ISIS: terrorist state or terrorist organization?

Master thesis

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Abstract
The thesis deals with the investigation of the terrorist activities run by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), an entity in the Middle East which is commonly referred to as a terrorist organization. By evaluating the activities run by ISIS in the seized territories, the organization of civil governance and public administration in them, the investigation of the propaganda model applied by ISIS for attracting new members from around the globe, and the analysis of the main sources of funding used by the Islamic State, the author proves that ISIS significantly differs from classical terrorist organizations, and therefore might be assigned the status of a terrorist state.

Abstrakt
Diplomová práce se zabývá.

Keywords
Insurgency, ISIS, Islamic State, propaganda, terrorism.

Klíčová slova
Evropská

Range of thesis: 108 314 symbols, 67 pages
Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to bring my deep gratitude to my thesis supervisor .......................................................... for their assistance, recommendations and correction throughout the period of research. My greatest debt of gratitude goes to my family, mother, father and sister and friends who have supported and inspired me. Among those I should like to thank for their kindness and help to me when I was writing this thesis .....................
Master Thesis Proposal

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ISIS: terrorist state or terrorist organization?

TOPIC CHARACTERISTICS

My work will consider terrorism itself, define its nature and essence, its symbol and relevance of study in these days. Today’s threat of terrorism prevails throughout the world and its power develops every day. One of the most pressing threats occurs to be the Islamic state ISIL. In my work I will describe them by showing the extremist, radical methods of implementation of the Khilafat and Islamic laws. The creation of this terroristic state in Iraq and its spread to other neighbor countries and also the fight for Islamic jihadist authority between ISIS and al-Quaede. One of the research questions of my thesis will be: How ISIS uses Islamic religious propaganda for their spread and recruitment of their military forces; the use of religious ideology as tool for non-positive goals. Also my work will propose some of the forecasts, what will happen in future in this blackspot region, the counterterrorism effectiveness, how state gets money (the sponsorship of terrorism).

Qualitative case study methodology
The thesis is going to be based mainly on qualitative methods and is going to use an interpretative approach or illustrative approach. I would like to analyze my research topic through the exploration of different scenarios, for the paper to have a more comprehensive approach and to forecast the future activities of terrorism. I also aim to explore the ability to explain such phenomenon as terrorism, I will use documents as well as scientific articles and literature on this issue, drawing on secondary sources such as scholarly books and articles, publications also the news articles. In my work I have case study about IS, describing this phenomenon from different sides, illustrate such activity as ISIS to discover some theoretical observations. Because terrorism is multicausal phenomena, I am going to touch the fields like sociology, politics, economics, philosophy as well.

Outline:
1. Introduction.
2. General definition and concept of terrorism.
3. Methodology.
4. Radicalization and propaganda in terrorism, ideological theory of radicalization.
5. Case study: ISIS
6. Conclusions
7. References / Bibliography

References / Bibliography
5. Howard Book; 10/14/2014; “ Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore by Jay”; 1st edition; Sekulow Publisher
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1 Introduction

In the conditions of globalization, the geopolitical relations in the world are developing at a very rapid pace, and are characterized by the constantly growing tensions between different major actors on either the global or many regional scenes. On the one hand, this is preconditioned by the bipolarized structure of the struggle for global domination which has remained after the end of the so-called “Cold War” between the United States and the Russian Federation, and on the other hand, the intensification of struggle between regional actors is largely preconditioned by the great growth of different regional leaders, and their desire to re-distribute the powers over resources and geopolitical influence.

Often, the global and regional geopolitical struggle involves all means available to the most prominent actors, and states might use direct hostilities for the purpose of expanding their authority, gaining new territories, or simply extending the scope of their geopolitical impact. Such actions provoke response on the part of different smaller groups of geopolitical actors, local communities of people, and so on. This is reflected in the guerrilla struggle, revolts, regime overthrows, and terrorism. All those events are favored by the overall growing tensions which produce a firm background for the development of violence.

In recent years, the threat of terrorism has reached its unprecedented peak, and the world has been shaken by a great number of terrorist acts causing thousands of casualties among civilians. However, if terrorism had rather been confined in the borders of individual regions in previous years, today, the scope of terrorist activities has extended far beyond the boundaries of single countries, and therefore the menace of terrorist acts threatens the entire world, including the most developed countries which see terrorists as the essential rivals of democracy, and seek uniting their efforts in the aim of counteracting any further spreading of terrorist activities on the international scale.

Taking into account the recent tendencies in global geopolitics in the context of the ever-growing threat of terrorism, and the efforts undertaken by developed Western states to counteract this threat, the investigation of the phenomenon of terrorism and its worldwide
spreading deserves particular attention. Those conditions explain the relevance of the topic of this research, as terrorism requires detailed analysis for the purpose of forecasting the possible future scenarios of development of terrorist activities on the international scale, and the response of the international community to such activities.

An issue of particular importance is the understanding of the reasons which precondition the development of terrorist groups’ activities, and the levers which terrorists use for motivate their aggression against people, at the same time establishing their authority and attracting newcomers to their formations. Explaining this phenomenon is a key task in the context of understanding how terrorists are able to expand their activities despite the great opposition on the part of the world’s most powerful armies and law enforcement agencies, and for revealing the most effective countermeasures which might be undertaken for stopping and further eliminating any and all terrorist threat on the global scale.

Within the framework of this thesis, the analysis will focus particularly on the detailed examination of one of the world’s most powerful terrorist organizations, namely the Islamic State. The choice of this organization for investigation is due to a number of reasons. First of all, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has been constantly increasing the geographical area under its control in recent years, and as of today, the opposition of the part of the NATO countries and some of the Arab states hasn’t yielded any fruitful results against the terrorists. On the other hand, the analysis of ISIS is much important taking into account the religious background: the terrorist organization positions itself as an Islamist community defending the ideas of the Quran. The terrorists are killing thousands of civilian people on religious grounds, and this deepens the fears over the Islamist threat in the developed part of the world, which entails the cooperation between Western countries aimed at limiting the expansion of ISIS. However, it is important to analyze religion as a tool used by ISIS for reaching its geopolitical goals, as it might reveal the essence of the terrorist movement, and help segregate the proclaimed and real intentions of ISIS.

However, although the Islam State of Iraq and Syria is traditionally seen as a terrorist organization, there are different opinions regardless whether ISIS indeed is a terrorist group, or it should be considered as rebels fighting for their geopolitical freedom
and ideals. This debate is much controversial, as there are many pros in cons in the construction of this particular aspect of ISIS classification. However, this issue requires particular attention, as explicitly evaluating the real status of ISIS in the tight interconnection with the specificities of its activities is a key step on the way to the understanding the reasons which actually promote the commitment of the actions undertaken by ISIS, and thus for finding ways to further oppose them.

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate the essence of the activities led by ISIS, and to reveal the main arguments in favor and against the recognition of ISIS as a terrorist organization.

The goals of the thesis are to analyze the activities of ISIS as one of the world’s most powerful terrorist organizations; to track the role of ideological, and namely religious, propaganda in the expansion of the terrorist activities led by ISIS on the global scale; to investigate the specificities of ISIS financing; to evaluate which factors allow considering ISIS as a terrorist organization, and which factors, to the contrary rather allow defining the status of ISIS in another way, namely as a terrorist state; and to draw comprehensive conclusions with regard to the aim of the thesis.

In order to fulfill the above goals, in the course of my analysis, I will focus in particular on several key aspects which should be helpful for retrieving data valuable for the analysis of the topic within the framework of this research. Namely, within this thesis, the key focus will be put on the following elements:

1. Specificities of the activities run by ISIS;
2. Radicalization of the population in the Middle Eastern region, and the reasons preconditioning the popularization and success of ISIS;
3. Propaganda led by ISIS, its ways and methods, and role in the organization’s activities;
4. Sources of financing used by ISIS for funding its activities;
5. ISIS’ attribution to a terrorist organization or terrorist state: pros and cons.

The conclusions drawn with regard to the fifth element mentioned above will be drawn based on the evaluation of the data within the four previous elements, and based on the key theoretical aspects related to terrorism and terrorist activities.
For the purpose of running a deep and comprehensive research, the methodological framework of case study will be applied. In the scientific literature, the case study method stands for a deep investigation of a particular situation or event and its development over a course of time. The investigation run within the framework of case study focuses on the analysis of the research object using the qualitative analysis of its behavioral patterns and parameters, course and vectors of development, particular specificities and features, and other important aspects characterizing in detail the case item, group or situation put into the focus of the research. One of the key benefits of this approach is that the detailed investigation of the research object allows the researcher generalizing the data drawn from the analysis, and thus subsequently applying them to the investigation of other research objects in the same field (Dul and Hak 2008, pp. 3-7).

The case study method is based on the deconstruction of the research object into its different aspects or intrinsic features with the aim of subsequently running their deep investigation, and therefore for drawing conclusions as regards the research object’s specificities in all minor respects. With this aim, different additional methods such as the analysis of empirical data, comparative analysis, and forecasting may be applied in order to reveal the trends in the target object’s activities, and to monitor the possible vectors of their subsequent development (Yin 2013, pp. 5-7).

Within the framework of this thesis, the research object investigated in the case study will be the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, commonly referred to as ISIS. As the main aim of the thesis is to reveal whether ISIS fits the classical explanation of the term “terrorist organization, the case study will aim to reveal the key specificities of ISIS’ activities run in the Middle East and beyond. Namely, the research focus will be put onto the specificities of ISIS’ political and military activities, sources of the Islamic State’s funding, and the propaganda activities led by it. The findings of the case study analysis should help obtain detailed data on the different aspects of ISIS’ activities, and thus should allow for a comprehensive qualitative evaluation of the Islamic State for thereafter drawing a conclusion on whether ISIS is a terrorist organization or not.

The data for analysis will be taken from a number of publicly available open sources, including both print publications in the form of books and scientific articles, and
reliable Internet sources providing wither retrospective information on terrorism and the
development of terrorist activities on the international scale or expert opinions on the issue.
All such sources will be used for the purpose of fulfilling the aim of the thesis through the
formation of a comprehensive information background and the subsequent development of
grounded forecasts with regard to the research question.

Among other bibliographic sources, the following sources will be used for writing
Karmon's; 2005; “Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries,
Nationalists, and Islamists”, Pool, Jeffrey (16 December 2004). "Zarqawi's Pledge of
Allegiance to Al-Qaeda: From Mu'Asker Al-Battar, Issue 21", Patrick Cockburn; (2014);
“The Jihadis Return; ISIS and the new sunni uprising.”, etc.

