THE GLOBALISATION OF MIDDLE EASTERN TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary global terrorism has its roots to Middle East, especially starting from 1960s. The Israel-Palestinian issue has geared up the wave of modern terrorism and then following the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan has garnished the terror atmosphere since 1980s, giving birth to al-Qaeda. With that, affiliates, and franchised organizations of al-Qaeda mushroomed in all corners of the world making it a global network. Therefore, al-Qaeda made a landmark in modern terrorism which is motivated by religious extremism. Having said that, this paper portrays how terrorism in the Middle East has its ramifications all around world making it globalized by collecting data from qualitative methods such as interviews, statements, books, journal articles, websites etc.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific Strategies, Regional Stability

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and political violence in the Middle East declined but expanded elsewhere. The continent of Africa is emerging as an epicentre of terrorism. Similarly, a part of Asia is experiencing a revival. Due to the pandemic starting in 2020, terrorism is on the decline worldwide including in the Middle East.

The threat in the Middle East peaked in 2014 with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) declaring a caliphate. With mastery of the Internet, the ISIS and Islamic State recruited worldwide bringing fighters and family members to Iraq and Syria. With the threat of political violence especially terrorism peaking, the world came together to fight a common enemy. With a coalition of 83 nations fighting the Islamic State for five years (2014-2019), their conventional fighting power declined steadfastly. Today, the virtual caliphate exists, and the far-flung provinces sustain. However, the Islamic State today is a shadow of its past. When the Islamic State emerged as the preeminent target, its predecessor, al Qaeda, another global terrorist movement, took the opportunity to revive.

The threat is likely to expand in the near future with the Islamic State entering a new phase of global expansion after losing in its physical battlespace in Syria-Iraq in March 2019 (Aslam and Gunaratna 2020). The Islamic State lost its last territorial stronghold in Baghouz, a small Syrian town in the province of Deir ez-Zor close to the Iraqi border. The motivated, skilled, and networked terrorist and guerrilla fighters are slowly and steadily returning home or to

neighbouring safe havens (Aslam and Gunaratna, 2020). The capabilities for mounting attacks - expertise in recruitment, financing, intelligence, and tactics, are proliferating. The threat to the west - North America, Europe, Australia - and the rest of the world - the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia - is real, current, and sustained (Laqueur, 1999).

THE CONTEXT

On a global scale, the Islamic State and al Qaeda still operate as the most lethal entities. In the Middle East, both the groups survive dominating parts of Iraq and Syria. Although al Qaeda core is In Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's most formidable entity, Hayat Tehrir al Shiam (HTS) is located in Syria. Operating as a part of a larger coalition, HTS is the largest of all al Qaeda associated groups (Laqueur, 1999). Similarly, in Yemen both the Islamic State and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operates (Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, 2019). Meanwhile, new hotspots are emerging especially in Africa and Asia where both the Islamic State and al Qaeda affiliates notably al Shabab presents a formidable threat. Although Mozambique is not part of Central Africa, Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) attacked and took control of Mozambique's town of Palma starting in February 2021. Cabo Delgado province that host Palma is the home of the largest and richest Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) project in Africa.

THE BACKGROUND

The origins of the contemporary wave of modern international terrorism can be traced back to Six-Day War fought between 5 and 10 June 1967 between Israel and Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. With the conventional defeat of the Arab armies, the Palestinian threat groups started to mount attacks against Israeli civilian and commercial targets. It was evident that the Arab world was unable to challenge Israel militarily in open warfare. The Palestinians drew lessons from movements in Latin America, North Africa and Southeast Asia that had shifted from guerrilla warfare in rural areas towards terrorist attacks in urban environments. The series of aircraft hijackings, bombings and kidnappings gained traction. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an Israeli El Al flight traveling from Rome in Italy to Tel Aviv in Israel on July 22, 1968 (Katjuscia, 2012). In addition to targeting El Al offices overseas, an international trend developed with Palestinian groups hijacking 16 airplanes from 1968 - 1976. Operating transnationally, Yasser Arafat's Fatah killed 11 Israeli athletes and a German policeman at the Olympics in Munich.

Gradually, the threat in the Middle East expanded from Palestinian to include Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian and other threat groups. The first generation of Middle Eastern terrorism including by Palestinian and Lebanese threat groups were driven by ethnonationalist and left-wing ideologies. The second generation of Palestinian and Lebanese terrorism were driven by ethnonationalist and politico-religious ideology. The most notable examples were

Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas in the case of Palestine and al Dawa and the Hezbollah in the case of Lebanon.

