

The Rise of Islamic State (ISIS)

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The rise of Islamic State (ISIS) quintessentially represents a unique movement in the global jihadist movement. Islamic State's emergence can be traced back to the region's (Middle East) violent conflicts such as Syrian crisis and political instability in Iraq. The paper argues that the overarching goal of this organization is to carve a global state called 'Caliphate.' The Islamic State has emerged as the most successful terrorist group as no other terrorist group in the modern history was able to manipulate the chaos. The paper further goes on to address the ideological background of the Islamic State, and in doing so it delves deep into the Islamism and global jihad. The emergence of this group is a serious challenge to the global security and peace, therefore its demise is must.

[**Keywords** : ISIS, Da'esh, Islamic state, Global jihad, Al-Qaeda, Levant, Caliphate, Ideology, Terrorism]

1. Introduction

The Islamic State known by its myriad names (ISIS/ISIL/IS/Da'esh) represents a unique episode within the global jihadist movement. It was for the first time in the modern history that a

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terrorist group was successful in conquering a territory as large as the size of present day United Kingdom, with several million inhabitants, transformed itself into a quasi-state, and established a unique political system matching the key characteristics of a typical totalitarian regime.¹ The rise of ISIS shows that there is an urgent need to understand what transpired in Arab societies and politics of the Middle East. The emergence of Islamic State manifests a symptom of broken politics of Middle East and delegitimization of state institutions as well as of the spreading of civil wars in Iraq, Syria, and beyond. The cause of the group's development and its rise thereof is located in the severe social and political conditions in Arab societies as well as in regional and global rivalries.² Four key factors in ISIS's birth are: First ISIS can be seen as the extension of AQI (Al-Qaeda in Iraq), which in turn was the creation of US invasion of Iraq 2003. Second the incapacity to articulate policies emphasising national identity in post-Saddam era further nourished inter-communal distrust, thus deepening and widening the Sunni-Shia divide. Third the breakdown of state system in Syria and the descent in a full-blown war is a significant factor in giving birth to ISIS. Fourth, the derailment of the Arab Spring uprisings and the spill-over effect attached with it was again an important factor in consolidating the gains made during the course of Syrian civil war.³ Since its emergence the Islamic State asserts and tries to possess itself as possessing many of the necessary virtues of modern state, including governance and legal structures, a viable economy, and the ability to provide basic and complex public services. This terror group invests heavily in religious rhetoric, adding another layer to the group's appeal and overall legitimacy. The argument they advance is that they are not driven primarily by some grand sectarian war or anti-western sentiment, but by a desire to restore the Islamic Caliphate.⁴ The Islamic State has not only emerged as the most ruthless of all the Sunni jihadist organizations but also the most successful militant group globally and far better advanced in its combat missions and battles. ISIS is so extreme and brute that many other well-known radical jihadist groups have not only distanced themselves from this group, but have also publicly condemned its actions and even fought it directly at times. The Islamic State jihadists often commit violence against fellow Muslims, routinely violate human rights and international law, and also threaten and kill apostates, Christians and Jews and many other religious

communities and sects who generally do not subscribe to its ideology. In short, the group is composed of religiously motivated psychopaths. Not only are the ISIS fighters ruthless, but also have attained sufficient material assets in order to raise and support a standing military force. They are no longer a terrorist gang, rather an organization possessing greater striking power than any other terrorist force in the Middle East, surpassing the striking power of al-Qaeda. They possess the will to use the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to carry out its fanatical agenda and aims.⁵ ISIS is possibly the best equipped, richest terrorist force in the world at present, and what makes it more dangerous is its possession of both means and will to carry out its threats. The group possess a huge war chest of money, military equipment, and materials available to carry out its threats. It has captured significant amounts of high-tech U.S. military equipment abandoned by the Iraqi army. If this group somehow obtains increasing amounts of weapons of mass destruction, the global danger of this group would only increase exponentially thereby risking world peace and stability.⁶

