



Research Article

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The Reasons Behind the Rise of ISIS: An Analytical Perspective

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Abstract

In June 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) surprised the international community by declaring the establishment of a self-proclaimed Islamic State in the territory of Iraq and Syria. There are several factors behind the rise of ISIS including; the political chaos in Iraq, which paved the way for ISIS to come up within the political struggle and conflict in the country. This is a clear indication that the Iraqi people need reconciliation and compromise more than any other time. The old sectarian tension between Sunnis and Shias in Iraq helped ISIS to capitalize anti-Shia rhetoric and sectarianize its war against Shia Militias in order to achieve the sympathy of the marginalized Sunni population. Meanwhile, some domestic, regional and international circumstances led to the fall of ISIS including lack of dependable allies, false claims and the threat of ISIS on Iraq and beyond pushed the international community to stand against the group. And they cooperated and collaborated with each other to form a coalition and this fact led to almost defeating ISIS in Iraq as a terrorist organization that held territory.

Keywords: Terrorism, ISIS, the international community, foreign terrorist fighter, extremism

1. Introduction

Iraq is regarded as one of the most dangerous countries with numerous records of terrorist attacks in recent years. There are essential problems, which led to the rise of such a terrorist organization. The political chaos, sectarian conflict, lack of legitimacy, poverty and sense of victimization are the main problems in Iraq. Meanwhile, there are other problems that contributed to the emergence of ISIS, such as foreign intervention in the domestic affairs which led to the fact that there were outside production problems in Iraq and also the country does not depend on itself to solve its problems, in addition to that the exploitation of Islam has always been used by the leaders of ISIS to attract young people to join the organization's ranks. Hence, ISIS used Islam to justify its barbaric activities. The aim of this research is to find proper answers to the following question, What are the original reasons behind the rise of ISIS? this paper is trying to explain how ISIS rose in a short period of time and to analyze which atmospheres paved the way for a small terrorist organization to become so powerful and also to determine the factors behind the rise of ISIS. In addition to examine the strong and weak points of the group. As well as to highlight the objectives of the state and non-state actors in the fight against ISIS and to underline the effectiveness of the U.S. led coalition in the confrontation of ISIS. For this study, the research was conducted by using a qualitative approach to examine the

reasons and analyze the factors that led to the rise of ISIS in Iraq by using a case study. Qualitative researchers shed light on the natural atmosphere of phenomena and concentrate on how respondents seem right to their own condition. This paper tests the hypotheses that including ISIS's identity was shaped over time by the political, cultural, social, and material circumstances in which it would ultimately rise. Therefore, according to Constructivism theory ISIS inspired by an extremist idea, which is a social construction and this is an important concept to find a cure for the phenomena of ISIS beyond military means.

2. Historical Background

Two decades ago, the dream of establishing a Muslim worldwide Caliphate began as a blazing fantasy in the mind of a Jordanian extremist terrorist called Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. However, in 1989 he arrived in Afghanistan as a Jihadist wannabe. But, the time was late to fight against the former Soviet Union forces that occupied Afghanistan. Thus, he returned to Jordan, and later became one of the international violent terrorist figures for the following decade. Indeed, he together with Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi were imprisoned in Jordan. Then, during his prison period, he developed his group and upon his release with a group of his followers, he returned to the Pakistan-Afghanistan area in order to establish a training camp for terrorists where he became a close friend with al-Maqdisi. Indeed, Al-Zarqawi alongside Al-Qaeda was active during 1999-2001 in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, he decided to not join Al-Qaeda when he met Osama bin Laden for the first time, because at the beginning, Al-Zarqawi did not give allegiance (bay'at) to Osama Bin Laden (Cole, 2015).

He was forced to escape to Iraq in 2001 when the Taliban fell in Afghanistan. Later on, in Iraq, his existence went unnoticed until the U.S. used him as evidence for who had links with the Iraqi regime. Therefore, the U.S. was claiming that Saddam Hussein had a connection with al-Qaeda. But, the fact is that Zarqawi was looking to establish his own organization, he was a free agent. Soon after the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, he escaped to Kurdistan Region-north of Iraq and founded the precursor to today's ISIS: Jama'at al-Tawhid w'al-Jihad (the Party of Monotheism and Jihad), most of his followers were foreign fighters from outside of Iraq, whilst, his rhetoric was the same as Bin Laden, but he had different goals. In fact, his aim at the beginning was to target Shias in order to sectarianize his war as a Sunni group against Shia, while Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden view Shia as heretics but widely targeted them for slaughter (Ghosh, 2014).

Soon enough after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 a wave of suicide bombings took place by Zarqawi's campaign that made him a megastar of the international terrorist movement. As a result, he got support from Bin Laden himself. Shortly after, he joined Bin Laden, rebranding Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Then, in the spring of 2006, Zarqawi saw himself as an "emir". He started to persist with his harsh interpretation of Islam's law that was accepted by his Iraqi Sunni extremists, but a pair 500-pound bomb was dropped by the U.S. Air Force in June 2006, and Zarqawi's ambitions were cut short (Gergis, 2014).

3. The Reasons that Led to the Rise of ISIS

In reality, there are several factors that contributed to the rise of ISIS, however, politics in Iraq have always been the major factor of unrest in the country, but it is also associated with the rise of terrorist groups. In fact, the military has a direct connection with the insurgency; therefore, it is obvious that a terrorist group has a better environment to restore itself in an area where a fragile army is in charge. Also author Robinson claims that "Wherever there are lots of finance sources with no administration, especially oil as the fuel of war, definitely terrorism will find its fuel to operate" (Robinson, 2015, p. 2). Indeed, the widespread mass media and its outlet have been used as an effective tool, which made ISIS as a rescuer that led angry Sunni people to join its ranks. As a matter of fact, Islam has always been exploited by terrorist organizations. In reality, wherever Sunni and Shia live together,

antagonism always plays a major role in the conflict between them. Actually, the Syrian civil war was an excellent opportunity for terrorist organizations to reorganize themselves including ISIS (Warrick, 2015).