The Muslim terrorist groups received an impetus in 1979. The left wing and ethnopolitical character were supplanted by politico religious ideology with three defining events that changed the global threat landscape. First, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Day in 1979, witnessed 30,000 Muslims from Asia, Africa, Middle East, the Caucasus, Europe and North America traveling to Pakistan to fight against the Soviets. After a decade long fight, the Soviet forces were checkmated. The mujahidin (Fighters of God) claimed that the superpower was defeated. On February 11, 1979, the Iranian Revolution empowered the Iranian students to siege the US Embassy in Tehran and hold the Americans as hostages for 444 days. Although, a superpower, there was very little the United States could do to secure the rapid release of its citizens. Third, the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by Mohamed Abdullah al Qahtani on November 20, 1979. Claiming to be the redeemer of Islam or Mahdi, his group sieged Islam's holiest site. The Saudi authorities working with the French commandos ended the siege on December 4, 1979. Saudi Kingdom beheaded 68 members of group. These three events influenced and formed the narrative of Muslim threat groups. In the decades that followed, the world witnessed the rise of politically-motivated violence by religious groups' predominantly Muslim groups.

THREAT TRAJECTORY

The centre of gravity of terrorism shifted from the Middle East to Asia with the anti-Soviet multi-national Afghan jihad campaign in the 1980s. From Asia, there were three waves of radicalized Muslims. In the first wave, several hundred Muslims travelled from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and China to Pakistan and they fought against the Soviets in the 1980s (Gunaratna, 2015). When they returned, they formed threat groups or influenced existing groups to use violence to advance their aims and objectives. That is the contemporary beginning of the extremist and the terrorist groups in Southeast and Northeast Asia. In the second wave, Central, South, Southeast and Northeast Asians went to fight in Afghanistan against the US and its allies in the 2000s. In the third wave, they went to Iraq and Syria to build a caliphate. While many fought against multiple coalitions, a few hundred returned. Some of the returnees and deportees conducted attacks in their home and in neighbouring countries.

While thousands of Pakistanis participated in the anti-Soviet fight, none went from India. Although India hosts the second largest Muslim population, the pro-Soviet India under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi controlled the impact of the developments in Afghanistan in India. The Indian religious space is syncretic, integrated and well regulated. In contrast, Pakistan, a frontline state in the fight against the Soviets, became the home for several thousand fighters that settled down. Tribal Pakistan gave birth to al Qaeda on August 11,

1988. Consisting largely of Arab recruits that fought against the Soviets, al-Qaeda was formed. Led by Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda emerged as the first global terrorist movement. A religious cleric Abdullah Azzam was the mentor of Osama bin Laden, an engineer and his successor Aymen al Zawahiri, a medical doctor. In Afghanistan, successive al Qaeda leaders survived. Their host was the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, who destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha images in March 2001. Although a religious illiterate, he held the title of commander of the faithful or Amir al-Mu'minin (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008).

The very same title hitherto reserved for the caliph was held by successive leaders of the Islamic State, the second global terrorist movement to emerge. They were Abu Umar al Baghdadi (2006-2010), Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (2010-2019) and Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (2019). The genesis of IS can be traced back to March 2003, when the US intervened in Iraq. A common Jordanian criminal turned a jihadist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, fought in the Afghan conflict. After US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, he relocated to Khurmal, the north of Iraq and established Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. Abu Musab's mentor was Al-Maqdisi, the author of Millat Ibrahim (Religion of Abraham) that promoted two concepts - first, takfir, excommunicating Muslims, who did not follow Islam as "kufr" (unbelievers) so that they can be killed and second, "al wala wal bara", Muslims associating only Muslims and disassociating non-Muslims. To Maqdisi, Muslims believed in God alone and non-Muslims are polytheist. After excommunicating apostates as Kufr (unbelief) and labelling infidels as shirk (idolatry) respectively, they were permitted to be killed (Light, 2009).

