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The ISIS Model and its Influence Over Global Terrorism

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Abstract

Counter-terrorism efforts against jihadist groups have been challenging for law enforcement and the military because terrorist organizations constantly update their tactics and mimic the successful strategies of popular and influential groups, such as ISIS, that have developed a specific model for carrying out their destructive acts. ISIS created its terrorism model in 2014 and has used it to control territory, spread its ideology, create provincial branches in different regions, inspire lone actors, and generate revenue. Terrorism databases are full of incidents that involve ISIS-style tactics, targets, and affiliated groups that act as provincial branches of ISIS. This paper examines how ISIS developed its model, what components that model involves, and how the model has influenced not only jihadist groups but also right-wing extremists and drug cartels around the world. The study uses a mixed method of quantative and qualitative research, and the proposed ISIS Model is developed through a rigorous literature review.

Keywords: ISIS, ISIS Model, Jihadist Terror, Right-Wing Terror, Lone Actors

1. Introduction

Powerful and well-equipped terrorist organizations along the lines of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) develop organizational, operational, and ideological models. Their ideologies expand to different regions, and other terrorist organizations mimic their tactics and targets. In terrorism history, for example, anarchist groups adopted a model where assassination was deemed an effective tactic for achieving their goals (Colson, 2017), while some Palestinian terrorist organizations pioneered the use of hijacking and hostage-taking operations (Veilleux-Lepage, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers were well-known for deploying suicide bombers, a tactic that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey and the Black Widows organization in Chechnya copied and furthered (Pape, 2003). More recently, terrorist groups have used bombing, kidnapping, and shooting as their tactics of choice, while lone actors have chosen car-ramming and stabbing as their preferred methods of attack.

Terrorist organizations, right-wing extremists, and criminal groups across the globe have emulated the ISIS model in terms of ideology, tactics, and targets. The globalization of the ISIS model has led to the creation of numerous terrorist groups that have attempted to act like a de facto state in countries where ISIS-affiliated groups have operated. Thanks to the widespread emulation of its model, ISIS now is more popular than al-Qaeda and has expanded its reach into more countries and killed more people than al-Qaeda. This study examines the ISIS model and explains how other terrorist organizations have mimicked this model, using open-source data.

Methodology

The cardinal method used in this article is the systematic literature review. A high volume of relevant literature was sifted through, and scientific material was given priority. Along with scientific studies, on not so rare occasions, information produced and presented by governmental agencies are utilized. The insights and visualization are mainly predicated on open-source data and public information reachable through the internet. Therefore the proposed ISIS Model is broadly based on the authors' academic studies, research, and field experiences. Rudimentary versions of the model were revised through reactions to earlier publications and presentations.

The ISIS Model

ISIS, known variously as the Islamic State, ISIL, and, in Arabic as Daesh, has been one of the world's most popular and deadly terrorist organizations since it controlled territories in Iraq and Syria. Founded by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi in 2004, ISIS emerged in Iraq from the remnants of al-Qaeda. By 2007, ISIS had faded into obscurity. The group re-emerged in 2011 when it invaded the territory in the region amid growing instability in Iraq and Syria. In 2014, ISIS' leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, announced the creation of a caliphate in the territories the group controlled. The intense military campaign led by the United States in 2015 resulted in considerable losses for ISIS. By December 2017, ISIS had lost 95% of its territory.

The United States shifted its campaign to Syria in 2018 and backed Syrian Kurds under the flag of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which captured ISIS positions. President Donald Trump declared victory against ISIS in December 2018 and stated that ISIS was defeated in the region. The heavy blow for ISIS was the loss of its leader in October 2019 when U.S. forces killed Baghdadi (Wilson Center, 2019). Despite the declaration of victories, ISIS continued to be listed in international reports as one of the top three terrorist organizations in the world. According to the 2019 Annex of Statistical Information, ISIS was the second organization in the top ten perpetrator groups with the most incidents that year and the perpetrator of 575 attacks in Iraq and Syria (US Dept. of State, 2020). The group conducted more than 600 attacks in Iraq and Syria between January 2020 and May 2020 (Wilson Center, 2020).

ISIS owes its capacity and popularity to the model the organization developed. The uniqueness of this model comes from its nature that enables ISIS to control territory, expand its ideology, create provincial franchises with its name, inspire homegrown extremists and lone actors, carry out lethal attacks, use media and social media to its advantage, and generate revenue from various sources. This model also had unintended consequences, as it paved the way for states to enable and sponsor terrorism. Followingly, the paper explains each component of this model in detail.

