



**The Al-Azhar Observatory for
Combating Extremism and Terrorism
responds to the question:**

Where is Daesh (ISIS)?

An Analytical Report

March 2018

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**An analytical report
In search of the answer to this pressing question**

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- Daesh groups remain armed and their existence threatens world peace.
- Libya, West Africa, and South Asia appear to be main targets of Daesh.
- Approximately 6000 members of Daesh have fled Iraq and Syria.
- Those who have fled would have 3 possible options ahead of them.

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- Daesh failed in their attempt to transform Egypt into a land of conflict and division, as the police and military forces provided safety and protection to the Egyptian people.
- 10,000 Daesh militants have fled to Afghanistan, and additional fighters appear to be on their way to the Afghan territories.
- 6,000 Daesh militants are threatening the peace of Africa, and thousands of innocent souls are in a state of fear as to their activities.
- Thousands of Daesh militants have become scattered in the Libyan desert, and they are striving to settle there with permanence making it their next base.
- Daesh is formulating expansionist strategies in Asia after their defeat in Syria and Iraq, and currently its intention is to disrupt the efforts leading towards The Silk Road Economic Belt.

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- Those who are returning from Daesh are a danger, threatening the European continent.
- Where have the remaining fighters of Daesh disappeared to? A mystery that has caused an alarm for German and French authorities.
- Declaring victory over Daesh is not the end of the battle in the foreseeable future.
- Militants of Daesh seek to shift from one region to another.
- Six steps must be taken to ensure that Daesh does not re-emerge.

PART ONE

- The defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria does not mean the end of the Daesh threat.
- Daesh groups remain armed and their existence threatens world peace.
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The beginning was in 2014 when news agencies and official organizations confirmed the emergence of a new terrorist organization referring to itself as Daesh, which captured vast amounts of Iraqi territory in record time. It declared the establishment of its alleged caliphate and quickly moved into Syria completely taking over cities and regions. Since then, world peace – particularly in the Middle East – declined into the state of fear. Daesh covered these areas in seas of innocent blood and brought destruction and chaos to other cities. Day by day, thousands of children became orphans and the cries of distressed mothers rose above and beyond every other sound. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the claimant to the Daesh leadership, increased daily in barbarity and his thirst for more blood.

To counter the crimes of this organization, which is considered one of the bloodiest groups in human history, world powers announced the formulation of an international coalition to eradicate Daesh. They surrounded the militants for more than two years and bombarded Iraqi and Syrian cities that Daesh had occupied. Daesh in return responded with increased killing, bloodshed, intimidation; and those who were massacred in every case were the innocent citizens who alone paid the heavy price.

In December 2017, Russia announced the end of its military operation against Daesh in Syria, and a few days after this announcement, Iraq confirmed the liberation of all its territories from the militants of this terrorist organization. In the end, an announcement from the Syrian Democratic Forces also came, supported by the coalition led by the United States of America, that they had taken complete control of the Syrian city of Raqqa, which was the base and the central stronghold of Daesh in the Syrian territory. Official news of the defeat of Daesh militants in Iraq and Syria emerging from Russian, Iraqi and Syrian sources gave hope to the innocent of this world, and they came to believe that the darkness of terrorism had diminished and the dawn of peace and security had risen once again over the horizon of this land. However very quickly, this hope faded and a new fear – more grievous than that which had passed – overtook it. The fear arose due to demands of world leaders to combat this organization still and for the international community to counter the Daesh threat despite the announcement of victory over it. These demands meant that the terrorist threat would remain regardless of its defeat in the lands of its alleged caliphate.

Here a logical question arises: *Where have the Daesh militants gone?* This is what the Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism is responding to in this special report, and we present our analysis henceforth.

40,000 Fighters

As mentioned above in the introduction, Daesh emerged and announced the establishment of its alleged caliphate in the year 2014, and since then, it continued to attract supporters from all parts

of the world. Alongside its increased control over territories in Syria and Iraq, the number of foreign fighters also increased drastically until a few months after their emergence, they reached 40,000 fighters according to some statistics.

In the middle of June 2017, Turkish authorities documented names of 53,781 individuals from 146 different countries. The countries of their origins all confirmed their departure from their native lands with the aim of joining Daesh. The authorities noted that they travelled to Syria by way of Turkey. This is also mentioned in the report published on 26 October 2017 by the Clarion Project, which works to address human rights and combat terrorism.

