ISIS: A Major Threat to Peace and Security of Middle Eastern Countries

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Abstract: *This study looks into the rise and effects of Mostly in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East. ISIS is a terrorist group that uses illegal and violent tactics to create an Islamic state under a caliphate, posing a danger to regional peace and security. The study investigates the causes of ISIS-related conflicts, their effects on regional security and peace, and how regional rivalries contribute to the rise of terrorist organizations. This paper applies constructivism, using a theoretical and descriptive research technique, to examine the ideological underpinnings of ISIS, recruitment strategies, and the impact of societal norms. The organization's extremist view of Islam is highlighted as the historical background chronicles its origins from its founding in 1999 to its international recognition in 2014.*

Key Words: ISIS, Middle East, Radicalization, Jihad, Caliphate, Non-state armed group

Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), commonly referred to as Daesh or ISIL is a terrorist organization working in the Middle Eastern states of Iraq as well as Syria, a threat to bordered countries as well as states far from their borders. ISIS is working to take control of the Muslim countries which they say is for the protection of Islam but in reality, promoting extremism and proves to be a threat to Muslims as well as non-Muslims life and dignity. Middle is a region that includes most of the Arab countries. It consists of parts of Africa, Europe, and Asia. The Middle East region of the world is home to the ISIS hub states of Syria and Iraq. ISIS was founded with the intention of advancing Islamic law and creating an Islamic state ruled by a caliphate. To establish an Islamic state they employed violent and illegal measures. region. The regional rivalries to gain regional influence over others, sectarian fights and non-cooperation between the states let IS to spread faster. ISIS used different tactics to influence the region, surprise attacks being the common one, and used to attack when and where no one could guess and cause fear in peoplethey made people leave their houses and get control of their lands and goods (Thatcher, 2021).

Due to IS militant terrorist activities, the region was caught in fear, and terrorism got rooted here and spread to other parts of the world, especially the neighbouring countries. It transferred from the Middle East to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Now, countries around the world are fighting a long war against terrorism, supporting each other for the cause and saving the world from destruction. Amidst intense social and political conflicts within Arab nations and the emergence of creeping sectarianism, mostly

driven by the geostrategic competition between Iran, which is ruled by Shia, and Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia, ISIS poses a fresh threat to the regional security order. ISIS is a danger not just to the stability of surrounding Arab nations but also to Syria, which is engulfed in a civil war, and the Iraqi state, which was established following an invasion and occupation led by the United States in 2003. Its capacity to do so is less a result of its potency as a geopolitical actor and more of the weakness of the Arab state structure. The purpose of this study is to have a deeper comprehension of how ISIS is threatening peace in the region and to provide measures to this issue (Staff, 2019).

Research Questions:

The study involves the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for tensions due to ISIS in the region?
2. How do these tensions affect regional peace & and security?
3. How have regional rivalries added to the Growth of terrorist groups and attacks?
4. What activities and tactics of ISIS are involved?

Research Methodology:

This research is theoretical and descriptive. It uses second-hand data and information i.e. through secondary sources such as newspapers, the web, and journal articles. It involves no primary source and is an explanatory research design that explains the concept of radicalization of ISIS in the Middle Eastern region that is reshaping its politics in an aspect.

Theoretical Framework:

Here, constructivist theory explains the emergence of this non-state actor ISIS`s standpoint of implementing Islam, the Western view of their ideology, the world`s outlook of Islam, and the perception of threats posed by them. There are various approaches to applying constructivism to the Middle East and ISIS: Constructivism examines the construction of identities and how they impact behaviour. Understanding how ISIS creates identities, especially about religious, ethnic, or cultural affinities helps us better comprehend the organization's recruitment tactics and the appeal it has for particular people or groups. All of these are socially constructed with time and events as they highlight how identities, norms, and ideas shape international affairs. Besides this Constructivism takes into account how social norms affect the actions of both state and non-state actors. An analysis of the social and cultural norms prevalent in the ISIS-affected regions can shed light on the reasons behind the radicalization process and the attraction of specific individuals to the group's extreme ideologies. ISIS emphasizes the significance of ideas in the fight by looking at how the organization uses propaganda and the media to create stories and sway public opinion.

Hypothesis:

According to the report, ISIS has significantly impacted national, political, and security issues while also causing several issues that jeopardize world peace and security, regional peace and security in the Middle East, and Islamic peace and security worldwide.