The book by Chaliand Gerard contains valuable data on terrorism, its theoretical
definition, different scientific approaches to the investigation of terrorism, and valuable
historical information on the evolution of terrorism and its development on the international
scale. Gus Martin’s encyclopedia even further broadens the scope of theoretical knowledge
on terrorism, and the data contained therein will be helpful for forming a firm theoretical
background on the issue related to the topic of this research. Ely Karmon's publication deals
specifically with Islamist terrorism, and the information presented in it is important to
analyze in the context of the investigation of ISIS and the religious motive used by the
terrorist organization for justifying its terrorist activities. Patrick Cockburn’s book is
dedicated to ISIS itself, and contains valuable data on the historical roots of the
organization, its key principles and goals, impact in the Middle East, and goals declared on
the international scale. Thus, all such data are essential for achieving the goals of the thesis,
and they will be investigated in detail within the framework of this research.

In addition to the print publications, online sources will help maximize the
relevance of the data taken for the analysis, and will allow revealing the most up-to-date
trends in the analyzed issue.

Based on the findings of the analysis and the results of the research run in
accordance with the plan described above, and conclusions will be drawn by the author for
the purpose of increasing the contributing value of the thesis and accomplishing the tasks set within the framework of this research.
2 General definition and concept of terrorism

When investigating the terrorist threat on the international scale, and the impact it has on the actions undertaken by different countries around the globe, it is first of all worth clearly understanding the concept of terrorism, its definition, and the different characteristic traits of this phenomenon.

In the scientific literature, there is no single commonly accepted definition of terrorism, as different research tend to investigate this phenomenon from different perspectives, and therefore tend to evaluate it from different positions. Also, the lack of a single definition of terrorism commonly used in the scientific practice is due to the fact that different countries have different legislative bases dealing with terrorism and constructing this phenomenon with their own inherent peculiarities (Brookes, Pooley and Earnest 2015, p. 21).

The word “terrorism” is derived from the Latin noun “terror” which can be literally explained as huge fear or panic state of a person under the impact of any external circumstances. The word “terrorism” was historically used for the first time in the context as we understand it today after the Great Revolution in France, with the establishment of the French Republic led by Maximilien Robespierre. The leader of the French Revolution proclaimed terror as the only true method to overthrow the archaic remnants of the French monarchy, and to establish a truly new republic for the French people to live in. According to Robespierre, terror assumed the use of the most severe methods of punishment and prosecution against the supporters of the old regime, including mass punishments and killings. During this epoch, the ruling of Robespierre was called the Reign of Terror, and the word “terrorism” gained its shapes which subsequently transformed into its today’s understanding (LaFree, Dugan and Miller 2014, pp. 27-29).

With the course of time, the definition and understanding of terrorism and terrorist activities have shifted. If initially they were constructed as activities run by the repressive apparatus of the state, starting from the late XIX century and until today, terrorism has been commonly seen as activities run by non-state organizations with the use of massive violence, killings or injuries, based on different grounds, including social, ethnical,
religions, and other motives, with the main aim of entailing massive fear among the population, and thus igniting tensions in particular regions or local areas (Gerard 2007, pp. 12-14).

Despite the fact that there are no generally adopted definitions of terrorism due to the lack of comprehensive international conventions on terrorism, the most popular of such definitions include the ones given by the official bodies of the United Nations, the international organization within the framework of which great efforts are undertaken with the aim of counteracting terrorism and eliminating the threat of terrorism for the sake of civilians’ safety and the prosperous development of the international community. Thus, as stated in the United Nations Declaration to Supplement the 1994 Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, the term terrorism stands for “Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them.” At the same time, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566 defines terrorism as “criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.” (Walker and Lennon 2015, pp. 48-53).

Although the above definitions given by the official bodies of the UN slightly differ, they still provide a comprehensive advisory legal framework for the UN member states to use when developing their legislative base aimed at countering terrorism, as well as when developing common security measures focused on the struggle against terrorism and terrorist organizations. However, until there is still no comprehensive international
convention of terrorism, new different definitions of terrorism might emerge even within the United Nations (Horgan 2005, pp. 73-74).

In the legislation of the United States, namely in Title 22 of the US code, terrorism is defined as activities which “involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping” and occur “within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.” or “outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.” (Hudson 2002, pp. 117-118).

In the Russian legal practice, terrorism is seen as the ideology and practice of impact on public opinion, adoption of decisions by public bodies, local governments or international organizations implemented by means of force, terror or other forms of unlawful activities. Overall, it can be stated that there are many similarities in the construction of terrorism in different states around the globe, and as of today, the efforts in the creation of a single comprehensive convention of terrorism are primarily aimed at uniting such definitions and elaborating a common position for the international community to treat terrorism from the legal perspective (Clarke 2015, p. 75).

As can be seen from the different definitions of terrorism given above, terrorism activities might significantly differ according to different criteria, including by scope of such activities, motives for their performance, methods used by terrorists, and so on. As a result, different classifications of terrorism can be found in the scientific literature, depending on the particular aspect of terrorist activities investigated by the researchers. The most widely used of such classifications of terrorism include, but are not limited to the following:

1. By subjects performing terrorist activities and the nature of their organization:
   - Unorganized (individual) terrorism. This type of terrorist activities is performed by single persons who act on their own, without being backed or financed by any major terrorist organizations. Most often, such terrorist acts are have an unsystematic nature, and are performed with aims of attracting public attention to some particular issues or with aims of financial enrichment;
- Organized (collective) terrorism. In contrast to individual terrorism, organized terrorist activities are planned and subsequently implemented by terrorist organizations, i.e. united groups of peoples pursuing terrorist goals, which possess funding, weapons, and coordinate their activities for the purpose of achieving the tasks set for their terrorist acts. Such terrorist activities are the most widely spread around the globe, and most often, they are of a systematic nature (Abass 2014, pp. 33-37).

2. By territorial scope:

- Domestic terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are performed within the boundaries of single states, and are primarily aimed at influencing the decisions of such countries’ public authorities;

- International terrorism. When terrorist activities go beyond the boundaries of single states, i.e. are performed in particular countries by members of terrorist organizations located in other states or by individual terrorists citizens of other countries, such terrorist activities are considered to be international terrorism. With the growing impact of some terrorist organizations, the intensity of international terrorist activities is constantly growing (Anjarini 2014, pp. 81-83).

3. By goals followed by terrorists:

- Political terrorism. This type of terrorist activities can be defined as acts aimed at undermining the peace and security within a particular community, spreading the sense of fear among the population, and impacting the authorities of the respective state or jurisdiction for political reasons. Sometimes, such terrorist activities are aimed for overthrowing the existing public authorities and thus capturing control over the redistribution of powers and resources on the respective territories (revolutionary political terrorism), or for other purposes not associated with the direct capturing of power (limited political terrorism);

- State terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are performed by the public authorities of states which use authoritarian methods and dictatorship as the mechanisms of maintenance of power over the population. Most often, such activities are based on political motives, but in contrast to political terrorism, they are performed by the official authorities
of states, and not by either individual terrorists or united terrorist organizations (Locatelli and Caruso 2014, pp. 27-28);

- Data terrorism. This term emerged in the late 1990’s-early 2000’s, with the rapid technological progress and the ever-growing role of online and computerized technologies in the performance of all types activities in both the public and private sectors all over the world. Data terrorism stands for the theft, unjust use or other fraudulent activities with private and confidential data stored on computerized data storages. This term is also often commonly referred to as cyber-terrorism;

- Passive terrorism. This term is used in the scientific and legal practice for describing the activities run by public governments which do not prevent the escalation of terrorist activities, and passively allow for their further development and spreading (Horgan 2005, p. 40);

- Criminal terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are committed for reasons not associated with any political goals or the overthrowing or capturing of power in any jurisdiction. Most often, criminal terrorism is associated with other primary goals of the respective criminals, for instance, such as theft of money, liberation of criminals from jails, procurement of particular goods, and so on;

- Pathological terrorism. Pathological terrorist activities are seen as terrorist acts performed by people due to their ill mental condition. Such activities do not have any particular goals or motives, and are only associated with psychological, psychic and mental disorders of people who haven’t received any due care and haven’t been isolated from society (Brookes, Pooley and Earnest 2014, pp. 35-36).

Political and state terrorism are the largest in their scope, and they include a wide range of differently motivated and justified terrorist activities which deserve particular attention. Namely, political terrorism can be conditionally subdivided into the following types of terrorist activities according to the motives pursued by terrorists and terrorist organizations:

1. Nationalist-separatist terrorism. This type of terrorist activities is spread in geographical regions or territories claiming for their right to independence from their metropolitan areas. Nationalist-separatist terrorist organizations motivate their use of
violence and terrorist acts by the desire to restore the historical equity and ensure the right of the respective communities’ self-determination. Most often, such organizations do not see themselves as terrorists, but rather as guerilla fighters for independence. The brightest examples of nationalist-separatist terrorism might include the terrorist acts committed by ETA, a Basque organization claiming for the Basque Country’s secession from Spain, the activities of IRA (Northern Ireland, UK), acts committed by the Caucasus Emirate (Chechnya, Russia), and so on (Pearse 2015, pp. 116-117);

2. Social revolutionary terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are first of all aimed at changing the class structure of society, or the existing political order for reasons of its social inequity. The terrorist activities of this type were brightly illustrated by the events of the Revolution in Russia in 1917, and more recently, by numerous terrorist attacks in the least developed African countries (Gus 2011, p. 144);

3. Right-wing terrorism. This particular type of political terrorism includes terrorist attacks run by the supporters of far-right political movements such as ultra-nationalist and neo-Nazi political parties of currents. Right-wing terrorism is most often directed against the supporters of left-wing movements such as communists, LGBT activists, supporters of some forms of liberalization such as the free access to marijuana or the legalization of prostitution, and so on, as well as against the official authorities inclining toward the left-wing ideology;

4. Left-wing terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are directed against any forms of right-wing ideology, and are committed by various Marxist, communist, anti-fascist, anti-globalist or other similar left-wing groups. The motives for left-wing terrorist are the same as for right-wing terrorism, and directly opposite in terms of the ideology (Pearse 2015, pp. 116-119);

5. Religious extremist terrorism. The terrorist activities of this type are committed by fundamentalist religious terrorist groups who claim for the superiority of their religious beliefs, and follow the policy of forced conversion to such religion. The most widely spread form of religious terrorism is the Islamist branch of terrorist activities, where terrorist organizations seek the spreading of the Sharia laws in particular communities. This type of terrorism is seen as particularly important and dangerous on the international scale, as in
recent years, the scope of Islamist terrorists’ activities has been constantly growing (Islam 2015, pp. 182-184).

