

Sectarianism And The Ideology Of The Islamic State (Is): Terrorism Threat And Policy Issues

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Abstract

The emergence of the Islamic State posed a serious security threat internationally following years of instability in Iraq and Syria. The core leadership of the group remains in Syria and Iraq with a bolstered network of affiliates. The apocalyptic Islamic State's ideology and its radical objective continue to be worrisome. This study examines the origins of the Islamic State grounded on contemporary terrorism and security threats posed by its dissemination of Islamic extremism in a move to create and expand its territory. A qualitative methodology was employed through a descriptive research design and informed by secondary and primary sources of data. It is revealed that a clear post-Iraq war peacebuilding strategy could have avoided strife due to sectarianism. There is a need to shut financial and economic conduits in order to effectively cut down the activities of the Islamic State, aside from the military interventions.

Keywords: - Terrorism, threat, sectarianism, ideology, Islamic State

I. Introduction

Jihadist terrorism appears to have been relegated to a lower priority due to the problems provided by the COVID-19 epidemic and the redirection of attention and resources toward great power confrontation. However, complacency can be harmful (Clarke, 2021a). Although both al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State have suffered setbacks, their offshoots and affiliates are still very much alive and well. Despite the fact that many Muslims were repulsed by the brutality of the Islamic State's reign in Syria and Iraq, jihadi doctrine nevertheless has widespread appeal in the Arab and Islamic world due to stagnant economies and deep-seated sectarian tensions. Barnes and Schmitt (2021).

Even while the overall operational tempo of jihadi groups has slowed down in recent years, some of their affiliates have become more active while others have fallen dormant. The total number of attacks by ISIS, al-Qa'eda, and its affiliates rose significantly from 2009 to 2016, then began to fall in 2017, and is now expected to level off between 2018 and 2020. (JTIC,2021). The number of lone-actor assaults in the West (that is, in North America, Europe, and Australasia) motivated by Islamic State peaked in 2017, but has since declined (JTIC,2021). There are probably two primary causes for the decrease in assaults carried out by lone actors. When the Islamic State lost its actual caliphate, among other things, it also lost the

ability to spread propaganda and direct its adherents to carry out attacks. Second, the United Nations Security Council monitoring panel stated in a July 2021 assessment that the COVID-19 pandemic had "artificially lowered" the likelihood of terrorist activity and that assaults were expected to rise up again once travel restrictions were lifted (UNSC, 2021).

The threat posed by the Islamic State (IS) is not an exaggeration both at regional and local levels. Due to the limits of counter-terrorism strategic priorities by its enemies, it may not be easy to counteract IS efforts or exploit the group's weaknesses (Byman, 2016). In the last decade and a half or more, it appears that the rise of the Islamic State exemplifies a clash pitting tradition and modernity. The Islamic State is variously known as Daesh, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but the term Islamic State (IS) has become more common even among the group itself.

Emerging apparently in the period 2013-2014 from nowhere, IS grabbed the attentiveness of audiences from the international community as a result of its acts of barbarity that were extensively publicized. This was also supported by its statehood declaration and the overturning of other state borders. The emergence of the Islamic State marked the most revolutionary change in the Middle East's geopolitics since the

implementation of the Sykes-Picot Agreement after World War I as noted by Cockburn (2014) and Burke (2015). Several questions have been prompted following the emergence of this group: What is its origin? How did it come about? What threat does it pose to the international community? Why was it possible to quickly get established? What are the prospects of its endurance? Is it conquerable? In light of these questions among others, it is imperative to understand the motivation and organization of the Islamic State and its potential to last. Also, if it is defeated how to eschew the group's re-birth (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine the terrorism, threat, sectarianism, and ideology of the Islamic State as a terrorist organization. This was predicated on the contemporary security and political challenges emanating from the diffused Islamic radicalism. According to Hove (2018), in the academic literature, the Islamic State has not been extensively studied even though it has received tangential media coverage. In the process, this study adds knowledge to studies that have attempted to examine the origins and nature of the Islamic State like Gulmohamad (2014), Byman(2016), Oosterveld and Bloem, (2017), and Hove (2018). The study expands the narrow understanding of the Islamic State's ideological disposition and sectarianism and broadens policy options of containment and counter-terrorism.

2. Background

The Islamic State gives the impression of having suddenly appeared from nowhere (Anonymous, 2015). Given that the organization's emergence was non-linear, what is evident according to Oosterveld and Bloem (2017) is that, IS is a clear-cut product of its own time, circumstances, and geography. It emerged from the tremors of the Iraq war which raged from (2003 to 2011), the Arab uprisings which started in 2010, and Syria's civil war in 2011. More important is that IS is a result of wider Islamisation of global tendencies that emphasize the hostilities between modernity and religiosity, this being worsened by increased Islamic aggressiveness. The rise of the Islamic State is best understood ostensibly through the historical and regional context. The ideology of the Islamic State is apparently premised on the obscurity of doctrines originating from the genesis of Islam which came to terms with the contemporary world about 200 years ago. From the First World War when Napoleon invaded Egypt, rulers and thinkers of the Middle East pursued the need to adapt Islam to the modern world

(Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). Instead of disallowing progressive ideas from the West, Islam was preserved on the pretext that it was indeed society's cornerstone, more so in the era of secularism. Such thinking was known as the Arab renaissance or the Nahda (Hourani, 1962). But, the position of the Western countries during the First World War and immediately after, was a big disappointment to the leaders of the Arabs who had been promised self-determination which was dishonoured (Wright, 2016). After this colossal betrayal of the Arab cause, the standing of the Western world will invariably suffer from the consequences in a number of ways. Most Muslims had to conclude that trusting the West together with its values had to cease and only seek to renew Islamic customs for guiding the Arab world.