Historical Background:

Islamic State (IS) or ISIS, also called Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) or "Daesh", was founded by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi a Jordanian extremist in Iraq in 1999. In the start within 5 years, it assured a bond and devotion to Al-Qaeda, and took part in the Iraqi insurgency and 2003 Iraq invasion by the US. In 2004, emerged from the local offshoot of Al-Qaeda as an independent group. In 2006, Zarqawi's successor announced the Middle East's establishment of the Islamic State Eastern state of Iraq, with Omar al-Baghdadi as its leader. It got global acknowledgment in 2014

when it made the Iraqi security forces move out, following the seizure of Mosul and the Sinjar massacre. Al-Qaeda then disowned the Daesh group of militants because they believed that some of ISIS's actions were "too extreme," Al-Qaeda declined to accept accountability for them. ISIS has shown itself to be a formidable and expanding force. They have lived up to their image as savages. They keep moving forward in the Middle East, tightening their hold on a scared and unprepared area. In 2013, the organisation changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS. ISIS was renamed the Islamic State when its leader, Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, declared the establishment of a Caliphate system in parts of Syria and Iraq later in June 2014 (Hassan, 2018).

ISIS adhered to Salafism, an extremely radical interpretation of Islam as it uses a rigorous commitment to the Qur'an and Shari'a law to build and uphold Qur'anic hegemony, which encourages violence and bloodshed. ISIS follows an apocalyptic theology, holding that Islam will soon be saved by the arrival of the Mahdi, or "guided one." ISIS has vowed to wage war on all unbelievers. That encompasses Christians, Jews, and Westerners. However, it also encompasses all other "Muslims," including Hamas, who do not swear loyalty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the new caliph. It has taken ISIS less than 18 months to become known for its savagery. They continue to be classified as a terrorist group, but they are also recognized as a skilled guerrilla force. From a military perspective, their organizing abilities have been excellent. ISIS is remarkable for an organization like ISIS, when incompetent military forces, instability, and corruption are the norm (Berti, 2015).

Middle Eastern Region:

The Middle East is a transcontinental region consisting of the eastern part of Europe and the western part of Asia. It was known as an east region in the past but in the last century, it got the name of the Middle East. The modern history of this region is full of conflicts and wars. In the previous centuries, regional and world powers tried to get control of the region due to their rich natural resources as well as their geographic location. The once peaceful region became conflicting and violent, starting from peaceful demands of democracy and freedom, and ending with civil wars around the region. The region encompasses the lands that were formerly part of the Ottoman Empire and Persia. Consequently, the region that appeared on the map of the world following the Ottoman Empire's breaking, would roughly correspond to what we usually refer to as the Middle East, along with Iran. The Near East, an earlier phrase, was once widely used. Typically, it also applied to regions that were formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire in southeast Europe, specifically the Balkan Peninsula. (2019, Rashed) Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, UAE, Bahrain, Cyprus, and Yemen are the main nations of the Middle East. Afghanistan and a few others also included occasionally, under the Greater Middle East (Oktav et al., 2018).

This concern stems from the region's strategic importance t along with the variety and importance of its historical political, social, and cultural legacies. For the people of the Middle East, the region has great religious significance. hat region over the years. It is in this region that the most revered holy sites of the three monotheistic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were first established. The strategic component of the region has been enhanced by superpower competition and sporadic wars since the mid-1900s. However, the region's overall importance is higher and is linked to its location as well as its primary resource, oil. The Islamic Renaissance and Pan-Arabism are essential components of Middle Eastern contemporary consciousness. They are complementing movements, in a way, that have given the region's diverse population a renewed feeling of Arab and Muslim identity. The Middle Eastern states' internal and external policies have been impacted as a result (Beeson & Bisley, 2016)

ISIS and Middle Eastern states:

ISIS emerged from the Middle Eastern state of Iraq, extending to the state of Syria. As it originated it affected other parts or states of the region too. The group expanded its network to different neighbouring and regional states. They started attacking and bombing several Middle Eastern states to influence them and devise their terror forcefully. They wanted to form an Islamic State with their leader to be a caliphate, to ensure all the citizens were followers of one religion (Dorj & Benam, 2022).

i.e. Islam. Due to their activities in the country about three million Syrians had left their hometown. With a total population of 22 million populations among 6.5 million people are internally displaced. Refugees mainly move to neighboring states and some move to Europe. Except for Germany, no other European state is willing to host Syrian refugees. The involvement of non-state actors in the conflict leads to sectarian hostilities as Iran and Saudi Arabia are fighting their indirect proxy and funding these non-state actors. These inter-religious tensions are another threat to regional stability (Sleiman-Haidar, 2018)

Political, social, and economic conditions in the region also contributed to the emergence of ISIS; After Saddam Hussein's dictatorship was overthrown in 2003, a power vacuum in Iraq allowed extremist organizations to flourish. In a similar vein, ISIS took advantage of the chaos caused by the ongoing conflict in Syria to establish a foothold and get resources and weaponry. ISIS effectively leveraged social media platforms to recruit fighters abroad, disseminating its ideology and drawing individuals from diverse countries. (Davison,2022). ISIS supported its activities through many means, including oil smuggling, extortion, and looting. Its ability to maintain its finances allowed it to grow its following and continue operating. Certain regions had weak or inefficient governments, which allowed ISIS to create quasi-state structures and impose its strict interpretation of Islamic law.