State terrorism is a versatile phenomenon, just as political terrorism, and might include a wide range of different activities. Namely, according to the Geneva Declaration on Terrorism, state terrorism includes, among other things, “police state practices against its own people to dominate through fear by surveillance, disruption of group meetings, control of the news media, beatings, torture, false and mass arrests, false charges and rumors, show trials, killings, summary executions and capital punishment; the introduction or transportation of nuclear weapons by a state into or through the territory or territorial waters of other states or into international waters; military exercise maneuvers or war games conducted by one state in the vicinity of another state for the purpose of threatening the political independence or territorial integrity of that other state (e.g., in Honduras, in Korea, in the Gulf of Sirte); the armed attack by the military forces of a state on targets that put at risk the civilian population residing in another state (e.g., the bombings of Benghazi, Tripoli and Tunis, Druze villages in Lebanon and Kurdish villages),” etc. (The Geneva Declaration on Terrorism, UN General Assembly Doc. A/42/307, 29 May 1987, Annex).

Due to the constantly growing scope and impact of terrorist activities, the issue of terrorism has lately become essential on the international scale, and governments of countries around the globe are seeking mutual cooperation with other states for the purpose of counteracting, eliminating, and further preventing any escalation of terrorism, regardless of its reasons and motives. Such international activities aimed at countering terrorism are commonly referred to as anti-terrorism or counter-terrorism. Counter-terrorism includes all means, methods, tactics, and actions undertaken by public governments and non-government organizations for the purpose of opposing the terrorist threat. The international cooperation in the field of counter-terrorism is carried out in two main fields: elaboration of a well-thought legislative base for the counteraction to terrorist activities, and creation of joint task forces aimed at fulfilling particular practical tasks and running law enforcement activities aimed at preventing and eliminating terrorism. With the growing scope of international terrorist activities, countries around the globe tend to create special military
forces with heavy equipment for the purpose of effectively suppressing the military activities run by terrorists (Hamdar and Moore 2015, pp. 54-55).

The tactical operations run against terrorist organizations either by the public authorities of individual states or by joint interstate task forces are elaborated depending on the particular circumstances of the respective terrorist acts, the expectations of the public authorities, risk of human casualties, and so on. Conditionally, all possible tactical actions which might be undertaken against terrorist groups can be divided into two main branches:

1. Conservative anti-terrorist operations. Such operations assume negotiations with terrorists, payment of ransoms, territorial cessions, and so on, i.e. fulfilment of terrorists’ requirements with the aim of preserving human lives, avoiding protracted and large-scale military opposition, and so on;

2. Progressive anti-terrorist operations. Such operations do not assume any negotiations with terrorists or cessions to them, and are used for the complete suppression of terrorist movements and physical eradication of terrorists (Roach 2015, pp. 223-226).

Taking into consideration the growing impact of terrorists’ activities on the international scale, in the near future, the cooperation between countries around the globe in the field of common security and the counteraction to terrorism will be likely to play an essential role in the development of the international community.

As the main aim of this thesis is to evaluate whether the status of a terrorist organization is appropriate when speaking of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, it is important to sum up the findings of the theoretical research above, and to draw the conclusions regarding which criteria testify that an organization is terrorist or not.

As it has been shown earlier in this chapter of the thesis, the definition of terrorism differs across different countries and international organizations depending on the specificities of their legislature, nevertheless the following key criteria which are rather generally adopted in the international community for classifying an entity or unit as a terrorist organization are as follows:

- Each terrorist organization or group has its political motives driving the run of terrorist activities against the civilians or public bodies of a country, and thus the pursuit of some particular goals contrasting the ones of the official authorities in the respective state;
- Severe and violent activities. Terrorist activities are always aimed at bringing deaths and destruction, and this is an inherent criterion of any terrorist organization;

- Long-term devastating psychological impact. The aim of any terrorist organization is to create an atmosphere of terror in which it would be easier to affect the minds of both the authorities and the population, thus making them succumb to the political will of the respective terrorist units;

- The structure of terrorist groups assumes the use of conspiracy for the purpose of avoiding any possible unveiling of the organization’s members, and thus for ensuring their ability to organize terrorist attacks against the population or against government bodies (Walker and Lennon 2015, pp. 40-41).

Thus, in the subsequent chapters of the thesis, the above key parameters testifying an association’s status of a terrorist organization will be tested for their applicability to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and other important aspects of ISIS’ activities will be investigated more in detail in order to reveal the possible aspects of the organization’s activities which might go in contrast with its terrorist status commonly assigned to ISIS by the world’s major powers.

3 History of ISIS

Investigating the history of ISIS is important in order to track where the origins of the organization started, and in which ideas they were initially rooted, as this is a key task for fulfilling the aim set for this thesis, namely for evaluating whether the status of a terrorist organization is appropriate for ISIS or not.

The initial popularization of the different groups and movements which later formed the backbone of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (today most commonly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) had occurred after the 2003 American invasion of Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom which led to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime and the establishment of the American control over the administration of Iraq). The invasion led by the American army provoked the emergence of a powerful insurgence movement, which on the first stages mostly organized suicide bombings of religious institutions and the public bodies of Iraq (Clarke 2015, pp. 38-39). One of such groups which were sought to be
suppressed by the American Armed Forces was the movement Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad and its ideological leader, the proponent of Salafi jihad Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. This militant group had tight interconnections with al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden who had acknowledged the terrorist attacks against the American civilians on September 9, 2011, which ties were publicly confirmed by al-Zarqawi. Similarly to al-Qaeda, Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad ran attacks against civilians in Iraq, and this was one of the main reasons due to which the organization was largely seen as terrorist by the Western states (Pearse 2015, pp. 201-204).

The American administration of Iraq failed to effectively remedy the situation in the country in the conditions of great social tensions, religious conflicts between the different groups of Muslim confessions, and the lack of confidence in the newly appointed authorities. This contributed to the great rise of insurgency and support of the insurgent movements by the local population. The lack of sufficient security against the background of the rising importance of such movements led to great numbers of victims as a result of bombings and other attacks (LaFree et al. 2014, pp. 77-79).

A particularly important aspect of the American administration to be noted here in the context of the investigation of ISIS is the fact that the Americans supported the establishment of the Shi’ite regime to be leading Iraq under the government of Nouri al-Maliki. This regime opposed the Sunni regime which had traditionally been governing the country prior to the American invasion, just at it opposed the Iraqi Kurds, another ethno-religious minority inhabiting the country. Although the Shi’ites in aggregate constituted over 60% of the Iraqi population, the actions of the pro-American administration provoked great resentment among both the Sunnis and the Kurds (Clarke 2015, pp. 130-132).

In this context, it is important to link the events which occurred in Iraq in the context of the formation of the insurgency movement to the theoretical research regarding the explanations of the main causes leading to insurgency on certain territories.

According to Gross (2015, pp. 22-32), insurgency movements tend to emerge on territories conquered by other nations or states where the local population believes being oppressed by the conquerors in terms of its national, social, religious or any other development. In this case, as the author states, a just cause emerges for the locals to run
military opposition against the country or nation which limits or prevents their independent existence. Also, as the researcher argues, there are two main preconditions for any hostilities to be justified and to be constructed as insurgency or guerrilla warfare: just cause and legitimate authority.

Thus, as Gross (2015, pp. 21-22) argues, “unlike states, guerrilla organizations cannot ignore the demands of just cause and legitimate authority. For states, the ad bellum principles that define the grounds for starting a war have never been very popular... Absent just cause and legitimate authority, guerrilla organizations indeed face charges of criminal behavior. Armed with just cause and legitimate authority, these same organizations enjoy the right to combatant status, and, in some cases, the right to aid from the international community.” According to the researcher, legitimate authority stands for the legal grounds which may justify a guerrilla movement’s claims over a particular territory where hostilities are carried out, while just cause stands for the availability of justified preconditions for starting hostilities, and without any breach of moral or such other laws. For instance, as Gross further states, legitimate authority can often be explained and justified by the UN Charter where the right for the self-determination of peoples is explicitly stipulated. Therefore, as the author affirms, in case that a people’s territory or its part is governed by another people without its consent or will, this already creates preconditions for the emergence of insurgency. As for just cause, this phenomenon describes the lack of other measures to remedy the negative situation without the use of hostilities, and the presence of factors which further promote the development of insurgency such as the oppression of the local population, violation of human rights, suppression of language or religion, etc.

The above theoretical findings can be extrapolated onto the situation in Iraq in the early 2000’s, after the American-led intervention in the country. Thus, although the Western researchers mostly claim the guerrilla warfare which started in the country after the US intervention to be the activities of terrorist organizations as described above, those events can be explained from quite a different perspective. Namely, as the American Armed Forces intervened in Iraq, they actually occupied the country. Although the US didn’t officially annex Iraq or established its direct authority over the country, as stated
earlier in this thesis, the new administration of the country was in fact under the United States’ total control. Therefore, despite providing Iraq with certain formal attributes of independence in political and economic activities, the US still oppressed the local population, as the country was occupied by foreign armed forces.

This directly violated the principles of the UN, namely as stipulated in Article 2(4): “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations” or in Chapter 1, Article 1, part 2, where it is claimed that one of the main aims of the UN is: “To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.”

Thus, in my opinion, regardless of the reasons pursued by the American authorities when sending troops to Iraq, in the long run, the country was invaded, and became occupied. The rights of the local population were impaired, and therefore this gave birth to the preconditions for the development of the insurgency movement. As the persons and organizations initially involved in such movement didn’t have any opportunity to run large-scales hostilities against the American army, they resorted to bombings and other types of attacks inherent of terrorist organizations as state earlier in this thesis.

In 2005, al-Qaeda and Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad which in fact became its subsidiary in Iraq, agreed upon a plan of counteraction to the American forces deployed in Iraq, and first proclaimed their goals which subsequently were used as the core for the activities pursued by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Namely, they claimed for the total and ultimate expulsion of the invasion armed forces from Iraq, and the establishment of a caliphate on the entire territory of Iraq, and thereafter on the territory of neighboring Muslim states, and also proclaimed Israel to be one of the main enemies of Islamic countries all over the world (The Historical Roots and Stages in the Development of ISIS 2015).

In 2006, Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, already renamed into Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, merged with several smaller local Iraqi insurgent movements (which were
all considered to be terrorist groups by the United States and the country’s Western allies), and created an organization entitled the Mujahideen Shura Council. MSC was aimed to further promote the large-scale military activities run against the American forces in the country and the administration governed by the pro-American local political leaders. The new organization even further focused on running suicide attacks against different civilian objects such as schools, hotels or mosques, with the main aim of promoting attention on the part of the media around the globe, and confirming their readiness to run the most severe actions for achieving their goals. Shortly thereafter, MSC merged with several other local Sunni groups, and was renamed into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), which was already the direct precursor of ISIS (LaFree et al. 2014, pp. 81-83).

