

*Human Geography*

## Territorial Claims of a Terrorist Entity “Dai’ish (Islamic State): Are they Based on a “Historical-Geographical Logic”?

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**ABSTRACT.** The terrorist entity “Dai’ish” known also as the “Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham” was set up on the territories of Iraq and Syria in 2014. But it claims much more territories in Asia, Africa and even Europe. A map showing the terrorists’ large territorial appetite has been spread on the internet. A number of states are declared as targets that should be invaded by 2020. With full understanding that these aims are absolutely illegal we must admit that “Dai’ish” succeeded in influencing the minds of its ardent supporters in many countries, including European ones, from where substantial numbers of fanatics joined the terrorist entity. Are claims of “Dai’ish” based on any historical-geographical logic? The reasons that determine specific attention of “Dai’ish” towards its “sphere of the interests” are discussed. © 2017 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** “Dai’ish”, Territorial Claims, Caliphate, Historical-Geography

The terrorist entity “Dai’ish” (Dai’ish is the abbreviation of the Arabic name of a terrorist entity Dawlat al-Islamiah f’al Iraq wa al-Sham, which is used throughout the Middle East and many Western states. ISIS (or ISIL) is abbreviation of the same name in English) differs from the other terrorist groups. It has conquered its “own” territory - the main foundation of statehood. “Dai’ish” was proclaimed on the territories of Iraq and Syria in 2014 and its claims being a “Caliphate” whose leader – the “Caliph” (from Arabic Khalifah, - religious successor to the Prophet Muhammad) theoretically has both secular and spiritual powers and each believer (Muslim) must obey

him. Radical fighters from all over the world gathered there and in the beginning the entity had a lot of territorial gains.

The map shown in the article depicts the territorial claims of the terrorist entity which it declared its target by 2020. The territory comprises big parts of African and Asian states and a part of Europe as well. These claims are absolutely illegal and unacceptable within the actual world political order and these goals are impossible to be reached.

Nevertheless these territorial claims are based on the so-called “historical-geographical logic” which goes deep into history. It is clear that claiming some-



This is what the “Caliphate” will look like in 5 years if nothing is done to stop the “ISIS.” – By Jake Burman - <https://thetacticalhermit.com/2015/09/15/islamic-state-map>

thing which belonged to a state (or, broadly, to a “civilization”) thousand years ago is a dubious task: according to the same “logic” before the 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Islam did not exist at all and homeland of the Arabs was confined to the Arabian peninsula only. Using a certain “historical-geographical logic” for territorial claims is a double-edged sword. There is no logic when taking as the starting point the 7<sup>th</sup> century Caliphate. But this is no argument for the fanatics of *Dai’ish* and its supporters throughout the world.

Nobody will argue that the Arab world had since spread over large territories of Asia and Africa and Islam is represented even on the larger territories. Arab Caliphate was founded in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. It had successors and off-springs that were bitter rivals of each other. The territories governed (or claimed) by these Caliphates, is the main source for the territorial claims of “*Dai’ish*”. The former Caliphates’ historical geography explains the huge territorial appetite of the former.

The first four Caliphs directly succeeding Prophet

Muhammad considered to be *Rashidun* (Rightly Guided) were chosen through the community consultation. These Caliphs (especially the second one - Umar) enlarged the territory under Islamic rule and conquered Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, Iran.

But real Caliphate as an Empire was set up by the Caliph from Umayyad dynasty Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan by the mid-7<sup>th</sup> century with Damascus as its capital. The Umayyads continued the Muslim conquests, incorporating the Caucasus (named *Qoozaz* on the map, parts of Central Asia, Sind (the territory of modern Pakistan), the Maghreb and Al-Andalus (most of the Iberian Peninsula) into the Muslim world. The Umayyad Caliphate covered 11,100,000 km<sup>2</sup> and 62 million people (29 per cent of the world’s population of those times).

The Arab expansion towards Europe was stopped by the Franks when they were defeated in the battle of Tours in 732. The Arabs were not able to conquer the city of Constantinople and defeat the Byzantine Empire in Anatolia. They also failed against the

Khazar Khaganate (in the North Caucasus and what is now South Russia). In the east the Arabs were not able to invade China. They did not conquer all of the Indian Peninsula. But Islam spread not only in India, but even further, into the islands of Java, Sumatra, etc, (i.e. modern Indonesia) and modern Philippines.

The Umayyad dynasty had been forcefully replaced by the Abbasids, descendants from Muhammad’s uncle, ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, in 750. The Abbasids moved the capital of the Caliphate from Damascus to Bagdad in Iraq, the city which was purposefully built to be the centre of the Empire.

That is why both Damascus and Bagdad have such an importance for “*Dai’ish*”.

A surviving member of the Umayyad dynasty, Abd-ar-Rahman, escaped to al-Andalus and declared himself the ruler of Spain (the Cordoba Emirate succeeded by Cordoba Caliphate). The Abbasid Caliphs were not able to reach Cordoba where the Caliphate existed in 929-1031.

Among the other Caliphates worthwhile to be mentioned is the Fatimid Caliphate covering Egypt, Palestine, a part of Maghreb and Hejaz in 909-1171. Its rulers claimed being heirs of Muhammad’s daughter Fatima and her husband, the fourth Rashidun Caliph Ali.

Thus in 929-1031 there were three Caliphates at the same time – the Abbasid, the Cordoban and the Fatimid ones. It is worthwhile of mentioning that the Bagdad and the Cordoba Caliphates were Sunni states, whereas the Fatimid Caliphate was Shiite.