3.1 Politics

The Arab vs. Kurd and the Arab Shiite vs. Sunni struggles in Iraq have progressively led to the fact that the country is deeply divided. This fact provided a favorable platform for ISIS both a power vacuum to exploit and a way to achieve the Sunni's support. The Kurds in Iraq have been involved in ethnic tension since the establishment of the country. Moreover, after the Iraq-Iran war in 1980 Sunni-Shiite struggles repeatedly led to violence and were never brought under full control since the war came to the end in 1988. Furthermore, the Kurdish uprisings at the end of the first Gulf War in 1991 also contributed in the political chaos in Iraq, although the U.S. reduced the level of civil war between 2003 and 2008. But, the U.S. resolve and diplomacy failed in the irresolute result of Iraq's 2010 election. Therefore, Iran's cautious concentration on winning influence and making sure of Shia dominance kept Maliki in power. Thus, the Erbil Agreement in 2010 to establish a truly national government rapidly became an empty shell (Katzman & Humud, 2016). As a result, Prime Minister Nuri Maliki got full control and became the only person in the country who had the authority over the whole security forces and he exercised his power in a way that mostly targeted the Sunni leaders and against Sunni populations which finally resulted in a new round of tensions between Shias and Sunnis.

However, many scholars such as Nader Hashemi and Stephen Wicken have tried to find out the sources of the rise of ISIS. They attempted to identify someone or a specific political agenda to blame for the emergence of the group; some politicians have been accused of using ISIS for their own political agenda such as former Prime Minister of Iraq, Nuri al-Maliki. Also, Nader Hashemi and Stephen Wicken have analyzed and offered explanations regarding the political chaos in Iraq and ask how come a small terrorist organization gained such large territory in the region (Ahmadipour, Jonidi and Aghagolzadeh, 2017). Moreover, they point the finger of accusation to blame at political actors for the current mess in the Middle East: indeed, the discriminatory policies of the Iraqi government towards the Sunni population, the withdrawing of the U.S forces from Iraq, plus the lack of the political balance between Sunni and Shiite were determining factors to the political chaos in Iraq.

What happened was, the result of 2010's election once again brought a Shiite leader to power. In reality, the policies of the Shiite government marginalized the Sunni population. Hence, Prime Minister Maliki instead of integrating awakening Sunni members into the Iraqi national army, he strengthened his control over a centralized security and political apparatus. Most Sunnis considered this as sectarianism and authoritarian. Furthermore, the Sunni Arab areas have only benefited from the Iraqi economy a little. In addition, unemployment became a major problem in Sunni-populated areas. More dramatically, in 2011 Maliki decided to weaken the Sunni organizations. As a result, Sunni territories decreased in Baghdad. Plus, he decided to dismiss the Sahwa militias, and accused them of protesting against the government (Wicken, 2013). However, the Sunnis have been accused badly in their support for the rebellion against the U.S led invasion of Iraq. Even though, the majority of the Sunni population rejected extremism and insurgency during 2006 to 2011. But, Malki's policy of marginalization and his treatment under the name of counter-terrorism gave grievances to Sunnis.

In fact, not only the deprivation of Sunnis' participation in the military sector, but the government also began to arrest Sunni leaders. Therefore, the situation deteriorated more; as a result, the Sunni population took to the streets in Sunni areas and demonstrations started. Clearly, their demands were for justice and real participation of Sunnis in government, they were angry with government policies. Consequently, what happened was in 2012 a wave of Sunni demonstrations took place against the government; indeed, the protests represented a major inflection in Iraqi Sunni self-identification alongside sectarian lines (Adnan & reese, 2014). Meanwhile, the Sunni leaders and

parties were divided over their position in the competition for resources and power inside Iraq and with neighboring countries as well as with the Kurds. In addition to that, they were also divided in terms of their computation about how to address their position in Iraq, either through a direct negotiation with their competitors to participate in the government, or through insurgency.

Despite the fact that the demonstration brought no result, the movement remained peaceful. In 2013 due to the lack of security, provincial elections were postponed in some Sunni populated areas; therefore, this led to the security forces intervention and the killing of over 20 protesters. As a result of this fact, the violence between protesters and security forces erupted immediately across Sunni-majority provinces resulting in more than 200 protesters being killed. In the next months, the tension escalated and the Iraqi Sunnis progressively requested support for an armed resistance that included insurgent groups and tribal militias such as al-Tariq al-Naqshabandia (Mossallanejad, 2016). In addition, the policy that has been adopted by former Iraqi prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, had a role in the strength of ISIS, from his both terms of office during 2006 to 2014, Maliki tried to marginalize the Sunni population from power in Iraq. He proved to be a corrupt and tyrannical ruler who avoided reconciliation of Iraq's ethnic groups. Indeed, his attempt to build personal power on the basis of Shiite support weakened the Iraqi army, and also destroyed the trust of the Sunnis. Furthermore, Maliki having strong ties with Iran and showing support to Syrian regimes has alienated the Sunni community even further. As a result, this all led to a place that the Sunni population was hoping that ISIS could restore control of the Sunni areas. Clearly, the Iraqi army has shown obvious helplessness and weakness. However, after the U.S led invasion in 2003, for several years the Iraqi army was rebuilt, trained and equipped by the U.S forces at large expense, even after the U.S. withdrew from Iraq, still, the U.S military advisors continued to assist in the rebuild of the forces. But, soon after the U.S withdrawal from Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki started to fire Sunni officials from the army, thus, somehow the Iraqi army became Shiite militias (Kam, 2014). Therefore, once tested in 2014 when ISIS attacked, the army collapsed because it did not get support from local people. To conclude, ISIS took advantage of the political chaos in Iraq, to show itself as the defender of the Sunni oppressed minority.

3.2 *Manpower and weaponry*

3.2.1 *Manpower*

In general, throughout history, foreign fighters have been an important element of transnational terrorism. Historically speaking, in 1980, foreign fighters traveled to Afghanistan to fight alongside the mujahideen. Indeed, the same thing happened to a lesser extent in Chechnya and Bosnia in the 1990s. As well as, in Iraq after 2003, and the civil war in Syria, But the emergence of ISIS has broken new ground, never before have foreign fighters gathered at the scale and speed as they have joined ISIS (Lang & Al Wari, 2016).