2. Manipulating the Instability in the Levant

The emergence of Islamic State has its roots in the political and social instability in both Iraq and Syria. There were some objective factors that gave birth to this terrorist group. The most important among these factors was the US invasion of Iraq. Even though US repeatedly declared Iraq war as a linchpin to the global war on terror, but it proved opposite and gave birth to terrorism. The US invasion of Afghanistan and its toppling of the Taliban regime had denied jihadists the safe havens, but very soon penetrated into Iraq, when the instability became rife.⁷ The outbreak of a civil war in Syria provided ISIS with a golden opportunity to expand its influence and gain strategic depth in the region. The civil war in Syria in a lot of ways aided the emergence of ISIS, which then was successful to manipulate the breakdown of State institutions and the country's descent into chaos after 2011. The Syrian civil war reflected a clear case of political and economic vulnerabilities rather than any substantial sectarian and parochial concern. It was only during the later part of the uprising, that it took a sectarian façade.⁸ The expansion of the Islamic State militants into Syria, provided it with a strategic depth and significant economic resources, and after its takeover it dissolved the international border that separated Iraq

from Syria. and by doing so, it affirmed its supremacy as a supreme non-state actor.⁹

The Islamic State is not a mere assembly of psychopaths rather a religious group with a quintessential belief following a distinct variety of Islam (puritanical Islam) as opposed to traditional belief or conventionally accepted one. Through its appeals it hopes to build a complete society.¹⁰ The Islamic State represents both a movement and an organization that commands a disproportionate share of the world's attention, while sitting on the cusp of rapidly changing regional dynamics (socio-political) and world order. This outfit has pushed a new understanding of the radical Islamism, terrorism, and an extreme fanaticism writ large.¹¹

The Islamic State routinely tortures its enemies and those masses who do not bow to its ideals, which is totally in contravention against the norms of international law. The organization operates a number of detention facilities (some of which are known and some other totally unknown) within its jurisdiction. The group has used many techniques of torture which are nothing but brutal and egregious.¹²

3. Jihadism

The broader phenomenon associated with the rise of the Islamic State can be traced back to the ideals of global jihad. Islamism as a socio-politico movement emerged in the 20th century as an anti-thesis to the problems of the modern nation-states.¹³ Since the emergence of Al-Qaeda there have been there have been four different waves of global jihad. The first wave began in 1990s and reached its peak with 9/11 events. The second wave began with the US invasion of Iraq. The third wave started in 2007 and continued till 2009, following Al-Qaeda's footprint in Arabian Peninsula. The fourth wave started in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, subsequently witnessing the expansion of Al-Qaeda and its various factions and affiliates in the Levant region.¹⁴ Even though there has been a concerted effort by the US and its allies to address the challenges of counter-terrorism, still there has been a four-fold increase in Jihadist fighters as per the latest figures. The movement still continues to be in a decent shape.¹⁵ The period between 2012-2018 turned out to be an important transitional phase for the global jihadist movement, mainly because of the ability of Jihadists to expand and manipulate the atmosphere created by the

events of the Syrian civil war. The effect was such that a hybridized current gave birth to the militant Islamic movement known as ISIS. No other militant or extremist group was able run a twin campaign of terror attacks globally, and waging military struggle against local regimes hitherto.¹⁶

The idea this outfit tries to promote or sell is envisioned to be a unified and a transnational government called Caliphate. The Caliph will rule over the state as he is the vicegerent of God, to enforce the commandments of God. The type will be the highest political organization on earth with absolute obedience to the commands of God.¹⁷

Islamic State a newly created and rapidly expanding quasi-political entity remains a challenging international threat. The group seeks recognition as an Islamic Caliphate, the only legitimate political authority. In fact, it is a theocratic proto-state like entity, with self-asserted state like qualities, but rendered illegitimate by international community.¹⁸ By conquering territory, the Islamic State established its own institutions and hence started to fulfil its goals by means of its ideology. It started to eliminate its enemies through of its military might it maintained. One of the central characteristics of this regime is the use of its violence against various religious groups and also massive human rights violation. In a sense, the violence seems to be institutionalized.¹⁹ It controls and runs a huge economy running in billions of dollars, which is very essential for its survival and hence provides it a reason as well as might to expand its territory.

The rise and existence of the Islamic State poses a substantial and a realistic threat to the global peace and security, and therefore, it must be confronted and engaged by international community. The demise of the group will to large extent will depend upon the reconstruction of the fragile state institutions and the genuine political reconciliation among various warring factions (ethnic and religious) of the Middle East.

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