Defeat of Daesh

On 7 December 2017, Russia announced that Syrian lands had been completely liberated from the clutches of the terrorists. This was confirmed by Chief of Staff, Valery Gerasimov, who stated that Russia had withdrawn its forces from Syria due to the completion of operations against Daesh.

The Russian Chief of Staff indicated that the efforts of the Russian army linked with opposing the terrorist organization, Daesh, had been completed. Whilst the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, stated that for approximately two years, the Russian Armed Forces in co-operation with the Syrian Army have defeated the terrorists, and therefore they decided to return the vast majority of the Russian military forces stationed in Syria back to Russia.

Following the Russian announcement by some days, Iraq also confirmed through its Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, that complete liberation of the Iraqi lands from the grasp of Daesh militants had occurred. Thereafter, the Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by the coalition led by the United States of America, announced that they had taken complete control of the Syrian city of Raqqa, which was the base and the central stronghold of Daesh in the Syrian territory.

Where has Daesh gone?

The declaration regarding the liberation of Syria and Iraq from one of the bloodiest organizations in history has made everybody question whether this means that the international coalition forces have succeeded in completely eliminating the Daesh militants, and therefore liberating the world from their threat forever. Naturally the answer to this question is negative. Hence the leaders of the countries fighting this organization, although they announced the end of its presence in Iraq and Syria, are currently emphasizing the need for a collective international front to counter the Daesh threat which has spread across numerous parts of the world by way of its individual members, propaganda circulated through the internet media, its sleeping cells, and those who have returned back to their countries. In other words, this clearly means that the threat of Daesh continues to exist despite its defeat in the land of its alleged caliphate.

In view of this painful reality, everyone, especially the research centres who specialize in tackling terrorism and extremism, are all looking for a response to the most vital question: Where did the militants of Daesh go after they left Syria and Iraq? Attempts to answer this question are not only occupying the minds of researchers and those concerned with this discussion, but political leaders are too exerting a great deal of attention and care towards this end, and they are looking for the answer this intriguing question too.

On 24 October 2017, four days after the terrorist attack which devastated security forces in the

Bahariya oasis region in the desert south of Cairo and killed 16 security personnel, Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, remarked in a television interview that the present success in Syria and Iraq against Daesh will result in the militants of this organization moving from that front and turning towards Libya, Egypt, western border, Sinai peninsula and West Africa.

On Sunday 10 December 2017, the French President, Emanuel Macron, confirmed that military operations against the Syrian based Daesh would continue from the middle of February 2018 until the end of the month, contradicting the Russian announcement that stated that the Syrian lands had been liberated completely from terrorist control.

In a related context, the Afghan Minister for Hajj and Religious Endowments, Faiz Mohammad Osmani, stated that more than 5,900 Daesh militants fled from Iraq and Syria and they are on the verge of entering Afghan territory. He expressed his worry over the possible entrance of these terrorists to Afghan territory and called upon the security forces to exercise caution, according to Afghan news reports. The Afghan Minister questioned the whereabouts of those militants and what their new direction would be, and then he responded that there is no doubt that Afghanistan would be the main target for these terrorists.

View of the Al-Azhar Observatory

Faced with the remnants of the Daesh threat, the Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism is of the view that Daesh militants would have three options ahead of them following their fleeing of Iraq and Syria:

- To resort to places where they may have a base, such as Libya, the Iraqi-Syrian border or certain locations within the Sinai peninsula.
- To carry out terrorist activities in Europe, and in doing so expand and take their battle from the east to the west.
- To transform their fighting into the tactics of guerrilla and desert warfare, something of which they have experience from Iraq.

We will clarify the three options that Daesh could resort to and why? Also whether the militants succeeded in infiltrating the Sinai peninsula? As well as some other questions we will answer in the second part of this report.

PART TWO

- Daesh failed in their attempt to transform Egypt into a land of conflict and division, as the police and military forces provided safety and protection to the Egyptian people.
- 10,000 Daesh militants have fled to Afghanistan, and additional fighters appear to be on their way to the Afghan territories.
- 6,000 Daesh militants are threatening the peace of Africa, and thousands of innocent souls are in a state of fear as to their activities.
- Thousands of Daesh militants have become scattered in the Libyan desert, and they are striving to settle there with permanence making it their next base.
- Daesh is formulating expansionist strategies in Asia after their defeat in Syria and Iraq, and currently its intention is to disrupt the efforts leading towards The Silk Road Economic Belt.