It is believed that the foreign fighters who joined ISIS from European countries, those are people who went to Europe and they could not integrate into the Western societies, indeed they were in a unsociable conditions, and this allowed them to re-defined the way they were viewing the world as individuals. Their definition was in the framework of Islam, while they realized that there was such a center like ISIS, which claimed establishment of so-called Caliphate on the global level. Therefore, those people who lost their nation and they were able to get citizenship in European countries, but this remained only on paper because they could not get this citizenship in their mind. Therefore, an alienation condition was created among those people. Thus, this drove those people to seek to join that center in order to fulfill their dreams, which were the creation of a state that corresponded to their ideology. This is why they were even ready to sacrifice their life. In fact, this does not correspond to the material criteria, but this matched with the fact that they were looking to an ideological system on the planet that the superpower countries did not allow them to set up for themselves. Therefore, the foreign fighters were seeking to establish such a state on the earth, even if

they could not do so, they committed suicide to fulfill their dreams in the doomsday.

Statistically speaking, from the beginning, it is estimated that approximately 30,000 fighters have joined ISIS from at least 85 different countries. Although, the majority of ISIS fighters are coming from the Middle East and the North Africa. Meanwhile, a huge number of foreign fighters are coming from Europe, as well as, Canada, Australia, the U.S, and all around the world (Benmelech & Klor, 2016).

ISIS also includes many cadres of ex-Baathists, as well as local Sunni tribalists, some of them are Salafi jihadist networks and others are local and transnational criminal networks. It is estimated there are about 5000 fighters. Also, there were many other Iraqi Sunnis who worked for the organization in many fields such as governance, logistics, recruitment training, they were called unarmed militants. Thus, there were different fighters with different interests, tasks, and expectations (Gurcan, 2014). In fact, since the beginning of the Arab uprising in Syria the U.S. and the West plus the Gulf States have supported and trained rebel groups in Syria and Libya to overthrow first Muammar Gadhafi and later Bashar al-Assad. Nevertheless, this strategy follows the saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend, most of those fighters afterward joined ISIS and other terrorist organizations in Syria" (Mekhennet, 2014, p. 6).

More importantly, the foreign fighters contained an important portion of ISIS's fighters and suicide attackers. Hence, some of them were enlisted in order to conduct suicide attacks; others were recruited on the basis of their fields of expertise and their knowledge. Thus, not just for the battlefield, but also for intelligence and ability to use psychological warfare, as well as offer technological and logistical assistance. Indeed, ISIS also used their proclivity for extreme attacks to threaten local populations. Additionally, it also utilized foreign fighters to conduct terrorist attacks against targets all around the world (Lister, 2015). It is also worth mentioning, there are several factors that contributed to the motivations behind the connection of foreign fighters to ISIS. Indeed, some viewed it as a rite of passage, looking for martyrdom and combat, moreover, some went for humanitarian reasons but later were drawn to join, or they were looking for greater meaning in life or attempts to impress the opposite sex, or the local community, perceived adventure, or a desire for increased credibility, revenge, to belong or gain peer acceptance, or to redress regional and local grievances, otherwise misguided conflict experience expectations, or family members encouraged each other.

3.2.2 *Weaponry*

The meltdown of the Iraqi army in the Sunni areas was a result of the central government policy in three ways. The first thing is that the marginalization and abandonment of the Sunni areas led the army to no access to precious intelligence information in the region, thus the Sunni tribes were no longer in contact with the security forces, therefore, the army was not able to properly evaluate the situation in those territories. The fall of Mosul made this marginalization clear. Indeed, ISIS had penetrated into the city months before the group was able to take control over the whole area. Even before that time, some neighborhoods were under the control of its followers. In fact, they liquidated possible adversaries and imposed taxes upon local businessmen (Mossallanejad, 2017). Whilst, even before the fall of the city, the public prosecutors, the security forces and the government typically just stood by as the State's domination on the means of compulsion disintegrated. Meanwhile, the second factor is related to the army itself, after many years of rebuilding and despite the American assistances in terms of training and equipment, the Iraqi army still was a fragile army and has not developed into a unified force (Gambhir, 2015). In the meantime, the agendas of the former Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki dominated the army; the officers' ranks were rewarded for money rather than for prior performance and skills. As a result, the army became full of ghost soldiers who just existed on the payrolls. Thereby, the Iraqi army never became a proper one. And the last factor is that, while the policy of the central government marginalized the Sunni areas, at the same time ISIS was deliberately removing moderate Sunni leaders, especially those who were in contact with the

Iraqi army and the American troops to reorganize and strengthen the stability and security during the campaign of counterinsurgency.

When it comes to the ISIS's weaponry, ISIS used all kind of weapons that it could achieve. Indeed, there were several sources of obtaining weapons, but most of its weapons were looted from the Syrian and Iraqi armies (Barret, 2014). Notably, ISIS used militancy tactics such as insurgency operations, conventional militancy action, and acts of terrorism. Generally, ISIS diminishes its targets through a wave of terrorist attacks. Then infiltrates the defending forces and the population, slowly gains control some part of the areas of the target, and then rapidly attacks the rest

Apparently, ISIS got most of its weapons from the Syrian and Iraqi armies. Therefore, when ISIS occupied Mosul city in 2014, it took over a huge quantity of Iraqi army weapons, from another side ISIS captured weapons from rebel organizations in Syria. In this field Boyd (2014) argues that:

Some reports show ISIS has purchased weapons in Syria, Iraq as well as abroad. In fact, the United States, along with Arab states such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, determined to arm the Syrian rebels under the Free Syrian Army umbrella. Most of the fighters who were in Free Syrian Army, later on, joined ISIS. Therefore, they took their weapons with themselves. (p. 6).

In term of types of weapons, ISIS's weaponry can be categorized as below:

The light weapons: ISIS had various types of rockets, mortars, and anti-aircraft weapons, anti-tank missiles, and launchers, Humvees, also ISIS has Toyotas mounted with machine guns (Abu Rumman, 2020).

