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THE FIGHT AGAINST IS REQUIRES MORE THAN BOMBS

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The latest terrorist attacks in Paris underline the necessity of even closer international cooperation when fighting jihadi terrorist organisations. The international community is faced with a complex challenge, since jihadists have not only considerably increased in numbers during the past years, but have taken control over large areas in Iraq and Syria, started to exploit new sources of income and seized heavy weapons.

Ideological combat

Muslim theologians and religious leaders worldwide increasingly condemn the acts of violence committed by the Islamic State's (IS) terrorist militia and call on their publics not to leave the prerogative of interpretation of Islam to extremists and violent criminals. In a fatwa (Islamic religious decree) British Imams defined the IS as a "heretical" and „an oppressive and tyrannical group“, the joining of which is forbidden for religious reasons. It is the duty of all Muslims to oppose the "poisonous ideology" of the IS. The Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, which with its 57 member states is considered the collective voice of the Muslim world, condemned the atrocities committed by militant groups, such as the IS, in the name of religion. The Vice Rector of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Abbas Abdullah Shuman, who is considered as the highest dignitary of Sunni Islam, expressed himself in a similar way. Particularly Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Arab states show increasing con-

cern in view of the developments in Syria and Iraq since numerous Arab citizens fight within the ranks of the IS and may perform attacks in their own countries as well. The risk of IS terrorist attacks has increased since many Arab states have started to take part in the air strikes.

Legal measures – provisions of individual states

In Arab states such as Jordan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia there are sympathisers for the extreme interpretation of Islam, as advocated by the IS. Some of the Gulf States – or influential citizens – have repeatedly been accused of financing jihadist organisations. Moreover, these countries, with Saudi Arabia leading the way, have offered a breeding ground for the violence-prone ideology of the IS, by spreading their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in numerous Muslim states. At the same time, however, Saudi Arabia is counted as one of the largest „investors“ in counter-terrorism program-

mes. The Kingdom finances campaigns to fight terrorism in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mauritania. As a reaction to the proclamation of the caliphate by the IS in the summer of 2014 the Kingdom supported the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) with 100 million USD. In addition, Saudi Arabia introduced a very strict financial control system in order to curb the financing of terrorist networks. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon try to prevent a spillover of IS extremism onto their own state territories by means of increased border controls and buffer zones.

The rapid success of the IS in Iraq and Syria also induced states which had not yet been afflicted by terrorism to take measures for containing the popularity of jihadism. Under UN Resolution 2178 (2014), the international community commits itself to take active steps in order to meet the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters (FTF). For the first time FTFs are named as a major element of violent extremism.

On the European level the EU Commission is planning a new counter-terrorism strategy, including a passenger data agreement, and has increased controls for people entering the Schengen area. In addition, a stronger focus is to be placed on cyberspace as a platform for criminal actions, investigating, in particular, the incitement to terrorism or hate crimes.

In Austria the measures against extremism are comprised of three fields: prevention and sensibilisation, consultations and intercultural dialogue as well as strengthening available instruments. This includes, inter alia, the prohibition of IS symbols, changes in the Border Control Act as well as deliberations to deprive jihadists of their citizenship.

Direct and indirect intervention

The coalition against the IS, which was formed by the USA in the summer of 2014,

has received increasing international support since the beginning of the operation. Currently, 62 states are members of the anti-IS coalition. The states may contribute in a direct military manner (air strikes), indirect military manner (weapons deliveries and deployment of military advisors) and, lastly, by way of humanitarian aid.

Military intervention

According to the motto “Iraq first” the plan is first to stop the advance of the IS in Iraq by directly supporting the Iraqi military and the Kurds. Second, the coalition will attempt to weaken the IS in the Syrian hinterland. Apart from oil fields, the targets are also control posts, training camps, vehicles, military camps and command and control facilities. In addition to the USA and Great Britain, the “Arab alliance“, i.e. Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and also the United Arab Emirates, substantially contributes to the air strikes in Syria. States which carry out attacks exclusively on Iraqi territory are France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Australia. Most states as well as Austria provide humanitarian aid.

Strengthening the Kurds

Since the beginning of the air strikes the Kurdish regional government in Erbil has proved to be an important ally of the anti-IS coalition. Their Peshmerga represent the combat forces on the ground. In order to strengthen them, President Obama wants to support them directly with weapons and training, without taking the indirect route via the Iraqi central government.

Further states willing to provide the Kurdish units with weapons, equipment and military advice are Albania, the Czech Republic, Canada, Croatia, Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain. Iran was the first state to supply the Kurds with weapons for their fight against the Sunni militias. Because of the decade-long cooperation of the Iraqi Kurds

with the Islamic Republic of Iran against Saddam Hussein, Tehran has a direct interest in strengthening the Kurdish forces. However, Iran, like Russia, does not officially belong to the anti-IS coalition.

Germany has already supplied 10,000 Peshmerga fighters with weapons, such as assault rifles, hand grenades and anti-tank weapons, all worth 70 million Euros. At the end of 2014 the Peshmerga forces were able to achieve some initial successes by retaking the Sinjar Mountains, which had been under siege by the IS for months.