In contrast to the previous forms of this organization, ISI differed as it was already claimed to be not an association of insurgent movements, but the self-proclaimed Sunni state, with its own division of the Iraqi caliphate into different regions, governments appointed for each such administrative units, and so on. Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was proclaimed as the Islamic State’s emir, the own Cabinet of Ministers was formed within the organization’s structure, and different persons were assigned roles similar to the classical distribution of powers in Arab countries. Nevertheless, in the conditions of the domination of the American occupation forces, the activities run by ISIS remained the same as before, and attacks against both the invasion armed forces and the civilians continued (Pearse 2015, pp. 222-224).

Such steps undertaken by the Islamic State of Iraq, considered to be a major terrorist organization in the Middle East by the Western states, were designed not only to popularize the organization among the local population (first of all the Sunnis), but also to legitimize the organization in the eyes of neighboring countries’ radical Islamist groups, and to show that the ultimate goal of the Islamic State was not to run terrorist activities, but rather to establish their own authority over the Muslim territories of the Middle East (Dhiman 2015, p. 60).

Thus, this was the first step in the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Overall, the chronology of the establishment of ISIS occurred in four main stages, and can be presented as follows (The Historical Roots and Stages in the Development of ISIS 2015):
Stage 1 (2004-2006). The establishment of the guerilla (as claimed by themselves and other Islamist movements) or terrorist (as claimed by the US and Western countries) organization Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia from Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. The leader of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed by the American special forces, and this promoted changes within the organization, which led to the subsequent metamorphoses in its structure, goals, and management.

Stage 2 (2006-2011). The transformation of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). On this stage, the merger of Iraq’s militant groups occurred, which contributed to the growing scale of the Islamist guerilla warfare/terrorist activities on the territory of Iraq. However, as the American forces understood the factors which contributed to the rise of the Sunni Islamism in Iraq, they started implementing policies designed to promote the rejection of such groups by the Sunnis, and by the end of the deployment of the American military contingent in Iraq, the activities of ISI declined (Dhiman 2015, p. 68).

Stage 3 (2012-June 2014). With the withdrawal of the American Armed Forces from the territory of Iraq, the level of security in the country significantly dropped due to the inability of the local regime to effectively counteract the activities led by the militant groups. As a result, ISI regained its military force and intensified its military campaign. On this stage, ISI expanded its activities to the territory of Syria where it claimed to establish the authority of the caliphate by founding the so-called Al-Nusra Front, another militant organization which was set to oppose the Syrian government in the conditions of the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War (Pearse 2015, pp. 233-234). However, within a year, ISI and al-Qaeda broke the relations between them, and entered into a protracted conflict as a result of the struggle for power in Iraq and Syria and the inability to agree upon the main ideological grounds to be subsequently used in the military activities and further state-building process. Al-Nusra Front remained loyal to al-Qaeda, while ISI transformed into the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (later renamed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, also commonly referred to simply as the Islamic State, or IS). ISIS claimed its total legitimacy over the territories of Iraq and Syria, and declared the war on all major actors in the Middle Easter regions (Locatelli et al. 2014, pp. 155-158).
4. Stage 4 (June 2014 until present time). Following the successful military activities run against the Joint Task Force led by the United States and other NATO countries, against the local governments of Iraq and Syrian, and against the Kurd separatist provinces in both countries, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has been able to establish its control over as much as approximately 20% of the territory of Iraq, and over 50% of the territory of Syria, also claiming to have the rights for part of the sovereign territories of Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, some West African, Southeast Asian and North Caucasian countries (Clarke 2015, pp. 230-232).

Thus, as can be seen from the information above, the emergence of the Islamic State on the territories of Iraq, Syrian and beyond in the Middle East wasn’t a spontaneous phenomenon, and the process of the formation of ISIS had been gradually developing since the time of the US-led intervention in Iraq.

As claimed by Hashim (2006, p. 23), any growth in the activities of insurgency movements beyond singular attacks up to great structures running large-scale hostilities are impossible without the popular support. Thus, as the researcher argues, “...insurgencies need popular support. To gain such support the insurgents must articulate a cause and the people need to view that cause as legitimate, in the sense that it embodies their grievances and promises them redress.” Therefore, when applying this argument to the gradual development of ISIS in Iraq, it can be stated that the activities of the Islamic State, namely the hostilities initially run against the American Armed Forces, and thereafter against multiple enemies on the territories claimed by the ISIS leaders, were supported at least by part of the population. Namely, this is true when speaking of the Sunni population which believed its rights to be oppressed by the American intervention forces against their confessional opponents – the Shias as stated earlier in this thesis. Thus, taking into account the aforesaid circumstances, it can be stated that the activities of ISIS were effective from the very beginning due to the fact that the organization was able to effectively reach the local population in Iraq and Syria with its appeals. This affirmation will be further investigated more in detail in the next chapter of the thesis, where particular attention will be paid to the propaganda tools used by the Islamic State, and their role in the popularization of the organization’s activities with the aim of recruiting new militants.
Going back to the third stage of the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, it should be pointed out in particular why al-Nusra Front and ISI broke their ties, and started acting individually, thus impairing their aggregate force which could otherwise be applied to achieve common goals. The outbreak of the conflict between ISI and the Syrian organization which was initially set to spread the influence of ISI on the Syrian territory occurred in the late 2013, when al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Nusra Front, claimed for the invalidity of ISIS’ claims over Syria, and proclaimed the complete autonomy of al-Nusra Front in Syria (Weiss and Hasan 2015, pp. 140-141).

However, ISIS refused to accept the claims of al-Nusra Front, and its leader al-Baghdadi ordered to run further activities in Syria, both against the local government and al-Nusra Front as ISIS’ ideological rivals. The main discrepancy in the views of al-Nusra Front and ISIS regarding the military activities run in Syria consisted in the fact that al-Nusra Front claimed to focus on the struggle against the governing regime of Assad, and preferred focusing on guerilla warfare/terrorist activities, but didn’t foresee any plan of the establishment of Islamist ruling in Syria. To the contrary, the goal of ISIS was to include Syria in its own caliphate, and thus ISIS opposed not only Assad’s regime, but also all opposition forces (which had a situational alliance with al-Nusra Front), the Kurd separatists, and the American-led Joint Task Force. ISIS were also much more focused on the religious opposition and the establishment of the Sunni ruling, known for their massive killings of Shi’ites and representatives of other minor religious groups on the territories controlled by the organization (Clarke 2015, pp. 237-239).

On June 29, 2014, after the achievement of successful military results and gaining control over great territories in both Iraq and Syria, ISIS proclaimed its goal to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate, with the full-scale political, religious, military and other authorities of the Muslim population around the world. As a result of such clear claims of the territorial integrity of Islamic countries mostly located in the Middle Eastern regions, the Muslim community beyond Iraq and Syria started undertaking efforts to oppose the possible spreading of the activities led by ISIS (which it claimed to be a terrorist organization, and thus rejected any its self-proclaimed legitimacy or sovereignty over any lands whatsoever) (Weiss and Hasan 2015, pp. 142-144). This was particularly stressed by
Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Libya, Iraq’s neighbors, which started deploying their military contingents on the borders with Iraq fearing the possible invasion of ISIS’ militants. On the one hand, this testifies the Arab countries rejection of ISIS’ ideas and the readiness to oppose the organization using military force, but on the other, it at the same time showed that ISIS was already considered to be a major military force in the region, and thus its countries needed to work over common efforts to oppose the organization’s attacks (Walker and Lennon 2015, pp. 307-309).

In the summer of 2014, ISIS ran a number of effective attacks, gaining control over major regional cities in Iraq and Syria, and also gaining control over part of the Libyan territory. The organization’s subsidiaries also started their guerilla/terrorist activities in Africa, namely in Nigeria, where the methods used by the group’s adepts were the same as in Iraq and Syria, which created grounds for it to be named as a terrorist organization by the global community (Weiss and Hasan 2015, p. 154).

In response to the effective military campaign of ISIS, the American-led Joint Task Force started its campaign against ISIS in the region without the consent of the local Syrian authorities, but with the support of the Iraqi government sought to be overthrown by ISIS. The warfare ran by the Joint Task Force focused on the aerial bombings of the ground bases maintained by the militants of ISIS. However, despite some effects of the anti-ISIS campaign mostly reflected in locally successful operations, overall, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria continued its offensives, and the territory of the self-proclaimed caliphate continued growing. Several groups beyond Iraq and Syria declared their belonging to and affiliation with ISIS, and started running their attacks against the government institutions and civilians in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan and Egypt, and in North Caucasus, namely in Chechnya (Stern and Berger 2015, p. 66).

In 2015, the struggle against ISIS intensified both in Iraq and Syria, with the involvement of new actors in the antiterrorist campaign run in the Middle East, namely the Russian Federation supporting the ruling of Assad’s regime in Syria. As a result, certain parity was reached in terms of the areas held by different groups of opponents on the territories of the states. However, the warfare continued, and moreover, large-scale terrorist attacks were run by ISIS on the territories of states which had publicly condemned them as
a terrorist organization, namely in Tunisia and Kuwait (Weiss and Hasan 2015, pp. 159-161).

As of today, the outcomes of the military struggle in Iraq and Syria and in the Middle Eastern region in general are yet to be seen, and the ultimate results of the warfare may be quite different. Different experts tend to provide variegated explanations and forecasts regarding the subsequent development of ISIS and the organization’s ability to subsequently conquer the desired territories in the Middle East and beyond. Such drastic differences in the forecasts may be justified by the great number of actors involved in the warfare in Iraq and Syria, and the differently vectored goals they pursue in the military campaigns run. Therefore, taking into account the above information, it can be stated that the process of formation of ISIS is yet not over, and the organization may be subject to some changes or new stages of development in the near future, depending on a great number of factors affecting the overall geopolitical conjuncture in the region (Walker and Lennon 2015, pp. 333-336).

Nevertheless, in my opinion, as the research within the framework of this chapter of the thesis shows, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has already been able to establish itself as a major geopolitical actors not only in the regional, but also in the global terms, and it has provoked great opposition on the part of the global community and the world’s major powers in all respects. This has previously never been reached by any terrorist organization, which further raises issues related to the topic of this thesis, namely whether ISIS indeed fully complies with the parameters of a typical terrorist organization, or its inherent characteristics may testify that the organization may still be assigned another status, and its goals are broader than the goals of an average terrorist unit.