The heavy weapons: ISIS was able to take over advanced technology and heavy weapons from the Syrian opposition and other groups in Syria, the Syrian army, and the Iraqi army. ISIS had issued some reports claiming the group has various types of heavy weapons including, artilleries, tanks, war Hammers, anti-aircraft missiles, Scud missiles, various types of armored vehicles, MIG-21s, air-to-surface missiles, mustard gas, other types of gasses, shoulder-launched anti-tank missiles, advanced Konkurs and Kornet missiles (The Historical Roots and Stages in the Development of ISIS, 2014, p. 3).

3.2.3 Finance

When we say ISIS, we are talking about the richest terrorist organization in the world. Indeed, ISIS has managed to take control of several economic resources, including gas fields and oil wells, as well as phosphate and cement industries, in addition to food storehouses and farmlands in both Syria and Iraq. Furthermore, it looted many banks and various weapons and equipment. On top of this, it collected extortion, various taxes, and ransom money. ISIS also receives donations from Islamic associations and individuals in Europe and in the Middle East. Moreover, trafficking in women, antiques, drugs, and human organs are also sources for ISIS's income (Schweitzer & Einav, 2016). In below the finance sources of ISIS are articulated.

Illegal proceeds from the occupation of territories: such as control of oil fields and oil refineries. In fact, it is one of the greatest finance sources for ISIS. However, the organization took control over an area in Iraq and Syria that are rich in many oil and gas fields, and interestingly instead of destroying them, ISIS tried to utilize them for its own use, in addition, to selling oil and gas on the black-market export (Akhbari, 2018). Therefore, oilfields and refineries, which have been controlled by ISIS, provide a huge portion of the group's income. Hence, ISIS dealt with oil traders, tribal leaders, middlemen, and shipping companies, who bought oil, from them at lower market prices.

Ransom from kidnapping: undoubtedly, ISIS gained huge finances from ransom by kidnapping individuals including, local Syrians and Iraqis, the members of minorities, the Western and Asian foreigners. Therefore, ransom payment from kidnapping is one of the most reliable methods wherein ISIS is funded. Thus, through this external method ISIS has earned huge money in response to releasing the kidnapped persons from insurance companies and foreign states.

Taxes: indeed taxes are also considered to be one of the largest of ISIS's finance sources. Where, these are internal methods, imposed on businesses, farms, industries, and inhabitants. Therefore, there are several types of taxes, which are obligatory to be paid including checkpoint taxes imposed

on transportation, taxes on land and real estates, taxes on gasoline, taxes on customs, commercial transaction taxes, and electricity taxes. Hence, some of these taxes were pure extortion. But, the rest was a systematic collection of taxes in exchange for services. Furthermore, there was illegal taxation of cash and goods that transit from the territories where ISIS operate, including; tax upon goods, road tax, interning border tax of trucks. Moreover, ISIS also put a tax on the employment salaries, government employees who lived under ISIS control and travel to other cities to receive their salaries from the government; when returning their salaries would be taxed by ISIS (Woertz, 2014).

Bank looting: also supplied a prospective source of income. ISIS has derived a huge portion of its finance and wealth from looting the branches of banks in its territory, in this regard (Duhaime, 2015) also backed this argument by saying that: "ISIS differentiates between state-owned and private banks, the cash of state-owned banks are the property of ISIS, while the private banks cash remains in the bank to be taxed by ISIS when customers withdraw" (Duhaime, 2015, p. 4).

Donations from non-profit organizations: Such as wealthy regional donors. ISIS took benefits from rich pocket donors in the region and abroad. Indeed, this kind of source is less profitable compared to other sources, but it is important for ISIS as other sources of income diminish (Taneja, 2018).

Material support such as support associated with foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs): according to the U.S. government information from more than 120 countries at least 44000 FTFs have left their homeland and joined ISIS, it is estimated each of those fighters brought an amount of money with themselves which increased the income of ISIS (Keatinge, 2018).

Income through social and communication networks: despite rich pocket donors, ISIS also gained material support from lower level donors, the group used social media to secure individuals lower material supports through cash couriers, bank transactions or wire transfers. The use of social networks helped ISIS to find a favorable platform to broadcast its activities and spread its ideology this led to find many inspired members who are willing to be part of this organization, whether directly or contribute indirectly by money. In addition to that, the development of technology makes easy to transfer funds immediately to any location. Therefore, these lower level donors became another financing source for ISIS (Al-Istrabadi and Sumit 2018).

Mining and manufacturing plants: ISIS has managed to gain control of phosphate mines, phosphoric acid, sulphuric acid, and cement plants in Iraq and Syria; most of which were owned by foreigners. However, ISIS could not run industrial plants and mines without purchasing industrial goods and services from other countries and paying for that which is dealing internationally. Therefore, this is one of the types of illegal trade-based terrorist financings (Haroro and Et al, 2020).

Sex & slavery businesses: Slavery trafficking is not the same as human trafficking; there is a legal difference in that with slavery, as far as ISIS and the buyers are concerned, what is being bought and sold is property. Hence, here women have no rights as a human being, but all rights over her are acquired to the purchaser. In fact, ISIS has sold thousands of Yezidi and Christian women. As a result, ISIS gained money from this trade (Cook and Vale, 2018).

Real estate rentals and sales: in territories that have been controlled by ISIS, homes, industrial sites, as well as agricultural land owned by individuals, also businesses that ISIS found undesirable were confiscated, including from Shiite Muslims, Christians, politicians, police and army officials, judges and lawyers. For that reason, ISIS inventoried the properties and sold them at public auctions, or rent them (Hassan, 2018).

Agriculture: ISIS controlled some of the most fertile areas of Syria and Iraq that produce a lot of barley and wheat. Consequently, from selling these products ISIS gained money (Evans and Et al, 2021).

Sale of antiquities: ISIS has control of private collections, museums, and archaeological sites. On a broad scale, antiquities from the territories that ISIS has controlled excavated and traffic beyond its borders. Therefore, ISIS has gained huge amount of money from selling antiquities and heritages (Grantham, 2016).