Informed by this dynamic, three occurrences impacted and added to the rise of contemporary Islamic aggressiveness. First was the surge of oil around the 1970s enabling formerly poor desert countries to assume lifestyles that were unacceptable to Islamists. This further involved Western countries in the affairs of the Middle East (Burke, 2015). The second was Iran's revolution of 1979 which proved that establishing a state based on the teachings of Islam was possible (Smith, 2015). Third, ten years later saw a ground-breaking event when the then Soviet Union occupied and subsequently had to withdraw from Afghanistan. This became the Islamicist origin of militancy (Rey & Al Rachid, 2016).

In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, the US government launched military operations against Al Qaeda assumed to have orchestrated the attacks from Iraq and Afghanistan. Although in 2003 during the US invasion of Iraq Al Qaeda was unavailable at that time, the following chaotic years became fertile ground for extending its influence in Iraq and elsewhere (Chilcot-Report, n.d). The consequent rise of IS was occasioned by two ill-fated decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) namely; the dissolution of the Iraqi army and the initiation of the Iraq regime de-Baathification. These were costly decisions that seeded sectarian conflicts in Iraq in the period 2006-2007 pitting Shia against the Sunnis. The Sunni population was almost completely affected by this CPA decision. The stand-off which emerged between Shia and Sunnis evidently favoured the Al Qaeda group in Iraq which transformed later into the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). A number of Sunni communities of Iraq also started supporting the ISI after 2010. ISI was an affiliate of Al Qaeda and a forerunner of the

Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). According to Burke (2015), this was a result of methodical marginalization; systematized discrimination, and many unfulfilled governmental promises in Baghdad.

With respect to the escalation of the Syrian and Iraq instability, the powers from the West were quite aware of the impending danger. In 2012 a Pentagon report anticipated the potential rise of IS as an organization with America allegedly interested in that development (Hugh, 2015). However, regardless of the likelihood that the West was at least unintentionally drawn into the formation of IS, there could have been no malign intention (Hugh, 2015). Still, it is generally agreed that if Iraq was not invaded in 2003 and in the aftermath, IS could have not been in existence.

In 2014, pundits and politicians correspondingly seem to have had some shock as the Islamic State occupied large tracts of Iraq. This punctuated the ability of the Islamic State with high publicity of decapitations, organized sexual enslavement, massive executions of the religious minorities, and related brutalities (Byman, 2016). The ostensible success in the fightback led by the US at the penultimate end of the decade, however, made the US believe that IS was gone and that it was no longer a matter of priority (Blair, 2009). This stance of neglect remained after the civil war erupted in Syria where the group recreated itself as it became actively involved in Iraq again.

Since then, the Islamic State has grown from strength to strength into an international organization based in Syria and Iraq, with provincial groups in charge of territories in the world of Muslims. In the West, the Islamic State has since claimed to have supporters in thousands. It triumphed more than what Al Qaeda could have done. When the IS advanced its battlefield and increased its atrocities, it attracted global attention, and the US directed its priority to it again. Concerns about the group were elevated in the wake of the Paris attacks in November 2015 when 130 people got killed and the deaths of 14 people witnessed in California at San Bernadino, around December 2015.

The use of intimidation, mass murder, brutality, and violence by the Islamic State is based on the belief that excessive violence is the instrument at its disposal to foment chaos, purify societies and break the Westphalian states. The ideology behind the activities is chaos creation then followed by a righteous and just Islamic administration. The

fundamental use of violence would be a precursor to the imposition and introduction of Sharia law (Jones & Smith, 2015; Hassan, 2015; Reardon, 2015). To achieve its objective and as implied in its name the Islamic group clearly seeks to establish a state which is purely Islamic and to which all Muslims worldwide could relocate to. The creation of an Islamic State spanning Iraq and Syria has given IS the impetus to enhance territorial expansion through its proxies across the Islamic world and beyond. Meanwhile, the group's adherents have sought to ride on the seemingly successful wave of IS.

The Islamic State initiated plans for the deployment of fighters into countries of the West to attack the 'far enemy' as referred to by Al Qaeda (Lister, 2016) and to use any available means (al-Shami, 2014). Despite significant losses suffered on the ground, the group's conception of a caliphate continued to be robust on a level that is virtual. Therefore, IS may continue drawing supporters who have the potential to eventually fight for its total comeback (Votel, Bembenek, Hans, Mouton & Spencer, 2017; Gambhir, 2016; winter, 2015).