To where did the militants of Daesh disappear after their defeat in Iraq and Syria? In answer to this question, this special report is divided into three parts. In the first part of this report, we have presented a timeline of the emergence of this terrorist organization, and we have shed light upon the number of foreign fighters who have joined them. Furthermore we have reported the views of political leaders regarding the mission of the militants of this organization in the forthcoming period. The Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism has stated in the first part of this report that there are only three options for the Daesh militants:

- To resort to places where they may have a base, such as Libya, the Iraqi-Syrian border or certain locations within the Sinai peninsula.
- To carry out terrorist activities in Europe, and in doing so expand and take their battle from the east to the west.
- To transform their fighting into the tactics of guerrilla and desert warfare, something of which they have experience from Iraq.

Option One – In Search of a Base

The Al-Azhar Observatory holds the view that the first option is the most realistic. There is no doubt that the Daesh militants, following the collapse of their strongholds in Iraq and Syria, fled to other cities where their leaders saw potential areas to form new bases. The pressing issue they must be concerning themselves with is regarding to which region the organization can travel towards in order to initiate the establishment of a new alleged caliphate as was done previously in Iraq and Syria?

The opinions of politicians which we have presented in the first part of this report suggest that the Daesh militants, following their defeat in Syria and Iraq, will turn to Afghanistan, West Africa, Sinai, Pakistan, Libya and Central Asia. The ground reality is also in accordance to these views, since Afghanistan could become a suitable base for Daesh due to its similarity to Iraq and Syria in terms of the presence of sectarian diversity. This provides Daesh with the platform to exploit the sectarian divide and create a new stronghold for their terrorist activities.

And this has already become a reality, resulting in a large number of Daesh militants turning towards Afghan lands following their defeat in Syria and Iraq. Zamir Kabulov, the Russian presidential envoy to Afghanistan, confirmed this in a report published by the TimeTurk news

outlet, stating that Russia was from amongst the first countries to warn against the rise of Daesh militants in Afghanistan. This report showed that the strength of Daesh in Afghanistan increased recently, and their number has exceeded 10,000. Moreover, this figure continues to rise alongside an influx of new militants from Syria and Iraq following their downfall there.

The Khawar Miana news agency reported that the number of foreign fighters under Daesh is currently increasing, specifically in the district of Darzab in the province of Jowzjan, in northern Afghanistan, where Baz Mohammad Dawar, the acting administrative chief for Darzab, informed Khawar Miana that the number of foreign Daesh fighters in the district has reached approximately 1,250; with militants bearing of Turkmen, Chechen, Tajik, Uzbek, Pakistani, Algerian and French nationalities. The majority of these fighters can converse in the language of Arabic, which shows that they were members of the organization that fled from Syria and Iraq.

Daesh in Africa

It is considered a genuine possibility that Daesh fighters are heading towards Africa. In fact, the return of Africans who fought with Daesh in Syria and Iraq back to their native lands has been confirmed by numerous news outlets. In this regard, Ismail Sharqi, the Commissioner for Peace and Security at the African Union, warned of the potential of 6,000 Africans who were fighting under Daesh returning to Africa. He called on the African countries to help prepare for their return and pointed towards the fact that currently there are movements of 6,000 African fighters amongst a 30,000 strong Daesh army. This is an issue which has caused fear of the re-emergence of the tragic events in Algeria that occurred following the return of fighters from Afghanistan, which led to the death of thousands of innocent lives.

The Al-Azhar Observatory upholds that the re-emergence of Daesh fighters, specifically in the desert lands, presents a threat to the continent of Africa and to the peace and security of all citizens. This is an issue which requires great dedication and co-operation between countries of the continent, not only domestically but also internationally. In addition, sufficient information regarding the militants needs to be shared effectively in order to prevent the terrorists infiltrating the infrastructure of these countries.

Daesh in Sinai

Despite the success of the Egyptian army in delivering crushing blows to the terrorist group in the Sinai peninsula, tackling hundreds of their members and restricting their presence in a number of areas, we still believe that terrorist activity is on-going and will be conducted from time to time; though the tactical strategies employed may alter. Regardless, it is to be noted that their activities continue to target the army, police, Coptic Christians, Sufi groups and Islamic heritage sites. These individual operations, indicate that the organization in Egypt is still capable of inflicting profound harm and destruction.

