

# Daesh's demonic second coming ... s



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*Daesh will aspire to be more geographically dispersed to avoid presenting an easy target, it will consolidate its strength in the shadows to avoid provoking a decisive response*

Allow me to make a bold prediction: Within a few years, not only will Daesh return to prominence, but it will become exponentially more vigorous and difficult to defeat.

Daesh continues to be the wealthiest terrorist organisation in history, with hundreds of thousands of dollars stashed away in readiness for its re-emergence. Tens of thousands of Daesh personnel may still be at large, or deployed as sleeper cells across Iraq and Syria. Meanwhile, about 100,000 detainees with various levels of Daesh affiliation languish in mass camps. Their status is problematic, because of their multinational character: Should their home countries reluctantly accept them back, or leave them to rot or hang?

Let us not forget that Daesh perpetrated the worst crimes known to humanity: Burnings, stonings, beatings, rape, genocide and other systematic atrocities. Yet its ideology remains potent, with wide-reaching propaganda capabilities: A few symbolic victories (the recapture of a town, a spectacular terrorist attack...) could inspire thousands of confused and sick individuals to flock back into its ranks.

It is tempting to assert that because Daesh's actions were self-evidently evil, all those who lived under it must be evil too. Our failure to recognise



There have been recent deadly Daesh assaults in northern Lebanon and the Sinai, along with horrific attacks against Sri Lankan churches.

why many ordinary Iraqis and Syrians tolerated Daesh (other than simply out of fear) will be a major factor in allowing this menace to return.

Daesh's rule varied markedly across its so-called caliphate. While foreign jihadists brutally imposed alien theocratic models upon major cities, in small rural towns Daesh leaders were predominantly locals. The result was an organic hybrid between local traditions and Daesh's rigid asceticism. When Daesh was purged, local jihadists simply melted into the mountains, using their exhaustive knowledge of the land-

scape to embark on a war of attrition against security forces.

By 2011 Al-Qaeda in Iraq was a defeated force. Yet Nouri Al Maliki's sectarian policies, his purge of Sunni politicians, and his reliance on brutal paramilitaries to entrench his power alienated Sunnis and other communities. By 2013, Iraq was awash with a furious ferment of protest movements and anti-state forces — Islamists, tribes and Baathists. Daesh swept to power out of this complex milieu.

The fight-back against Daesh was partly franchised out to Iran-aligned

paramilitaries who have today been put back in control of localities reduced to ashes by coalition bombing campaigns. Iraqis are squeezed between two evils: "Hashd" militants and Daesh are equally guilty of sectarian atrocities. Before the 2018 elections, Sunnis in areas liberated from Daesh were widely prevented from accessing documentation allowing them to vote, access benefits and travel around the country. Paramilitaries terrorised returnees into fleeing back into exile. Thus, a high proportion of the population have effectively become non-persons,

with the stigma of Daesh branded upon entire regions. Aside from discredited Hashd, few respects allowed to hold political dangerous for Iraq's that Sunnis are left fei enated and angry tha

Deprived of core territory and Iraq, Daesh has dangerous. Thousand fighters who avoided dispersed, either qu home or migrating t fields, pledging to w and attract new recr

## London bomb factory, a sign of Iran

*Hizbollah's secret stash of tonnes of ammonium nitrate is just*

CON COUGHLIN

The latest revelation that an Iranian-backed terror group has been stockpiling bomb-making materials in London has shed fresh light on Tehran's reach in Europe.

For decades after the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iran mainly confined its terrorist activities to the Middle East region, using the Revolutionary Guard Corps and proxies such as Hizbollah to target opponents and undermine moderate Arab regimes.

There was, of course, the brief flurry of terrorist activity in Paris in the immediate aftermath of ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's emergence as the leader of the revolution, as his followers sought to neutralise opponents of the clerical regime. Other notable acts of Iranian terrorism outside the region include the infamous 1994 attack against a Jewish institution in Argentina, which killed 85 people.

But for the most part, the focus of Iran's activities has been confined to the region, where attacks have been deployed as an effective tactic in support of Tehran's drive for regional dominance.

Now, intelligence officials in Europe are undertaking a radical re-

appraisal of that view in the light of recent events. Earlier this week, it was revealed that London raided a terrorist cell with links to Hizbollah four years ago. It was stockpiling three tonnes of explosive materials on the outskirts of London in what has been described as a secret bomb factory.

The bomb-making group was discovered in the autumn of 2015, shortly after Britain had become one of the signatories to the controversial nuclear deal.

Even though former prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May — who was then serving as home secretary — were informed of the discovery, the fact that it was not made public suggests they were keen not to reveal any information that might damage the flawed nuclear agreement.

Even now, British authorities are reluctant to disclose too many details. A brief statement issued by the Metropolitan Police this week simply stated that counter-terrorism specialists had raided four properties at addresses in north-west London — three businesses and a home — and that a man in his 40s was arrested on suspicion of plotting terrorism, although he was later released without charge.

However, British intelligence officials close to the investigation believe the stockpile was part of an international Hizbollah scheme for future terror attacks in Europe. They have drawn parallels between the stash of chemicals discovered in London and a similar case in Cyprus at around the same time. Hassan Bassam Abdallah, a 28-year-old member of Hizbollah's military wing, was convicted of possessing 65,000 ice packs filled with ammonium nitrate which he admitted were for use in future terrorist attacks in Larnaca. He was subsequently jailed for six years.

For years, whenever I have raised the subject with senior British intelligence officials, they have repeatedly denied the existence of Iranian-backed sleeper cells in the UK, maintaining the traditional line that Iran's terrorist activity was mainly confined to the Middle East.

But in reality, the discovery of this London bomb factory is part of an upsurge of Iranian terrorist activity in Europe in the past decade.

Concerns that Hizbollah had expanded its operations in Europe first surfaced in 2012 when the group carried out a bomb attack against a tour bus in Bulgaria, prompting the European Union to



Hizbollah supporters hold placards during a gathering in Beirut.