3. Compelling case

Pundits and politicians regularly portray the Islamic State as an organization that is new. Importantly, its basic character is less understood, with the terrorist tag being the general description. Byman (2016) believes that the word terrorist is a misnomer with reference to the Islamic State. Despite their reciprocal hostility and different approaches, the Islamic State is usually identified with Al Qaeda. The group is also portrayed inaccurately as a fanatic, in spite of its several strategies and decisions which are realistic or rational. With this misperception, it may not be surprising why policymakers have no deep understanding of the group's true weaknesses and strengths. As a result, some less informed assessments may have been made about possible or real threats posed by the group.

The Islamic State has long been occupying large swaths of areas in the North and West of Iraq as well as in the Eastern and Central parts of Syria. In the period 2014-2018, the IS suffered a defeat losing the swaths seized from 2013 to 2017 together with many of its recruits. The losses were a result of a combined operation by a coalition of international and local military forces led by the US forces. However, a recent assessment by US officials revealed that the Islamic State remains

strategically able to reconstruct and enable the caliphate to re-emerge, probably with increased capability than before (Robertson cited in Seldin, 2018). The group is actively conducting campaigns of insurgency in Syria and Iraq and continues to be a security threat in these areas and beyond (Coats, 2018 cited in Blanchard & Humud, 2018). It is estimated that about 30 000 former and current personnel of the Islamic State could still be present in some parts of Iraq and Syria (DD, 2018). Almost the same assessment and approximations have been made by UN reports (UN, 2018). By August 2018, officials from coalitions considered few IS fighters to have been fighting from this broader population. They suggest that the support base could actually be broader because other supporters are not openly doing so for reasons that are strategic and self-preservation (CJTF-OIR, 2018). As a result of a study, it was revealed that although there has been a decrease in successful IS attacks in North America and Europe in 2018, the attempted number of attacks in Europe has not changed (NYT, 2018). The hostility between the US and Syria is likely to continue while the thawing of the US-Iraq relations is still indeterminate amid relentless negotiation efforts. In February 2018, the US intelligence assessment of the Islamic State reveals that the group will continue to pose a threat of terrorism to the interests of the US, its allies, and the whole world (Coats, 2018 cited in Blanchard & Humud, 2018).

4.0 Literature review

This section includes; theoretical underpinning, the roots of the Islamic State, the use and interpretation of Islam by the Islamic State, sectarianism, and terrorism threat.

4.1 Theoretical underpinning

A number of theories have attempted to describe the creation of modern and ancient states. While this paper does not seek to explore theories explaining the evolution of the Islamic State it is important to mention theories for state formation. It is most likely that the Islamic State employed many of such theories of state development especially: media, war, ideology, voluntary, and conquest theories. It is noted that arguments and counter-arguments have been traded by different experts and scholars over the origins of states and patterns or paths of their growth (Hove, 2018). However, there is an agreement by theorists on the need to understand the formation of a state predicated on the relations between states and society. Hadra (2015) argues that disagreement

among scholars is whether the development of a state is a consequence primarily of external or internal affairs. It seems that the Islamic State's evolution and development were direct influence by among others; ideology, global media, conquest, and warfare theories with an interplay of both external and internal affairs.

4.2 The roots of the Islamic State

In as much as Al Qaeda is believed to have originated from the reaction to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, the Islamic State may have arguably originated from the military involvement of the US in 2003 (Byman, 2016). As an appointee of US President Bush, Paul Bremer's two major decisions were instrumental to the increased instability of Iraq. First, he dissolved the army of Iraq and dismissed all known Baath party members from the public service system. Over 100 000 Baathists became unemployed and then beefed up skilled personnel for the insurrection (Stern & Bergen, 2015). The second occasion was the civil war that erupted in 2011 in Syria. Whereas the sectarianism between Shiites and Sunnis was significant for the recovery in Iraq of the Islamic State, the context of Syria was significant for the expansionary activities of al-Baghdadi. The porosity of the Syria-Iraq border permitted jihadists to easily get into the territory of Iraq. Upon their return from Iraq back into Syria, the group of Jihadists further destabilized the country. In this situation, the Islamic State of Iraq seized an opportunity to join the conflict through the Jabat al-Nursa a group created early in 2012 (Gomes & Mitri, 2018).

The 2010-2011 Arab uprisings also propelled IS in Iraq to pervade Syria and exploited an existing cleavage between the majority Sunni in Syria and the minority group of the Shia Alawites that had been in power from the 1970s led by the family of al-Assad. The ascendancy of the IS in Syria was partially President Bashar al-Assad's divisive strategy among his foes. For Al-Assad, the conflict which was incipient in the country had to be against his government and the Islamic radicals. This scenario would present the best chances of survival to him (Reuter, 2015). The rise of the Islamic State was also important in supporting rebels in Syria which inadvertently ended up being in the wrong basket. When the civil war in Syria started, Western allies had to quickly impose economic sanctions on al-Assad's administration as well as its Middle East partners particularly Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. However, Borger and Mahmood (2013) observe that when the

European Union lifted an embargo on oil, Al Qaeda and Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) benefited. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi who led the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria from April 2013 had to increase his power and control in the Iraq-Syria border areas on both sides. Come 29 June 2014, he had the audacity to declare the Islamic State as a global caliphate. He also restored an institution abolished in 1924 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk of Turkey.