Maqdisi and his followers championed the concept of Tawhid (oneness of god) where only Allah was permitted to be worshipped. Maqdisi and his followers regarded democracy as another religion as democracy permitted other religions to be practiced. After his release from Jordanian custody, Maqdisi toned down stating that suicide should be the last resort. Although they subsequently fell apart, Maqdisi's preaching's shaped thinking of Abu Musab and their writings influenced his successors who created the Islamic State of Iraq, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State (Light, 2002). After proclaiming a caliphate on June 29, 2014, "Dawlah Islamiyah" or the Islamic State radicalized both Islamic organizations and Muslims worldwide. The Islamic State influence expanded worldwide creating two categories - the friends and enemies of God. Islamic State commanded its followers - the friends of God - to kill the enemies of God (Kruglanski, Hettiarachchi and Gelfand, 2019) . The ensuing death and destruction disrupted Muslim-non-Muslim relations. Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Attack is one such case.

Fired by the ideal of Islamist supremacy, Islamists believed that by invoking Allah, the Arabic word for God, they can fight and defeat its enemies. Driven by politico-religious aims and objectives, the threat groups from al Qaeda to the Islamic State unleashed an era of violence. The turn of the millennium saw the emergence of hundreds of Muslim extremist and terrorist groups in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The conflict theatres where Muslims suffered

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continue to attract Muslims from worldwide to come, train and fight for their faith and the faithful.

Today, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan are the epicentres of global terrorism. The violence in these theatres contribute to over half of global terrorist attacks. Often terrorism is a by-product of protracted armed conflicts (Hwang, 2018) . Conflict conditions create the milieu for the spawning and growth of terrorist groups. With the increase in the number and intensity of terrorist and guerrilla conflicts during the last decade, political violence affects two-thirds of the countries of the world.

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

The Middle Eastern terrorist groups learnt from their predecessors in West, Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia. Terrorism is a unique form of political violence as it targets civilians (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008) . Politically violence is a campaign backed by threats and acts of violence against the state and the community (or communities). To generate fear in the other, politically motivated violence is systematic, and deliberate. It primarily targets civilians with the intention of competing for and controlling political power (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008) . Other forms of political violence include attacks against infrastructure (sabotage), political leaders (assassination), military (guerrilla warfare), and ethnic and religious communities (genocide). While attacks against civilians, or 'soft targets', are the most common in the initial wave of terrorist operations, terrorist groups subsequently develop the capability to attack security forces ('hard targets'). The tactical repertoire of contemporary terrorist groups includes forms of political violence other than terrorism. For instance, the National Liberation Army (ELN) sabotaged gas and oil pipelines in Colombia, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) assassinated moderate politicians in Spain, Tareek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) conducted guerrilla warfare against Pakistani security forces, and Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) 'cleansed' Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces of Muslims and Sinhalese (Kruglanski, Hettiarachchi and Gelfand, 2019).

Some terrorist groups are extremely complex and well organized. They often have elaborate infrastructures of leadership and highly developed methods of funding their work. Weaponry ranges from crude homemade devices to advanced high technology; equally the training terrorists receive can be equal to or arguably even exceed that of the most advanced government specialists.

Why do people choose to engage in behaviour that leads to the severe injury and death of sometimes thousands of civilians – men, women, and children alike? Terrorism differs from common crime: crime is often driven by economic motive, while terrorism is driven by political motive. However, with the decline of state sponsorship, terrorist groups increasingly resort to crime to build their capacities and capabilities. For instance, the Revolutionary

Armed forces of Colombia (FARC) extorts money from foreign companies in Colombia, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) kidnaps foreigners, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan traffic narcotics, the Revolutionary United Force of Sierra Leone (RUF) smuggles diamonds, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria (GIA) steals cars, and Al Qaeda engages in bank, credit card and cheque fraud. Therefore, contemporary terrorist groups traverse along the political violence-criminality nexus. Overall, terrorist groups are armed political parties. Strategically their goal is always political (Maharani, 2018) . Operationally, they build support and operational infrastructure; tactically, they build military power, accumulate economic wealth, and gain political strength.

Over 100 definitions of terrorism exist.   While no one definition has gained universal acceptance, there is agreement that terrorism is the threat or the act of politically motivated violence directed primarily against civilians. Some supporting the Palestinian, Kashmiri, Sikh and Kurdish struggles have argued that they are legitimate campaigns and therefore their actions against civilians are not terrorism (Gunaratna, 2018) . They have also argued that when a campaign is legitimate, the fighters are 'freedom fighters' and not terrorists. Killing unarmed combatants, including women and children, is not an act worthy of a freedom fighter. Whether a campaign is legitimate or not, deliberate attacks against civilians to achieve a political goal is terrorism. Irrespective of legitimacy, perpetrator, location and time of the attack, terrorism is a means to an end.