To counter and contain the threat posed by ISIS, the international community which included Western countries and regional powers reacted with military intervention, airstrikes, and backing for local forces. Although ISIS had subsequently lost a large amount of territory, its surviving members remained a threat to regional security(Elhudairi & Işıksal, 2022).

Role of regional rivalries in the Growth of terrorist groups:

The region has many rival states for gaining power and hold on the region. Even the major powers in the region compete politically which affects cooperation between the states, triggering the increase of jihadi extremism, in its military as well as political groups. One major rivalry is between Iranian Shias and Saudi Sunnis. The point is, that this fight is not for religion but to get religious influence. Other conflicts including Saudi-Qatar, Turk-Iran, Turk-Kurd, etc. are also fueling the wars and terrorist activities in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Across the Middle East region, the long ongoing conflicts between Shias and Sunnis over the last four decades have made the situation worse. Throughout the region. Extremism is both, increased and has triggered the already present differences even more. In Iraq, Sunni extremists headed against the Shia-led government, and in Syria, Sunni supporters fighting against the Alawite government reinforced by Shias from Lebanon and Iran. Also, in Yemen, the opposite, is Shias fighting with the Sunni government. To minimize the tensions, some policy should be devised, ensuring in favour of both sects, so no conflicts arise later in any sectarian group (COLE, 2013).

The violent terrorist attacks by non-state actors especially by IS have resulted in the displacement of millions of Syrians. Some of them are internally displaced while others are considered to be refugees. These refugees adversely affect the receiving state's military, political, and economic security, which overall affects the stability and security of the region as a whole. The claim of re-Islamization by these non-state actors leads to a division in the region between some conservatives on the one hand and modernists on the other hand and these competing ideologies result in clashes between

them which ultimately affects the stability of the region (Cordesman & Toukan, 2022).

Furthermore, through their disruptive forces, they want to transform the region that threatens the prevailing regional order. These actors also challenge the legitimacy of existing state systems. Continued terror attacks and bombings in the neighbouring countries including Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Yemen destabilize the region. IS uploaded videos of its brutal attacks which resulted in increased fear among people. (The Danger of Jihad: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Other Groups, 2017).

Tactics and Activities of ISIS:

ISIS is not as active as it was before but is still involved in military operations with other groups and battalion formations. ISIS has been using the Surprisingly, NATO forces have employed the clear-hold-build counterinsurgency technique in both Afghanistan and Iraq. ISIS has been using methods similar to those used by the Americans in their 2006 campaign against the Sunni insurgency. ISIS typically launches a surprise attack, inflicts the greatest number of deaths, and sows fear before retreating with little to no damage then bide your time till the Iraqi military and hostile residents depart the assigned area.. ISIS pursued employing foreign volunteers with no military training as suicide bombers, either driving explosives-filled trucks or going on foot while wearing suicide vests. Often more than one suicide bomber is utilised, as happened when a vehicle exploded near the headquarters of a Kurdish party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in the town of Jalawla in the disputed and heavily fought-over province of Diyala, north-east of Baghdad. ISIS currently possesses heavy machine guns, artillery, and other indirect fire capabilities. Iraq's air assets can be neutralised by ISIS by creating a surface-to-air threat to the Iraqi air force at Baghdad International Airport, Taji Base, and Balad Airbase. ISIS can also use the artillery pieces it has captured to launch medium-range direct-fire attacks against reinforced positions in downtown Baghdad. ISIS most certainly plans to attack the Green Zone and other stronghold locations with sufficient ground defence.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as ISIS or ISIL, and its allies launched an offensive against government forces in northern Iraq in June 2014. Numerous mercenaries joined up with ISIS's allies. The group founded by al-Baghdadi has a huge appeal among young foreigners, especially Western youngsters who have committed to Jihad (Kumar, 2015). In Syria, eighty percent of the foreign fighters have joined al-Baghdadi. ISIS and its allies overran numerous cities with a wave of attacks, including Mosul on June 9th, Samarra on June 5th, and Tikrit (June 11th). The Iraqi military left the areas, and on June 13th, 2014 Kurdish forces took

