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## The Threat of ISIS and the Global Response

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By Kazi Anwarul Masud

Once again another Islamic radical group has arisen from the sands of the Middle East to wreck havoc in an already disorderly world. Surprisingly this group has forced its way into internecine fights in Iraq and Syria to carve a "state" that goes beyond terrorism.

Starting as an al-Qaida splinter group the group first named itself as Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) and it expanded in 2013 as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS- territory in the Levant region includes Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Cyprus, , and an area in southern Turkey) through absorption of an al Qaeda-backed militant group in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, also known as the al-Nusra Front. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi declared his group to be known as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). But both Al Nusra group and al-Qaida refused their association with ISIS.

In June this year Isis announced the creation of a caliphate (Islamic State) that erases all state borders making ISIS the self-declared leader of the world's estimated 1.5 billion Muslims. The group also announced a name change to the Islamic State (IS). Al-Baghdadi's claim of an Islamic Caliphate has been received with derision. The Economist (July 12 2014) writes: "The International Union of Muslim Scholars, a group of Sunni lambasted SIC's declaration of a caliphate as illegitimate, destructive not only to the Sunni uprisings in Iraq and Syria but to Islam in general. Not even the Jordanian cleric released from prison last month and widely respected in jihadist circles, endorsed the caliphate project. He called on ISI leaders and followers to "Reform yourselves, repent, stop killing fellow Muslims and distorting religion.

" ISIS' declaration of a translational state defies the definition of a state as is commonly understood. Implicit in its declaration is also a call for jihad to people subscribing to its belief to rebel against the authority of the country of which they are citizens. This act should not be confused with the burning of draft cards by students during the Vietnam War for there was never any question of renouncing the US

citizenship by the card burners though some Americans left the country to escape imprisonment. Nor is it to be seen as irredentism where a state may advocate annexation of territories presently administered by another state on grounds of common ethnicity, prior historical possession or other reasons. By no stretch of imagination is the claim of ISIS of an Islamic Caliphate can have any rational basis.

ISIS has been called as the most brutal of all terrorist organizations--all of whom are brutal in any case. The rise of ISIS has been credited with the assassinations of respected Sunni religious leaders. Jessica Lewis of the Institute of the Study of War warns the West to take Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and his intention to establish Islamic Caliphate seriously. Lewis adds that there have been assassinations targeting political leaders, but there have also been assassination campaigns targeting protest leaders. The latter concerns her greatly, because it appears that AQI wants to deter constructive engagement between the disenfranchised Arab Sunni population in Iraq and Maliki's government.

The post Iraq invasion policies of the international coalition forces have also been cited as a factor blaming the coalition forces during the Iraq War for "enshrining identity politics as the key marker of Iraqi politics". ISIS's violence is directed particularly against Shia Muslims and indigenous Syriac-Aramean, Assyrian, and Armenian Christians. Christians living in areas under ISIS control who wanted to remain in the "caliphate" faced three options, converting to Islam, paying a religious levy or death. It may be academic to discuss the legality of assassination as a tool of statecraft of a terrorist organization. Yet the civilized world should remind itself of the illegality of such acts.

Emmerich de Vattel defined assassination as "treacherous murder". Because assassination is generally committed through treachery political thinkers throughout the ages found it abhorrent. Hugo Grotius, the father of international law, condemned assassination by treacherous means. Hague Convention on Laws and Custom on War especially forbade killing or wounding treacherously individuals belonging to hostile nations or army.

In 1981 President Reagan issued an executive order prohibiting any person employed by or acting on behalf of the US government to engage in or conspire to engage in assassination. The order was a codification of an earlier policy laid down by President Ford in 1976. Interestingly an article titled "Can we put the leaders of the Axis of Evil in the crosshairs" published in Parameters (Fall 2002) of the US Army War College asserted, "Under the current circumstances assassination may prove to be a more frequent and necessary means of countering the asymmetric threat our nation will continue to face". Controversial it may be yet the alleged assassination of Yasser Arafat by the Israelis and the recently aired video in which Jackie Kennedy alleged President Lyndon Johnson to be behind the assassination of JFK are disturbing news.