Driven by needs, narratives and networks, the environment, grievances and ideology create exclusivists, extremists and terrorists. As opposed to criminals engaging in violence for personal gain, terrorists are politically motivated. Political violence - including terrorism - is a political message and seeks to influence a wide audience. Unless and until government and their partners understand the causes and drivers of politically-motivated violence, terrorism presents an apex threat. While most groups operate nationally, others are active regionally and globally.
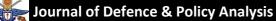
TERRORIST IDEOLOGIES

The Middle East threat groups borrowed from ideologies not indigenous to the region. Although terrorism as a tactic became popular in the Middle East, its origins rested in the West and Latin America. Terrorist groups develop secular and religious ideologies or belief systems to politicize, radicalize and mobilize their actual and potential followers.   By conducting a terrorist campaign within an ideological framework, a terrorist group seeks to advance its aims and objectives. Although the aims differ according to the ideological orientations of the groups, the objectives range from gaining recognition at local, community, national and international levels; intimidating and coercing both the target population and the government; and provoking the government to overreact for the purpose of generating greater public support. Three principal ideological strands have generated the ideological

fuel required to spawn and sustain terrorist campaigns around the world, namely ideological terrorism, ethno-nationalist terrorism, and politico-religious terrorism. The next sections discuss each of these in turn.

Ideological Terrorism: Ideological terrorism is driven by both left wing and right-wing ideologies. Marxism, Leninism and Maoism provide the ideological fuel to left wing terrorist groups to advance their aims and objectives. They seek to overthrow existing regimes and establish communist and socialist states. Most of the groups driven by left wing ideologies - Communist Combatant Cells (CCC) of Belgium, Red Army Faction (RAF) of Germany, Red Brigades (RB) of Italy, and Action Direct (AD) of France - disintegrated with the end of the Cold War (Baylis, Smith and Owens, 2008). Although the ideological justification for these groups to continue ended with the death of the Soviet Empire, a few groups driven by left wing ideologies survive in the poorer regions of the world. They include FARC in Colombia, Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), New People's Army (NPA) in the Philippines, and People's War Group (PWG) in Andhara Pradesh in India. Of these groups, FARC, Nepal Maoists and NPA pose a severe national security threat to Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines. Among the left-wing groups still active in Europe are the Revolutionary Organisation 17 November and Revolutionary Nuclei, both of Greece, and the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party (DHKP-C) in Turkey.

Groups driven by right wing ideologies include the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations (Church of Christian Aryan Nations, Church of Jesus Christ Christian), Aryan Liberation Front, Aryan Brotherhood, Arizona Patriots, the American Nazi Party (National Socialist Party, United Racist Front) and the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC). A group driven by a right-wing ideology conducted the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995 (Chia, 2016). Until the turn of the century, threat entities - groups and personalities- driven by right wing ideologies pose a low threat compared to other categories of terrorism. In contrast to the left-wing groups, the bulk of the right-wing groups are located in North America and in Western Europe. Most right-wing groups are neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, anti-Semitic and racist groups. These groups, dominated by 'skinheads', attack immigrants and refugees, mostly of Asian and Middle Eastern origin. After the '9-11' terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, the pace of these attacks increased.

Ethno-nationalist terrorism: The first wave of ethno-nationalist campaigns was by national liberation movements directed against the Colonial rulers. They included the Irgun and Lehi opposing the British rule in Palestine in the 1940s and French rule in Algeria in the 1950s. Contemporary groups driven by ethno-nationalism can be divided into three sub-categories. These groups fight for autonomy, unification, or reunification (irredentism). For instance, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Jammu and Kashmiri Liberation Front (JKLF), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam are fighting for independence from Israel, India, and Sri Lanka respectively (Shashikumar, 2021) . The members of these groups are motivated by Palestinian, Kashmiri

and Tamil nationalism. Similarly, Continuity and Real IRA are fighting for reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Likewise, the PKK is fighting for linguistic and cultural autonomy for the Kurds in South-eastern Turkey. In comparison to other types of terrorism, ethno-nationalist conflicts produce the largest number of fatalities and casualties, the largest number of displaced persons and refugees, and the biggest human rights violations. Groups that have adopted virulent ethno-nationalist ideologies pose a significant threat to their opposing ethnic communities and governments.

