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Arab Spring, Jihad Summer

Mission Forever Unaccomplished

by PEPE ESCOBAR

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Welcome to IS. No typo; the final goal may be (indiscriminate) regime change, but for the moment name change will do. With PR flair, at the start of Ramadan, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS, or ISIL – the Islamic State of the Levant – to some) solemnly declared, from now on, it will be known as Islamic State (IS).

“To be or not to be” is so ... metaphysically outdated. IS is – and here it is – in full audio glory. And we’re talking about the full package – Caliph included: “the slave of Allah, Ibrahim Ibn ‘Awwad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn ‘Ali Ibn Muhammad al-Badrial-Hashimi al-Husayni al-Qurashi by lineage, as-Samurra’i by birth and upbringing, al-Baghdadi by residence and scholarship”. Or, to put it more simply, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

IS has virtually ordered “historic” al-Qaeda – yes, that 9/11-related (or not) plaything of one Osama bin Laden – as well as every other

jihadi outfit on the planet, to pledge allegiance to the new imam, in theological theory the new lord over every Muslim. There's no evidence Osama's former sidekick, Ayman "the doctor" al-Zawahiri will obey, not to mention 1.5 billion Muslims across the world. Most probably al-Qaeda will say "we are the real deal" and a major theological catfight will be on.

After all, in Syria, ISIL as well as Jabhat al-Nusra were initially fighting under the banner of al-Qaeda, until the brand – in spectacular fashion – decided to dump al-Baghdadi. He and ISIL went too far – with all those videos of decapitations and crucifixions and serial profanation of Shi'ite, Sufi and Christian sanctuaries.

Al-Baghdadi, born Ibrahim al-Badri in Samarra, is an average Sunni Iraqi cleric with a degree in pedagogy from the University of Baghdad. His alter ego was born after Shock and Awe in 2003, and soon metamorphosed into a de facto serial killer – blowing up Shi'ite kids at ice-cream shops or scores of women at Shi'ite weddings.

ISIL's track record in Syria includes banning every flag apart from its own; the destruction of any "polytheist" temple or sanctuary (except if it is Sunni); and strict imposition of Islamically correct women wear. Most of all, it is a track record of terror. This is not an army, rather a well-trained militia of professional mujahid, European passport holders included, with battlefield experience in Iraq, Afghanistan and, to a lesser degree, Chechnya. Heavy weaponizing is petrodollar-financed – the usual, wealthy "Gulf donors", which does not exclude official connections.

Sources of income diversified mightily when ISIL captured the oilfields surrounding Deir Ezzor in Syria; and after the recent offensive across Niniveh province in Iraq, they were able to lay their hands on vast arsenals of heavy artillery, lots of cash and gold bullion and, why not, US Humvees left behind. Their trademark, of course, are those columns of brand new white Toyota Land cruisers – free off road advertising Toyota HQ in Japan may not find particularly welcome.

Loaded with oil and profiting from tax revenue, IS is now firmly on its way to provide (minimal) services and support a (mighty) Jihadi Army – much like the Taliban from 1996 to 2001. One may be sure IS will continue its massive "social engagement" strategy; talk about a chatty Caliphate which loves YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. No wonder they are a hit among Google generation recruits – as well as becoming fund-raising aces via gruesome videos. In thesis, indoctrination progresses hand in hand with "charity work"; residents of Aleppo, for instance, can dwell on how ISIL (gruesomely) looks and feels on the ground.

Mission forever unaccomplished

It's unclear how the new IS reality will play on the ground. The new Caliph has in fact declared a jihad on all that basket of corrupt and/or incompetent Middle East "leaders" – so some fierce "battle for survival" reaction from the Houses of Saud and Thani, for instance, is expected. It's not far-fetched to picture al-Baghdadi dreaming of lording over Saudi oilfields – after decapitating all Shi'ite workers, of course.

And that's just a start; in one of their Tweeter accounts IS has published a map of all the domains they intend to conquer within the span of five years; Spain, Northern Africa, the Balkans, the whole Middle East and large swathes of Asia. Well, they are certainly more ambitious than NATO.

Being such a courageous bunch, the House of Saud is now tempted to accept that imposing regime change on Nouri al-Maliki in Iraq is a bad idea. That puts them in direct conflict with the Obama administration, whose plan A, B and C is regime change.

Turkey – the former seat of the Caliphate, by the way – remains mute. No wonder; Ankara – crucially – is the top logistical base of IS. Caliph Erdogan's got to be musing about his own future, now that he's facing competition. In theory, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Jordan are all saying they're ready to fight what would be a "larger-scale war" than that gift that keeps on giving, the original, Cheney junta-coined GWOT (global war on terror).

And then there's the future of the new \$500 million Obama fund to "appropriately vetted" rebels in Syria, which in fact means the expansion of covert CIA "training facilities" in Jordan and Turkey heavily infiltrated/profited from by IS. Think of hordes of new IS recruits posing as "moderate rebels" getting ready for a piece of the action.

It's easier for Brazil to win the World Cup with a team of crybabies with no tactical nous than having US Secretary of State John Kerry and his State Department ciphers understand that the Syrian "opposition" is controlled by jihadis. But then again, they do know – and that perfectly fits into the Empire of Chaos's not so hidden Global War on Terror (GWOT) agenda of an ever-expanding proxy war in both Syria and Iraq fueled by terror financing.

So 13 years ago Washington crushed both al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Then the Taliban were reborn. Then came Shock and Awe. Then came "Mission Accomplished". Then al-Qaeda was introduced in Iraq. Then al-Qaeda was dead because Osama bin Laden was dead.

Then came ISIL. And now there's IS. And we start all over again, not in the Hindu Kush, but in the Levant. With a new Osama.

What's not to like? If anyone thinks this whole racket is part of a new live Monty Python sketch ahead of their reunion gig this month in London, that's because it is.