3.3 Propaganda

Interestingly, ISIS passionately embraced social media and web forums to establish a wireless so-called caliphate, fighting enemies both on the ground as well as on the web. Indeed, they are effectual keyboard soldiers, deploying terror before their troops even hit the ground. While discussion forums and chat rooms were broadly used by ISIS, younger viewers are more likely to arrive at discussions through social media (Schori, 2015). Thus, ISIS used social media to draw on disenfranchised and vulnerable youth. Therefore, ISIS attempted to build identification and spread its ideology with its target audience.

In fact, social media throughout its history has been used to have an impact on public opinion. However, the ability of using social media such as the internet to have an impact of public opinion had been used only by states. But, it also makes it possible to be used by individuals and other groups. Indeed, the social media sped up the impact on public opinion much more, because it has millions of users all around the World. Thus, ISIS from the beginning of its establishment has used different areas of social media to have an impact on public opinion. Despite, other terrorist groups have used social media to achieve their goals such as Al Qaeda, but statistics show that unlike other terrorist groups ISIS was successful at using social media to achieve its aims. Hence, ISIS uses social media for three purposes. Firstly, they are seeking to fear people by publishing its cruel crimes. Secondly, to inform people about its activities and victories. And the final one, in order to publish some of its humanitarian activities in contrast to its first purpose, such as playing with children, distributing aids among people. By this way, from one hand it shows its power and from the other hand, it gains popularity among people (Napoleoni, 2020).

In fact, ISIS produces too much propaganda, showing the brutality of the group punishments and promising a peaceful life in areas under its control by showing photos, videos and even music. In reality, one of the significant tools that ISIS used to attract people especially foreign people is propaganda. Moreover, ISIS used the black flag as an emblem for all Muslims in the world. Notably, ISIS used many methods to brainwash the population under its rule. Indeed, after the group declared the establishment of Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). In November 2006, soon after, the group established the Al-Furqan Foundation for publishing its media productions. Afterwards, in 2013 the group began to expand its media presence, ISIS established Al-I'tisam Media Foundation, Ajnad Foundation, Al-Hayat Media Center which publish in English, Russian, German, and French languages. ISIS's propaganda was abnormally promoting, it was broadcasting in 23 languages. Hence, they were publishing horrific images and videos of beheadings, burning people alive, explosions, and torture, to show how powerful the group is. The group also used social networks such as twitter, Facebook, and other social networks to attract jihadists through the online method (Winter, 2015). In addition Alfred (2015) explains more and argues that;

In ISIS's propaganda campaign, many different audiences are targeted by ISIS, including enemies of the group and supports. Meanwhile, the propaganda is aiming governments such as the member of the U.S-led coalition against ISIS, international publics, local governments, as well as people who are outside its territory. In addition, the group also has many different supporters they target whether its potential recruits or potential supporters, potential or disseminators' propagandists. (p. 8).

Furthermore, ISIS has used its propaganda machinery, as one of its most effective tools, to facilitate its expansion. Indeed, the group has set up a strong messaging campaign in order to win over potential allies. Including; local Sunnis, political Islamists, as well as regional jihadist groups. Therefore, ISIS's propaganda machinery has increased the expansion efforts of the group on the ground, and also improved its capabilities, sometimes fuelling exaggerated awareness of ISIS's strength in new areas (Williams, 2016, pp. 3-5). Hence, ISIS has used several common narratives and themes in its global propaganda attempts. In fact, "ISIS's theme is "winner's message", which exposes ISIS as an unstoppable militia force that can defeat all enemies" (Gartenstein, Barr & Moreng, 2016, P. 4). Thus, this narrative has been mainly effective in persuading prospective foreign fighters and

jihadi organizations, which indicated ISIS has power in the region. Moreover, ISIS has also adapted its campaign to local conditions, tapping into local social and political grievances (Gartenstein, Barr & Moreng, 2016).

To conclude, ISIS's propaganda addressed the grievances of Muslims across the world, including: transgression of the ummah as well as the western humiliation, military jihad, hypocrisy of Muslim and MENA leaders, plus providing social services within the territories that are controlled by ISIS, also the ability to administer territory by law, in addition to order and providing security. In fact, the anti-Western messages give ISIS more power to drag those who undervalue the Western culture. Hence, the West became the center of ISIS's claim to defend Muslims from the Western oppressions. For ISIS, the Western people want to steal the God given natural wealth to the region and they are those who colonized the region and fought Islam, those who do not believe in Allah. Therefore, through this lens it became easier for the group to attract oppressed people in the region and alienated Muslim youth in the world to its center.

3.4 *The exploitation of Islam's ideology*

In reality, ISIS is a jihadi-Salafist Islamic organization, seeking to restore the golden days of Islam through jihad, a holy war against external and internal enemies. Indeed, ISIS is a jihadi Salafi or Wahabi group that depends on the extremist interpretation of Islam. Therefore, it seeks to promote violence of religions; also its members believe that who do not agree with or stand against the organization's interpretation is infidel. Hence, ISIS seeks to return Muslim community to the early days of Islam, when Islam was expanding through jihad. For that reason, Salafist believe that jihad is a duty. Furthermore, through jihad (holy war) all Muslims must distribute and implement Islam in all aspects of their life. Meanwhile, this could happen only by making the lands of Islam free from other cultures, especially the Western culture. In addition to that, another belief of Salafist is that only through the use of violence and the uncompromised militancy way this aim could be archived. Therefore, all Muslims must fight against the enemies of Islam. Hence, according to their belief, not only the U.S. and the Western countries but also other the leaders of the Arab countries who are the puppets of the West and have a connection with them, are considered to be infidels (Goodwin, 2015).

