How to fight Daesh

The killing of at least 39 people by a gunman in Sousse, Tunisia, along with the destruction of a Shia mosque in Kuwait, on Friday 26 June, may signal a shift in strategy for Daesh (ISIS).

Until now, their declared aim was the establishment of a caliphate in Iraq-Syria. This latest development could be the start of a new global jihad. The targeting of tourists is a move away from the targeting of religious minorities and non Sunnis Muslims.

The flow of foreign fighters to Daesh’s capital in Raqqa, Syria, is another alarming trend. Tunisian nationals now make up the largest proportion of foreign fighters.

And Daesh will be the beneficiaries of intensifying sectarian division and conflict in a area where Daesh has established itself in Iraq.

Online videos and videos show Iraqi Shia militias, many funded by Iran, apiing the brutality of Daesh. In one film a militia hang a man upside down and burn him alive. In another supposed Daesh supporters are shown being beheaded. And in yet another an alleged child supporter of the Sunni jihadists is shot.

 Shia militias deny having units within Anbar province where much of the fighting between Daesh and Iraqi Government forces has taken place. But reports, including from Human Rights Watch, say that Shia groups harass Sunnis, anyone they suspect of supporting or even tolerating the presence of Daesh, long after Daesh have been driven out of the area.

COMPETITION

Both sides are now engaged in a vicious competition over which can commit the most terrifying atrocity, demonstrate the most brutality. Of course Daesh use Shia militia videos to recruit to their operation.

As well as continuing fighting with Kurdish forces, Daesh are attacking members of rival Islamist groups within Syria. Online videos show 12 men being beheaded, some of whom were from Jaish al Islam and the al Nusra Front, who make up the largest jihadist opposition to Daesh within Syria.

In Yemen where al Qaeda claim their strongest base, Daesh attacked Shia al Houthi rebel leaders in the Yemeni capital. This strategy may be aimed at pushing out al Qaeda, who have used the rebellion by the al Houthis to consolidate power in the south-east of the country, but not resorted to heavy sectarian violence.

In an interview with the Guardian (10 June) al Qaeda ideologues, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada (recently released from jail) discussed the rift with Daesh which has led to it supplanting al Qaeda as the foremost jihadist network.

Maqdisi, who remains close to Ayman al-Zawahiri Al Qaeda’s leader, says Daesh are a seemingly loyal group when operating as Al Qaeda in Iraq, but the appointment of Abu Bakr al Bagdadi as their leader, following the death of founder al Zarqawi, displeased al Qaeda. Permission for al Bagdadi’s elevation was not sort from Bin Laden. A later falling out between al Bagdadi’s group and the Syrian al Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al Nusra caused the final split.

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, Daesh’s spokesperson and one of their senior propagandists, has declared al Qaeda’s leaders are western stooges and “misleading scholars”. Maqdisi states that “Bin Laden was a star. He had special charisma” where as Zawahiri does not have the ability to be listened and obeyed, leaving him isolated and without the infrastructure of global affiliation that helped to sustain al Qaeda.

After 9/11 al Qaeda was able to gather groups across much of the Arab world as well as in Europe, Africa and South Asia, where it based itself on the Afghan/Pakistan border. Individual groups were given freedom to operate as it was believed that strategy would bring in supporters and promote the establishment of a Caliphate. The leadership would vet and select commanders to ensure they were loyal, but did not interfere in the day-to-day running of the separate organisations. Daesh’s universal declaration of a Caliphate with a chosen Caliph and the call for all devout Muslims to join it, and swear allegiance to it, has completely undercut al Qaeda’s methods.

Much of what Maqdisi and Qatada says shows a generational split between Daesh and its commanders and the older, more established figures in al Qaeda. Maqdisi says he wants a more “moderate” organisation, more like Hamas in Gaza then Daesh in Raqqa. Such a shift may prove popular with those appalled by Daesh brutality. But Hamas and Al Qaeda are not “acceptable” versions of Daesh; their ideology and outlook is very similar, it is only tactics which divide them.

Some of the roots of this seemingly unstoppable wave of reaction lie in what the USA did after invading Iraq in 2003. It disbanded much of the Iraqi state machine and promoted “de-Ba’athification”. In the chaos and destruction which followed everyday governance collapsed. Its slow replacement by a fragile political system which depended upon the representation of ethnic identities has, in the long-run, completely failed. Although sectarian conflict waned for a few years, forces around the mosques and the Islamist factions were able to come to the fore. And for some time now corrupt Shia sectarianism has been dominant in government.

All these factors have allowed Daesh to gain a base among disaffected Sunni Arabs of the northern and western areas of Arab Iraq. They have recruited former Ba’athist intelligence officers and military commanders and that has helped them establish an army of experienced and able soldiers and military commanders extremely quickly.

Haji Bakr, who is said to have been the architect of Daesh’s takeover of northern Syria brought an entire Ba’athist unit with him when he joined the group.

For Workers’ Liberty, the appalling events in Tunisia and the continuing expansion of Daesh’s influence across the region underline the need for a step up solidarity. But what do we say politically?

We are against the British government’s shallow and potentially dangerously counter-productive propaganda initiative in schools. The Tunisian events have triggered announcements about spying on schools students’ internet use, but the government have been planning this for some time. But young people in schools should be allowed a democratic space to debate issues about religion and racism, a space where Daesh’s distorted worldview can be challenged.

The campaign shows a dangerous lack of grip, but this is unfortunately not unusual. It is mirrored by the actions of the Tunisian government which after the attack on the Bardo museum in Tunis, cracked down on radical Islamist groups, and closed mosques. These measures absolutely fail to deal with the infrastructure of global affiliation that helped to sustain al Qaeda.

As Solidarity goes to press this week our comrade Jill Mountford is leading a radical walking tour of East London.

Part of Ideas for Freedom, the Walking with Sylvia tour will visit places where the socialist feminist Sylvia Pankhurst organised, discuss her politics and the lessons we can learn from her life.

When the fight for women’s suffrage is taught in schools Sylvia’s role and politics is left aside in favour of the more “palatable” story of her mother and sister. We know about Sylvia, and of the east London working women’s movement, because socialists between now and then have written about it, read about it and run meetings on it.

The theme of this year’s Ideas for Freedom was imagining the future. But, in fact, that past is the only thing we actually know about. In order to imagine, and have the tools to fight for, the future we must learn from past.

As regular readers of Solidarity will know, our newspaper and our organisation plays an irrepealable role in recording the history of our movement, and educating others in the lessons of the past in order to equip them to fight for the future. For our organisation to play that role we need money.

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Thanks this week to Stuart and John. So far we have raised £5827.

Help us raise £15,000

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Solidarity 371 will be out 15 July; 372, 29 July; 373, 19 August; 374, 2 September, and then back to the usual weekly schedule