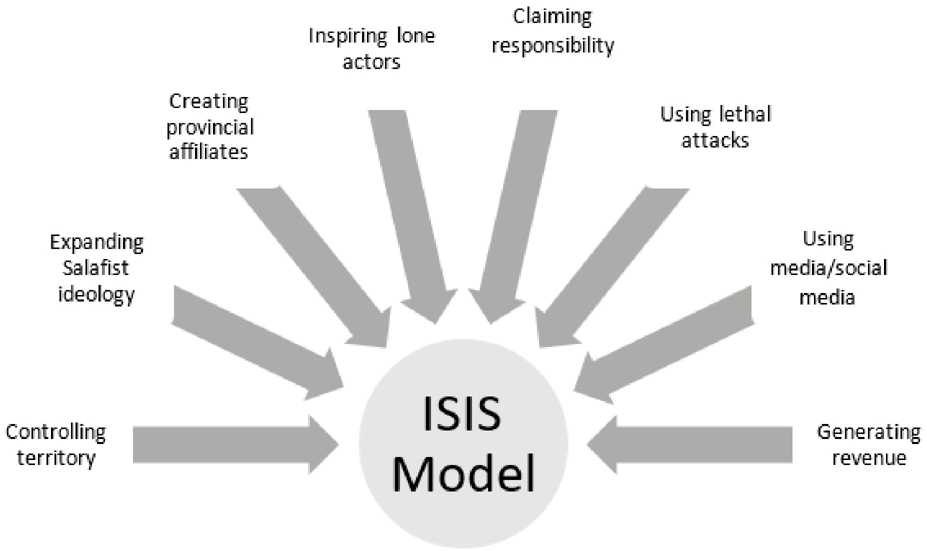

Figure 1: The ISIS Model

Controlling a Territory and Acting Like a De Facto State

In areas where it controlled territory, primarily in Iraq and Syria, ISIS acted like a de facto state and executed a twisted version of the Islamic law that included the use of some outdated punishment methods, including whimpering, stoning, and beheading. At its peak of popularity, ISIS controlled a total of 100 thousand square kilometers (38,610 square miles) in 2014 (Jones and Dobbins, 2017) and a total of 110 thousand square kilometers (42,471 square miles) of territory in 2015. The group's popularity waned considerably in subsequent years at the same time that the U.S. military took action against the terrorist organization. By March 2019, the amount of territory controlled by ISIS was reduced to 4,000 square kilometers (1,544 square miles) in Syria (Eklund and Degerald, 2017). In June 2020, six years after Baghdadi had declared a jihadi state, ISIS continued to lose territory and a vast number of its fighters; however, ISIS terrorist attacks have resumed, indicating that the group is surging once again (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2019).

The ability of ISIS and other terrorist groups to control territory and act like de facto states is the result of a variety of factors, such as weak states and their capacity to get access to arms and explosives; however, it might be misleading to assume that ISIS' success in governing territories has inspired other terrorist groups to do likewise. An article published in 2019 used the term of *terrorist semi states* to draw attention to terrorist groups that control territory (Honig and Yahel, 2017). For example, al-Shabaab in Somalia encountered difficulties during a Somali military campaign against the group but still controlled vast swaths of territory in the country's south and central areas. Boko Haram in Nigeria is another example of a group that pledged allegiance to ISIS and expanded its territory into Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, and claimed a territory the size of Belgium (The Cipher Brief, 2020). The Taliban has grown its territory since 2014. It controlled or contested seventy districts in 2015 but was battling for 117 districts in 2018. In addition, the Taliban consisted of 20 thousand fighters in 2014 but that number tripled in 2018 (Kube, 2018). Eventually, in 2021, the Taliban took over the control of Afghanistan in toto (NL Times, 2021). Similar to ISIS, the terrorist groups al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and the Taliban have used twisted versions of Islamic law in the territories they have controlled. A territory upon which their version of Islam invokes a sense of belonging and invokes a unique identity resonating with its inhabitants. That eventually contributes tremendously to their survival and expansion of their Salafist ideology.