Politico-religious Terrorism: Groups driven by religiosity include those from the Christian, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic communities. They include Army of God in the US, Kach and Kahne Chai of Israel, Babbar Khalsa International of Punjab, India, Aum Shinrikyo (recently renamed Aleph) of Japan, Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Armed Islamic Group of Algeria. Aum, an apocalyptic group, aimed to take over Japan and then the world (Post-War Security Challenges, 2019) . In contrast to other Islamist groups campaigning within their territories, Al Qaeda and (to a lesser extent) Lebanese Hezbollah have a global or a universalistic Islamic agenda. To justify violence, politically motivated religious leaders propagate corrupt versions of religious texts, often misinterpreting and misrepresenting the larger religions.

Of the religious category of groups, Islamists or groups motivated by radical Islamic ideology have been the most violent. Although Islamic Revolution in Iran was by the Shia and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was by the Sunnis. By holding US hostages for 444 days, the Islamic Republic of Iran defied the US. Similarly, by defeating the largest land force, the Soviet Army, the anti-Soviet multi-national Afghan mujahidin demonstrated to the entire Muslim world the Islamist power! After successfully defeating one superpower, the Islamists turned their energies towards building a capability to defeat the remaining superpower - the United States of America, its Allies, and its friends in the Muslim world. The Islamists interpreted the collapse of the Soviet empire as the defeat of the Soviet bear, the US defeats in Iraq as the Eagle having crashed, and the next enemy as China, the dragon.

With suicide attacks - interpreted as martyrdom operations - becoming widespread and popular among Islamist groups throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the scale of violence these groups unleashed has surpassed secular ethno-nationalist, left wing, and right-wing groups. For instance, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Abu Nidal Organisation killed far fewer people than their Islamist counterparts, Hamas and PIJ. In the evolution of politico-religious groups, Al Qaeda and its family of groups are new actors, operating globally and willing to kill in large number (Resolution 2242, 2015) .

Terrorist campaigns are also driven by ideologies that lack mass appeal and are therefore less common, for example state-sponsored, anarchist, and single-issue terrorism. As terrorism is

a low-cost high impact form of violence, states wishing to advance their foreign policy goals have supported terrorist groups to attack their inimical states. Due to sanctions imposed by the international community against states that sponsor terrorist groups, this clandestine surrogate form of warfare has declined throughout the 1990s into the 21st century (Resolution 2242, 2015). Although the US government accuses a range of countries for supporting terrorism, little evidence exists that North Korea, Sudan, or Cuba currently sponsors terrorism. Throughout the 1990s, Sudan and Libya were active sponsors of terrorism. Although the scale of sponsorship has declined, governments in Iran, Syria and to a lesser extent Lebanon continue to support terrorism. For instance, Iran has arranged a number of shipments of small arms and associated ammunition, rocket-propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107-millimeter rockets, and plastic explosives, possibly including man-portable air defence systems, MANPADs to the Taliban since 2006. The politically coloured US list does not include another dozen of countries that support foreign terrorist groups clandestinely.

Single-issue terrorist groups include violent animal rights activists and anti-abortion groups that seek to change a specific policy or practice rather than the political system. Anarchist terrorists seek to overthrow established governments by waves of bombings and assassinations. The recent wave of protests against globalisation parallels anarchist violence from 1870-1920 (Resolution 2242, 2015). However, the trajectory of anti-globalisation movements is yet to be seen. State response to anti-globalisation movements will determine whether we are likely to witness the emergence of terrorist groups espousing the cause of anti-globalisation.

Some groups have overlapping ideologies. Although PKK is ethno-nationalist, it has a strong Marxist-Leninist orientation. Similarly, the original ideological disposition of the LTTE was Marxist-Leninist. Likewise, Hamas and PIJ are religious, but they have a strong nationalist dimension. Although Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is ethno-nationalist, it has a strong religious dimension. Ideologies of groups tend to shift with the changes in the political environment. Groups in North America and Western Europe driven by left wing ideologies declined in strength and size at the end of the Cold War (Resolution 2242, 2015). Conversely, the post-Cold War period witnessed a resurgence of groups driven by ethnicity and religiosity. As a result, groups driven by ethnicity and religion account for about 70-80% of all terrorist groups. Furthermore, the ethno-nationalist and religious groups have the greatest staying power: unlike left or right-wing conflicts, ethno-nationalist and religious conflicts are protracted (Resolution 2242, 2015).