The issue of ISIS’ status will be investigate more in detail in the next chapter of the thesis, but to sum up the information regarding the history of ISIS which might be useful and helpful in the subsequent analysis run in this paper, it should first of all be noted that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was formed from much smaller radical Islamist groups in Iraq in the early 2000’s, and the main catalyst for the rise in the scale of those organizations’ activities, and their popularization among the Islamist part of the Middle Eastern population was the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, and the establishment of
the American-led control over the territory of Iraq, which only further deepened the social, religious and ethnical tensions in the country. The subsequent growth of the number of ISIS’ adepts and followers, and the effective military campaigns run by the organization only further confirm its importance in the global geopolitics, and highlight the need to investigate the real status of ISIS in the context of its current powers and activities.

Overall, when evaluating the historical course of the emergence and subsequent development of the Islamic State’s activities, it can be stated that from the very beginning, the organization had intrinsic features inherent of classical insurgency movements. Thus, as stated by Stanton (2009, pp. 21-23), any insurgency is characterized by seven key inherent features: “Without a cause, the insurgency cannot persuade the population to join or assist in the campaign... Second, in an insurgency, at least one of the belligerents is a state and the other is a nonstate actor indigenous to the country in which it fights... Third, the goal of the insurgency is the destruction of the existing order, that is, the police and military... Fourth, the aim of the insurgency is the seizure of state power. This is accomplished by creating disorder and impairing the government’s ability to manage the disorder... Fifth, the battlefield of an insurgency is undefined, although it is usually internal to a country’s territorial boundaries, often with external influences... Sixth, the duration of an insurgency is indefinite. It is a protracted struggle... Finally, the weapons of insurgents are terrorism and guerrilla warfare.”

Now, I would like to present my own opinion on the above parameters of insurgency and their applicability to ISIS. The above seven intrinsic characteristics should be tested against the activities of ISIS. Thus, as proven earlier in this thesis, there were grounds and preconditions for the development of an insurgency movement in the Middle East, namely the American-led intervention in Iraq in the early 2000’s which caused opposition on part of the local population. Next, in the hostilities run by ISIS, there are indeed two groups of actors: ISIS on the one hand (initially a non-state actor which thereafter possessed territory and started acting more like a classical state), and the US or allied forces on the other hand, which fits the characteristics of insurgency movements as described by Stanton (2009). Next, the activities of ISIS were indeed directed to reverse the existing order in Iraq, Syria and beyond. The organization also aimed to seize power over
the territories where it was running warfare (part of such territories were indeed seized by the Islamic State in the long run). The battlefield for ISIS was proclaimed to be confined by the boundaries of the Islamic countries, however, the terrorist attacks run by the ISIS militants later went beyond such boundaries. As for the duration of the Islamic State’s warfare, as of today, it still continues, and indeed is a protracted military struggle. Finally, ISIS indeed uses terrorism and guerrilla warfare for struggling against the Allies and establishing its authority over the claimed territories.

Thus, a finding and contribution of this research is the fact that the activities run by ISIS fit the classical description of insurgency. This is reflected in most key parameters of insurgency inherent of ISIS, and therefore this validates the question investigated in this research. Furthermore, the findings of this research allow tracking the development of ISIS’ activities by years, thus investigating the development of the movement classical of other organizations and movements leading guerrilla warfare.

Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn from the above information that the warfare led by ISIS is inherent of classical insurgency movements in all respects. This finding further raises the question stated as the research aim of this thesis: is ISIS a terrorist organization, or rather a terrorist state?

In the next chapter, I would like to proceed directly to the case study of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria for evaluating whether the organization can be definitely named a terrorist unit, or may rather be assigned another status, taken into the findings of the previous research.
4 Case study of ISIS: terrorist organization or not

For the purpose of clearly understanding whether should be regarded as a terrorist organization or not, it is particularly worth investigating more in detail the activities run by ISIS in terms of aspects such as propaganda and financing. In this chapter, I would like to focus on several key research questions, namely which propagandist activities the Islamic State runs, and which information channels are used for those purposes; which ways of funding ISIS uses; and who the main donors of financial assistance to the organization are. I would also like to consider in particular the role played by the United States in the radicalization of the Islamic population of the Middle Eastern region where the ISIS militants operate, and how the propaganda led by ISIS highlights the role of the US in the organization’s activities. In the context of the financing of ISIS, I would like to pay particular attention to the operation of the black market, and to how it contributes to the funding of the organization’s goals.

One of the methods most widely used by ISIS within the framework of the organization’s propaganda is their videos of beheadings and other tortures of their prisoners distributed over the Internet around the globe in their propagandist messages, the followers of ISIS tend to blame the United States for its violence, which they largely believe to be a responsive measure to the activities previously run by the US and the NATO forces on the territory of the self-proclaimed caliphate (Rose 2014). This finding is particularly important in the context of this research, as it highlights the role played by the American media in the radicalization of the Islamic population of the Middle East. Moreover, as it has already been mentioned previously in the thesis, the presence of the American contingent in Iraq had originally been one of the key preconditions to the formation of rebel groups (commonly referred to as terrorists in Western media) some of which later united to form ISIS.

Next, coming back to the investigation of the propagandist activities led by ISIS, it should be stated that, as experts point out, the videos shot by ISIS show a totally professional approach to every single detail, which means that the organization invests specifically in the development of this branch of its propaganda activities, aiming to create
the best images to be delivered to the target audience (De Graaf 2015). The executed persons are often forced to say negative things either about the United States or the Western world in general on the camera. Apparently, ISIS pursues several key goals of their activities by propagating such videos. On the one hand, they address the target audience, namely people prone to radical activities on the ground of religious intolerance, which is useful for the organization from the perspective of the opportunity to attract new members. On the other hand, the militants of ISIS aim to bring the sense of fear to all those who might oppose their activities in the future, and to bring this atmosphere of fear to the civilian population of Western countries stating that their governments lead the war against the Islamic State, and therefore they will be punished for their authorities’ sins (De Graaf 2015).

In addition to the film studio, ISIS run their Al Hayat Media Center. This unit used by the media division of the organization is particularly important to investigate in terms of how ISIS spread their propaganda and try to recruit new members. Al Hayat Media Center is designed to reach the foreign audience, namely the non-Arab speakers, particularly the youth which is more prone to accept the propagandist messages developed within the framework of ISIS (Rose 2014).

An interesting detail about the video propaganda run by ISIS, as pointed out by experts, is the fact that it is constructed in a way to address the target audience of different cultures in different ways, namely the people inhabiting the territory of the self-proclaimed caliphate, and the populations of the Western states (Reuter 2014). Thus, the Hollywood-like scenes of executions are aimed at finding great response among the American and Western European populations, as such videos are designed to be cool, passionate and intriguing. However, for the local population, the movies directed and run by ISIS are terrifying, as people on the territories claimed by ISIS know well that the beheadings are real, and that they might become the next victims in case that the organization seizes control over their settlements. Therefore, the propaganda led by ISIS effectively works on different directions at the same time (Reuter 2014).

As Cottee (2015) points out, the main issue of the media fight run by the Western states against the propagandist machine led by ISIS is the fact that the jihadist organization
has its clear and distinctive narratives which constantly find positive response among the citizens of Western countries (as testified by the growing number of Western states’ citizens coming to ISIS), however the Western have nothing to oppose to those messages, except of blaming them for their inappropriateness, violence, etc. Therefore, ISIS have inherently better positions in the eyes of the media content users, and the propaganda spread by the organization is much more effective than the countermeasures undertaken by the Western governments (Cottee 2015).

A particularly important thing to be mentioned about the propagandist activities led by ISIS is the fact that the recruiters of the organization actively use online social media and social networks for attracting new members. This method of propaganda is very beneficial for the purposes of ISIS due to several key aspects. First of all, the online environment covers the widest range of audience possible, and therefore allows for the greatest number of prospective members to be recruited. Second, there is no distance barrier, and ISIS can spread their videos within minutes all over the world. Third, the Internet is very hard to take under control, and therefore ISIS can its their videos of almost any content via the World Wide Web. Although there have been a number of blockages of the information spread by the organization under the claims of the American authorities, they haven’t yielded any results, and the organization still actively uses the Internet for its propaganda and recruitment purposes (Hahn 2015).

Namely, the members of ISIS responsible for propaganda and recruitment not only run their own web resources, but also actively benefit from almost all social networks available in the online environment such as Facebook, Twitterm, Pinterest, Youtube, WhatsApp, Tumblr, and so on. Those networks are particularly popular within ISIS for attracting foreigners. Namely, according to estimates, as much as 3,400 members from Western countries fought alongside ISIS in Iraq and Syria as of the early 2015 (Greenberg 2015).

As communities in the aforementioned online networks with the global outreach tend to be banned due to the inappropriate content (such as videos promoting violence), the members of ISIS mostly work as individuals under different usernames, often disguising their actual IP addresses. As experts point out, the members of ISIS know well the online
environment, and effectively operate within it in all respects. The main methods used by them for propaganda in social networks include the spreading of propagandist videos and images affecting the human psyche. Not only they rely upon the propaganda of Sunni Islam, but also try to persuade people that ISIS is a state rather than a terrorist organization, which would provide them with all the goods which the Western civilization ruled by the oligarchs deprived them of (such goods may include the cancellation of rent, provision of free houses, promises of the better extraterrestrial life through purification, etc.) (Geiger 2015).

Another important aspect of the activities of ISIS fighters in online networks is the fact that they are well designed in terms of the psychological aspects. For instants, the militants making part of ISIS not only promote wartime propaganda, but also post their pictures which people around the globe post everyday on Instagram or Twitter, namely how they eat, how they play some games, caress animals, and so on. As experts explain, this approach used in order to merge the glorification of ISIS as mujahideen warriors with the fact that they are ordinary people, and not terrorists as depicted in the Western media. Therefore, people watching such content should become interested in the organization and in its goals, and may thereafter contact its members via their network accounts, which contributes to their growing popularity, and thus the greater ability to attract new members (Kelly 2014).

Such activities have never been typical of terrorist organizations which rather always preferred acting in a clandestine way, and therefore, as stated by US Department of State Spokeswoman Jen Psaki, “There’s no question that what we’re combating with ISIL’s propaganda machine is something we have not seen before,” which only further proves how effectively ISIS operate on the web with their propagandist messages (Hahn 2015).