On this basis, ISIS used Islam to brainwash people. Hence, the group offers a new unprecedented militant Salafi ideology, which is the religious rationale to justify, recruit motivate and legitimate many of its fighters. According to this basic, Al-Baghdadi has traditionally reinvented his own characteristic brand of Islam to legitimize his leadership. Moreover, he has used fighters for a militant ideological movement. Indeed, he has unified politics and religion into a more comprehensive religious ideology. Meanwhile, when it comes to examine ISIS's claims and the principles of Islam; ISIS claims that it stands for unadulterated and pure Islam. Thus, ISIS wants to return to the first three decades of Islam which was the golden age, when the prophet Mohammed was alive, he was interpreting Islam for people, but after his death, multiple interpretations of the Quran have arisen, so this can be used to challenge ISIS and reject its monopoly of interpretation. In addition, ISIS claims that Muslims are mistreated and their rights violated all around the world, therefore, the only way to get their rights back is through the fight (Hoffman, 2014). Furthermore, ISIS claims that its war is defensive of the Muslim community rather than offensive, against the Western domination and colonization of Arabs, as well as other Muslim lands by the rulers who are pro-Western. But, the fact is that Muslims are not humiliated all around the world, they are not persecuted in the Western society where millions are living. However, in the reality, the largest mistreatment against Muslims is taking place in Muslim countries such as Middle Eastern countries. On top of this, the ISIS fighters also claim that only by the sword can true Islam be established. Consequently, this indicates that other religions and sects who live in the Muslim society can be forced to convert to Islam or to be killed. But when it comes to Islam's history, there is evidence that other religions such as Christians and Jews were living in Muslim society in the era of Prophet Mohammad. In addition to that, there are many other texts in the Quran as well as hadiths that give

importance of coexistence in the Muslim community (Schmid, 2015, p. 4). In this regard author Humayun (2014) explains more by saying that;

Apart from the terminology, there is nothing in common between the so-called Caliphate that established by ISIS and the concept of real Caliphate in Islam. Indeed, there is a direct clash between what ISIS practice and what holy Quran says. For example, there is an explicit text in holy Quran which says “No obligation in religion” and the recognition of human diversity. In addition, Islam abolished slavery; prohibit killing innocent people, but when it comes to the reality of ISIS’s practices; their practices are contradicted to these fundamental principles of Islam. (p. 3).

In sum, ISIS seeks more to manipulate vulnerable people who are searching for the meaning of life. The one who does not know much about Islam’s texts can be easier to brainwash and unlikely to push back on what they are told. Indeed, ISIS seeks to find isolated people from society as well as those who are living far away from big cities, especially young people because it is easier to convince them according to the manual.

3.5 Anti-Shiite nature

Historically speaking, from early 1920 sectarian tension and political reasons were championed by sectarian political actors in Iraq, but when the Iranian revolution took place in 1979 and more precisely by the 1990s, the equation of majority Sunni and minority Shia in the political calculation and marginalization of Shias from politics had deepened and matured the struggle between the two sects in the Middle East. Therefore, this had an impact on the Iraqi population to the extent that it led to Shia belief that they were the majority with not enough space to participate in politics in a country with minority Sunnis (Cockburn, 2015). While, the sectarianization in Iraq was inevitable; a change of regime in 2003 accelerated the escalation between the two sects (Hunter, 2016, pp. 13-17). In fact, Saddam Hussein made a false belief that Sunnis are the majority in Iraq, this belief is still persistent in the mind of many Sunnis in the country today. Therefore, after the fall of the former Ba’ath regime, Sunnis still feeling suppressed from participating in power according to their size and sectarian tension sparked after 2003 by the U.S.-led invasion (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2020) As a result, with some help from the U.S. and Iran, Shias took power at the expense of the Sunni minority. Therefore, many Sunni extremists see the emergence of Shia power in Iraq as a sudden change. Since they had the prosperity and the power rule which Saddam’s regime granted them on the base of their sectarian affiliation. Today, there is no trust between the Sunnis and Shias. Moreover, they are playing the zero-sum game to control Iraqi political institutions. However, Shias felt suppressed when the country was ruled by Sunnis, and as long as Shias are in control, Sunnis feel that they are not fairly represented (Torkameh, Hafeznia, Roumina and Zahra, 2022). Therefore, ISIS exploited this anti-Shia nature and that is an important factor of how the group gained support in the areas that were heavily populated by Sunnis. Consequently, one of the most significant factors in ISIS’s renaissance is the conflict between the two largest Arab religious groups: Sunni and Shias. ISIS is a Sunni extremist group and its fighters are Sunni, and sectarian conflict between the two groups is a powerful tool for ISIS to use it against Shias (Fromson and Simon, 2015, pp. 14-27).

It is clear that sectarian rhetoric is a dominant ideological trend cross the Middle East. Indeed, the problem has deep roots. Thus, the leak of education is one of the reasons that many people in the Middle East are under sectarianism. There is a hate between Sunnis and Shias, and this fact gave an opportunity to ISIS to use sectarianism as a justification, not as the primary motivation. Hence, the group uses this anti-Shia nature to gain support in the Sunni areas. Thus, ISIS exploits the local power vacuum in order to increase its capabilities and amass territory (Lafta, Al-Nuaimi and Burnham, 2018). Therefore, this is one of the reasons that ISIS has more support in Sunni areas.

In short, the rise of ISIS has revived with revenge one of the oldest conflicts which is the rift between the Shias and Sunnis in Islam. In reality, Iraq has a Shia majority population; also Sunnis are a minority in Iraq, living in the north and west. Since the creation of Iraq after WWI, Sunnis were in power in Iraq till 2003. But, when Saddam Hussein’s Sunni regime collapsed by the U.S. led invasion

soon after Shias took power and marginalized Sunnis, as a result, ISIS used this anti-Shia nature as the basis of sectarianism to legitimize its war against Shia militias.

3.6 *Sense of victimization*

ISIS benefited from the old narratives, which are centered on victimization, the loss of past glory, and resentment. While, some of them are specific to the Arab world, others infuse the wider international Islamic community. In fact, the Arabian Peninsula's status was the cause of occurrence of these ideas, since the origin of Islam and the ensuing sense of community felt by Muslims outside of the region therefore, many of grievances in nature are regional and became sources of conflict for Muslims, such as colonialism, a desire for the golden age of Islam, the establishment of Israel, the Gulf war, the U.S. led invasions of Iraq (Etaat, and Dabiri, 2017). However, these grievances happened many years ago, but in the framework of this victimization narrative, this unfairness, and injustices, whether they are real or alleged, combined into a mutually strengthening story of oppression (Cosgrove, al-Chalabi, Slusher & Pollard, 2014). Hence, these grievances make it doable for ISIS to posture itself as a savior of sorts, offering both empowerment and redemption. Furthermore, Davis (2014) claims that: "ISIS appeals to many Muslims who consider the West as anti-Islam, clearly one of the group's main goals is to eliminate the artificial boundaries that have been drawn to separate Muslims in the World" (p. 9).

