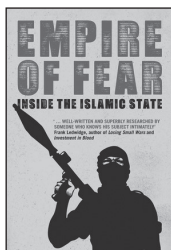


## บรรณนิทัศน์

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ชื่อหนังสือ: *Empire of Fear: Inside the Islamic State*  
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In late 2014, in a Basic News Reporting course that I teach, I spent some time going over the news concerning the violent rise of the Islamic State (abbreviated to IS for this review, and often referred to in the media as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh). We went over what the jihadist group stands for, who they are and why it is so important for people, especially journalists, to be aware of IS right now. To underscore the significance of the topic, I asked the students, who were mostly Thai, to identify IS on an exam and to elaborate on why students in a predominantly Buddhist country, located thousands of kilometers away from where IS is based, should take the developments about IS so seriously.

Besides the students' general descriptions about the horrific acts that IS had been responsible for up to that time, some suggested in their answers that the jihadist group might launch a terrorist attack in Thailand, or that Muslims in the south of Thailand, who have waged

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their own campaign of violence in the southernmost provinces, might be inclined to pledge allegiance to IS. I responded to these students that these scenarios were not likely, based on the prevailing intelligence held by almost all experts and officials at the time, which was that Thai Muslims were not likely to join IS and the chance of Islamic extremist terrorism occurring in the Thai capital was slim, as IS had not yet claimed credit for any major acts of terror outside of the area it controls in Iraq and Syria (<http://www.straitstimes.com>).

Since the time I gave that exam, Bangkok endured a terror attack on August 17, 2015 at the Erawan Shrine, located in the heart of the city, in which 20 people were killed. The attacks were allegedly carried out by Uighurs of Turkish descent (as of this writing, two suspects have been indicted and are in custody awaiting trial). While this incident does not appear to be motivated by global religious jihad, it does serve as a warning that such an incident could take place in Bangkok.

IS first showed its potential for destruction outside the territories it controls when the tragic terror attacks in Paris occurred on November 13, 2015 (<http://www.independent.co.uk>). Shortly after that attack, a married couple who pledged allegiance to IS killed 14 people at an office party in San Bernardino, California on December 2. Then, on January 14, 2016, IS claimed credit for a terror attack in Jakarta, motivated by the perpetrators' belief that Indonesia was not Islamic enough (<http://www.straitstimes.com>). By now, it is clear that IS, or those who have been radicalized by IS, can potentially strike anywhere – even Thailand.

*Empire of Fear: Inside the Islamic State*, by BBC reporter Andrew Hosken, offers readers a solid overview of the history of IS and

documents many of the jihadist group's haunting, horrifying incidents of torture, rapes and beheadings. While the references are gruesome – some might think gratuitous – they inform the reader how deep IS's savagery cuts and how dangerous it has become.

Before readers even get to the first sentence of *Empire of Fear*, they will see a map on the first page depicting “a new world order as conceived by Islamic State,” in which the borders that define Europe, Africa and Asia have been revised, and a massive swath of black dominates the landscape, depicting IS's envisioned future caliphate. On IS's map, Spain and Portugal would become a land named Andalus, the name that this region went by centuries ago when it was under Islamic rule. A land mass going from Greece up north to Austria would be renamed “Orobpa.” India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, parts of Iran and other surrounding countries would become a territory called Khorasan, and about 20-30 countries in northern Africa would be consolidated into three zones.

IS wishes to establish a society in which every religion is banned except for its version of pure Islam practiced under strict Sharia law. Apostates who do not fully adhere to its version of Islam are known as kuffar, and, according to IS's philosophical ideology, they deserve to be killed. Notably, the Yazidi people, who have lived in the area since ancient times, have been forced to hide in the mountains; females who could not escape in time before IS took over their towns and villages have been used as sex slaves, including pre-pubescent girls. IS followers, who are Sunni adherents, also viciously hate Shia Muslims. This stems from an intra-religious rift dating to the beginnings of Islam, but this feud has been taken to such an extreme by IS in recent years that

IS's violent activities towards the Shia have drawn the disapproval of Al Qaeda.