IS initially executed a swift sweep across the territory taking Mosul almost with no fight on the 10th of June 2014. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 2015) had to proclaim IS hardly one and a half years later, as an unparalleled global security threat. According to Stansfield (2016) the fact that IS got traction when the region experienced upheavals of a socio-political nature was not a mere coincidence. But, the strategy of survival has also been replete with inherent self-destruction weaknesses. For instance, its integral strategy hinges on executing a merciless and rigid ideological methodology meant to create a caliphate that is lasting or permanent. The original focus was on a nearby enemy and then one further away. The IS leader, al-Baghdadi, considered a caliphate as having a magnetic effect hence his persistent quest to overturn the regional existent state system (Doornbos & Moussa, 2016; Fishman, 2016). Paradoxically, the Islamic State's bid to establish its own state by abominating the Westphalian system has been trapped by several characteristics of the West's statecraft.

4.3 South Asia

With the recent collapse of the Afghan government and the Taliban's strengthening control on major towns and huge swaths of the nation, Afghanistan has the potential to once more be a target for foreign terrorist fighters (Isikoff & Winter, 2021). From Gaza to Idlib, jihadi groups all over the world have welcomed the Taliban's win, indicating that this is an issue that has permeated worldwide and has the potential to accelerate the global jihad. "many al-Qaeda sympathisers published a letter from a jihadist calling [the] Taliban win a watershed event analogous to 9/11," writes one observer. "[T]his occasion vindicates the concept that 'what was taken by force can only be restored by force (GCT, 2022) .

There would be tremendous consequences for international security if Afghanistan once again became a significant international base for foreign terrorist fighters. Since the Islamic State's ascent in 2014, Western nations have devoted considerable

resources to stopping their people from migrating to conflict areas to join terrorist organisations (Clarke, 2021a). A similar exodus of Europeans to Afghanistan is unlikely due to the laws and policies enacted over the last seven years, albeit the problem of "frustrated" foreign jihadists, or those who are prohibited from leaving but who then seek to conduct attacks at home, will remain a critical concern for decision makers and security agencies (Byman, 2017)

4.3 Sub-Saharan Africa

As stated in a recent UN report, "the most striking development" of the first half of 2021 "was the emergence of Africa as the region most affected by terrorism, and in which the largest numbers of casualties [were] inflicted [by jihadi terror groups] (UNSC, 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where things are getting worse at an alarming rate. Jihadists are expanding their territory from Mali to Mozambique, taking advantage of the region's porous borders, weak security forces, and ethnic and tribal tensions. Inadequate government is just one of many enduring problems that helped foster the expansion of violent jihadist groups. Particularly, the Islamic State has made expansion in sub-Saharan Africa a top priority, focusing more attention, resources, and strategy on the region than it did before (Warner, Farrarel, Nsaibia, & Cunnings, 2016). The outcomes justify further investment in African subsidiaries, as evidenced by the results. ISCAP in Mozambique took control of the city of Mocimboa de Praia in the province of Cabo Delgado in August 2020, catapulting the group to prominence and paving the way for subsequent attacks. In March of 2021, seven months later, ISCAP led an assault on the northern Mozambican town of Palma, seizing territory for four days, killing dozens, and beheading some of the victims. The attackers are members of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al Jamma'ah (ASWJ), one of the two factions that make up ISCAP. ISCAP has a second arm that is made up of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the DRC. ISCAP's DRC affiliate claimed responsibility for the first suicide bombing in the country in late June 2021, sparking concerns of a growing insurgency adopting Islamic State-style tactics and strategy.

Affiliates of al-Qa'ida have shown remarkable resilience, honing their operational and organisational capabilities such as recruitment, propaganda, and targeting (Clarke, 2021a). This includes JNIM in the Maghreb and al-Shabaab in Somalia and East Africa. Both al-Qa'ida and

Islamic State militants have tried to seize control of gold mines in the Sahel in order to fund their activities and organizations. If the United States and its allies, including France, continue to reduce their presence across Africa, it could create security vacuums that various jihadist groups will rush to fill. According to Schmitt and Savage (2021), the Biden administration is considering a Pentagon proposal to send dozens of Special Forces trainers back to Somalia in response to the rising security threat there. This would reverse a policy decision made by the Trump administration in January 2021.