Expansion of Salafist Ideology and Creation of Provincial Franchises

The ISIS ideology is multifaceted and claims to be representative of authentic Islam, though it is a twisted interpretation of the Qur'an and based on the doctrines of Salafism and Wahhabism. Politically submissive Salafism

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paved the way to political *takfirism*—unconstrained Islamism that leads to the ex-communication of Muslims who have been declared as infidels or apostates. This approach constitutes the essence of the caliphate and the jihadist ideology in Islamism (Hassan, 2016). As a general rule religion has always been a legitimating force behind many deeds and terrorism is not an exception to that. The ISIS' version of Islam morphs society into isolated enclaves with loose or no ties with mainstream Islam (Cinoglu, 2010).

The ISIS ideology uses a hub-spoke group model that has enabled the group to expand through loose ties across the globe, particularly during the peak of its popularity in 2014 and 2015. According to the 2019 Annex of Statistical Information, ISIS affiliates in 26 countries had declared loyalty to the organization. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah*, and the Maute Group are some of the terrorist groups that have pledged allegiance to ISIS without changing the name of their groups ((US Dept. of State, 2020). Many affiliates, however, began using the word *"IS"* as part of their group's name. ISIS then stipulated that it would provide tactical support to its provincial affiliates in return for these groups having territorial authority in a country or region and being willing to alter their internal organizational structure and strategic decision-making processes in line with the strategies of ISIS core (Zenn, 2019). Figure 2 below shows ISIS' province-based affiliates that have added the word *"ISIS"* to the group's name. They are based in Africa (green circles), Asia (yellow circles), and the Middle East (yellow circles).

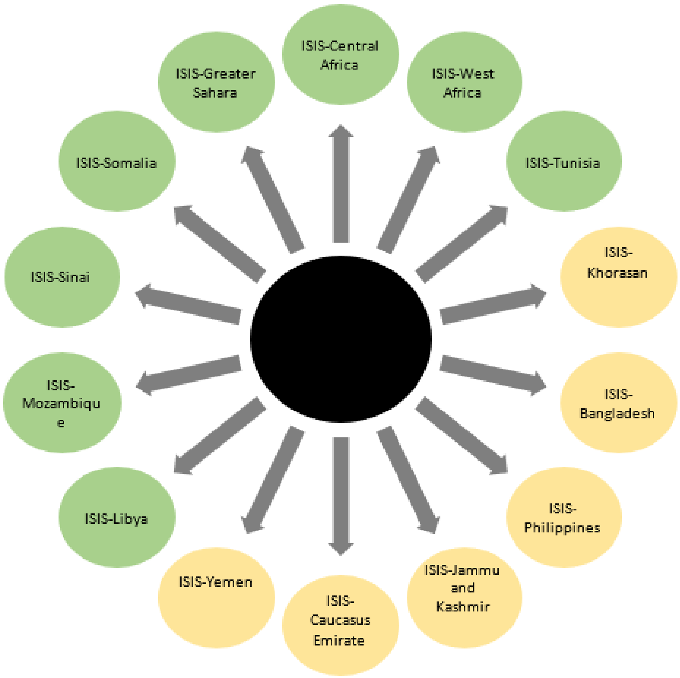
ISIS-Central Africa
ISIS-Greater Sahara
ISIS-West Africa
ISIS-Somalia
ISIS-Tunisia
ISIS-Sinai
ISIS-Khorasan
ISIS-Mozambique
ISIS-Bangladesh
ISIS-Libya
ISIS-Philippines
ISIS-Yemen
ISIS-Caucasus Emirate
ISIS-Jammu and Kashmir

Figure 2: ISIS franchises that have added *IS* to their group's name (US Dept. of State, 2020)

Whatever their reasons for pledging allegiance to ISIS, all these smaller groups shared the belief that they could benefit from ISIS' brand name and popularity in terms of attracting more recruits, gaining recognition, and receiving ideological and logistical support (Cengiz and Karademir, 2020). Other factors, however, also played a role in each terrorist organization's decision to declare loyalty to ISIS. The defection was a common reason. Examples include defectors from the regional terrorist group ISIS-West Africa that was formed by former militants of Boko Haram; defectors from ISIS-Somalia that was created by former al-Shabaab commanders; and defectors from ISIS-Greater Sahara that was created by former al-Mourabitoune militants. Some groups wanted to change their organization's name. For example, Ansar Bait al-Maqdis (ABM) changed its name to ISIS Sinai (BBC, 2016). The desire of some veteran fighters to form jihadist groups after leaving the war in Syria and returning to their home countries played a role in the decision to pledge allegiance to ISIS. One example is the Libyan provincial branch of ISIS. Roughly 300 veterans formed the Islamic Shura Council after leaving Syria and then declared loyalty to ISIS (Wehrey and Alrababa'h, 2015).

