most formidable form of political organization under the current world structure that is most conducive to economic development, improving social welfare and safeguarding the people in the territory from external risks.<sup>61</sup> Those ethnic minorities struggling in turmoil and war environment are so desirous of long-term peace. For them, building an independent nation-state will always be a political ideal worth fighting for.

About civil wars, the current security measures for de-radicalization have had some effects in curbing the reemergence of violent religious extremism for a certain time. But in the long run, the absence of necessary expression of community beliefs implies an escalating security threat. If the succeeding policymakers regard those conservative and radical voices only as a manifestation of the diversity of minority groups and preserve them in the context of pluralism in the post-war reconstruction and shaping of public policies, then it only sowed the seeds for future regional politics.

In the beginning of the New Year, reporters of Xinhua News Agency interviewed refugees from Sinjar who now live in the rehabilitation camp in the east of Mosul. They said that they are now afraid to return to their homes because of the risk of being murdered or slaughtered, from the Yazidis to the Arabs, as retaliation for ISIS' brutal rule.<sup>62</sup> National hatred and violent revenge are far from ended. The post-war reconstruction will clearly be a long journey.

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<sup>59</sup>N. Grigoriadis, ed., *Instilling Religion in Greek and Turkish Nationalism: A 'Sacred Synthesis'* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 70.

<sup>60</sup>W. Bo, ed., *Research on the Kurds Issues in Middle East*, (Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2014), p. 437.

<sup>61</sup>R. Lachmann, ed., *States and Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 200–203.

<sup>62</sup>W. Yudong and C. Shuaipeng, 'Six months after liberation, Mosul is hard to recover after war: revisiting the former headquarter of ISIS', *Reference News*, (10 January 2018).