So, what do the aforesaid findings regarding the propaganda activities led by ISIS give us in the context of the aim of this research? As pointed out by Thackrah (2013, p. 206), “The aim of terror is to induce fear and uncertainty, while propaganda can and does serve every imaginable purpose from religion to politics and commerce... The political objectives of propaganda can only be reached by a complex psychological-military process in which propaganda and violence play a key role. Successful terrorism depends on
effective propaganda about terrorist operations.” As proven above, this can be explicitly applied to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Indeed, ISIS uses propaganda for inducing fear and terror on the territories already under its control and the ones claimed by the caliphate, at the same time targeting the Western audience for both spreading terror among the ‘infidels’ and promoting the attraction of new members to the organization in order to further expand ISIS’ activities. Also, it has been proven that the successful terrorist activities of ISIS indeed rely largely upon the effectiveness of the Islamic State’s propaganda, which further confirms that the well-thought information propaganda is one of the key factors forming the backbone of the Islamic State’s successful warfare.

However, in the context of this research, it is worth understanding whether the propaganda activities led by ISIS are inherent of terrorist organizations or rather of countries, as this should become the first step in understanding how to correctly identify the Islamic State, which is the main aim of this research.

As argued by Unger (1974, p. 32), “The propaganda of totalitarian regimes cannot be measured with the yardstick of persuasion applied to non-totalitarian societies. Clearly one cannot speak of persuasion, as that concept is commonly understood, where those to be persuaded are a priori denied the freedom to hold contrary views. Yet it is possible to speak of a kind of ‘persuasion’ which retains sufficient attributes of that function to distinguish it from straightforward compulsion.” This explanation can be effectively transposed onto the propaganda activities led by ISIS. Thus, indeed, as stated above, the people living in the territories under the Islamic State’s control are severely oppressed in their freedoms, and first of all in the freedom of religion, and they have restricted access to any information. The propaganda disseminated by ISIS on the areas claimed to make part of the caliphate aims to persuade the population right in the second context outlined by Unger as described above. It means that the model of information propaganda applied by the Islamic State is similar to the one inherent of totalitarian states.

This finding is much important in the context of this research, as it shows that ISIS does not rely purely on the propaganda models inherent of classical terrorist organizations, but to the contrary, goes far beyond, and utilizes a model intrinsic of states, which is characterized by a much more well-thought and elaborated approach, wider reach, and
greater investment. Therefore, this should be taken into account when subsequently analyzing the activities of ISIS, as it is the first point which might prove that the Islamic State is a terrorist state rather than a terrorist organization.

Therefore, another contribution of this research to the discourse regarding the activities led by ISIS is the fact that the Islamic State’s propaganda activities are in fact inherent of states and not of terrorist organizations. This finding is important for answering the main question of the thesis, namely whether ISIS should be classified as a terrorist state or terrorist organization.

Now, having investigated the specificities of ISIS’ propaganda and its practical role for the development of the Islamic State’s activities in the Middle East and beyond, it is worth focusing on the investigation of the government model applied by ISIS to the territories it has seized. This is particularly important as of today taking into account the fact that the Islamic State has been able to capture great areas in Iraq and Syria as stated earlier in this thesis. Therefore, it is worth tracking the administration tools and methods applied by ISIS in order to reveal whether it acts as a terrorist organization or as a state.

When investigating the nature of ISIS’ activities, Cordall (2014) argues that, in contrast to the beliefs popular in the West, “In the midst of the chaos, ISIS is deliberately and methodically establishing clear areas of definable civil governance, breathing new life into the memory of a series of caliphates that united a succession of Muslim empires until 1924.” According to the author’s affirmation, the Islamic State indeed builds a model of state governance similar to traditional Muslim states, and thus differs much from the existing terrorist organizations. This can be tracked in how ISIS controls the seized territories by implementing its policies over the regions captured. The researcher further proves his arguments by testifying that the organization of the caliphate assumes the clear distinction of functions between the military and civil authorities: the former are responsible for the recruitment of warriors to ISIS’ armed forces, the development of the military strategy to be followed by the Islamic State, and the performance of warfare activities against ISIS’ rivals, while the latter deal with the civil economic and political administration of the lands making part of the self-proclaimed Caliphate.
The civil administration of the Islamic State is run by the ministries each of which has its own head, i.e. minister. Such institutions do not have a steady physical address, and the functions are assigned to particular persons responsible for their performance in a way similar to classical states. The territories captured by the Islamic State have their own administrative and territorial division. Thus, the area covered by the Islamic States is divided into province. Each province has its own emir, and military and civilian deputies which oversee the local territories. Moreover, the Islamic State has established its own system of courts and law enforcement agencies which are provided with the powers inherent of the judicial and law enforcement systems existing in traditional states. Also, it should be noted in particular that ISIS devotes specific attention to the economic development of the territories seized. Namely, ISIS has nationalized the enterprises in the field of telecommunications, mining, power generation, etc., and as of today they operate under the supervision of the civil administration. Moreover, ISIS has established its own system of education based on the Sharia laws, i.e. traditional religious education based on the Sunni confession of Islam, and with a great focus on the use of propaganda (Birke 2015).

Many of the civil officials appointed by ISIS are professionals in their fields. Some of them are ex-officials under Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Bashar al-Assad in Syria. They are appointed for specific purposes, and have clearly defined responsibilities and powers allocated from the center. For instance, in the city of Raqqa, there is an ISIS official responsible for the operation of mills and the distribution of flour among the population. Overall, it can be stated that the civilian administration of the Islamic State is much decentralized, while the military axis is rather dominated by the center of the organization (Cordall 2014).

Arango (2015) further argues that despite the fact that there is a popular belief in the Western states that ISIS wouldn’t become a state in the near future, “the group is putting in place the kinds of measures associated with governing: issuing identification cards for residents, promulgating fishing guidelines to preserve stocks, requiring that cars carry tool kits for emergencies.” Unfortunately, the information on ISIS and the way it builds its internal processes is much limited. However, from such tiny details, it can be clearly seen
that the system of civil administration in the territories seized by the Islamic States is much complex and much developed. This system is inherent of classical states, and ISIS definitely tries to implement the achievements of classical public societies in its activities, although still keeping the Islamist basis for the development of the state.

The taxation system which the Islamic State operates in the territories seized from the Iraqi and Syrian governments exists as well. On the example of the city of Raqqa, it can be stated that the Islamic State’s civil authorities collect a 2.5% income tax from merchants. This income tax is referred to as zakat. Additionally, there is a monthly levy amounting to 1,500 Syrian pounds (USD 8.30) which is charged on a lump-sum basis. Also, the Islamic State collects SYP 400 per month for the operation of telephone lines, although as of today, all costs associated with their maintenance are borne by the Iraqi and Syrian governments, respectively (Birke 2015).

There is also a cleaning tax charged from merchants (in fact, the only private business activities which are allowed in the Islamic State) amounting to approximately USD 7 to 14 per month. Merchants are also required to pay approximately USD 2,500 per year for renting a stall in the market. As regards the social sector, ISIS operates a system of utilities similar to the ones existing in traditional states. On the average, every person in the territory of the Islamic State is required to pay USD 2.5 for electricity and USD 1.2 for water on a monthly basis (Engel 2015).

As for the locals employed in the entities operated by ISIS, the Islamic State tends to regularly pay salaries which may amount to as much as USD 400 per month, and a personal income tax is charged from such salaries which amounts to 10% of their aggregate value. Moreover, in order to ensure sufficient social standards of the population’s living, the Islamic State’s authorities use the direct regulation of prices, and have a system of quality standards against all products coming to the market are thoroughly verified (Birke 2015). Moreover, it should be noted here that the prices for most goods offered in the market are twice as low for the militants of ISIS, i.e. the persons who take direct part in the Islamic State’s warfare run against its rivals (Harress 2015).

In December 2015, there was a leakage of the Islamic State’s secret documents which were intercepted by the Western states’ agencies. Those documents reveal the ISIS
authorities’ subsequent plans for the development of the caliphate. Thus, as stated by Kaplan (2015), “The group’s emphasis on state-building seems to set it apart from past terrorist groups, like al-Qaeda, which focused primarily on military strategy. The ISIS document includes plans for establishing foreign relations, centralized control over oil and other parts of the economy and creating food self-sufficiency.” This means that in addition to the existing system of public administration which is not inherent of terrorist organizations, but is rather an intrinsic feature of traditional states, the authorities of the Islamic State aim to go even further, and enter the international arena, at the same time continuing to improve their internal economic policies.

As of today, the civil policies implemented by the Islamic State in seized territories are rather weak and not much effective. Thus, as stated by Caris and Reynolds (2015), “ISIS’s sweeping yet exclusionary method of governance is potentially one of the organization’s greatest strengths, but it may also become one of ISIS’s greatest weaknesses. ISIS maintains social control by eliminating resistance, but this in turn places technical skills that are essential to run modern cities in shorter supply. In the process of establishing its governance project, ISIS has dismantled state institutions without replacing them with sustainable alternatives. The immediate provision of aid and electricity, for example, does not translate into the creation of a durable economy.” Nevertheless, as the author points out, although this system of state governance is weak and may lead to the devastation of the economic and social achievements of the previous governments which had been legitimate prior to the capture of those respective territories by the Islamic State, it still remains a system of public governance, which is absolutely uncommon for classical terrorist organizations as outlined earlier in this thesis.

So, how does the information above regarding the specificities of ISIS’ governance of the territories seize fit the framework of our research question?

As Raic (2002, pp. 73-74) states, the classical characteristics for identifying an entity as a state customary in the international legal practice are stipulated in the 1993 Montevideo Convention. Thus, as set forth in Article 1 of this Convention, “The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations
with the other states.” Moreover, Article 3 of the Montevideo Convention stipulates that “The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states.”

So, when testing the system of governance in the Islamic State against the above Montevideo criteria, it can be state that ISIS complies with the aforesaid characteristics commonly believed to be intrinsic characteristics of states in the international practice. Thus, the Islamic State indeed has its permanent population. As shown earlier in this thesis, despite the great oppression of part of the population in the conquered territories and despite the great number of refugees fleeing from those territories under ISIS’ control, there is some great support of ISIS’ activities among the locals. This means that they remain under the government of ISIS, and accept the organization’s system of governance.

Next, ISIS indeed has its defined territory. Such territory can be conditionally divided into two parts: the territories under the control of the Islamic State, namely the areas captured in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, and those territories which the Islamic State’s leaders claim to make part of the caliphate. The Islamic State runs its warfare against the Middle Eastern and Muslim African countries with the aim of re-conquering the territories which it believes should form the great Islamic Caliphate. Thus, all in all, it can be stated that ISIS indeed has its territory.

