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The Rise of ISIS

Introduction

About four years ago, ISIS or the Islamic State was not in existence. Currently, it controls vast amounts of land in both Syria and Iraq. It has shown its handiwork daily on YouTube or Twitter. The group has repeatedly shown that it is bigger than a transnational terrorist group. Smith states that it has proved that it is an organization with a complicated command, logistical capabilities, control, and propaganda. It has also proven its potential to take over and administers important territory at the center of the Middle East. However, as the word leaders seek to understand how to react to the ISIS menace, they should first decipher the causes of its rise. The essay will seek to analyze the international, national, and individual factors that led to the rise of ISIS.

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International Analysis of the Conflict

The most obvious international cause was the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003. The invasion sparked an outburst of a sectarian civil war that created favorable conditions for the flourishing of the then Al-Qaeda. If the US had not invaded Iraq, Al Qaeda in Iraq would not have been strengthened, and ISIS would not have emerged out of it.

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Many people have argued that the inaction of the US since its withdrawal helped ISIS. However, Lodhi argues that the reason has been paleed by the invasion contribution to the rise of ISIS. If a residual US military had been left in Iraq, it might have blunted the ISIS offensive in Iraq in 2014. The US went on to bomb several ISIS targets in Syria that may have weakened it.

Iran has also been an active force against ISIS but its role in the rise of ISIS cannot be ignored. Iran has been the biggest supporter of Nouri al-Maliki, the former Prime Minister of Iraq. Iran was very decisive in negotiating in Maliki's favor after the general elections that took place in 2010. However, Smith argues that it was the US that had played the lead role in handing power to Maliki. Lodhi insists that Iran also went ahead to sponsor sectarian Shia Militias in Iraq including the Badr Organization and Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. The two sectarian militias were significant in alienating the Sunni communities from the government in Iraq.

Iran has also invested heavily on behalf of Assad in Syria. They intervened directly by the use of Iranian forces and then indirectly using the Lebanese Hezbollah. Henry explains that Assad almost fell in 2012, but Iran sent thousands of Iranian troops, Iraq Shia militias, and Hezbollah fighters that supported Assad ad prevented his fall. Iran also provided a lot of arms and about\$7 billion loans to support the Assad government in the war. They may have prevented the fall of Assad by fighting against the moderate rebels, but they ended creating space for the emergence of ISIS as the strongest and most influential antigovernment force.

The influence of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait cannot be swept under the carpet. Currently, most of ISIS income is gained through organized crime and oil. Initially in 2011 and

2012, ISIS did not have large fundraising channels. However, they were highly funded by the Gulf monarchies such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Despite the fact that they hardly share the extreme ISIS ideology, they disliked the Assad regime and their allies, and they decided to fund their opponents. During the cold war, the US funded far right militias and governments against the Soviet Union. Similarly, the wealthy Gulf States indirectly led to the rise of ISIS by funding them against Assad.

Initially, most of the funds that were sent to ISIS originated from private individuals who live in the Gulf States. It was only until a year ago when the ISIS threat became definite, that these countries formulated strong laws that could curb money laundering. Smith insists that the weak laws could allow the private donors to ship large sums of money to various Syrian rebels especially ISIS. An article by Beauchamp argues that ISIS was a Saudi project despite the fact that all the Gulf States deny their involvement.

National Analysis of the Conflict

Lodhi insists that the most culpable culprit in the rise of Isis has been the former prime minister of Iraq, Nouri AL Maliki. He is described as a lame duck that was recently voted out by his party members. He had run a Shia authoritarian government that was successful in excluding the majority of Sunnis from power and publicly favored the Shia-dominated country. The exclusion of Sunnis in the Iraq regime allowed ISIS to flourish under its nose.

Maliki authoritarian policies were decisive in the rise of ISIS. He utilized the counter-terrorism laws to put in prison all the Sunni dissenters. He also ensured that all the officials who

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used to be in Saddam's regime were stopped from holding office. Maliki also kicked out all Sunnis from the top positions in the military and government. Henry states that Maliki also went ahead to use deadly force against any peaceful Sunni demonstration aimed against his government. Furthermore, he aligned his government with the sectarian Shia militias that had slaughtered Sunnis during the post-invasion war.

Also, Maliki's policies were able to convince a majority of Iraqi Sunnis that they would never receive fair treatment from the Iraqi government. It made the Sunnis view Sunni militias and ISIS as far much favorable options. This is the main reason that ISIS received a lot of support for a short period in Iraq. Not only Maliki was hostile to Sunnis, but a majority of the top Iraqi Shia politicians also acted perhaps a bit more hostile than Maliki. Smith argues that the internal Shia politics hampered the reconciliatory efforts of Maliki. The Shia militia groups were very skeptical in including Sunnis in governance.

The Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad is also guilty for the rise of ISIS. He is in charge of the Shia dictatorship in Syria. He seemed to have deliberately nurtured ISIS as a method of marginalizing the moderate rebels who had the support of Western powers. Lodhi argues that it appeared that the Syrian regime and ISIS had made a pact that IIS would get a free pass in some chunks of Syrian lands while Assad focused on fighting the moderate rebels. The trick ensured that Assad was able to divide the rebels and forced the world to make a choice between two extremes, ISIS or the Syrian Regime.

Then ISIS conquered Raqqa, the first province that fell entirely under ISIS control, it was amazing that the Syrian regime had a different approach than it had in other regions. If other rebel groups took over any territory, Assad could bombard the liberated territories daily. However, Assad left the ISIS group to thrive in Syria because their existence ensured that international intervention to put an end to his mass genocide of Syrians a less likely option. If Assad had decided to attack ISIS territories with the same intent he had in other rebel-held territories, ISIS might not have been as strong as it is currently.