Some of ISIS's branches have been the product of ongoing civil wars. ISIS, for example, has opportunistically exploited the weakness of Islamist groups involved in the conflict in India's only Muslim-majority state, Jammu and Kashmir, which the Indian government split into two union territories in 2019, depriving it of the status of an independent state; Islamist groups involved in conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic. The Islamist groups in Jammu and Kashmir that fought under the control of *Lashkar-i Tayyiba* gravitated toward ISIS and chose to be the provincial branch of ISIS in Kashmir in 2019 (The Economic Times, 2019). Similarly, the Allied Defence Forces in the DRC leaned toward the ISIS ideology and began to fight under the banner of ISIS-Central Africa with other Islamist groups in Mozambique and the Central African Republic (Soufan Center, 2020).

Unlike ISIS, which continued to create loose ties with its franchises, Al-Qaeda concentrated on bolstering its roots in the locations where the group historically has been active (Perkins, 2019). In 2019, the number of Al-Qaeda affiliates was nine (US Dept. of State, 2020)[1]. Among the groups in this list, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) are two examples of Al-Qaeda's current localization policies. JNIM was formed by the merger of four al-Qaeda organizations in the Sahel region of Africa. In contrast, HTS was created from the merger of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups in Syria.

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[1] "Annex of Statistical Information," pp. 6 and 7. These groups were Al-Shabaab, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam Wal-Muslimin (JNIM), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, and Ansar al-Tawhid.

Having improved its capacity through global expansion strategies, ISIS has gotten ahead of al-Qaeda in terms of performing sophisticated attacks. According to the 2019 Annex of Statistical Information (US Dept. of State, 2019), ISIS and its affiliates were involved in more attacks and caused more casualties than al-Qaeda and its affiliates (see Figure 3).

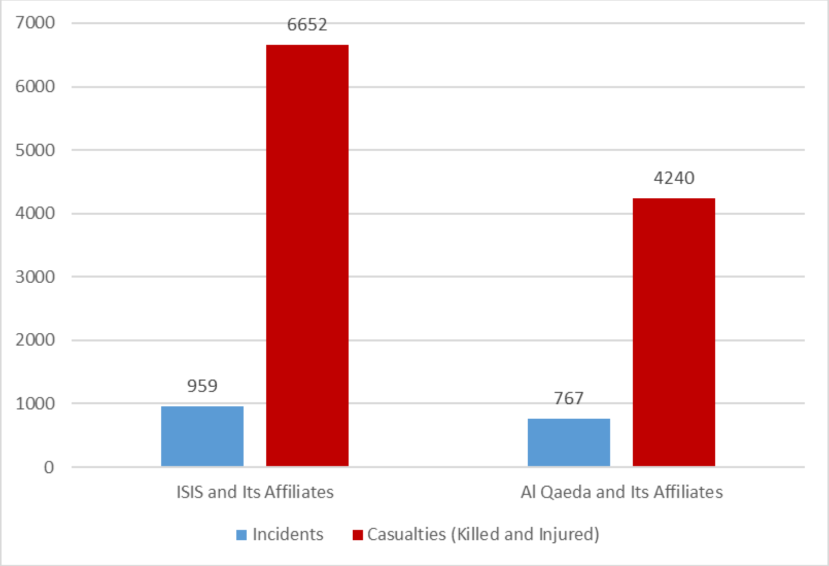

Figure 3: Comparison of ISIS and al-Qaeda attacks and casualties in 2019 (US Dept. of State, 2019).

Similar to the rivalry and competition between ISIS and al-Qaeda (Byman and Williams, 2015), both groups' affiliates have competed to be the leading organization in the regions they have operated. They have either used *hearts-and-minds* policies to attract recruits, or they have fought each other to be the dominant group. For example, JNIM, ISIS-Greater Sahara, and ISIS-West Africa wanted to invite more recruits in 2018 and selectively did not target Muslim civilians in the Sahel region of Africa. ISIS-Greater Sahara and JNIM, however, began to target each other to be the leading group in the Sahel in 2019. Similarly, between 2018 in 2019, ISIS-Khorasan[2] fought with the Taliban, and ISIS-Somalia fought with al-Shabaab.