However, the political motives of Daesh in Egypt which aim to change the land of Canaan into a place of division and chaos have failed, as a result of the efforts and sacrifices of the soldiers and police personnel. In response to the sacrifices of the soldiers, the terrorist organization had to resort to other tactics in order to exploit the sectarian strife, so they could recruit citizens easily and create new avenues of control. However, these cowardly antics failed due to the awareness of the Egyptian people, their national pride and their adherence to the emblem of national unity. These are positions personified by Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Coptic Church of Egypt. Al-Azhar has

strived through its propagation, education and research, at the forefront of which is the Al-Azhar Observatory, in raising awareness amongst citizens and refuting the evidence of the terrorist organization, rectifying miscalculated religious verdicts relied upon by the misguided youth who have joined the ranks of Daesh. Al-Azhar Al-Sharif has aided this cause, not only in Egypt but throughout the world by way of the Al-Azhar Observatory, which publishes its research in over eleven different languages.

Daesh in Libya

Since the collapse of the regime of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has experienced an absence of governance, and the numerous divisions which have led to bloody infighting testify to this reality. This situation has allowed any terrorist group to establish itself in the country without any real resistance. The organization of Daesh has strived to take advantage of this chaos and has begun to strengthen its presence in some quarters of Libya intending to make these lands a stronghold for the organization.

Daesh has previously declared that they have three bases within the Libyan territory: Tripoli, Barca and Fezzan. The organization in Libya gradually made North Africa a centre for its criminal activities between the years of 2015 and 2016. The declaration of Daesh was not mere rhetoric, rather it became a ground reality when the organization took control of the city Sirte in the year 2015, before the Libyans could rescue their city, leaving them the difficulty of facing the scattered remnants of Daesh in the deserts of Libya until today. In 2016, the Pentagon explicitly said that the number of Daesh fighters in Libya has reached approximately 6,500 militants.

The circumstances of Libya are such that they are not able to prevent Daesh making rapid gains even in those areas where there is no drastic sectarian divide nor a common enemy against whom gaining support is possible. These conditions have been utilized by the terrorist organization to its advantage of gaining control within Libya and further strengthening its presence, resulting in the organization being able to consolidate its presence in Libya. This quickly paves the way for the collapse of the state and undermines the shared feeling of the Libyan people.

In addition to this chaos and disorder within the state, there are other factors that have also brought Daesh to Libya and to make its base there. The most evident of them is the political, social and economic instability of the neighbouring countries which makes it an easy target for the organization. In relation to the geopolitical state of Libya, for it to be situated on the coastline has allowed Daesh to expand its activities into West Africa and to ally itself with Boko Haram in Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Niger, and northern Cameroon. In addition, the possibility of seizing Libya's vast oil resources and financial assets are further factors inciting the organization to gain control and stabilize itself in Libya.

Daesh in Pakistan

Pakistan has been listed as one of the most important countries where Daesh may be able to strengthen and solidify its presence. The TimeTurk news outlet reported that recent developments indicate that the key targets for the Daesh militants scattered in Afghanistan is to disrupt China's project known as The Silk Road Economic Belt, particular in and around Pakistan it is referred to as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This is considered the world's largest enterprise connecting China to Turkey, Europe, central Asian states, Afghanistan, Pakistan and numerous other countries.

This may not be far from the truth as Daesh is planning expansionist strategies throughout Asia following their defeat in Syria and Iraq. The purpose of China's development of The Silk Road Economic Belt would prevent these plans of militants materializing, whereby railroads would be placed in the way of areas targeted by Daesh for expansion.

Furthermore, China's strategy as regards this project in Pakistan – namely the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – was to build a trade route from Kashgar in west China to Gwadar in southern Pakistan, overlooking the Arabian Sea and close to the Iranian-Pakistani border. This route will also include the Chinese city Xinjiang which will give China access to the Indian Ocean, the Middle East and will connect Pakistani cities to one another.

The Balochistan province of Pakistan, though included in China's trade route in 2015, was also included in Daesh's project in 2016 whereby they exploited historical conflicts and carried numerous terrorist attacks against both police and civilians, the last of which took place on one of the churches in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan.

The same can also be said regarding Myanmar and Bangladesh which are included in the six routes which form part of The Silk Road Economic Belt that extends from southern China to India. The year of 2016 witnessed Bangladesh joining the Chinese project and simultaneously witnessed the declaration of Daesh regarding the beginning of their so-called *Jihad* campaign in Bangladesh. This announcement materialized as the terrorist organization was declared responsible for countless terrorist attacks which occurred there. Many counter extremism experts have warned that unusual violence, genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslims in the Arakan region of Burma have all aided the emergence of Daesh and other terrorist groups in Myanmar.