Even the Sunnis currently living under IS rule in Iraq and Syria (estimates suggest that there are as many as eight million) are not safe if they do not adhere entirely to the severely restrictive Sharia laws. Life has radically changed for ordinary Sunni Muslims living in IS-controlled territories; women have been forbidden from going to dentists, smoking can be punished by limb amputation, watching professional football games is punishable by 80 lashes. One ghastly example occurred when 13 teenagers were executed after being caught watching an Asian Cup match between Jordan and Iraq, even though the IS caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was once an avid football player and a great goal scorer, known as the "Messi" of his team (<http://www.mirror.co.uk>).

Hosken does a good job of weaving these vile episodes that have been reported in the international press into the narrative, and he also offers insightful views into IS's backstory using a variety of key sources and experts from Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East and the West.

One haunting incident occurred in 2006 when Al Qaeda in Iraq – the former manifestation of IS – attacked the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, Iraq, one of the most important and holy shrines for Shia Muslims. The BBC TV crew did not even bother trying to go, which turned out to be a wise decision as it is unclear that they would have survived. Atwar Bahjat, a female journalist for the Al Arabiya network, did cover the bombing and she lost her life. Immediately after the attack, she responded bravely and boldly by stating on live TV: "Whether you are Sunni or Shia, Arab or Kurds, there is no difference between

Iraqis.” But the retaliation against her courageous declaration on TV was brutal; she was raped and killed on the scene and her engineer and cameraman were also killed – another spine-chilling moment in a book full of horror stories.

Hosken’s own first-hand experiences on the ground in Iraq and his behind-the-scenes anecdotes offer readers some interesting insight into what it was like to report on this story. When he was preparing in 2014 to leave to go to Iraq to cover what was happening with IS, his colleagues wagered whether he would have to be rescued by helicopter off of a Baghdad rooftop, similar to the last U.S. helicopters that escaped Saigon at the end of the American war in Vietnam.

In fact, there was an evacuation plan in place for him, if necessary, and in June and July 2014, he said that as IS approached Baghdad, his discomfort was not just due to the weather, which regularly reached 50 degrees Celsius. It was unclear at that point whether IS might indeed breach the capital after seizing several cities in northern Iraq, until their momentum was squelched in August 2014 when a U.S. airstrike campaign targeting IS began (Hosken 2015: Kindle Locations 228-229).

Another memorable personal experience that Hosken shares was a chat he had with the 74-year-old owner of the historic Café al-Shabandar in Baghdad that had been destroyed by an explosion, killing four of the owner’s sons and a grandson. Afterwards, the man felt compelled to rebuild the café, as dangerous as that might be, in order to support his four widowed daughters-in-law and 12 grandchildren. The resilience after such loss is quite astounding and touching, and there are so many more stories like it that we will never know about.

Hosken mostly skips over the 1,300-year time period from Islamic history that has led up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, without much discussion of what precedence there might possibly have been for these extreme jihadists and their ancient world view. But while the book is light on tracing the possible long-term roots, Hosken clearly and effectively addresses the failings by the U.S. in the aftermath of the 2003 regime change campaign in Iraq that it led, and the poor leadership that emerged and has been in place in Iraq since the invasion. Hosken also comprehensively details the different incarnations IS has gone through and what originally inspired it.

The roots of the ideology can be found in the writings of Sayyid Qutb in the 1940s and 1950s and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in the 1980s, who espoused a vision of a puritanical form of Islam called Salafism that endorses jihad as a way to spread Sharia law around the world. The concepts found in their books have had a significant influence amongst certain Muslims since that time, and served as the ideology that spawned Al Qaeda and their attacks on September 11, 2001.