(Re)Building Iraqi Security Forces

The amount of time needed for crushing the IS is calculated by the US military to be three to four years. In so doing, first, twelve Iraqi brigades, including three Peshmerga brigades, are to be trained. At the same time new National Guard brigades are planned to be set up in each of Iraq's 18 provinces. These units are to be subordinated to the local governours and be responsible for security in these areas as soon as the Iraqi Army's counteroffensive commences. The setting up of the units is to be controlled by a new US task force in Kuwait. In addition, within the framework of the training programmes American posts in Erbil, Anbar and Taji, north of Baghdad, are to be established. Australia, Canada, Norway, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Turkey are willing to contribute special operations forces to training or advisory missions.

Setting up Syrian Opposition Forces

Another element of the anti-IS strategy is identifying reliable moderate rebel groups in Syria. Following an inspection process these rebels are to be withdrawn from Syria and trained and equipped in third states of the region. According to the Pentagon, the USA is negotiating with Turkey about a military agreement to train moderate Syrian rebels in Turkey. The objective is to train up to 15,000 fighters (this number is deemed to be suf-

ficient to crush the IS in Syria) during the next three years. The training of opposition forces will, at first, be supported by 400 US soldiers and is to commence at a military base in Kirsehir, south-east of Ankara, not before March 2015. Similar training programmes are to take place in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The so-called moderate rebels will be subordinate to the SNC (the National Coalition of the Syrian Revolutionary and Oppositional Forces), a panel, which since 2012 has been recognised as the legitimate representation of the Syrian people by the "friends of Syria" (USA, France, Great Britain, Germany and some Gulf states).

Assessing the chances of success

The strategy of the anti-IS coalition as presented by US President Obama is aimed at weakening and crushing the IS, however, without defining the desired end state, the strategic objectives and the required resources. The strategy only lists military actions such as air strikes in Iraq and Syria, military support and the training of local armed forces. As past operations have shown, such open-ended interventions entail high risks. The answer to the Islamic State requires formulating a clear strategy which also contains suggestions regarding the future of Syria.

In Iraq the offensive force of the IS could be considerably reduced by hundreds of air strikes, so that the jihadists are currently capable of carrying out only local offensives. Targeted air strikes on IS positions have prevented the seizure of Baghdad and Erbil and supported the retaking of the Mosul and Haditha dams. In Syria the grim combat of the PKK-affiliated Kurds (YPG) for Kobane has been supported by approx. 500 air strikes and the town been prevented from being seized by the IS so far. The most significant consequence resulting from this campaign was that the IS had to sustain heavy casualties and that its nimbus of invincibility was tarnished. On Syrian territory the major problem is that, besides the Kurds, there are

no allied fighters, who might take advantage of the effect of the air strikes. The different rebel groups are either ideologically different to the coalition members or so badly organised and equipped that they are not able to launch offensives against the IS in the foreseeable future.

It is difficult to assess the prospects of success for training and strengthening Iraqi and Kurdish security forces as well as selected Syrian rebels. In Iraq 3,000 US military advisors in several training camps are tasked with training Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. The success of the programme for finally crushing the IS depends on whether Prime Minister Al-Abadi will be able to restore the confidence of the Sunni population, which was disregarded by his predecessor. In Syria the training of moderate rebel groups will require more time until it will bring about the hoped-for results. Yet, the number of moderate rebel groups continues decreasing, because some brigades defect to the IS or to the Nusra Front – the Al Qaeda branch in Syria – either in order to survive or to be on the victorious side.

Findings and recommendations

- Because of the expansive ideology of the Islamic State the terrorist militia cannot be integrated into any political solution. The IS needs to be crushed militarily and a sustainable political solution for the whole region is called for.
- Air strikes alone without deploying ground forces might prove counterproductive, since attacks on oil and other infrastructural facilities are skilfully used by the IS in terms of propaganda, assuring the local Sunni population that the attacks are another American campaign against Islam.
- In the short term, in addition to containing the IS offensive it is important to maintain the political stability of the government in Iraq. If Iraqi politics again drifts into chaos, the IS may pose a serious threat to Baghdad.
- Apart from building up the Iraqi security

forces, the sustained stabilisation of the country also requires the political integration of the Sunni-Arab tribes.

- The international community is called to revitalise the peace process for Syria and to support the UN special mediator's efforts.
- The international community is advised to render economic and humanitarian support, particularly to the neighbouring states of Lebanon and Jordan. The already unstable political and economic situation in Lebanon is further aggravated by the refugee crisis.
- The military destruction of the IS alone will not result in the definite eradication of its ideology. Therefore, the nihilistic nature of the IS is to be revealed and the IS to be deligitimised ideologically. In so doing, Muslim states are required to condemn the atrocities committed in the name of Islam.
- The EU should first, and foremost, counteract the radicalisation of EU citizens. A communication strategy exposing the IS propaganda in social media and online platforms, e.g. by integrating reformed Syrian fighters, is an option.

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