As for Indonesia, Daesh have intended for a long period of time to establish an Asian ally to help them in expanding their alleged caliphate in Asia, utilizing the slogan *Long Live Daesh* and taking the help of new recruits in order to achieve its evil goals in south-east Asia. Perhaps the bombing that struck Jakarta which killed 7 people on 14 January 2016, was perpetrated by Daesh, indicating that they are still striving to establish a presence in Indonesia.

PART THREE

- Those who are returning from Daesh are a danger, threatening the European continent.
- Where have the remaining fighters of Daesh disappeared to? A mystery that has caused an alarm for German and French authorities.
- Declaring victory over Daesh is not the end of the battle in the foreseeable future.
- Militants of Daesh seek to shift from one region to another.
- Six steps must be taken to ensure that Daesh does not re-emerge.

In the third and final section of this report, the Al-Azhar Observatory for Combating Extremism, we explore the possibility of Daesh engaging in terrorist activity in Europe with the ambition of moving the battle from east to west, or making its transition to guerrilla and desert warfare, tactics which the organization has previously employed during its time in Iraq.

Option Two – The Direction to Europe

We initiate our discussion with the second option which Daesh may resort to according to experts which is to engage in terrorist activity within Europe, intending to move the battle from east to west. The terrorist organization will rely upon those who return from it to fulfil this operation. *Returnees of Daesh* is a term which has changed drastically following the defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq. Initially it was applied to members of Daesh who were deceived by its claim, and shortly after joining them they discovered that the prevailing circumstances in the area differed considerably from that which Daesh had originally proposed, due to this they decided to leave it and return back to their homelands. Following the defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, currently the term *Returnees of Daesh* has begun to carry a completely different meaning, since it is not feasible to ascertain whether those who have returned from Daesh still represent its ideology or have moved away from it. Numerous western governments have expressed their fear of them. Newsweek and the EU Observer have reported that Europe's anti-terrorism tsar, the Commissioner Sir Julian King, has expressed deep concern over the possibility of the *Returnees of Daesh* re-emerging. He stated that although he was anticipating the return of a number of them from the battle-zone to Europe, it does not dispel the fact that this number, whether small, poses a great and challenging threat that must be dealt with firmly and decisively.

In Germany, authorities calculated that the number of those who departed the country to join Daesh in previous years was approximately 940 people; 145 of whom were killed and more than 250 had returned. However, what concerns the German authorities is the exact whereabouts of the rest of them. The German authorities initially expected that all Germans who fought in the ranks of Daesh would return in numbers, following the defeat of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, however this did not materialize. Only the 250 fighters referred to previously came back. The fate of the others, except for four women who were arrested by Iraqi authorities in the city of Mosul, remains a mystery. From amongst the four women was the known Linda Wenzel, 17, from Pulsnitz in Germany. So a question remains which has rendered the German authorities uneasy: Where have the remaining Daesh fighters gone? It is evident that the momentous discussion regarding the German Daesh militants will be prolonged for quite a while, specifically because no evidence has been discovered regarding their death and whereabouts. Also Daesh usually publicizes the killing of its fighters or they inform the family or friends of the deceased in Germany of their killing, however this has not yet taken place.

Daesh in France

Anxiety has overwhelmed the French authorities, specifically because the danger of those who returned from Daesh has shocked France more than any other nation. French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, informed of the presence of 500 French citizens fighting in the Daesh ranks in Syria and Iraq, and on French news channel BFM TV, he described their return to France as a matter of extreme difficulty, without clarifying what he meant by this description whilst adding they will soon be captured or they will settle in scattered places. French Minister of the Interior, Gérard Collomb, emphasized that France will not negotiate with French terrorists who intend to return to French territory, agreeing with the Prime Minister of Belgium, Charles Michel. Gérard Collomb clarified that these individuals vehemently oppose the fabric of French society and questioned whether, at present when they are not established in any region, is it really necessary to negotiate with them for their return to French society? Most definitely international law will be upheld, but negotiating for their return is out of the question. The Minister of the Interior added that the possibility of French citizens who joined Daesh showing resistance due to the danger of facing the death penalty in Iraq does not change anything, for they have chosen their way of life and must face the consequences of their choices. Collomb confirmed that the possibility remained of sending officials to question French fighters imprisoned in Iraq whilst saying that the situation of women and children who intended to return will be critically analysed on a case by case basis. Moreover, a French source revealed that 700-1000 fighters went to Syria and Iraq from France, and in 2013, 400-450 were killed and approximately 250 others returned to French territory.

