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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RISE OF RADICAL TERRORISM AND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Ewelie C. Justice[1]* | Emmanuel Wonah[2]

Abstract

This paper examined the rise of radical terrorism and the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The broken politics in the Middle East and the fraying de-legitimization of state institutions arising from structural imbalance in the political system has resulted in the spike of radical terrorist organization like the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The paper adopted the secondary sources of data. To give theoretical explanation to the subject matter, two theories were employed. First, the Frustration-Aggression theory offers explanation that inequalities gives expression to aggressive outcome. Second, is the Clash of civilization theory identifies the new fault line of conflict along world civilizations. The paper found out that one of the deepest underlying sources of Muslim anguish and frustration lies in the dramatic decline of Arab civilization. The paper therefore recommended that the war against terrorism will be unending if the fundamental causes and grievances are not addressed.

Key words: Terrorism, Radical Terrorism, Extremism, Middle East, Islamic State.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The ever changing crisis in the Middle East lay credence to the fact that violent conflict remains the dominant problem facing the international community. The exacerbating conflicts in the region at first appears to be independent cases but a deeper reflection shows common features mostly a combination of ethno-religious and state resentment. In Iraq and Syria, the tussle is amongst the Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Turkmen among others. These divisive tendencies are further heightened and tend to escalate to conflict as a result of the irreconcilable contradictions arising from the economic, political and religious structures which depict the institutions of the state. The result of this underperforming state institutions and perceived frustration has resulted in the emergence of different extremist groups who have found safe havens in the Middle East. In the midst of this conflict, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or otherwise known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levante (ISIL) has grown to power and subsequently proclaiming itself a "Caliphate" by 29, June 2014. Thus ISIS got stronger and was increasingly able to fight back and challenge the state including its monopoly of the use of force.

2 | CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

TERRORISM

Terrorism like everything else comes in waves (Rap-

[1]Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt. P.M.B 5323 Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

[2]Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt. P.M.B 5323 Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Address correspondence to: Ewelie C. Justice, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt. P.M.B 5323 Port Harcourt, Nigeria,

port, 2001) and in cycles (Bergesen and Lizardo, 2004). Like all political concepts, it is characterised by the conflict between professed ideas and its implementation. Terrorism, therefore, is a fluid and elastic concept that has become an issue for which scholars differ as to what constitutes terrorism. One of such problems bothers on the delineation between terrorist and freedom fighters (Jenkins, 1982; Hoffman 1998), state terrorism and non state terrorist (Stern 1999) hence, it is not surprising that consensus definition about its nature differs sharply.

Consequently, developing a precise definition of the term "terrorism" has been problematic. Generally, terrorism is often regarded as a type of violence perpetrated by non-state actors (Gibbs, 1989; Laqueur, 1996; Enders and Sandler, 2002) and an act or threat of violence against non combatants with the objective of exacting revenge, intimidating, or otherwise influencing an audience (Stern, 1999) or an attempt to govern or to oppose government by intimidation (Pye, 1956). In this line, the FBI defines terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (FBI, 2006). It is this use of lethal force and violence that falls outside the normal form of political struggle that sets terrorism apart from other forms of political violence (Tilly, 2004) as terrorists are prepared to engage in things most people would not dare, such as suicide bombings (Baudrillard, 2002).

As weapon of the weak (Scott, 1985) and as a result of the asymmetrical nature of terrorism involving battle between two unequal parties, terrorism adopts a premeditated attack on soft targets with no direct connection to the terrorist's grievance. Hence, in what follows, terrorism involves the use of threat of violence to communicate a political message rather than defeat an opponent's military forces (Crenshaw, 2001).

In view of the above, according to Schinkel (2009), terrorism is anchored on the fact that it is premeditated, and politically or ideologically motivated (Hoffman, 1998; Crenshaw, 1972; Laqueur, 1987) involving extreme violence (Tilly, 2004) targeted at unarmed civilians (Stern 2003) or strategic political, economic or religious targets (Crenshaw 2001) by non state organizations that seeks to influence by fear

(Crenshaw, 2001; Stern, 2003) which are dangerous to human life and global peace.

Furthermore, in its simplistic definition, the British Government puts the concept as "the use, or threat, of action which is violent, damaging or disrupting, and is intended to influence the government or intimidate the public and is for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, or ideological cause". It is within this definitive view that the concept of terrorism will be interrogated and the new wave of terrorism explored.