Following its initial foray into cross-border attacks in 2010 during the World Cup in Uganda, al-Shabaab continues to pose a threat in Somalia and the surrounding region. There have been a number of high-profile terrorist attacks in Kenya that are part of al-Shabaab's regional strategy. The Westgate Mall in Nairobi was the target of a complex attack in September 2013, and a university in Garissa, Kenya, was the target of a coordinated attack in April 2015. These assaults hinted at al-Shabaab's development into a regional powerhouse with global reach. In January of this year, al-Shabaab launched spectacular attacks against a hotel and office building in Nairobi, Kenya, killing 21 people and injuring 28 more during an overnight siege. The resurgence of al-Shabaab was first made clear when the group launched a series of attacks in Mogadishu and northern Kenya over the course of two weeks at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. In early January 2020, three Americans were killed when al-Shabaab attacked the Kenyan military base Manda Bay, where they were stationed.

Perhaps Al-Shabaab is looking further afield than East Africa. The terrorist group al-Shabaab successfully recruited a number of Somali American youth between 2007 and 2010, including one who went on to become a suicide bomber. A Kenyan al-Shabaab member was arrested in the Philippines in 2019 after he was instrumental in foiling a terrorist attack. The plot involved a hijacking of an aeroplane in the United States with the intention of crashing it into a building, similar to the attacks on September 11, 2001. As indicated by the most recent U.N. monitoring team report, al-Shabaab has man-portable air defence weapons (MANPADs) in its arsenal, has enhanced its use of drones, and maintains both the intent and capacity to commit attacks against aircraft and civil aviation facilities (UNSC, 2021). In 2016, al-Shabaab detonated a bomb packed inside of a laptop, ripping a hole in a Somali passenger flight (Kriel

& Cruickshank, 2016). Even though al-Shabaab holds sway over most of Somalia, the Islamic State still has a presence there, particularly in Puntland. The Al Karrar office, which serves as a link between ISCAP in Mozambique and the Islamic State in Somalia, is another reason why the Islamic State's presence in the country is useful.

On the other side of Africa, the danger is equally severe. French efforts to combat terrorism in the region were complicated by a second coup in Mali at the end of May 2021. French President Emmanuel Macron declared the withdrawal of all 5,100 French troops from the African countries of Chad, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso as part of Operation Barkhane the following month. Although it is anticipated that a more international force will replace the departing force, growing regional anxiety suggests that even this replacement may fall short (Clarke, 2021a). If dysfunctional governance and regional instability continue to be the norm, jihadis will take advantage of these opportunities for their own benefit, regardless of the size of Western counterterrorism forces on the ground. Each of ISGS, eISWAP, and JNIM has shown an impressive propensity to take advantage of recent political developments across the Sahel. Countries like Togo, Benin, Ghana, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire (Campbell, 2021) and Burkina Faso are feeling the effects of or are at risk of jihadi activity as it spreads throughout the region. As of July 2021, seven of the top 10 countries affected by Islamic State and al-Qa'ida attacks were in sub-Saharan Africa: Somalia (95 attacks), Nigeria (65 attacks), Cameroon (30 attacks), Mozambique (29 attacks), Niger (22 attacks), Mali (19 attacks), and Kenya. 64 It's still a risky situation, what with the shifting Western counterterrorism strategy and the uptick in jihadi-driven violence in the region. JTIC, 2021).

4.4 Middle East

The recent shift by jihadists toward localisation is one of the most crucial advances in defeating transnational terrorist groups (Clarke, 2021a). Most notably, al-Qa'ida has encouraged its affiliates to try to blend in with regional social movements. Successful branches of Al Qaeda, AQAP and AQIM, have established themselves in Yemen and North Africa (Horton, 2017). Syria's branch of al-Qa'ida became sufficiently "local" that it severed ties with its parent organisation. Lister (2020) notes that the current iteration of al-Qa'ida has a far flatter organisational structure than in the past, consisting of "a loosely networked movement, comprising likeminded but regionally

separate cells, each pursuing local agendas." Over time, senior al-Qa'ida members have ceded power to the organization's branches and affiliates. This is shown in the latter's ability to choose its own targets and craft its own propaganda in response to local grievances rather than calling for a global jihad (Mendelsohn & Clarke, 2021)

4.5 Future Islamic terror and technology

Terrorists, relentless in their aim of inflicting psychological fear on civilian populations, would undoubtedly seek out new technology and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ingeniously create newer weapons or ways to murder (Clarke, 2021a). Both goals were included in an April 2020 conspiracy that was foiled in Germany. The main Islamic State cell in Tajikistan reportedly investigated the feasibility of employing toxic artillery shells and drones to drop weapons (Soliev, 2021). The counterterrorism community should anticipate an increase in the number of violent non-state actors attempting to harness these technologies as the barriers to entry for access to newly emergent and emerging technology, particularly sophisticated systems, continue to be dropped. It has never been possible for individuals or small groups to have access to "the degree of systems integration and command-and-control that modern technologies are giving," as noted by Cronin (2021: 267).