The question that arises is why are thousands of terrorists including foreigners(nearly a thousand are reported to hail from Chechnya and perhaps 500 or so more from France, Britain and elsewhere in Europe) are attracted to ISIS ideology? ISIS's ideology originates in the branch of modern Islam that aims to return to the early days of Islam, rejecting later "innovations" in the religion which it believes corrupt its original spirit. It condemns later caliphates and the Ottoman Empire for deviating from what it calls pure Islam and hence has been

attempting to establish its own caliphate. Salafists (a militant group of extremist Sunnis who believe themselves the only correct interpreters of the Koran and consider moderate Muslims to be infidels; seek to convert all Muslims and to insure that its own fundamentalist version of Islam will dominate the world) such as ISIS believe that only a legitimate authority can undertake the leadership of jihad, and that the first priority over other areas of combat, such as fighting against non-Muslim countries, is the purification of Islamic society.

For example, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since ISIS regards the Palestinian Sunni group Hamas as apostates who have no legitimate authority to lead jihad, it regards fighting Hamas as the first step toward confrontation with Israel. Sectarian conflict has also contributed to the rise of ISIS. Jessica Lewis is convinced that ISIS is already a threat to the United States. ISIS is not only dangerous in a regional context because it is overthrowing modern state boundaries in ways that incur massive ethno-sectarian killing and cleansing. ISIS is also a global jihadist organization that shares al-Qaeda's ideology, such that its progress drives towards a post-state and apocalyptic vision that involves the destruction of the modern state system. ISIS is now a direct threat to neighboring states in the Middle East, and ISIS is broadcasting the intent to attack Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the West. The threat of attacks against the U.S. is present. It is therefore necessary, opines Jessica Lewis, for the U.S. to consider ways to defeat ISIS, not only to preserve the integrity of the Iraqi state, but to preserve her own security.

Many wonder how ISIS have risen to be the most important terrorist group in such a short time. It is believed that three factors mainly contributed to its rise. The first is the inconsistency of its opponents. In Iraq, the revival of the group since it was essentially wiped out in 2006-- 2007 was made possible in large part due the imprudent policies of Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki. The biased anti-terror laws as well as the tendency to employ sectarian rhetoric in military campaigns against militancy in Sunni areas estranged the Sunni population, which played into ISIS's hands. The second reason is the clarity of its ideology and approach compared to other Islamists. The fact that ISIS has already announced an "Islamic state" that Muslims can join, and fight for its survival and expansion, appeals to a considerable number of people – even though its brutal tactics have alienated others. The third reason is the group's ability to gain substantial funding. As most jihadist groups, ISIS justifies extortion, ransom payments, and monopoly of resources by the fact that it considers itself as the only legitimate Islamic entity that represents the interests of Sunni Muslims. While other rebel groups fight the regime, ISIS has busied itself with taking over areas under rebel control. ISIS also uses soft power by helping people with building roads and bridges and catering to local needs. The group has acquired considerable funds by looting Mosul central bank and taking gold bullions from other banks. ISIS generates revenue from producing crude oil and selling electric power in northern Syria. Some of this electricity is reportedly sold back to the Syrian government. According to some estimate ISIS may be the richest terrorist organization in the world.

One solution can be Mali type foreign military intervention. Moderate Muslims, in particular Muslim Diaspora in the West, cannot remain as a victim of "progressive alienation" from the mainstream society of the country they live in because one terrorist or the other wreck havoc for the unfinished work of the Western powers. For the sake of politico-economic advancement of the Islamic world.

Al-Qaeda, ISIS or any radical Islamists have to be eliminated by the international community by using both hard and soft power. Sitting on

the fence is no option.

*(The writer is a former Secretary and Ambassador from Bangladesh)*

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