authority over Kirkuk, the oil centre in northern Iraq. The Iraqi government had lost control of its borders with Syria and Jordan in June 2014. From its foundation in Syria and Iraq, ISIS is expanding farther afield. On 24 September 2014, it was announced by the French government that a tourist abducted in Algeria had been slain by a group professing loyalty to ISIS. It was also reported in September 2014 that militants had crossed the border from Afghanistan. into Pakistan with banners and pamphlets encouraging people to join ISIS. After fighting in Syria, militants from Afghanistan and Pakistan have returned home to enlist more people for ISIS. Additionally, there have been claims of ISIS cells working in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. There is a strong undercurrent of sympathy for the Sunni radicals in the official Saudi news media, notwithstanding the Kingdom's determination to take military action against ISIS. (Mironova, 2016)

Impact on Peace & Security:

Conflict, poor governance, political unrest, socioeconomic disparities, and grievances are still used by ISIS and other groups to draw support, gather resources, and plan terrorist acts. This is an intolerable catastrophe including human rights, security, and humanitarian issues. Repatriation also stops foreign terrorist fighters and their families from

becoming even more radicalized and turning into violent extremists, as well as from moving around uncontrollably (Hashim, 2022).

Regional Impact:

The Islamic State's expanding threat of terrorism should worry neighbouring countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries. As ISIS continues to spread its terrorist activities throughout Syria and Iraq, millions of people are escaping to nearby countries. as well as other parts of the globe. The outcome is a large-scale migration. Increasing its operations into neighbouring Middle Eastern countries and gaining more territory is one of ISIS's objectives. Thus, as the huge Immigration occurs, some ISIS fighters enter neighbouring countries by sneaking in as refugees. By using this tactic, it will be able to establish a foothold in such nations, organize assaults, and spread its ideology and interpretation of Islam to more people, radicalizing more individuals. (Suror Shaba Polus, 2017)

If neighbouring nations do not have appropriate protocols in place to verify the identities of the migrants, they run the risk of experiencing security problems when they accept refugees from Syria and Iraq.

They are going to be the breeding ground for ISIS fighters who will come after
them. The main perception of ISIS is that it poses a direct threat to Arab nations. If Sunni Arabs continue to keep mute in the face of ISIS's terrorism pseudo-religious ugliness might soon come upon them. If ISIS expands beyond its existing territory in Iraq and Syria, Arab society will be thrown into violent conflicts, stripped of all goodness in life, and confronted with obstacles to economic progress. The governments of the Arab world are too strong, authoritarian, and biased to effectively combat ISIS (Hashim, 2022).

Global Impact:

People from several nations join ISIS in their fight as a result of their radicalization. They will expand their operations to attack other nations and boost the number of warriors they have. To battle ISIS and defeat the terrorists, a cross-section of the world has been created. The USA, Russia, the UK, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and the majority of the European countries are a few of these nations. Outside of its heartland in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State can plan, direct, or motivate its supporters to carry out attacks against its targets in about seventeen other countries. Their murderous movements pose a menace to the entire world, and they can easily conquer other European areas as well as any other country, including the United States contest international security and peace (Thatcher, 2021).

Challenges to combat ISIS:

The emergence of armed non-state groups that possess innovative methods of conflict has caused instability in the global order and jeopardized global peace and security (Al-Amiri & Hassan, 2023.

Legality of Military Intervention:

ISIS has been implicated in multiple acts of terrorism since the start of the conflict in Syria and Iraq. As a result of injuring and killing people, these attacks have crossed the line from being considered armed attacks to being considered acts of aggression against victim states. Nonetheless, in international law, force may be used in other states' territory with those states' permission, the Security Council's approval, or in self-defence, as stipulated by Article 51 of the UN charter. Individual and collective defence against ISIS is permitted in Iraq as long as it is done with the approval of the government there, which asked for outside support in the fight against ISIS. In the Syrian context, self-defense is inapplicable and strikes are not legally permissible without the approval of the Syrian government. Several legal justifications are inadmissible, including hot pursuit, ungoverned land norms, and humanitarian action (Al-Amiri & Hassan, 2023.

