

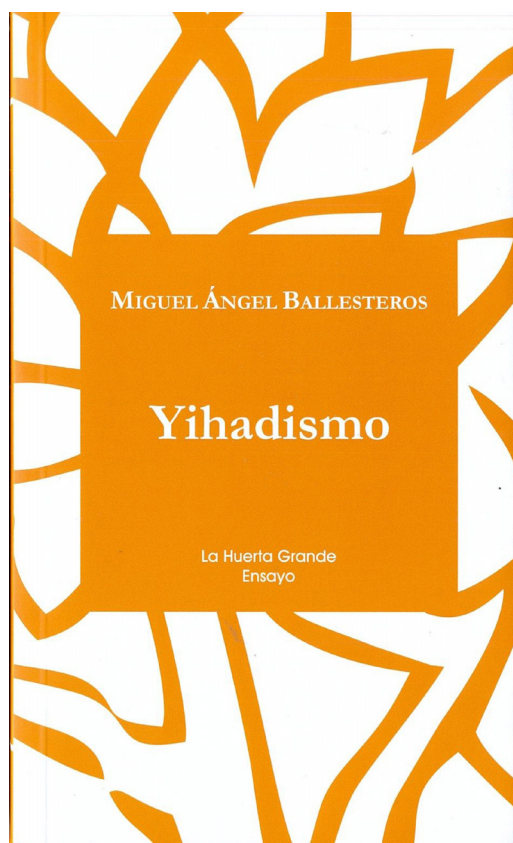
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## BOOK REVIEW

*Miguel Ángel Ballesteros (2016), Jihadism. Madrid: La Huerta Grande publishers, 163 pages.*



“Introducing clear and precise ideas” as well as “presenting in an orderly fashion” the data needed to “understand what may happen in the near future” in relation to the “severe threat” posed by jihadist terrorism. This is the goal set out by General Miguel Ángel Ballesteros in his book “Jihadism”. For this purpose the author chooses a “chronological description” to shed light on the context that gave rise to the existence and growth of the so-called “Islamic State” or “DAESH”. The complexity of the subject and the non-specialist target readership of his book warrant this approach with the stated aim of “narrating events occurring in very different, albeit often interrelated, scenarios”. The resulting book supports the author’s choice as it indeed contributes to thoroughly inform about the current terrorist threat and its possibly most notorious expression to date, i.e. the “Islamic State”. As General Ballesteros’ work asserts, this terrorist group constitutes yet another manifestation of a phenomenon defined as the “global jihadist movement” by authors such as Assaf Moghadam and Colin P. Clarke<sup>1</sup>. The book falls within this framework of analysis and its structure, which respects this conception of the jihadist phenomenon, is highly pertinent, as will be summarised below.

The first chapter analyses jihadism as the driving force behind different terrorist groups in the course of the last decades. As opposed to the erroneous beliefs repeated by representatives of various political quarters, the author’s explanation proves the relevance of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam such as Salafism as an inspiration for individuals who opt for the violent mobilisation implied by jihadism. In this sense, Ballesteros assures that “the Quran contains approximately 2% of verses that justify the use of war or violence to safeguard Islam”. Therefore the sacred text includes statements that “justify the use of violence in the eyes of jihadists”. Moreover he adds that “where they find full support for their warring intentions is in the *hadiths*, or records of the words and deeds of the prophet”. The analysis of this highly sensitive but essential question is complemented by an analysis of the rules by which the *sharia* or Islamic law considers it “legitimate to start a holy war”. In this analytical context Ballesteros highlights the importance of the theories developed by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb which provided the required ideological framework for the jihadist terrorist groups analysed throughout the book. The breach between Muslim and Western societies that Qutb advocated links in with the identification of Islamic fundamentalism as—in the words of Professor Carlos Echeverría—“a movement to recover what is one’s own, the lost identity, and as an instrument to reject the ubiquitous Western culture, the legacy of colonialism”.

The second chapter introduces particularly enriching and instructive geostrategic notions. This enables the reader to understand a current phenomenon which requires a retrospective look at regional conflicts that have persisted in time and seen opposing strategic interests intervene. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United States and Russia, amongst others, are revealed as fundamental actors in this geos-

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1 Colin P. Clarke and Assaf Moghadam, “Mapping Today’s Jihadi Landscape and Threat”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, pp. 347-371, 2018.

strategic analysis of a region that has spawned a terrorist group such as Al Qaeda and that lies at the origin of another criminal organisation known as the “Islamic State”.

The subject of analysis of the third chapter is in fact the rise and development of the group led by Osama Bin Laden, as well as its effective expansion through like-minded groups. The chapter looks at the introduction of the “strategy of universal jihad” responsible for the indiscriminate and highly lethal violence that has hit different societies around the world with such devastating effect. This allows an insight into the multifaceted character of a global jihad characterised by the proliferation of groups spread across a variety of geographic locations and identifying with a common ideology. Such is the case of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), or Boko Haram, amongst others.