The Bagdad Caliphate of the Abbasids had been destroyed by Mongols in 1258 when they captured Bagdad and killed the last Caliph. A descendant of the Abbasid Caliph fled to Egypt. There he found political asylum under the Sunni Mamluks which by that time had become the rulers of Egypt. The descendants of the Caliphs of Bagdad remained just spiritual leaders of the Mamluk Sultanate.

In 1517 Egypt was conquered by the Ottoman Sultan Selim I who seized Syria, Palestine and Hejaz as well. By that time the Ottomans already ruled the

Balkan countries, the Crimea and Anatolia. Much later it was claimed that Selim I obtained the title of Caliph in Egypt for his descendants. But actually the Ottoman Sultans didn’t use the title until the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the Sultan-Caliph residing in Istanbul (Constantinople) despite the weakness of the Ottoman Empire relative to Europe represented the largest independent Islamic political entity. The Sultan-Caliph had some authority beyond the borders of his Empire as the spiritual leader of (Sunni) Muslims. Quite for a while the Sultan-Caliph’s claims were supported by the British Empire which sometimes needed his authority in its colonies with Muslim population.

The Ottoman territory grew as a result of conquests made mostly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when it comprised Anatolia, the Balkan peninsula, most of Hungary, the Romanian principalities, the Crimea, most of the Caucasus, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Southern Azerbaijan, Hejaz, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Cyprus. By 1683, the Ottomans although losing some territories in Europe and Persia, had temporarily conquered parts of today’s Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia.

“*Dai’ish*” has based its claims towards the Asian, African, and European countries on the above-mentioned historical facts: as a “Caliphate” it considers itself the “legal successor of all the Caliphates”. Its claims encompass 19 Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Oman, Pakistan, The Palestine Administration, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkmenistan, The UAE, Uzbekistan, Yemen), 12 African countries (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, Sudan, West Sahara) and 22 European countries (Spain, Portugal, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The British Gibraltar, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine)

The territories (entirely or partially) of the above-

mentioned states were for a while under the sway of the one or another former Caliphates. That is a reason of claims of “*Dai’ish*” which it considers “logical”.

However, on the map one can see that the terrorists’ territorial claims go beyond the so-called “Caliphate logic”.

20 African, 9 Asian (including China and India!) states and European state (Austria) are shown on the map claimed by “*Dai’ish*”. None of them has ever been a part of any of the Caliphates.

But in these cases “*Dai’ish*” relies upon a so-called “historical logic”: territories of some of the modern states were occupied by Muslims or a Muslim state in the past (e.g. India was the centre of the Deli Sultanate and the Great Mogul Sultanate).

Another factor of claims might be so-called “human-geographical logic”. In the majority of “non-Caliphate” states the population is either Muslim, or they have a substantial Muslim minority. In some African states Islam is even the official religion. There is substantial Muslim population in several Asian countries as well and in some of them it is the official religion. In China there are Muslim Uyghurs in the westernmost part of the state, among whom Islamic radicalism is spreading with dangerous speed.

China in the east, as well as Austria in the west, might have been included in the “sphere of inter-

ests” of the “*Da’ish*” from so-called “political-geographical logic”: both states served as barriers for invading Muslim empires.

Thus almost all presumable “logical” reasons for the territorial claims of “*Dai’ish*” could be deciphered, although there is no true logic in these claims from the point of view of international law.

None on these claims are actually achievable, especially when “*Dai’ish*” terrorists are losing ground in Syria and Iraq when a coalition of states is fighting them. Most probably the entity will not last long. No international organization or a state would have ever recognized the terrorist entity as a state.

However, the problem is that with the end of “*Dai’ish*” the radical Islamism will not die out. The leaders of “*Dai’ish*” were quite successful in their efforts to influence the minds of their ardent supporters in the world. Radical fanatics are not rare and their number does not seem to decrease. For the latter the idea will persist that there are just two parts of the world - “Dar al-Islam” (The House of Islam) and “Dar al-Harb” (The House of War). In the latter all the believers (Muslims) ought to carry out “Jihad” (Holy war) in order to spread the true faith there. The idea is not a new one. It originated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century when Islam was emerging although no one was able to accomplish it so far.

*საზოგადოებრივი გეოგრაფია*

## ტერორისტული წარმონაქმნი „დაიშ“-ის ტერიტორიული პრეტენზიები: არსებობს თუ არა ისტორიულ-გეოგრაფიული ლოგიკა?

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გეოგრაფიის ინსტიტუტი, თბილისი, საქართველო*

ერაყისა და სირიის ტერიტორიებზე 2014 წელს დაარსებულ ტერორისტულ წარმონაქმნ „დაიშ“-ს (აგრეთვე ცნობილს, როგორც „ერაყისა და შამის/ლევანტის ისლამური სახელმწიფო“) აქვს პრეტენზია, რომ ის ყველა ადრე არსებული სახალიფოს მემკვიდრეა და უფლება აქვს მათ ხელში არსებულ ოდესღაც ყოფილ ტერიტორიებზე. ინტერნეტში გავრცელებული რუკა ტერორისტთა დიდ ტერიტორიულ მადანზე მიგვანიშნებს: „2020 წლისთვის დასაპრობი ქვეყნების“ რიგში მოექცა ევროპის, აზიისა და აფრიკის არაერთი სახელმწიფო. მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ ეს მიზნები აბსოლუტურად არარეალისტურია, „დაიშ“-ის ხელმძღვანელობა ცდილობს გავლენა მოახდინოს მის მხარდამჭერებზე მსოფლიოში და აჩვენოს, რომ მისი პრეტენზია „ლოგიკური და სამართლიანია“. ეს პრეტენზიები მოკლებულია ისტორიულ, ისტორიულ-გეოგრაფიულ და საზოგადოებრივ-გეოგრაფიულ ლოგიკას, მაგრამ რადიკალური ისლამი ამას არ ცნობს.

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