Violation of International Laws:

IHL forbids acts of fear and applies to all parties equally, irrespective of whether they are acting as aggressors or as defenders of themselves. Following 9/11, the US-led war on Afghanistan was deemed an international armed conflict (IAC), and international humanitarian law (IHL) was applicable. The question of whether persistent violence in different regions qualifies as armed conflict or if these organizations are sufficiently armed to be subject to international humanitarian law (IHL) has become contentious due to the proliferation of terrorism and ongoing violence. ISIS is fighting in Syria and Iraq in a non-international armed war that is controlled by Add Protocol I and the Geneva Conventions. ISIS uses its philosophy as a pillar of support for its ideology and legacy, which breaches both Islam and International Humanitarian Law from various angles. Although IHRL only applies to states and does not apply to the NSA, it is violated by its effective authority over the people and territory held by ISIS as well as its governance outside of the war zone. In addition to IHL in armed conflicts, non-state armed organizations that dominate territory are subject to customary human rights duties, particularly regarding political involvement and social and economic rights. In addition to adhering to Islamic law, ISIS is also bound by international humanitarian and human rights law. (Aridi, 2016).

Financial Stability:

With a yearly budget of $2 billion, the Islamic State is a well-funded terrorist group that mostly receives funding from taxes, ransom payments, oil sales, utilities, and mining. By 2014, ISIS was making about $150 million a month, controlling 60% of Syria's oil production capacity and 10% of Iraq's. Although the international community is vital in the fight against terrorism financing, ISIS's capabilities have outpaced these efforts. According to Christiane Duhaime, stopping the delivery phase will neutralize ISIS and its activities. The goal of UNSC resolution 2253 is to impose a framework to expose and dismantle the illicit financing of ISIS and affiliated organizations through the trafficking of artefacts, oil, and other illicit materials. States need to take action, such as closely observing funds and controlling online payment methods (Hashim, 2022).

Socio-Political Measures:

Sectarianism and investments in marginalized Sunni Muslims in Syria and Iraq have allowed ISIS to grow in strength. While political reforms can help rebuild confidence in just central governments, military action is still required to defeat ISIS.

This involves tackling the abuses of human rights committed by the Syrian regime. Stable regional countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran must also step in diplomatically and intervene. Propaganda from ISIS argues that it defends Islamic interests while opposing Western authority. An international coalition made up of Islamic states ought to be established to quell future bloodshed, defeat the area, facilitate a peaceful handover of power, and find a diplomatic solution to the Syrian civil conflict (Thatcher, 2021).

Future Prospects:

Local, regional, and global variables continue to foster radicalism. In many of the areas where ISIS and its affiliates operate, especially in Iraq and Syria, there is a sense of marginalization, injustice, rage, and a desire for vengeance. This provides the organization with the capacity and efficacy for recruiting and propaganda, in addition to knowledge of military and security operations and flexibility, allowing it to efficiently transition its strategies from one stage to the next and restructure its leadership and organizational structure.

The group understands very well that the loss signified the collapse of the caliphate in a real, concrete sense. It has, nevertheless, managed to keep the caliphate's symbolism alive among its supporters and adherents. The organization uses the transition from a physical caliphate to a virtual one as an ideological and intellectual shield for its

relationships with its numerous branches across the globe. The organization's leader continued to refer to his followers as the caliph, effectively spreading its message throughout the world. This message is being promoted by the media apparatus, indicating that the formal and public proclamation of the caliphate's collapse did not create a vacuum. (Rumman, 2020)

Even though ISIS grew and spread between 2014 and 2018, the group's propaganda has decreased, which has led to a decrease in individual and small-scale activities. The organization's reputation for violence, decapitations, and authority has diminished, and the propaganda that stoked young people's desire for power in Muslim and Arab societies has vanished. Taking advantage of current events such as the "deal of the century" and the restoration of relations between Arab governments and Israel, ISIS has redirected its attention to the Palestinian issue.

Conclusion

ISIS is a Sunni jihadist group that tried to get control over the states of Iraq and Syria, specifically but they aimed to rule Muslims all over the world. They wanted to form an Islamic State either by hook or by crook. They used force to get influence over the state of Iraq to Syria and started spreading quickly. They were part of a militant group Al-Qaeda but separated from them and started carrying out terror activities on their own. The security vacuum created in the country due to civil war led all these non-state actors to enter into conflict. They took part in Iraqi insurgency and many terrorist attacks later, around the Middle-Eastern region specifically and outside the region occasionally. Non-cooperation and sectarian fights in the region made IS grow and spread more and faster. The most common formula was to attack from where no one could think and create fear and terror of and influence over the Muslims forming their Islamic caliphate rule with their leader as the caliph of the state. Currently, they are not as active as before, but they still attack and bomb places in collaboration with other groups. As a result, the world is fighting against terrorism to get control over it and to have a peaceful environment where the lives of people are safe as it poses a severe challenge to security and stability in the region. The Middle East is a hub of diverse political systems which often creates a power vacuum that leads to the emergence of such non-state actors.

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