Terrorist organisations have a long history of utilising cutting-edge technologies in ways that effectively multiply their own resources (Gartenstein-Ross, Clarke & Shear, 2020). In an attack on a synagogue in Halle, Germany, during Yom Kippur in October 2019, a far-right extremist utilised handmade rifles with 3D-printed components (Hoffman & Ware, 2019). Terrorists saw this and may try to replicate it shortly. In 2018, former U.S. national security officer Mary McCord issued a warning that "would-be terrorists may build undetectable and untraceable firearms to employ against Americans here in the homeland" due to the widespread availability of blueprints for printing plastic guns. This is according to research (McCord, 2018). Explosives made using 3D printers are anticipated to rise in popularity alongside guns (Kirschke-Schwartz & Clarke, 2021).

It's possible that in the future, more technically advanced terrorist groups, militants, and militias will use AI and autonomous technologies to bolster their capabilities. Soon, terrorists could use AI to deploy swarms of drones or modify a self-driving

car into a bomb (Gartenstein-Ross, 2018). Terrorists are likely to be attracted to the decreasing cost, increased anonymity, and increased efficacy of AI-powered, autonomous weapons as their technology advances and their use becomes more common (Ware, 2019). Many of the tools terrorists would need to carry out their genocidal plots are already in the hands of the public (Scharre, 2018). Certainly, as lethal autonomous weapons become more accessible, terrorist organisations and small rogue states stand to gain the most; many governments already possess advanced conventional capabilities, but new weapons would shrink the asymmetry gap between states and non-state actors in some circumstances (Tegmark, 2017). Current and future weapons that incorporate AI will increase the number of attackers, the rate at which attacks can be launched, and the total number of feasible targets (Brundage et al, 2018).

4.3 Islam- use and interpretation by IS

The declaration of the caliphate and state creation is regarded highly because of its Islamic representational meaning. Jackson (2015) opines that the restoration of the caliphate office on its own is anything but unchallenged in the world of Islam. First, most Muslims are opposed to a situation whereby someone appoints oneself into office. Second, the lineage of al-Baghdadi is in dispute. His averment to have originated from the Quraysh tribe of Prophet Muhammad has been contested (Burke, 2015). Also, the claims by the Islamic State to be a symbol of Islam are often questioned. The IS has significantly claimed to be Islamic and to religiously apply Sharia law. Yet, narrowly interpreting Islam and its law by the Islamic State has a long history.

One significant strand of Islam is Wahhabism. This is an extremist sect of the 18th century couched in Salafism which was originated by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). Wahhabism emphasizes the necessity of purifying Islam from all forms of religious improvement and then returning to the original Salafism. This implies the first three Muslim generations (Crooke, 2009). Although there is no isolated ideology for the Islamic State per se, some of the early philosophies were provided in a guidebook entitled 'The Management of Savagery' issued in 2003, authored by Abu Bakr Naji. As noted by Atran (2016) cited in Oosterveld and Bloem (2017, p. 9) the guidebook argues that;

“Acts of daring sacrificial violence—whether by individuals or small groups—can be used to undermine faith in the ability of governments in the West and the Middle East to provide security for their peoples and to polarize Muslim and non-Muslims (...).”

In light of the group’s historical views of extremism, Hassan (2015) concludes that it is sensible to understand the group’s ideology in order to defeat it. In practice, it is more advantageous to examine how the ideology is applied instead of understanding the ideological content. At any rate, one expert from the Middle East asserts that “ideology is not the group’s primary purpose; it is a tool to acquire power and money. The group (...) continuously interprets Sharia in ways that justify its actions” (Khatib, 2015, online). More often than not, in politics what is done by people is indicative more of their intentions than what is said. In that respect, the Islamic State is no different.

4.4 Sectarianism

A key jihadist driver which is all-inclusive and popular is sectarianism. As noted by Lister (2017) this has been intensified to mobilize people in a struggle for power between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While it is not the main decisive competition factor for the two countries, the two states have used it in the mobilization of militia and popular support in the region during civil strife. The dichotomy of Sunni against Shiite has been employed by various governments right from Iraq to Syria and from Syria to Yemen in driving and shaping conflict. Such a destabilizing and costly game has been played by governments in the region propelling the Islamic State and Al Qaeda into substantial growth. The two groups have had their thrust in the Middle East, particularly hotspots of conflict like Iraq, Yemen, and Syria as a sectarian grand challenge in the Islamic world for primacy. The greatest beneficiaries of conflicts led by sectarianism are the extremist groups, hence jihadists are obliged to support and sustain such conflicts. They will do this in the furtherance of their gains and narrative (Lister, 2017). It may not be easy to tackle the narrative of sectarianism as a force behind rivalries in the region due to its historic nature.

Similar to Al Qaeda, the Islamic State was influenced considerably by the teachings of Wahhabism (McCants, 2015). Ideologically, the main difference occurring between the two was possibly the apocalyptic inclination taken by the

Islamic State. In the view of McCants (2015), most members of the Islamic State subscribe to the Mahdi idea. This is a prophetic personage that will direct and lead Muslims into a fight against all the infidels. It is concerned with the purification of Islam such that only the chosen few will decide who should be excluded from their community and those outsiders threatening their community. Moreover, Baghdadi who is an Islamic study graduate from the University of Baghdad, and a former employee in Fallujah and Baghdad as an Imam, believes he is a direct heir to Prophet Muhammad’s throne. This would provide him with more legitimacy to interpret the teachings of Muslims.