LIKELY FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The recent advances in technologies and revolutionary technologies such as drones and encryption create daunting challenges for governments. Terrorism as a tactic reached its high

point in the Middle East. However, from its origins in 1968, the geography and lethality of terrorism changed start. Geographically, future threat will no longer be the Middle East. The Middle Eastern brand of terrorism will replicate elsewhere in the world. The threat had spread considerable to different parts of the world notable in the migrant and diaspora communities in the west and Muslim territorial communities beyond the Middle East. Increasingly, Africa and Asia, where large Muslim communities live experience violence and terrorism.

Unless governments and partners can reverse radicalisation, the threat of terrorism will spread. Although terrorism does not pose an existential threat to most nation-states, the tier-one national security threat facing many countries is from terrorism. With the rise of Muslim threat groups at the turn of the century, Saudi cleric Nasir al-Fahd, the former dean at Umm al-Qura University issued a decree titled the legal status of using weapons of mass destruction against infidels" in May 2003 (Sageman, 2004) . "If Muslims cannot defeat the kafir [unbelievers] in a different way, it is permissible to use weapons of mass destruction.... Even if it kills all of them and wipes them and their descendants off the face of the Earth." The laptop of a Tunisian fighter in Syria included a 26-page decree by Fahd. With the Fahd attempt to justify WMD use, many threat groups, cells and personalities became interested and some invested in CBRN initiatives. Aman Abdur Rahman, the most influential Islamic State cleric in Asia ranked Fahd as one of the most influential clerics. Islamic State mounted chemical attacks after using the infrastructure in its controlled territory to embark on an ambitious program to develop other agents (Roberts, 2014).

In the 2000s, the threat in the Middle East proliferated in the use of unconventional weapons. Al Qaeda, Islamic State and other threat groups recruited rough scientists and developed special weapons programs. Since the declaration of a "caliphate" in 2014 and territorial control, Islamic State invested in chemical, biological and radiological programs. Starting with chlorine and mustard gas in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State emulated al Qaeda by exploring the development of biological agents (Aslam 2017). Also, in the same theatre, the laptop of an Islamic State Tunisian fighter contained a hidden 19-page document in Arabic on how to develop biological weapons and how to weaponize the bubonic plague from infected animals.

After al Qaeda moved to Taliban controlled Afghanistan, it recruited scientists running both chemical (cyanide) and biological (anthrax) programs, and discussed producing nuclear weapons (Sageman, 2004). After the Pakistani scientist Abdul Rauf was discontinued by the then al Qaeda deputy leader Dr Aymen al Zawahiri, US trained Malaysian biologist Captain Yazid Sufaat created al Qaeda's second anthrax program. Although contemporary terrorist attacks and threats are mostly using the gun and the bomb, the threat of unconventional programs are real. The governments are unprepared and underprepared to deal with chemical, biological and radiological attacks. Today's threat groups are interested to acquire, produce and use nuclear weapons although they lack the capabilities. Terrorist operatives and supporters have renewed their interest to use bubonic plague, anthrax and other special

agents. It was not in the Middle East but an Asian group in the US that used biological agents for the first time to attack its adversaries. In the 1980s, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh uses of Salmonella. The threat became pronounced in the 1990s with an Asian group Aum Shinrikyo used Sarin in the Tokyo subway (Korstanje and Clayton, 2012) .

DECLINE OF TERRORISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

With the US, Russian and Arab coalitions targeting Islamic State infrastructure, their leadership suffered in its heartland of Iraq and Syria. In response, Islamic State decentralized its operations developing capabilities to strike overseas using its affiliate groups, networks, cells and personalities. From a caliphate building group, the Islamic State transformed into a global movement working with over hundred groups, thousands of members and tens of thousands of supporters. The Islamic State surpassed all the other threat groups in the number of attacks, fatalities, injuries and property damage. According to the figures provided by the Islamic State, between August 31, 2019, and August 19, 2020, IS fighters killed and wounded a total of 15,522 people in 4,722 operations, covering 25 countries, including the November 2019 knife attack in London; the November 2019 raid in Ishkobod, near the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe; and the torching of boats in the Maldives in April 2020. Iraq, Syria, and West Africa (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria) account for the top three most active "provinces" in terms of attack frequency and casualty toll, followed by Sinai and Khorasan (Afghanistan). The changing geography of attacks is significant- the Islamic State most violent in the Middle East, followed by Africa and then Asia. The global footprint of terrorism is changing - Africa is emerging as a new epicentre. South Asia and Southeast Asia remains threat arenas. The West is the safest, although any attack in the west, will attack global headlines.