In point of fact, there is an old narrative that Muslims are victims of the Western repression and influence. Indeed, the West has a long history of suppression and interference of Muslim's territories, including the crusades, colonization, decolonization, and war. In addition, the Western governments are alleged to support corrupt regimes that have reserved Sunni populations. For example, in Iraq, the Sunni populations consider the U.S. involvement is suppression. In fact, the marginalization of the Sunnis after 2003, as well as the 2005 constitution and de-Baathification are evidence of victimhood by the U.S. However, during the invasion, the Americans promised to the Sunni tribes that they would support them. But, the central government mainly damaged what was achieved with the Americans by Iraqi treasure and blood. While, during Iraqi invasion, it's reported that about 2.5 million people became victims of the West's intervention (Barrett, 2017). As a result, the sense of victimization among Sunnis in Iraq used by ISIS to drag people's support as an ideology. Therefore, the Americans did not give them any kind of political autonomy or protection or self-determination in any way (Oosterveld and Bloem, 2017).

Interestingly, Some Sunnis view ISIS's idea to establish a so-called caliphate as an alternative to the modern nation-state system. Moreover, in the mind of many young Sunni Muslims, they are in the era of defending. Thus, they see ISIS as a way to restore Sunni power. Furthermore, it represents revival and strength in these young men's minds. However, they support ISIS not only because the members of ISIS are Sunni, but because of their exclusion in government in Iraq. Indeed, even those who are against ISIS's ideology view ISIS as the most liable power to defeat Iraq's militias. In addition to that, they consider ISIS as a way to revenge the U.S. because of what they did against the Iraqi Sunni population in Gulf war, also the U.S embargo on Iraq, as well as 2003 invasion. On top, what is more dramatic is that the central government in the eyes of many Sunnis is a Shia dominated government. In fact, those Sunni people consider the rule of Shia is worse than ISIS. For that reason, in Iraq the sense of disenfranchisement, victimization, and lack of representation in central government, as well as the humiliation, narrative, repression, and the lack of respect and dignity by Shia are observable among Sunnis (Mabon and Royle, 2016). All these led to the fact that Sunnis feel marginalized and suppressed. Moreover, the main grievances are the Shia domination, which is supported by Iran with the acceptance of the U.S. (Cabayan, 2014). Shortly, all together this played a major role for ISIS to get support in the Sunni areas.

3.7 Misappropriating the Arab Uprising

The Arab Uprising was a booming protest against everything, from the corrupt and puppet regimes, who exploit natural sources and controlled everything in the country, to the foreign humiliation and occupations heaped over all those who dared enough to think that they had a right to stand against. In fact, the Arab uprising was about this mysterious word, “*hurriyya*”, which means different things to different people, but at its most base, it means freedom from exploitation, oppression, a servile existence, and corruption (Beccaro, 2020).

It was late 2010 when a street seller Mohamed Bouazizi inspired millions of Arabs to revolt against totalitarian governments. Later, within weeks, apparently, the vulnerable Arab regimes began to shake. And a single man had sparked what Islamists, including radical groups for decades had not achieved; the overthrow of a totalitarian government. Indeed, a new generation of radical jihad groups saw this change as unique opportunities to endorse their own priorities, method, and strategy of jihad (Green & Ferguson, 2015). However, Jihad Salafists groups had little to do with the Arab Spring themselves, although, they comprehended the significance of capitalizing on new regional dynamics. As a result, the fall of the totalitarian regime in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya created contested security and political environments, thereby, thousands of jihadist Salafist activists and leaders released by new governments (Devine, 2015). However, this not only encouraged the positions of those groups but also created an unprecedented vacuum for them to work at a local level with the smallest of constraints. Meanwhile, the civil war in Syria provided a vacuum of security in the country and created a new arena for jihad, Furthermore, encouraging thousands of jihadists to travel to the country from across the Middle East and beyond. The Arab Uprising weakened the States and this gave a space to extremist organizations, among them ISIS to get stronger. Thus, in the Arab Uprising when the dictators have been removed, an opportunity has been given to the people to take power. Indeed, in the unstable situation always Islamic extremist movements take advantages to re-strong themselves and they use violence to force people to support them.

The post-Arab Uprising regional developments, particularly the Syrian civil war, did not only play the main role in redefining the struggle in Iraq, but it also affected the rise of ISIS. Indeed, the group has managed through the Syrian civil war to re-establish its power in Syria that has observed the biggest jihadi uprising at the time, even greater than Iraq. This is particularly true in terms of factions, the number of fighters, and size of armament. However, before the Arab Uprising, ISIS was weakened in Iraq, but the group joined the Syrian civil war the moment it was militarized.

In short, ISIS attracts significant numbers of young Muslims because of the alienation, humiliation, marginalization, unemployment, emptiness, hatred, hopelessness, and fear they experienced in their lives. Consequently, ISIS became so attractive for some Muslims, because the group offered worldly benefits, including polygamy, free land, and a solid monthly salary. Furthermore, in terms of other attractive benefits, ISIS also offers guaranteed eternal life in heaven. Since its members are evidently carrying out Jihad against the cruel Arab dictatorships, pro-western local puppets, and colonizers, as well as international imperialist oppressors and countering neo-colonial locals (Tobing and Indradjaja, 2019). As a result, humiliation and anger led to political violence in the Middle East. However, it clearly stems from corrupt, weak, and failing non-existent democratic states, but it also started from strong dictatorship states, which are the product of colonizers and the Western hegemony. In addition to that, conditions of Muslims in the Western nations alienated some young Muslims, these factors have been clearly capitalized on by ISIS in the Arab Uprising.