The fourth chapter deals with the “Arab Spring” and its implications for the global jihadist movement. Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria are the focus of this analysis which shows how “a failed or weak state with a large share of Muslims is the breeding ground for jihadism”. Endogenous factors are interrelated with exogenous ones, revealing the importance of the international community in such sensitive areas. To this regard, the author warns about the difficulty of avoiding particular countries turning into “safe havens for terrorism”, unless “the international community adopts very far-reaching measures to avoid this”. However, the latter imply huge obstacles. The lessons learnt and unlearnt over the last decades in relation to international intervention in the area also form part of the analysis in this chapter.

Following this systematic approach of chronology and content, chapter five goes on to delve deeper into the origin and consolidation of the “Islamic State”, paying particular attention to the decisive conflict in Iraq. “The military success” followed by “the political fiasco” represented by the intervention that brought down Saddam Hussein constitutes a centrepiece in this enlightening geostrategic analysis offered by General Ballesteros. It explains how an asymmetric strategy such as that used by terrorists was able to effectively reach a theatre of operations whose destabilisation has reinforced and fed global jihad.

Chapter six reflects the author’s exemplary military and academic training as he evaluates the “Islamic State’s” strategy. At the time of the book’s publication, General Ballesteros was the director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (IEEE), the Defence Ministry’s think-tank which has distinguished itself over recent years as a benchmark for scholars and anyone interested in security and defence. The IEEE has made a lot of commendable efforts in terms of outreach and training by way of the exhaustive studies published by its analysts and its director. This activity and leadership received recognition in June 2018 with the appointment of General Ballesteros as Director of National Security. Prior to this, General Ballesteros—who earned a PhD with extraordinary mention from the Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca—had contributed a fine intellectual exercise with his book “In Search of a National Security Strategy” (Ministry of Defence, 2016), while also lecturing at various academic and security-related institutions. As a seasoned expert he is in a privileged position to eva-

luate the terrorist strategy of the “Islamic State” from the vantage point of particularly useful sources such as the ones included in the bibliography listed in the final part of his book.

Clausewitz’s theories are perfectly brought up to date and applied throughout the book, proposing that within the context of the kind of armed confrontation pursued by global jihad, “the strength of the opponents depends on three elements: volition, reason and passion”. The first element rests mainly on “the military capacity that each of the opponents possesses”. Today “the power of a state is not limited to its military power; it also rests on its law-enforcement capacity, economy, technology and the nature of its international political alliances”. This state capacity contrasts with the capacity of terrorist jihadist groups whose “volition element is constituted by its fighters, its financial power and the alliances it is able to establish with other, similar organisations”. The three factors are decisive in the “asymmetric strategy” constituted by terrorism and which “derives from the great inequality entailed by the volition factor on either side”. As General Ballesteros points out, this is a result of terrorists “trusting in obtaining victory and subjugating the enemy by harnessing the element of passion”, i.e. through the support of their followers and avoiding “military confrontation according to the conventional model of warfare”.

General Ballesteros defines the ISIS strategy as “hybrid”, as evidenced by their resorting to diverse elements combining a variety of tactics such as terrorism, insurgency and conventional warfare. Within this “hybrid strategy” the group’s propaganda has played an outstanding role. Indeed, as the author points out, ISIS has cleverly applied the “AIDA model”, derived from advertising, in its efforts to “captivate the *attention* of the largest possible number of citizens in order to awaken their *interest* in ongoing events and to trigger the *wish* for them not to happen again”. All of which forms part of the ultimate objective of driving citizens towards “*action* against their leaders” and accepting the terrorists’ demands.

The study of the “Islamic State’s” funding is taken on in chapter seven which lays out the main mechanisms that have allowed this terrorist organisation to obtain significant resources. These include: donations from supporters present in various neighbouring countries, the *hawala*; income from the sale or smuggling of oil; income derived from natural resources; bank and tax revenues; and illicit trade.

The work is rounded off by chapter eight, dedicated to responses against the “Islamic State”, highlighting factors that have weakened or strengthened the actions undertaken by those who have confronted this terrorist expression. One of the weakening factors, as highlighted by the author, is the “time element”, i.e. its “speed of establishment”, partly as a consequence of the belated reaction by the states that were forced to counter its terrorist action. The previous experiences help in understanding the conditioning factors of the strategy pursued by an international coalition which—two years following the book’s publication—has managed to considerably weaken the “Islamic State”, wresting away a significant portion of the territory which it had been able to conquer as a result of the above-mentioned belated response. As Ballesteros concludes, “if the most used strategy in conventional conflicts has been that of *dete-*

*ring by retaliating*, in the face of terrorist groups the only way is to *deter by negating*, i.e., getting the message across to the adversary that they will never be able to achieve their goals through violence”. Again, strategic logic is essential in the analysis set out by the author. This leads him to underline the relevance of a factor which is at times underestimated or even ignored by some political decision-makers: “Victory over ISIS will not be possible without its ideological defeat”.

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