

well structured edition that is accessible to a large number of social categories through various explanations that make it easier to understand the need to normalize the life of a religious order.

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Michael Weiss, Hassan Hassan, *Isis. Armata Jihadului (Isis: Inside the Army of Terror)*, Bucureşti, Editura Corint, 2016, 346 p.

After 9/11, the book market was practically “invaded” by works concerning the Al-Qaeda, and the same is happening now in the case of ISIS. Some of these works were (and are) poorly written, sensation-seeking compilations, while others are based on serious documentation. Generally speaking, when a subject is “trending” the possibility to reach academic quality seriously decreases. Considering all of these aspects, the two authors of the present book did their best to create a work which is not only easy to read, but also a valuable source and a comprehensive synthesis of the history of ISIS. Although the book itself has some lacunae in its thematic approach - which can be improved in future editions - my general conclusion is that it represents a well-written analysis; it is well documented with original sources and can be very useful in getting to know the organization which shocked the world with its cruelty and efficiency.

Michael Weiss is, first of all, a specialist in the post-Soviet world, having published a series of high quality articles in press products like *Foreign Policy* and *Daily Beast*. Starting with 2011, he became a field correspondent transmitting the riots from Syria, getting acquainted with the depths of Middle Eastern politics. His co-author, Hassan Hassan, is a local intellectual, working as a journalist for the *National* from Abu Dhabi. Co-opted by Weiss, Hassan also has the quality of having been born in Abu Kamal, a town situated on the Iraqi border with Syria, part of the battlefield where, after the demise of Saddam’s Baathist regime, different Arab and international forces are disputing the supremacy of their strategic interests.

The book is highly readable, due to the simplicity of its language, the complexity of the information and the continuous linear presentation of the processes described. The book is structured into 14 chapters, starting with the cultural and social roots for a jihadist insurgency - which will be materialized in the form of the IS - 101naly the moment of the terrorist attack performed by the Kouchi brothers in 2015. In the first chapters, the key figure - around

whom the presentation of events is centred – is Abu Musaf el-Zarqawi, whom the authors consider to be the spiritual father of the Daesh. For a while Zarqawi was the second in charge in the structures of al-Qaeda, and his views concerning jihadist strategies were different than the ones shared by Osama bin Laden and his acolytes; in the authors' view, the current version of the Islamic State relies much on Zarqawi's system of thoughts. Some other key aspects of the book are present in the analysis of the responsibility for each part involved in the turmoil and the rise of the Daesh. In this respect, we cannot deny that the authors are slightly partial, but this seems to be beneficial in the end. Even if they do not deny the mistakes made by the US strategies for pacifying post-Saddam Iraq – including the failure of the Sons of Iraq peacekeeping project and the mismanagement of the democratic elections in the midst of the Shiite-Sunni conflicts. It is correctly pointed out that through the victory of the majority Shiite forces in the elections, most of the Sunni perceived a threat to their existence and Sunni radicalism represented the lesser evil compared to the domination of the Shiites. On the one hand, one of the strongest points of the book consists of its depiction of how the US-backed Awakening Moment managed to drive out the jihadists from Iraq, but in 2013, when the government suppressed Sunni protesters with fire, they returned, in the new political climate. On the other hand, the book insists on the role played by Iran – and its secret services – and Assad's regime, through their temporary strategic cooperation with violent cells, which became the nucleus of the organization that became their mortal enemy. On the one hand, this might at first appear to be an exaggeration, since ISIS is one of the enemies of the Shiite-Alavite conglomerate of interests. On the other hand, no detail can be neglected in the case of such an analysis. And in that opportune moment, it was in the interest of Assad and his regime to support the turmoil in Iraq, because they were violently suppressing the anti-regime protests in Syria. The slight involvement also represented a covert message that Syria – and Iran – should be left alone. The authors also make a good point in describing the oil – and artefact – smuggling of the IS through Turkey, even if the complete functioning mechanisms of the smuggling networks could not be entirely revealed. Such a quest could be very dangerous, and even if the information is obtained, it will have to be kept top secret due to reasons related to intelligence networks. The smuggling networks are shown to basically be the same ones from Saddam's era, and even if the political situation changed, the mechanisms which make this black market-activity to function basically remained the same.

One of the main strengths of the book is, first of all, its complex documentation that mostly consists of interviews conducted with western officials, people related to the ISIS and opponents of the ISIS from the Arab

world. Another major strength is the large sum of comprehensive information: in this respect, a glossary of terms and an index for names and places, for the previously less informed readers should be included in future editions.

I must mention those subjects about which I would prefer to read about in the future editions of this present book – editions which will surely be published, considering the high level of interest in this subject – or even in separate volumes which will continue the ideas present in this volume. Such would be a geopolitical analysis regarding the interests of regional and global players in the region concerning the role of the IS or of its similar alternatives; Turkey, Israel, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Russian Federation, China, the USA, the European Union and other actors all have their interests in this region. Another subject which could be developed regards the relationship between jihadist ideology and the cruelty shown by the ISIS fighters. In the last chapters, the authors approach the cruelty itself, but its motivation remains largely unrevealed and un-analyzed. A third aspect which could have been exploited is the system of relations within the organization lead by al-Baghdadi. For instance, there is no reference to the Boko Haram, an organization from Nigeria, which swore obedience to Al-Baghdadi, or to the presence of ISIS in Libya. A fourth aspect to be analysed could be the archontology of the ISIS itself because the structure of the organization might seem chaotic, but every single – symbolic or practical – position has its own logic, understandable for the leadership of the ISIS. Compared to al-Zarqawi, the figure of al-Baghdadi was only tangentially approached in this book; perhaps the authors will at some point dedicate a separate volume to the ascension of this character. Even so, there is much original information to be explored on the book's pages.

If we check the Internet for reviews concerning this present work of Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, we will generally find positive ones. It is definitely an interesting read and can be counted among the top written works concerning the history of ISIS. It is unsurprising that it became a bestseller and the Romanian translation is a useful initiative of the Corint Publishers.

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