3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a result of the dynamic nature of the subject matter, two theoretical frameworks were adopted. First is the Frustration-Aggression theory. One of the basic assumptions of the Frustration Aggression theory is the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Gurr (1970). Consequently, being frustrated translates in the inability of a person to achieve his or her stated goal and possibly thwarted by another party, thus the reaction is that of annoyance. According to Gurr (1970), there is the tendency for individuals or groups to fight against what they see as an obstacle to their achievement of a goal. Miller (1941) notes that frustration produces instigations to a number of different types of response, one of which is some form of aggression. In effect, the inequalities arising from distribution of social, economic and political good gives expression to aggressive outcomes.

The second is the Clash of Civilization advanced by Samuel Huntington. The basis of Huntington's thesis is that, during the post cold war era, conflict fault lines will transcend beyond been primarily ideological or primarily economic, but will be cultural or what he described as 'civilisational' (Huntington, 1997). He further argued that to understand conflict, cultural divisions must first be understood and that culture and civilization must be accepted as the cause of war, and not politics of state or economics. He describes civilization as a cultural entity in which villages, ethnic groups, religions all have distinct cultures at all levels of cultural heterogeneity. He further asserted that civilization is marked by com-

mon objective elements such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self identification of people. He believes that the new identification based on religion provides a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations.

Howbeit, the reshaping of world order, the decline in Arab civilization and the consequent frustration from perceived western dominance and the underperforming political, economic and social institutions have further driven terrorist radicalization. The quest by the Islamic state to establish a caliphate across the Arab world gives credence to Huntington's postulation.

4 | THE RISE OF RADICAL TERRORISM

Terrorism in post colonial era was predominated by nationalists and revolutionary movements based on growing resentment against state formation and creation of Israel as a threat to the Marxist leftist governments. Hence, for almost three decades, the activities of terrorist movements were closely linked to the Marxist ideology. While terrorism is a phenomenon that is constantly changing, the trend, method and lethality between each generation often entails a signal break with the past.

Studies on radicalization have found that religious ideology, culture, social and economic factors such as lack of education, unemployment, absence of upward mobility are the major factors that make recruits very susceptible to radicalization. As succinctly argued, political and social inequalities breed terrorist radicalization, this was aptly captured when Cronin (2004) stated that "the jihad era, is animated by widespread alienation combined with elements of religious identity and doctrine - a dangerous mix of forces that resonate deep in the human psyche". Religious terrorists often display a complete sense of alienation from the existing social system. They are not trying to correct the system, making it more just, more perfect and more egalitarian rather they are trying to replace it.

Similarly, Fuller (2003) further notes that "the deepest underlying source of Muslim anguish and frustration today lies in the dramatic decline of the Muslim world. The stunning reversal of fortune obsessively shapes the impulses underlying much contemporary Islamist rhetoric. The consequent state response and the vicious cycle of violence and counter violence blunt the radicalization further making it more belligerent and difficult proposition for state intervention. Efforts at radicalizing Muslim youths into terrorism and violent ways have become more pronounced since the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result radical terrorist networks have experienced a spike in recruitment and there is an increase in radical fundamentalism all over the world. Their goal in their terms is to drive the infidels from Muslim lands, to overthrow the corrupt and brutal governments imposed and sustained by infidels, and to institute an extremist version of Islam.

After the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Islamic revolution in Shia majority Iran, terrorism entered a new phase. The Soviet incursion gave boost to well trained terrorist groups, volunteers from across the world supported by Arab countries fought against the communist government. At the turn of the end of 1970s, a generation of radical Islamists embraced radical Islam as an ideology to justify the resort to transnational political violence, considered to be the only means of restoring the caliphate and unifying the Muslim community. The most radical manifestation of this ideology became the mujahideen terrorism, a fundamental of the Salafist school and a principal threat to the international community. As a result, there has been increased emergence of radical terrorist groups in Syria, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Indonesia, Thailand, Libya and many others. In most cases, they operate under different names in different countries like Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Taliban in Afghanistan, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria have grown into the most dreaded radical terrorist organizations with high degree of terror concerning global security concerns.

Among all these radical Islamic group, ISIS or Islamic state of Iraq and Syria, popularly known as Islamic state has become the current dominant Jihadi group with sheer brutality and sadistic violence as its signature mark. In a short span of 15 years, Islamic state has brought in radical and barbaric ideology with an agenda of capturing territories and establishing what it calls the 'caliphate', or, an Islamic state

and it has spread its tentacles all over Iraq and Syria. In the ideology of the 'caliphate', the Islamic state terrorists attack and damage the economy of governments and subjugate the population by visible acts of horrific terror and gain control over territories. The Islamic state twists the Islamic texts into perverse idiom with a narrative that legitimatize practices of slavery, beheadings, suicide bombings and other forms.