3.8 The Syrian crisis and ISIS

The Arab Uprising in 2011 and the Syrian Civil war presented to ISIS a golden opportunity to go back to the scene. Indeed, ISIS showed its presence in Syria by cooperation with some other terrorist organizations such as Jabhat Al Nusra. Also ISIS grabbed a golden chance in Syria, by using the

different regional and international interests in cooperation with terrorist organizations or egging them on. (Koolae, Narges and Akbari, 2021). Meanwhile, ISIS exploited inactivity by the international community toward the Syrian peoples' sufferings, while the Free Syrian Army already occupied the Syrian revolutionary scene. On the other hand, Jabhat Al Nusra needed to show up to make its place in the military sight. Afterward, in 2013 ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of ISIS and annexed Jabhat Al Nusra to it (Hatahet, 2015). However, even later disagreements rose between the two groups, but most of the Jabhat Al Nusra's men joined ISIS. At the end, the group lost most of its territories to ISIS (Hatahet, 2015).

In the meantime, in 2013, the loss of the Syrian regime's territory pushed Assad's supporters such as Hezbollah alongside Iraqi Shiite brigades to intervene in the side of the regime. Consequently, the Shiite militias' involvement and Iran's undivided financial and political support to the regime had an impact on the Syrian civil war. This fact widely contributed to rising sectarian tensions in Syria, which later on supported the ISIS narrative. In fact, Shiite intervention has legitimized the transnational Sunni opposed intervention, mostly benefiting ISIS (Bozorgmehri, 2016). In addition, ISIS exploited the political annulment left unoccupied by the divergent and disorganized Syrian opposition. Indeed, the opposition leaders failed to offer a common realistic vision. Even though, the international community failed to provide services to the areas that were liberated from the regime, such as security, effective administration, gas, and electricity. Therefore, it provoked dissatisfaction among local population against political leadership; hence, ISIS with its solid order and laws was able to convince people it would provide a better life for them (Gerges, 2016). In addition, also author Alexander (2016) has more to say about that;

ISIS was able to get benefit from interaction between the conflicts in Syria and Iraq much better than other forces in Syria. As it had intentionally set itself with the aim of eliminating the border between the two countries, ISIS was able to use each as a back territory for offensive maneuvers in the other and could transport men, arms, and material from one front to another. (p. 16).

By going back to recent history, when the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, the Americans promised to bring democracy but in reality hundreds of Iraqis were killed, later they left the country with many problems. After nearly a decade, this fact had an impact on the Syrian Civil war. Indeed, when people protested in seeking of democratic aspirations, again the same U.S. was not willing to show a serious reaction against the regime. Therefore, the Syrian people, as well as the people of the region, view this as sheer insincerity and betrayal to the democratic desire of the unarmed Syrian revolution. As a result, ISIS was decisive and quick in exploiting such inconsistency (Millstein, 2015). Meanwhile, the disintegration of the country's political system as well as social fabric and its transformation into a battlefield for regional wars by proxies, also presented inspiration and motivation for potential recruits to ISIS

More importantly, in terms of the weaponry and manpower, ISIS enjoyed the Syrian war to strengthen its militant capability; its aim was different from other groups. Hence, the group entered into the Syrian conflict not with the aim of accelerating the fall of the regime, but for establishing and consolidating its so-called caliphate. Therefore, ISIS strategy to control territories was symbiotic with the regime (Lewis, 2014). In fact, ISIS controlled those areas that the Syrian regime had decided were impractical to control, especially Raqqa province and around territories, unlike the opposition's forces to control whole the country.

4. Conclusion

All the way through those conflicts and chaos in the Middle East, extremist factions have reacted violently to the occupation and suppression that foreigners and what they called puppet leaders did against them, and this fact led to rise of terrorist groups, especially after 2011 and the most recent and deadliest and most powerful one ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in 2014. ISIS is a Jihadi-Salafism terrorist organization which belongs to the school of Islamic political thought and holds hard line orientations within this school itself. The group seeks to reinstate the golden days of Islam

when it had power through violence. ISIS rose in Iraq because of several factors. After 2003 Shias came to power in Iraq and the policy that was adopted by former prime minister Nori Al-Maliki marginalized Sunnis from participating in politics and army. He began to target Sunni figures one by one. Therefore, the stage was already placed for a revolutionary version of awe and shock when ISIS rose in Iraq. The Iraqi army almost became Shia militias and with the rise of ISIS, the army showed no resistance because they did not want to die in a land that they considered as not belonging to them, the ability of the army to protect Baghdad and other Shia areas is a clear indication in this regard. Therefore, the flow of the Iraqi army left ISIS with enough weapons and ammunitions to defend itself and with the influx of thousands of foreign fighters from all around the world and the help of local tribes; ISIS was able to stand on its feet for quite long. In addition, looting banks, ransom from kidnapping, oil smuggling, human trafficking, taxes, and selling heritages in the territory under its control gave ISIS enough fuel to operate its so-called Caliphate.

ISIS used a sophisticated propaganda to broadcast its advances and activities as a message to panic its enemies and on the other hand to show a friendly face of the life in its so-called Caliphate in order to attract more people. Furthermore, ISIS exploited Islam to brainwash vulnerable young Muslims who had primary knowledge about the principles of Islam. Despite this ISIS also used anti-Shia rhetoric to get the sympathy of Sunnis in Iraq and sectarianize its war against Shia militias. ISIS was like a magnet to drag angry Arab people who were protesting against their regimes in the Arab Uprising in 2011 and the group found a favorable platform in the civil war arena of Syria to radicalize and prepare them for its emergence in Iraq. The rise of ISIS was the outcome of some factors but after nearly three years its so-called Caliphate has shrunken and almost been defeated in Iraq due to some other factors. ISIS expanded its fight to multiple fronts and simultaneously declared war against many forces including the Iraqi army and Kurdish Peshmerga. This fact caused ISIS to not concentrate on one single front and it was defeated in all fronts. Furthermore, the lack of dependable allies left ISIS alone with surrounding enemies. There were unholy allies within ISIS. Local tribes cooperated with the group because they were fed up with the central government policy and ISIS showed itself as a rescuer at the beginning but soon enough the group began to implement its barbaric actions and lost the support from local populations. Moreover, ISIS exploited Islam to attract people and it claimed that it was following Islamic principles and Sharia Law, but it did not take a long time before people could easily compare between ISIS's false claims and Islam's true principles.

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