This world outlook has some implications that are relevant to how the caliphate defines its enemies. On its list of enemies, the Islamic State considers first the elimination of its closest foes like the Kurds and Shiites. This idea is drawn from Zarqawi’s conviction of having a strong base in the Middle East (Napoleon, 2016). After a strong territorial base, the next objective as noted by Stern and Bergen (2015), is the creation of a caliphate that is transnational. This requires a good starting point which is local. As expected, European countries and the US constitute the target list that includes the Persian Gulf apostate kingdoms, the Shiite regimes of Iran and Iraq, and the Alawite government of Syria. Informed by this reasoning, the activities and resources of the Islamic State are primarily committed to these regional and local arenas. This has been aptly described by Zarqawi stating that “the road to Palestine passes through Amman” (Warrick, 2015, 65).

Central to the ideology of the Islamic State is an attempt to strengthen the current state by monopolizing brutality, proselytization, violence, service provision, and then expanding the state (Byman, 2016). The foreign policy is one of radicalism, aggression and sounding an alarm to the neighbourhood. This is what informs the group’s terrorism agenda. However, it is not all that it does as far as terrorism is concerned which supports state power when rivals are intimidated or religious conflict is fomented. In the group’s endeavours, fighters who are foreign nationals play a very important role.

Hove (2018) notes that the Islamic State is seen as rooted in Salafist jihadism which Salafism is a radical politico-religious player in Islam seeking to bring back the golden period when Islam dawned. Apart from being very radical the faith of the Islamic State is founded on the quest to punish

rulers and governments that resist its ideological disposition (Gulmohamad, 2014). What is more extreme is how Islamic law is interpreted as the foundation that governs the international caliphate of Islam envisioned to come. It is anticipated to represent; the golden epoch of Islam sculpted from the original caliphs that came after the death of Muhammad the Prophet. Therefore, the ideology of Salafism holds that a jihad must be conducted against both external and internal enemies and that the duty to do it resides in each Muslim. In fact, al Baghdadi declared in his inaugural speech that Ramadan will be a month to conduct the Jihad. In this month the Prophet directed the armies to fight God's enemies, also a month when he would pursue the Jihad against polytheists and urged his followers to pay homage to Allah.

Al Qaeda and related global jihad groups also derive their motivation from Salafist jihadism though there are variations. The differences stem from the Salafi philosophy adopted by the Islamic State which is opposed to the diversity of theology (Holmquist, 2015). For Al Qaeda, enemy number one for Muslims is the Westerners, particularly the US and Israel. The Islamic State sees these enemies as secondary targets because the real and primary enemies are the regimes that are apostate and infidels among the Muslim people (Gerges, 2014). Based on this sectarian background, the short to long-term goal of the Islamic State is to create a caliphate from the debris of states created in the Middle East post-World War I.

4.5 Terrorism threat

The Islamic State was created from chaos and it continues this chaos because this gives it a very good opportunity to expand and persist. The main goal of the Islamic State is to grow the caliphate across the Muslim community and fight and conquer the apocalyptic battle directed at the West. Its major strategy pivots on three focus areas; the Muslim world, regional centres of power and the non-Muslim community (Lister, 2014). Based on these focus areas the Islamic State fuels local strife and hopes to broadly overturn them into a war of sectarianism. The prevailing situation in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and other countries where IS operates is chaotic and disorderly. This enables the group's prolonged existence, even though it could lose traction in Iraq and Syria (Lewis, 2016).

The Islamic State does have ideological contenders; confronting the Muslim Brotherhood, contesting Al-Qaeda, and challenging the Taliban

(Lewis, 2016). This does not imply an unwillingness to cooperate with those whose agenda is different (Fromson & Simon, 2015). In the non-Muslim community, the strategy is first, to create a rift in the European countries and then opportunities for implanting itself in their midst. Second, weaken Russia and the West by compelling them to escalate defensive mechanisms. And last, to incite conflict and discord among the Western countries by fostering discord and conflict among them (Lewis, 2016).

5. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed through a descriptive research design and informed by secondary and primary sources of data. Data obtained from primary sources included speeches, videos, and audio messages about the Islamic State on YouTube. Data obtained from secondary sources included library books, journal articles, research reports, the internet, and mass and print media reports. Document and content analysis of data helped to elicit underlying issues of sectarianism, and the Islamic ideology and to inform policy implications for security threats and counter-terrorism.

6. Main findings and discussion

From 2017 to 2018, although the US and its allies effectively liberated most of the areas previously held by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the leadership of the group has remained at large as its fighters seem to be developing into a force of insurgency. It is still a challenge to ensure stability in the areas that have been recovered. Its affiliates dotted internationally have continued operating and attempting attacks elsewhere and in Europe.

