

## Introduction of Joby Warrick

*By Chris Kijne*



Ladies and Gentleman, good evening,

Last week after I exercised my democratic privileges, I treated myself to a festive drink . Or two.

But it was definitely before the third that I had the following conversation in a typical Amsterdam café at a stone's throw from here:

Asks the woman: 'Are you also so terrified by ISIS?'

I said no.

She: 'But all these beheadings and all that horrible violence, doesn't that scare you to death?'

No, I said, because they're on the wrong side of history. It's a losing battle. And in any case: it's over there, not here.

She: 'But we had a beheading too. Here in Amsterdam, last year when they found that head in front of a shisha-lounge'.

I said: 'But that was a criminal gang-war, it had nothing to do with islamists'.

"No", she said, 'but they were from Morocco!'

And then I did order that third drink and I will confess to a fourth. And that's where my memory goes blank.

Because once more it became clear to me how much our democratic process and the decisions people took during that Wednesday the 15th of March were also determined by a process far away. A process that had entered its final phase exactly six years ago to the day. Because it was on the 15th of March 2011 that brave Syrians took to the streets of Dara'a and Damascus in the first protest that started the Syrian spring and would end up as the Syrian Civil War.

And with the Syrian war came ISIS. And with ISIS came the incredible cruelty and the images of that cruelty that went all over the world. And with ISIS came Charlie Hebdo, and Bataclan, and Brussels. And with ISIS and the Syrian civil war came Vladimir Putin and his bombs in addition to Assad's bombs. And with ISIS came our bombs on Syria. And with all the bombs and ISIS came the huddled masses that crossed the Balkans in the fall of 2015 on their way to paradise in Germany.

And all that, I am sure, was one determining factor in the result of our elections last week.

And not only here: two days ago I saw a survey done by Fox among Americans asking what their priorities were with regard to the Trump presidency.

One was job-creation.

Two was: defeating ISIS.

All I want to say is: we better know what we're talking about when we talk about ISIS.

So I'm very glad I was asked to stand here tonight to try and make this into an informative and fruitful evening. Because that is precisely what we are going to do tonight: talk about ISIS. Its past, its present and its future. And with a man who definitely knows what he is talking about: Joby Warrick.

Joby Warrick's Pulitzer Prize-winning book is not just a fantastic read, it's also the best informed book about the history of ISIS I've read. And for what that's worth: it is my job to read about ISIS. Among other things, *alhamdulillah*.

It's the story of a petty thug from a Jordanian backwater turning into the most feared adversary of the American troops in Iraq. It's the story of the Jordanian intelligence officers who know the man from his earliest days as a radicalising jihadi, but whom nobody seems to really listen to. It is the story of that bungled war in Iraq and the horrified intelligence specialists in the United States who see the drama unfold before their eyes without being able to do anything about it.

It is the story of another bungled process: the development of the Syrian spring into a Syrian civil war. Not in the least because the first bungling caused the Obama administration to hold back on real support for the good guys that were definitely there in the beginning. And thus it becomes the story of the heritage of that little Jordanian thug: the caliphate declared by ISIS in the east of Syria and the north of Iraq.

And that's how it became our story. And that is why we are so glad that he is here tonight, ladies and gentlemen: Joby Warrick.

Chris Kijne is a VPRO broadcaster, journalist and former board member of the John Adams Institute. He anchors for *Met Het Oog op Morgen*, the late night news-show of NOS at Radio 1 and regularly contributes to VPRO-radio's foreign desk. But his main work now is in television, making documentaries and doing interviews for both the investigative program *Tegenlicht* and the late-night interview-format *Gesprek op 2*.