Finally, as regards the capacity of entering relations with other states, as of today, ISIS doesn’t have any official relations established with foreign governments. However, as stated earlier in this thesis, the Islamic State aims to build up foreign relations with other countries’ governments already in the near future, which means that ISIS aims to fulfill this criterion as well.

Therefore, it can be stated that the model of governance adopted and implemented in the Islamic State is inherent of traditional states, and not of terrorist organizations. This conclusion is similar to the one that we have drawn when investigating the propaganda activities run by ISIS. This further proves that the classification of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization has its significant drawbacks, and is much doubtful. The above features intrinsic of states testify that the political aims followed by the Islamic State go far beyond the goals of classical terrorist organizations.
The above finding is another contribution of this research to the scientific investigation of ISIS and its activities. Namely, in my opinion, it is distinctly shown that the activities run by ISIS are inherent of classical states, even though ISIS uses terror as its main tool of state governance which is not inherent of democratic societies. This finding is another important aspect worth highlighting for the purpose of answering the research question of this thesis.

Another important characteristic feature of terrorist organizations is the way in which they are financed. So now, let’s proceed to the investigation of how the Islamic State is funded, as the large-scale hostilities and other activities (including the aforesaid media campaigns, propaganda activities, governance of the state, performance of civil administration duties, etc.) obviously require the investment of substantial funds.

When proceeding to the phenomenon of how ISIS is financed, it should first of all be noted that the funding of ISIS drastically differs from the funding of classical terrorist organizations, and this currently negates all the efforts undertaken by the Western countries, namely by the US services, as they implement the counterterrorist activities which have previously yielded great results, however not in the case of ISIS. Here, it should be noted, that in the early 2000’s, after the 9/11 attacks, the US services were able to totally cut off all financing of al-Qaeda mainly through two key steps: they tracked and eliminated all abilities for al-Qaeda to run money laundering, and thereafter cut the opportunity to raise funds through activities under the veil of charitable donations. Those ways of funding are traditional for terrorist organizations, just as other smaller profits such as ransoms for hostages. However, in the case of ISIS, the organization doesn’t need any external funding, and is totally self-sufficient in terms of yield generation, which makes it impossible for the US and its allies to cut off the inflows of money to the Islamic State, and moreover (which is a key argument within the framework of this research), poses under doubt the assumption that ISIS is a terrorist organization (Cronin 2015).

The first thing that strikes the eye when investigating ISIS is the fact that this organization actually runs activities similar to the ones implemented by any states in their classical definition. Thus, ISIS operates a developed taxation system under which it imposes taxes on all activities within the territories under the group’s control, and charges
taxes and other levies from the population, literally “taxing everything from small family farms to large enterprises such as cell-phone service providers, water delivery companies, and electric utilities” (Cronin 2015).

Thus, I believe that the findings above prove that this is definitely a financial model uncommon for any terrorist organizations, and this is one of the key reasons due to which the Western countries haven’t yet been able to cease the financing of ISIS, and thus to cut off any supplies of weapons or inflow of militants to the organization.

ISIS has implemented taxes on electricity, telecommunications agencies, customs tariffs on imported and exported goods (although such goods are smuggled due to the fact that ISIS is an unrecognized state), and other taxes and levies covering literally all fields of activities on the territories under the organization’s control. It also intensively uses extortion, and applies tortures or killings to the individuals who fail to timely pay all taxes and charges in full (Malm 2015).

However, the taxes charged by ISIS represent only one source of the organization’s income. Another major source of proceeds for the organization is the smuggling of oil, and its sales on the black market. Starting from the year 2012, in the course of the Syrian War ISIS has been able to take control over as much as 60% of the total existing oil production capacities in the country. Also, the organization has been able to seize control over part of the Iraqi northeastern oil wells which it fought away from the Iraqi government. Part of the oil produced is sold on the black market in Syria and Iraq, and part is smuggled to Jordan and Turkey (Cronin 2015).

The production of crude oil by ISIS is estimated to make up 25,000 to 40,000 barrels of oil per day, which provides ISIS with the estimated revenues of USD 1 to 3 million daily. In addition to the aforementioned main ‘black’ buyers of the ISIS-produced oil on the black market, the sales activities of the organization extend as far as to Armenia and Afghanistan. For the purpose of implementing those sales, ISIS operates a group of smuggling middlemen which ensure the trouble-free transportation of oil from the territories under the control of ISIS to other territories in Iraq and Syria, and beyond. Apparently, such middlemen have informal agreements with the customs services of neighboring states, or use other techniques for smuggling the energy resources. Also, the
ISIS militants take oil out directly off pipelines and storage tanks located on the territories seized by the organization in the course of hostilities. Such oil is thereafter loaded into barrels and transported using truck vehicles. The sales price of the oil sold by ISIS is evaluated by experts to amount to 42 to 74% of the market price, which ensures the great demand for it in the region. In addition to the production and sales of crude oil, ISIS also operates several oil refineries seized from the governments of Iraq and Syria, and produces gasoline and heating oil on the aforesaid facilities, and such products are thereafter sold on the black market as well (Satti 2014).

The logistics system used by ISIS for transporting oil abroad is very firm and safe for the caliphate due to the fact that the transporters of oil are private expeditors which in fact do not have anything to deal with the organization. As a result, the convoys of trucks which transport the barrels of oil loaded onto them avoid the possible bombings by the Joint-Task Force. This has been confirmed by the American officials who claimed the impossibility to run any activities against those caravans, as such activities would cause major casualties among civilians. For ISIS, this system is effective thanks to the fact that the end customer never knows who the producer and the actual seller of oil are, which means that the organization conceals its members in the course of all such operations, and preserves their clandestine nature (Durden 2015).

In addition to the oil deposits, ISIS has also seized control over other strategically important reserves of natural resources on the territories it conquered. For instance, the farmlands controlled by ISIS on the territory of Iraq produce as much as 40% of the country’s total wheat harvest. In addition, when capturing those farmlands, ISIS took approximately 50,000 of grain which it sold on the black market. As there is a food crisis in the region, ISIS is able to achieve an even higher profit margin when selling wheat. Furthermore, the organization holds control over important water resources, and over hydroelectric power facilities. For instance, for a period of time, ISIS has been able to control the Mosul Dam in Iraq, the country’s strategic object, but thereafter, the government took it back from the organization (Satti 2014). In Syria, ISIS holds control over important facilities involved in wheat and cotton production, which products are
thereafter sold by the organization as well, thus contributing to the replenishment of its budget (Cronin 2015).

Another important source of income for ISIS is the business activities run by the organization through its publicly held entities. For instance, a major source of the business income generated by the organization is the operation of Internet cafes. According to experts, this source provides the organization with substantial revenues. For instance, only in the de-facto capital of ISIS, the captured Syrian city of Raqqa, the organization holds up to 500 Internet cafes (this number only amounted to 20 prior to the city’s seizure by ISIS) (Malm 2015).

ISIS has traditionally generated its revenues through another important channel, namely the donations of foreigners supporting the organization’s activities. Such donations have most often been forwarded by the organization’s sympathizers among wealthy Sunnis in Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf countries. Most such flows are generated from Qatar due to the fact that the country has very weak restrictions for the outflow of currency, and this allows more freely transporting the funds to the territories under the control of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. It should be noted here in particular that the fundraising activities are performed by the members of ISIS which collect the cash funds in person, and thereafter transfer them to Iraq and Syria. Such persons are also responsible for the persuasion of prospective donators to make great donations. With this aim, ISIS also resorts to the active propagandist use of social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, etc., which only confirms the role of propaganda in the organization’s activities as previously highlighted in this thesis (Satti 2014). However, lately, foreign donations have significantly declined to ISIS due to the fact that the Persian Gulf countries have started implementing stricter measures for preventing the financing of ISIS, recognizing the organization’s threat for the region (Durden 2015).

Robbery contributes much to the financial proceeds of ISIS as well. In the cities in Iraq and Syria conquered and seized by the organization, ISIS militants rob banks, shops, homes of civilians. Such robbery obviously allows generating important income for the organization either in the form of cash funds, or in the form of any valuable objects or items thereafter sold on the black market (Satti 2014).
Next, ISIS uses looting as another major source of income. The organization operates in the regions of Iraq and Syria rich in historical sites. The militants of ISIS loot objects from museums, temples, old houses or any other historical sites. For instance, in Palmyra, despite destroying the sites which are associated with idolatry according to the propagandist messages of ISIS, the organization didn’t destroy the city itself, and gained estimated significant amounts of profits when it entered the black market for selling the items looted from the town. Antiquities can be found anywhere in the territories under the control of ISIS, and therefore their sales on the black market contribute much to the replenishment of the organization’s budget (See 2015).

Kidnapping and human trafficking represent another major source of the organization’s financial inflows. Those activities are similar to the classical terrorist activities, as ISIS resorts to kidnapping with the aim of requesting ransoms from the hostages’ relatives. Most often, the organization aims to take employees of large corporations, namely the ones from Western European countries, as hostages. In some countries, the law prohibits the payment of ransoms, and therefore ISIS most often executes hostages from the US or the UK. However, experts believe that the EU member states in aggregate pay at least several million US dollars of ransom per year to ISIS. As for human trafficking, ISIS tends to sell Shia women into sexual slavery. According to the data currently available, the girls seized in cities controlled by ISIS are usually put into ISIS-controlled brothels, or sold at slave auctions for bids varying from USD 10 to 150 (Satti 2014).

Another important aspect to be noted in the context of the investigation of ISIS’ funding and the organization’s economic activities is the fact that in the summer of 2015, the organization allegedly introduced its own currency – the dinar – to be used in circulation in the territory of ISIS. This information is particularly important taking into account the fact that ISIS positions itself as a country, and not as a terrorist organization, and the emission of use of own currency is one of the key attributes of independent states, and this is absolutely uncommon for any terrorist organizations (Dearden 2015).

Therefore, as regards the sources of ISIS’ financing, it can be stated that the organization uses both sources traditional for terrorist organizations such as ransoms,
kidnapping, sexual slavery, robberies, etc, and totally different sources of financial
proceeds which are typical of classical states, and not of terrorist organizations. The sources
making part of the second group include the developed taxation system constituted by a
great number of taxes and levies, and even customs tariffs for the products exported and
imported; implementation of economic activities such as the operation of various
production facilities, telecommunications companies, utilities, etc.; and sales of products,
most importantly oil, to foreign countries, even though through the black market.

The above findings are another major contribution of this research work. Namely, in
my opinion, the entire system of state incomes in the Islamic State is much different from
how classical terrorist organizations are funded. This allows stating that ISIS is different
from such classical terrorist organizations, and the system of ISIS’ funding is much closer
to the system of nation states’ income, with tax system and all other inherent attributes.