Had it not been for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Islamic State could have not been conceived, especially if a clear strategy to manage a post-war situation had been put in place. This strategy could have eschewed the sectarian conflict that ensued. The period dating back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire when the West was involved in the region positioned the group as an Islamic saviour in the wake of secular and corrupt regimes. The West has been reproached for being instrumental in the introduction of non-Islamic ideas to the Muslim community.

The seething sectarianism which emerged first in Iraq and then in Syria weighed indirectly to the emergence of various terrorist groups. It is unthinkable how groups like the Islamic State

could have emerged in the absence of sectarianism. The choice by the locals to join the group was not only driven fundamentally by ideological differences. Many years of discrimination and suppression in Iraq and Syria prompted the Sunnis to side with the Islamic State as a better alternative despite the existentialist ideology and systemic violence identified with the group.

The Islamic State has thrived in the absence of any state in the region and beyond, with an ability to exterminate the group completely. This could be attributed to the reason that IS does not have identifiable physical boundaries or resources where it can be easily located. Besides that, there has been no agreement on the best military strategy by both international and regional powers to decisively deal with the terrorist group. However, the caliphate can easily be broken through concerted efforts. Even though it can be argued that the Islamic State got the Gulf regional ideological inspiration, there is not much evidence is available to substantiate a significant financial backing for keeping it buoyant. The group's expansion in terms of affiliates does not necessarily portray its strength because one that emerged in Libya was meant to be a fallback platform in the event of a fold by the Middle East caliphate. Had it not been for the capability of many Baathists in the governance of the caliphate and military management, it is less likely that the Islamic State could have thrived as a geographical movement.

While the group has given its supporters an impression of what a caliphate of the jihadist looks like and demonstrated the possibility of one existing, the loss of territories is a challenge for a movement claiming to be under God's protection. On top of that, the Islamic State's credibility has been lost because of its brutality in governance, but it retains its popularity with young jihadists.

The US under Trump has moved from where Obama left in an attempt to eliminate IS and contain security threats in Iraq and Syria. This has not stopped the group's attacks, while its leaders are on the loose and its affiliates remain active elsewhere. Assessments by the US intelligence which are not classified take note of the gains made against the Islamic State and warn of impending instability challenges. These include the possibility of continued terrorist and insurgent threats and foreign fighters flowing out from Syria and Iraq. As the IS has lost ground since 2014, policymakers and observers have discussed frequently the challenges concerned with the reconstruction and governance of areas that have

been recovered. The US has expressed its wish to have the gains made to date consolidated and eschew the beginning of further conflicts. However, a terrorist campaign by the group has since started in Iraq and Syria, and Iraq. The US administration estimates that huge sums of money will be required to meet the costs of reconstruction in areas that have been liberated. It also suggests that a myriad of complex economic, social, and political challenges may arise from the remnants of the Islamic State. Such trepidations are reiterated in the wider policy debate about the outlook for a resurgence by the Islamic State, even when it does not hold any territory.

7. Policy issues for consideration

Defeating the Islamic State caliphate does not equate to the defeat of the group or its ideology, which continues to have influence in the Middle East. Dealing with the group militarily is good but not adequate on its own. There is a need to sever financial and economic channels to effectively incapacitate the IS. In the possibility of the group's complete defeat, the jihadists can easily switch their allegiance while some small pockets can continue and easily resurface possibly at a later stage in a new shape and form. Eradication of the Islamic State for the long term and its ideology calls for regional engagement which is positive based on commitment, credibility, respect, and trust. Central to this eradication is the need to address sources of the outstanding grievances while providing people with prospects of building them a brighter future.

The system of the Islamic State has the potential for more resilience than may have been considered. Although theoretically, the group could be incompatible with expectations of co-existing with the Muslim community, patriotism has been deeply rooted for the communities to wither away. When the Islamic State faces imminent decline, this could prompt an intensification of attacks directed at the US and its allies under the guise that they would have been complicit. Currently, the level of effective attacks is minimal, although it is not clear how many attempts failed. There will also be an influx of jihadists getting into Europe. When rebuilding Iraq and Syria, the establishment of governance structures that are sustainable is a prerequisite but ideological and sectarianism issues should be factored into the equation. This is critical for protecting the rights of the minorities and for the regional balance of geo-politics.

8. Conclusions

The Islamic State is a Sunni Islamist and international terrorist group that triggered insecurity and instability in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Its destructive attacks in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa courted attention internationally. The group shows pedigrees of an extremist organization whose emergence and growth have been a security threat to the Middle East and the international community. It is not only a terrorist group but a club of military and politics. The IS is predicated on a radical Islam version which is its political ideology seeking to propagate such a view through might on both non-Muslims and Muslims. The Islamic State has been in control of large swaths of Syria and Iraq from 2014 up until 2017 and received support from affiliate groups from other countries. Military operations against the Islamic State in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan continue with affiliates being monitored and occasionally attacked. But the political crises and conflicts complicate attempts to permanently eliminate the security threats which the group poses. The military operations by the international community could effectively reduce the fighters of the Islamic State, but the underlying issues of ideology and sectarianism among others if unmet will continue to leverage the group.

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