A thuggish Jordanian, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, became a protégé and friend of al-Maqdisi and began training jihadists in Afghanistan in 1999, where he got a taste of what an Islamic state under strict Sharia law could be like. After the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan made continued operations there unfeasible, he fled to Iran, and then to north-eastern Iraq where he led the insurgency against the U.S. after Saddam Hussein was toppled. Al Qaeda at first partnered with al-Zarqawi, in order to have a presence in the fight in Iraq against the U.S.-led coalition. But soon after, even Al Qaeda found al-Zarqawi's brutal attacks against the Shia to be too excessive, which was the main reason for the subsequent split.

Al-Zarqawi set the tone for brutality and severity during his campaign of terror in Iraq where he was considered to be an emir. He was killed in 2006 at the hands of a U.S. Air Force bombing campaign in Iraq, and it had looked like the U.S. forces all but wiped out Al-Zarqawi's extremist followers by the time the U.S. pulled out its last troops from Iraq in 2011. However, in 2010, the mysterious Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi emerged as the leader of what remained of al-Zarqawi's original group – then referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq – and began significantly increasing the terror and violence. To draw a comparison between the two leaders of the IS movement, Hosken quotes Dr. Alaa Makki, an important Iraqi Sunni parliamentarian, as saying al-Zarqawi was “Windows 1 or 2” compared with the “Windows 10” proficiency of al-Baghdadi, who amassed “many fighters and demanded loyalty from all Muslims,” which Dr. Makki says was “the very obvious difference”.

Hosken also details how IS has used propaganda to glorify the idea of the caliphate in order to steadily attract followers. And while IS shuns the West, the jihadists seem to be successful in using Facebook, Snapchat and Whatsapp to spread messages that attract others that want to fight and die for the cause. In another nod to the importance of social media in this struggle, Hosken describes how the text messaging service Line was said to be penetrated by IS, which spied on local people who had it on their phones, and supposedly someone who was caught using the app to communicate with Iraqi government forces, and was beheaded.

One thing that Hosken doesn't have much new insight into is why recruits are still streaming in the IS occupied land despite the inhumanity, extreme brutality, and savagery that IS routinely carries out.

At this point, however, it seems that no one has a one-size-fits-all answer to this question. (<http://www.theatlantic.com>).

The basic explanation given by Hosken in the book and by other experts and analysts is that Islamophobia in the West has severely threatened Muslims and made them ripe for radicalization, while IS's enticing propaganda woos them to come fight for the dream of an autonomous zone where Islamic values prevail. But at least some of the recruits grew up in relative peace and prosperity in tolerant societies, so it seems hard to imagine how they could be persuaded to embrace such hatefulness and would be willing to die for the dark fanaticism that IS espouses. This is one of the enigmatic and frightening mysteries surrounding IS.

Although the Paris incident and other attacks conducted by jihadists outside of the Middle East had not yet occurred when "Empire of Fear" was written, Hosken does make it clear that no common wisdom should be relied upon when it comes to IS. "[IS] has always taken the world by surprise and few people can say with any confidence what will happen next".

Paris was specifically targeted because IS derided it as "the capital of prostitution and obscenity" so it seems that Bangkok's infamously wild nightlife could certainly put the city at risk, and these extremists tend to be careful about hiding what terror might be in store and where the group intends to create mayhem next. Anything seems possible when it comes to IS, since they do not care about innocent lives if they are kuffar.

In retrospect, my students were right and the experts were wrong about the potential danger that IS presents. The group is hell-bent



on torturing and killing anyone who does not comply with its extreme brand of Islam based on strict religious interpretations that date back centuries. Even abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi who influenced AI-Zarquawi and other jihadists, has openly decried the beheadings and immolations, although his pleas have had little effect.

It is clear that IS could strike anywhere in the world. Hosken quotes Dr. David Kilcullen, the counter-insurgency expert for the U.S. State Dept., who says that the rise of IS is largely due to a “failure of the collective imagination...to predict what might happen.”

The threat that IS presents is real, and the civilized world needs to be informed about it. Andrew Hosken is doing his part to raise awareness in *Empire of Fear: Inside the Islamic State*, which features excellent reporting along with riveting and engaging details. It is disturbing, but hard to put down.

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