Individual Analysis of the Conflict

The ISIS appeal to many Arab or Muslim youth has been fundamental. A majority of the analysts assume that social media or religion as the main attraction for the swelling numbers of ISIS militants. However, there are about five reasons that influence individuals to join ISIS.

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The first caused the failure of Arab education systems. Their education systems focus mainly on the uncritical acceptance of authority rather than civic values or the vital analytical skills. Their religious education and history curricula education has made a focus on an us-versus-them ideology long sectarian, ethnic and ideological lines that has made individuals susceptible to ISIS influence.

Secondly, the inadequate economic opportunities and poor welfare systems have forced their citizens to look for alternatives. Smith explains that most of the Arab nations focused on economic liberation and hugely undermined the welfare systems without providing any alternatives. The investments were capital intensive but not labor intensive hence fewer people

were employed. In fact, very many educated people with degrees have the highest rate of unemployment.

The harsh reality forced many Arab individuals to turn to Islamist groups for the sake of survival. Some of the governments even encouraged some ultraconservative groups to set up facilities that could provide social assistance. Currently, Lodhi argues that some of the conservative groups have been accused of actively recruiting young Muslims in a bid to join ISIS.

Furthermore, bad governance has made many individuals develop an entrenched feeling of injustice. There has been a systematic maltreatment of many Arab citizens by their respective governments hence fuelling the process. For the past few decades, many Arab citizens have been accused of being threats to national security by their governments and were subjected to notable levels of brutality. Smith states that recent polls suggest that about 55 percent of Arabs distrust their political elite and national governments. Also, about 91 percent feel that financial and administrative corruption is widespread, and only 21 percent feel that all citizens are equally treated.

The fourth reason has been the brutal crackdown during the Arab awakening. The crackdown made some of the individuals to develop sectarian or ideological tinges that fuelled a societal discord. Most people became polarized along ethnic and religious lines. Lodhi argues that there has also been state-led violence against innocent civilians that has made them very bitter against their governments. Furthermore, there have been prejudiced judicial proceedings

and extra-judicial killings that have opened a strife among Arab societies that has made the young Muslims be disenfranchised. The youth end up joining ISIS to find their identity or purpose.

The distrust In the Western powers has made some people to join ISIS. Most Arabs have argued that there have been double standards in the application of international justice, especially in Palestine. The continued aggression by Israel against Arabs in Palestine has been a festering wound. Henry argues that about 77 percent of Muslims feel that it is an Arab course rather than a Palestine one. The West has been insincere in assisting against the injustices that were propagated by the Syrian and Iraqi regime hence, the people felt helpless and joined ISIS to help their people.

Important Aspects in the Rise of ISIS

It is important to note that ISIS employs a strict Sharia law interpretation in the administration of lands that it controls. Currently, it wages war against Syrian rebels, Kurdish militias, the Syrian government, and the West. It has received hundreds of thousands of new recruits and it has threatened to tip the power balance and conquer more territory.

It is also critical to note that Iraq and Syria are ethnoreligious due to European colonialism that trapped various religious and ethnic groups in the two countries. The conflict between the different groups led to the ISIS emergence. Lodhi argues that after Sunnis had been ousted from power during the American invasion, the US disbanded the Iraqi military and set up a new one that was Shia controlled. Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi, a self-proclaimed Caliph of the

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Islamic State, leads the ISIS group. The group is determined to revive the Ottoman Empire by conquering all Muslim states.

Solutions to the Conflict

It will be extremely difficult for Sunnis to reconcile with the Shia-dominated government that has been mistreating them through their Iranian ties. Most Sunnis are only interested in receiving fair treatment from their government. Some of them have even suggested a Sunni regional government that has similar powers to the Kurdish regional government aimed at protecting the minority Sunni population against Shia militia aggression. For a solution to be found there should be fair treatment of all the ethnic and religious communities in both Iraq and Syria.

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Most of the Iraqis and Syrians strongly suggest that ISIS is a Sunni issue that needs to be solved by Sunnis alone. The continued use of extremist Shia militias in the fight against ISIS has been striking sectarian tensions that will not stop until the militias are controlled. Smith explains that most Sunnis felt that the respective governments have marginalized them. The continued use of Shia militias in the battles only serves to strengthen the notion that the international community does not care. If the Iraq and Syrian governments can come up with an effective Sunni force, the fight against ISI will be easier.

Another method of controlling the ISIS menace is stopping the continued airstrikes. Henry states that most of the airstrikes have had very many civilian casualties. There are many people who may live in ISIS controlled lands but do not support the group. The airstrikes only

destroy the infrastructure in the lands and breeds a notion that the international community is protecting the Shia governments that have been alienating the Sunnis.

It is also very important that the regional governments desist from using foreign armies in Iraq and Syria. The continued presence of western forces in the two countries has made some of the civilians to feel alienated. It is evident that the international community as ignored the human right abuses that have been occurring in the region.

It is also evident that a military standoff will only destroy the two countries. It may not be the best option, but it would be important to seek a diplomatic partnership with ISIS. ISIS is fighting for many issues. If some of them are met, Lodhi argues that they may cease their atrocities in Syria and Iraq. It may mean that the borders of the two countries are redrawn, but there may be peace in the divided groups.

Conclusion

ISIS has been a menace in the Middle East. It grew out of the human rights abuses propagated during the invasion of Iraq. The international community and national leaders also played their part in its rise. It would be critical that the Sunni issues that have been raised are addressed so that there can be a concrete solution to the standoff.

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