The threat of international terrorism consummated in 9/11 signalling the second war on terror, the first having been declared by the Reagan administration. As widely argued the terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed everything dramatically as the world entered a new and frightening age of terror leading to the continuous increase in the number of radical terrorist organizations. In the peak of this ideology, Al Qaeda positioned itself as a determined enemy of the international community. Al-Qaeda was originally formed by Abdallam Azzam and Osama bin Laden to sustain the momentum of the anti-Soviet multi-national Afghanistan mujahideen campaign. Since its creation in 1988, Al Qaeda has sought to position itself as the pioneering vanguard of the jihad organizations worldwide. Then, with the formation of World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders, Al Qaeda morphed from a group into a network. By providing training, finance, weapons, and ideology to disparate jihad groups in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda earned the respect of like minded groups.

The twin bombing of the World Trade Centre was deeply symbolic. It signified retaliation for the cruise missiles that rained down on Afghanistan and Sudan in September 1998 while also targeting the hegemonic economic reign of the United States. The extent of the attack wrought by the 9/11 bombings accounted nearly for about 3,000 deaths and unarguably, underlined the strategic threat of Al Qaeda and more recently radical terrorist organizations to global security.

5 | FROM AL-QAEDA TO ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Daesh or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levante or the Islamic State arguably arises from the symp-

tom of the broken politics of the Middle East and the fraying de-legitimization of state institutions as well as the spreading of civil war in Syria. The breakdown of state institutions in Syria and the country's decent into all out civil war after 2011 has greatly impacted the insurgence of the terrorist group. It is important to note that terrorism is more likely to occur during periods of hegemonic decline. This position is supported by Fawaz (2016) in positing that the reliance on tyranny, corruption and coercion by governments across the region, led to the breakdown of state-society relationship.

As the repressive, corrupt and sectarian regimes in many states in the Middle East region generated political instability, spiked the birth and rebirth of sectarian and radical terrorist groups to occupy the vacant political space. Political instability either as a result of western intervention or the Arab Spring has been a potential factor contributing to the rise of the ongoing phase of terrorism within the region.

In so far that the capacity of the system to protect the integrity of its territory is affected, acts of terrorism is more likely when the system is undergoing transition or the system leader is in a state of legitimacy decline. Consequently, Mendelson (2016) finds a link in the growth of Salafist jihadist groups, to the weakening of states ability to enforce laws and provide border security. He went on to argue that weak states are less able to secure their borders and prevent such organizations from carving out safe havens for training and launching operations.

In the midst of this conflict, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has risen to power. On 29 June 2014, ISIS proclaimed itself a "Caliphate" initially based on, but not limited to, territories it controls in Syria and Iraq. New recruits were not only expected to engage in military activity but also help with building the emerging "state". This declaration demonstrates that the group envisions a long term plan and has undertaken military operations toward this end. According to Lister (2015) ISIS controls territory from Aleppo region of Syria to the Salah ad Din province in Iraq which is estimated to be larger than the United Kingdom.

ISIS is a radical and well-organized Islamist organization that has conquered territory in Iraq and Syria, further driving many Syrians from their homes. In

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Ar-Raqqah and other areas it controls, ISIS operates a primitive but rigid administrative system that comprises the Al-Hisbah morality police, the general police force, courts, and entities managing recruitment, tribal relations, and education. The group sustains the areas under its control by maintaining some basic services in a highly repressive environment. The stated purpose of ISIS is to establish a renewed caliphate, or rule according to the earliest leaders in seventh century Islam, and to become the highest authority in the Islamic world, destroying all it considers the enemies of Islam. The group is infamous for mass murder of civilians, graphic videos of beheadings of captives, and the destruction of irreplaceable archaeological treasures.

In the midst of this ISIS got stronger, and was increasingly able to fight back and thus challenge the state including its monopoly of the use of force. As Mendelson (2016) further argued that state weakness frequently manifests in its inability to provide basic services for its citizens; hence, well resourced groups, such as ISIS, then present themselves as alternative. As a result of this political tyranny and dismal social and economic conditions, ISIS exploits the vacuum by both challenging the ideology of the state and, at a practical level, presenting a subversive alternative through the re-establishment of the caliphate. By offering some alternative, insurgent groups can attract recruits and supporters, while consolidating their hold on territory and populace. With this Maher (2016) argues that ISIS presents itself as alternative to the Syrian regime and concludes by suggesting that ISIS is a result of "violent rejectionists".