Over half of the people, Islamic State and their associated groups killed were Muslims, they identified as apostates. Demonstrating the current and emerging threat to the Muslim world, the Islamic State presents an enduring threat to both the Muslims and the non-Muslims.

IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic during January-June 2020 led to a decline in global terrorism[1] . With no gatherings and restrictions, the two largest global terrorist movements - Islamic State and al Qaeda - were challenged. The period marks the "most diminished attack regiment in 2020 at less than 25 operations across only four countries, including Iraq and Syria." The focus was largely in the Middle East and Africa with the exception of Afghanistan in Asia and a few attacks in the Philippines and Indonesia (Putra and Sukabdi, 2013) .

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[1] Refer to the SITE Intelligence Group webpage https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/, "Recent Far-Right Updates on the COVID-19 PANDEMIC" on 13th to 26th May 2020.

Middle East: The largest numbers of operations were in Iraq and Syria. The al Qaeda aligned HTS in Syria and the Islamic State operations in Iraq continued to present a formidable threat. Ramadan witnessed Islamic State's fighters moving from Syria to Iraq and an uptick in high-casualty attacks. 'Battle of Attrition' surge by Islamic State fighters mounted "small-scale attacks targeting Iraqi forces and police, PMUs, Tribal Mobilization militiamen, and government members across the Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah al-Din governorates." This included "high-casualty armed assault coupled with sniper fire targeting a group of Kaka'i religious sect civilians and responding Iraqi forces in Diyala." With several thousand underground and above ground fighters, the Islamic State threatens its heartland.

Islamic State remained active in several theatres especially Yemen and Egypt. In Egypt, Islamic State's Sinai Province mounted an attack on Egyptian naval forces off the Rafah Sea coast.

Africa: Africa emerged as an epicentre of threat with both Islamic State and al Qaeda affiliate groups establishing an even stronger foothold in Western, central, northern and Eastern Africa. With Islamic State expanding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Christians were singled out and attacked and Congolese soldiers were attacked in Beni, North Kivu.
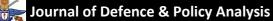
In the Sahel - Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger - the national forces led by the French coalition struck including killing the regional al Qaeda leader (Barcelona van attack suspect shot dead, police say, 2017).

Islamic State reported high levels of attacks in Nigeria, although they were exaggerated in terms of casualties and fatalities. As according to the Islamic State reporter "more than 110 Nigerian soldiers and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) members as the result of two high-level armed assaults in its foothold Borno, one leading to the seizure of parts of Monguno." Both police and military personnel were captured between Maiduguri and Monguno, executed and shown on Islamic State official videos. The high-casualty attacks targeting Nigerian forces and aligned militiamen in IS' foothold Borno continued.

Asia: In Asia, Islamic State was most active in Afghanistan. With the Afghanistan's al Qaeda aligned Taliban entering into a ceasefire, Islamic State mounted devastating attacks against a Sikh shrine, hospital and other targets.

CONCLUSION

The threat is likely to grow in the foreseeable future with the Islamic State entering a new phase of global expansion after losing in its physical battle-space in Syria-Iraq in March 2019. In parallel, al Qaeda and its affiliates worldwide are likely to join, cooperate and collaborate with Islamic State and entities especially after the death of its apex leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in October 2019. Both IS and its rival Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the al Qaeda affiliate in

Syria and Iraq present a formidable threat. From their core in Syria and Iraq, the capabilities for mounting attacks - expertise in recruitment, financing, intelligence and tactics, are proliferating. The threat to the west - North America, Europe, Australia - and the rest of the world - the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Asia - is real, current, and emerging (Schulze, 2009). The motivated, skilled and networked terrorist and guerrilla fighters are returning home or to neighbouring safe havens.

Muslims living 121 countries worldwide travelled to fight in conflict zones. With their return, others who interact with them will be susceptible to the ideological virus. They live in the migrant and diaspora communities of North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. The territorial communities inhabit the regions of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Although they are well integrated, Asia host 63% of the world's Muslim population (Schmid, 2005). Both Southeast Asia and South Asia hosts the world's biggest Muslim populations. These communities should be protected from ideologies from conflict zones radicalizing them.

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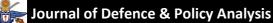
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