Bruce Hoffman, a political analyst and expert on terrorism based at the Georgetown University, explained his stance at a conference in Washington that despite numerous fighters from the ranks of Daesh being killed, thousands have survived and are gaining influence after departing from Syria. He emphasized that a few have begun to settle in the Balkans, out of the limelight, anticipating an opportunity to infiltrate into Europe.

It is the view of the Al-Azhar Observatory that each country's approach towards the returning militants will determine the scope of danger those returning militants could pose. It could also be an additional factor that contributes towards that specific country strengthening its understanding in relation to these terrorist groups, gauging their mentality and methodology, as well as examining the warfare tactics of these extremist groups. Therefore, it is emphasized that when a country adopts a well thought out and an advanced program to re-habilitate those returning and facilitates their re-integration into society methodologically, they will reap great benefit from them and may not face a similar threat from them.

Option Three – Guerrilla Warfare

In relation to the third option which Daesh may resort to, which is regarding a transition to guerrilla and desert warfare that the organization has previously employed during its time in Iraq; this may only be utilized if they do not possess the capability to return to their homeland, or when they are not able to move their organization to any other country outside of Iraq and Syria. Therefore, this option remains the weakest option from amongst the three choices they have in view of the Al-Azhar Observatory. This is due to their actual desire to move to a country where there are factors already present that can assist the organizations to carry out its terrorist operations within Europe with the aim of taking the battle from east to west.

Indeed to declare that Daesh is defeated is not the end of the battle in the foreseeable future,

though it would be promising if international solidarity was shown. This would lead to producing clear results with regards to defeating Daesh, but since these efforts are limited to certain regions, the extent of the problem is expanding, and subsequently as we declare victory over them in one region, we only empower them to return in some other region.

In light of the above, strengthening international efforts against extremism and terrorism and the involvement of states, both in intelligence sharing and military strategies, will contribute in hindering the re-emergence of Daesh again, or at the very minimum it will limit their progress to the required extent. Furthermore, it is essential to put an end to international politics which contribute towards the creation of terrorism and its growth. For example, as regards the unjust international political positions towards the Palestinian people in their pursuit of establishing their independent state with Jerusalem (al-Quds) as its capital. Likewise it is necessary to find solutions for those who are oppressed and for those who are refugees across the world. At the forefront of these are the Muslims in Burma, regarding whose plight Al-Azhar Al-Sharif has repeatedly criticised the silence of the world. In addition, it is mandatory to provide help and assistance to those countries that are suffering economic crises, especially the problem of unemployment which is exploited by extremist groups to attract young people.

Moreover, catering for education and the rights of citizens is imminently required, in particular being aware of genuine religious teachings, which should lead the list of priorities for global efforts. Numerous studies have shown that youngsters who are aware of religious teachings are less likely to be attracted by the terrorist groups in comparison to those who are unaware of their religious teachings and their moderate principles. In short, it is vital for all nations of the world without exception, to strive to eliminate the root causes of terrorism within their borders and to close all avenues from which terrorist organizations can infiltrate the minds of the young.

From amongst the most important steps to achieve our goal is to refute and dismantle the ideologies presented by these groups and their hard-line methodologies, for this will assist in making it difficult for our youth to join their ranks, but rather making them stand united in their confrontation of these ills and wrongs. Al-Azhar Al-Sharif has taken great strides to ensure that the fallacies, misunderstandings and illusions of these groups are refuted, through explaining their manifest contradiction to the objectives of Islam and its lofty principles. In this context, the Al-Azhar Observatory has launched several awareness campaigns aimed at immunizing young people from falling into the clutches of these groups and to prevent the risk of polarization. Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the foremost Muslim reference point in the world, will continue serving this purpose and will not stop until this barbaric, terrorist ideology is eradicated.

[ENDS]

The original Arabic report can be viewed online at: <http://www.azhar.eg/observer>

The report has been translated into English by Hafiz Issarar Hussain and Mohammed Mahin Saiyed of the UK Branch of the World Organization for al-Azhar Graduates. Visit: www.waag-azhar.org.uk