The Islamic State's pretensions to statehood have permitted it a veneer of legitimacy. By positioning itself as the protector of Islam, the Islamic State has been successful in attracting recruits, including substantial numbers of foreign fighters. This situation was aptly captured when Moubayed (2016) stated that the bulk of those that joined the salafist-jihadists frequently have done so, not necessarily out of a shared belief but because the previous political systems had failed. Thus ISIS has exploited the unrest in Syria for its own end. It continues to use the political chaos and violence to create a gap in which it could embed itself in Syria. With the use of local networks, resources and porous borders, ISIS has been able to seize and control large portions of Iraq and Syria.

The strategic target of ISIS is the consolidation and expansion of lands and authority of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and other neighboring Muslim countries. ISIS wants to destroy the colonial borders in the Fertile Crescent, or the Levant, which were drawn by the European powers at the end of World War One. In doing so, the group seeks to replace the "apostate" regimes with an Islamic state, a caliphate.

ISIS has extensively employed brutal tactics, including the use of explosive weapons, mass civilian casualty attacks through suicide or remote detonated car bombs, and the execution of fighters captured during military operations. The group has also relied on its increased mobility and firepower capabilities to surprise its opponents and ensure local superiority. Its military strategy also includes the negotiation of local agreements with various groups as part of a divide and rule system. It also relies on military hardware looted from other Syrian armed belligerents including material provided by external backers; recently its financial independence has further allowed the group to acquire military hardware through local markets.

The arrival of large numbers of foreign fighters has contributed to the group's expansion as the most extreme and experienced individuals have joined its ranks. ISIS functions under responsible command and has a hierarchical structure, including a policy level. The group has established a command and control system under Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, who holds absolute power and is supported by a number of entities including a military council, it depends on a network of regional and local emirs and military commanders to enforce tight discipline among its ranks and ensure full control of its territory.

As the group's ideology found resonance socially and economically among desperate communities, the group grew in lethality. As pointed by Syrian Human Right Report (2016), extremist group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (Islamic State of Syria or the Da'esh) killed several people notably Arab and Kurdish civilians in 21 March 2016. The report went further to cite the Commission of Inquiry that had recorded the Da'esh bombings of medical facilities in those areas controlled by Kurdish People Protection Units (YPG) and civilians were targeted. The

SHRR (2016:22) had shown that Jabhat al-Nusra to be responsible for killing 20 Druze, in Massacre in Idlib area in 2015 while Syrian Network for Human Rights implicated the death of 132 civilians to the activities of PYD and other related forces. As an instrument of warfare, extremist groups had utilized kidnapping as a tactic to instigate fear in the populace. As reported by SHRR (2016:22)

Armed extremist groups that are not linked to the government had kidnapped individuals especially in the northern areas targeting religious leaders, workers suspected government affiliates, journalist and activities. The SNHR attributed nearly 72,000 of estimated 75,000 forced disappearances to the government SNHR linked 1,479 disappearances to Da'esh, 892 to al-Nusra front, 397 to the PYD and other kurdish forces and 306 to armed opposition forces this may include the Salafist groups of Jordan

In what actually follows, there is a strong claim from the United Nations that terrorist groups continue to target aid workers and subject them to severe torture or most of the times used them for swap deal.

This ugly situation warranted COI in its June report of 2016 to opine that ISIS has 'only come to destroy'. It argued that this group (ISIS) had committed war crimes and genocide against the Yazidi women and humanity. The civilian population becomes a target of the indirect strategy when its fate as a potential victim can influence the decisions taken by its leaders. The notion that the fate of civilians automatically sways the political leadership represents a contemporary, contingent understanding of politics.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

As established the phenomenon of terrorism involves acts of pure mindless violence. It has its own dynamics and complexity, shaped by multiple social, psychological, historical, political and economic conditions. Hence, it must be noted that unless the social, political and economic conditions that spawned terrorism are addressed, acts of terrorism will continue to increase. It is therefore crucial to eliminate policies that have been a recruiting device; they must be separated from their widening constituency and while military might can destroy ISIS, its expanding support base can be eroded only by

policies Arab and Muslims see as just. Extreme radicalization can be countered by addressing the grievances that finds appeal in the teaming army of recruits through foreign policy changes, political concession where there are areas of disagreements, improvements, grievances of Muslim countries, income redistribution and dialogue.

Conclusively, even the destruction of ISIS will do little if the underlying conditions that facilitated the group's emergence and popularity-political oppression and economic marginalization will persist as delicate social and political problems cannot be bombed out of existence. By dropping bombs and firing missiles, the root of terrorism festers. Violence can be likened to a virus, the more you bombard it, the more it spreads. Hence, those who want victory against terror without addressing the fundamental causes and grievances want an unending war.

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