As stated by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2006, p. 14), “It is generally believed
that terrorist financing comes from two primary sources. The first is the financial support
provided by nation states or organisations with large enough infrastructures to collect and
then make funds available to terrorists... The second major source of terrorist funding is
legitimate or illegitimate revenue-generating activity committed by terrorist organisations
which choose activities that carry low risks and generate large streams.” Among the
methods making part of the second group, the author points out the following: extortion and
kidnapping, smuggling, drug trafficking, and money laundering. Those are the classical
sources which a terrorist organization might use for financing its activities.

When evaluating the aforesaid financing sources against the practical activities run
by the Islamic State, some drastic differences can be seen. Although ISIS uses the above
methods inherent of terrorist organizations for funding its activities as well, the main
financing sources for the Islamic State are the production and sales of oil, and the collection
of taxes from the population in seized territories as shown earlier in this thesis. Such
methods aren’t inherent of classical terrorist organizations, and moreover, the model of
their use by ISIS is similar to the ways in which classical states obtain their funds, namely
taxation and foreign (although the latter remains illegal in the case of ISIS, as it doesn’t
have any official relations with foreign states). All in all, the above findings further confirm
the conclusions previously drawn in the course of this research. The funding of ISIS gives another proof that the Islamic State might be classified as a terrorist state, and not as a terrorist organization, as it substantially differs in many aspects from what is commonly referred to as a terrorist organization.

Thus, as tested against the definition of terrorism explained in earlier in this thesis, it can be stated that ISIS’ activities are indeed terrorist due to the fact that the organization resorts to mass killings and the use of terrorism for impacting the population’s psyche, making tensions on political authorities, etc. However, when classifying the organization as a terrorist organization or terrorist state, I believe that the findings of this research allow distinctively identifying ISIS as a terrorist state and not organization, as large part of activities run by ISIS as shown above are absolutely not inherent of terrorist organizations, and are rather more characteristic features of states.
5 Discussion of results and contribution

The findings of this research allowed pointing out the main specificities of the activities led by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. In my opinion, one of the main drawbacks in the existing research dedicated to the activities of ISIS is the fact that most researchers commonly refer ISI to as a terrorist organization, without assuming any opportunity of the incorrectness of this affirmation.

Therefore, this research contributes to the discourse related to the status of the Islamic State by evaluating another potential alternative in the classification of ISIS. I put the focus on my research on the investigation of the main parameters and characteristics of the Islamic State’s activities with the aim of comparing how each of those parameters and characteristics fits the classification of ISIS either as a terrorist organization or a terrorist state.

Although similar assumptions exist in secondary research as of today, there has not been any comprehensive research paper dedicated to the evaluation of ISIS’ true status, and therefore this thesis is innovative in the context of the investigation of the Islamic State’s status.

I would like to point out that such investigation is required not only for the theoretical evaluation of the Islamic State and its activities, but also from the practical perspective: understanding the actual status of the Islamic State is a key prerequisite for elaborating effective countermeasures to oppose the subsequent growing intensity of the Islamic State’s terrorist activities on the global scale.

In order to run this research, I evaluated the specificity of the historical course of ISIS’ guerrilla warfare and the reasons which caused it, the system of ISIS’ financing and the different sources of income which the Islamic State uses for its development, and the system of power hierarchy in the Islamic State. Although I used secondary research sources for evaluating the different sides of those parameters, I provided my own opinion on those effects and my own evaluation of their implications for the definition of the Islamic State’s actual status. None of the research papers or bibliographic sources analyzed by me contained any particular information on the investigation of ISIS’ activities from the
perspective of the Islamic State’s status as a terrorist organization or a terrorist state, and therefore my research aimed to provide an innovative insight to that classification.

I compared how the guerilla warfare of ISIS, its financing and power hierarchy stand against the similar parameters and their structure in classical terrorist organizations. The findings of the research allowed identifying the fact that the Islamic State differs much in terms of its ultimate goals and the specific traits of its activities as compared to terrorist organizations. I highlighted all those facts, and emphasized the importance of each such finding for making an ultimate decision on the true classification of ISIS.

A major contribution of this research paper is my recommendation that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria should be classified as a terrorist states and not a terrorist organization. This is due to a number of reasons: on the one hand, ISIS pursues goals of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, which is not the goal of any classical terrorist organization, and on the other hand, ISIS’ sources of financing differ radically from those used by classical terrorist organizations, as well as the structure of ISIS’ internal hierarchy which is rather inherent of classical states.

The findings of this thesis have a unique importance. The proofs provided for the classification of ISIS as a terrorist state and my own analysis of the implications of such status provide evidence that the allied forces of Western States need to apply much improved strategies and tactics of their struggle against ISIS: the classical tactics used against terrorist organizations would not be likely to bring any substantial results, as ISIS relies on other sources of funding and powers as compared to classical terrorist organizations. Only by taking into account those facts, effective strategies can be elaborated for eliminating ISIS’ subsequent growth.
6 Conclusions

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is commonly believed to be one of the world’s most powerful terrorist organizations. As the research run within the framework of this thesis has testified, the formation of ISIS was not an instantaneous phenomenon, but rather a long process affected by a great number of different factors. The number of ISIS’ supporters surpasses any similar figures as related to any other terrorist organizations running their activities around the globe, and it testifies the great radicalization of the population in Iraq and Syria – the two countries where the Islamic State’s activities are the widest and most intensive.

However, the findings obtained show that the identification of ISIS as a terrorist organization is quite doubtful, as the Islamic State has many features uncommon to terrorist organizations, and can rather be classified as a terrorist state, which will be explained more in detail below.

As the research shows, the roots of the great radicalization of the population sympathetic for ISIS was historically preconditioned by the US-led intervention in Iraq, and the policies implemented by the US contingent and the US-loyal authorities in the country, which only ignited the inter-confessional tensions between the different groups of Muslims inhabiting Iraq. This promoted the great growth of terrorist organizations in both their number, and the scope of activities carried out. In the long run, the terrorist organizations in Iraq started seeking unification for the purpose of running their warfare against the US troops and the government loyal to the US at first in the classical form of terrorist attacks, suicide bombings, etc., but thereafter growing to major formations with their own armies.

The formation of such armies has allowed ISIS running effective large-scale warfare in the Middle East, and seizing major land areas in Syria and Iraq. This has become possible thanks to the radicalization of the population and the great popularity of ISIS among the local people.

In this context, a particularly important role is played by the propagandist activities led by the Islamic State. In contrast to the world’s most prominent terrorist organizations, ISIS uses the most up-to-date technologies for attracting new militants from all over the
world, including from developed Western countries. Thus, the Islamic State heavily invests in propaganda, for which purposes it maintains a film studio, a magazine, and a staff of Internet users propagating the Islamic State’s materials over the web. Most importantly, ISIS effectively uses social networks for covering the widest audience, increasing its popularity, spreading its messages, and attracting new recruits.

The model of state governance applied by the Islamic State on the territories it has seized insofar is rather inherent of traditional states as well rather than as of terrorist organizations. Thus, as shown in this research, ISIS operates a complex system of public administration in the part of Iraq and Syria where the Islamic State currently holds power. The authorities of ISIS in the Middle East are conditionally divided into the military and civil branches, each of which is responsible for the respective directions of activities.

The civil administration of ISIS operates a complex economic system, charges a great number of different taxes for the population, ensures the operation of the social sector by the provision of utilities, operation of public entities paying salaries to their employees, provision of healthcare and education services to the population, and so on. All those characteristic features are not inherent of terrorist organizations, and therefore this further proves the discrepancies between traditional terrorist entities and the activities of the Islamic State.

Finally, in the context of the public governance activities implemented by the Islamic State, it has been proven in the course of the research within the framework of the thesis that ISIS meets the so-called Montevideo criteria which are commonly adopted in the international practice as criteria used for identifying any formations as states.

However, probably the most drastic difference which highlights ISIS against classical terrorist organizations is how the Islamic State’s funding is organized, and the sources from which the main financial inflows are generated. As the research has shown, ISIS uses methods inherent of terrorist organizations for generating funds, namely kidnapping, sexual slavery, human trafficking, robbery, and so on, but those activities make only one part of the funds obtained by the Islamic State, and not the greatest. Thus, ISIS uses the production facilities located in the territories seized by the Islamic State for running industrial activities, and for subsequently selling the products extracted or
manufactured to foreign states on the black market. Most importantly, ISIS sells oil, which stands for the generation of the Islamic State’s greatest income evaluated at the estimated figures of USD 365 million to 1.1 billion per year. Also, the organization operates a complex system of taxes and levies imposed on the population inhabiting the territories under its control, and even has allegedly introduced its own currency.

The above features are inherent of classical states, and not of any terrorist organizations. Therefore, based on the findings of the research run within the framework of this thesis, when answering the research question, I believe that ISIS should be classified as a terrorist state rather than as a terrorist organization. While the terrorist nature of the Islamic State’s activities has been proven, its drastic differences from classical terrorist organizations as described above allow drawing a conclusion that the system of economic relations implemented within ISIS makes it a state, even though unrecognized, which further uses terrorist activities for expanding its territory and spreading its values.

The system of civil governance implemented by the Islamic State in the seized territories in Iraq and Syria further proves that ISIS aims to become a true state falling under the Montevideo criteria commonly adopted in the international practice for the recognition of states. ISIS has a complex system of civil public administration under which the governance directions are implemented in a way similar to traditional states, with the division in provinces and the operation of ministries responsible for economic development, education, healthcare, and so on. Furthermore, the documents which have recently leaked from the Islamic State testify that ISIS aims to enter the international arena by building up cooperation ties with foreign countries, which only further testifies the vector of ISIS’ development different from any classical terrorist organizations.

Similarly, it has been proven in the course of the research that the model of funding used by the Islamic State for financing its activities significantly differs from the classical financing models adopted by terrorist organizations. Namely, ISIS charges taxes from the population, and operates a number of industrial facilities, namely producing oil, thereafter selling products such as crude oil abroad. This is another confirmation of the rather erroneous classification of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization.
Finally, as regards the propaganda model used by ISIS, although it is based on terror as a means to affect human psyche, it is rather inherent of totalitarian states, which is another confirmation allowing proving the previous findings.

Thus, in the long run, it can be stated that the findings of this research allow drawing an ultimate conclusion that, based on the specific features of the Islamic State’s activities in different fields and aspects, ISIS can be classified as a terrorist state rather than as a terrorist organization.
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