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[2] [] ISIS-Khorasan also is active in Pakistan. Formed by an ex-leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban, the group's committee consisted of nine Pakistanis, two Afghans, and one person of unknown origin. ISIS-K concentrated its activities in Afghanistan, but today it has been the perpetrator of several attacks in Pakistan. Around 2,000 and 3,000 members of ISIS-K are based in Pakistan. International donations are chief financial resources of ISIS-K in Pakistan, in addition to the group's involvement in robbery in Sindh and Balochistan (Parvez, 2016).

Inspiring Lone Actors

The volume and violence of lone-actor terrorism have been increasing since the early 2010s. This strategy has recently been associated with ISIS but dates back to the 1980s in the Middle East when it was used by terrorist organizations and by far-right organizations in the United States (Hoffman, 2019). These lone-actors are ideologically motivated, inspired, and animated by a movement but lack a formal connection to a specific and identifiable terrorist group and a leader whose orders they would feel obligated to carry out (Hoffman, 2019). Inspired by the ideology of ISIS or al-Qaeda, self-radicalized actors have begun to commit individual attacks in the Western world. After seeing the massive defeat of the Western military in the conflict zones of Iraq and Syria, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, a Salafi jihadist terrorism ideologue, encouraged jihadist terrorist groups to make individual attacks in militants' home countries.

These individuals have mostly used vehicular, stabbing, and shooting attacks (Hoffman, 2019). After seeing it as a successful tactic for advancing the terrorist ideology, nationalistic groups in Palestine and right-wing extremists in the Western world adopted these tactics. According to media reports from 2010 to 2020,[3] ISIS-inspired individuals have been involved in around 40 attacks and killed more than 200 people during those attacks. In 2014, attacks and killings occurred inIndo France, Germany, the United States, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, Russia, Indonesia, Canada, Israel, Tunisia, and India. These ISIS-inspired individuals have perpetrated several notable attacks, including one in which ISIS-inspired Omar Mateen, who repeatedly referenced ISIS during his attack targeting the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, killed 49 people and wounded 53 others in 2016 (Visser and Couwels, 2016). ISIS-inspired individuals also have become increasingly involved in car-ramming attacks. Of the car-ramming attacks for which ISIS claimed responsibility in 2016, the individuals who carried out those attacks did so in France, Germany, and the United States (Counter-extremism Project, 2014). In one of those attacks, an ISIS-inspired individual drove his truck into a crowd and killed 84 people in Nice, France (Kennedy, 2014).

Such lone-actor attacks have not gone unnoticed by right-wing extremists in the United States and elsewhere, and are mimicked by those who have adopted foreign terrorist organizations' tactics (Jones and Doxsee, 2020). In addition to homegrown extremists, right-wing extremists have begun to copy ISIS tactics (Buckingham and Alali, 2020), and have been involved in attacks in the United States and several European Union countries. The number of right-wing extremist attacks rose significantly between 2013 and 2019 in the United States (Jones and Doxsee, 2020), and white supremacists and other right-wing extremists were the perpetrators of around 65% of the attacks in the United States in 2020 (Strobel and Levy, 2020). Some notable right-wing extremist attacks occurred in New Zealand, where 49 Muslims were killed in 2019 (Diaz, 2020); Pittsburgh, where 11 Jewish people were killed in a Synagogue in 2019 (Robertson and Mele, 2018); and El Paso, Texas, where 22 immigrants were targeted and killed in 2019 (Helsel, 2019).

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[3] Data on lone-actor attacks was collected by the authors using media sources.

Claiming Responsibility

Terrorist groups aim to achieve five goals with their violent attacks: (1) *Attrition* aims to cause damage and send the message that the terrorist group is capable of imposing significant damage to or destruction of its target; (2) *Provocation* aims to radicalize the population against the terrorist group's opponent; (3) *Outbidding* aims to send a message to the population that the terrorist group is more determined to target its opponent than any other group is determined to do so; (4) *Intimidation* aims to send a message to the population that the terrorist group is too powerful for the government to stop it, and (5) *Spoiling* aims to communicate to the terrorist group's opponent that the moderates on the opponent's side are not trustworthy (Kydd and Walter, 2006). Although these five main purposes of perpetrating terrorist attacks set forth a very broad framework as a result of long-lasting scholarly research, it can be merely applied to a certain type of terrorist attack in which the terrorist individual or group who commits the attack deliberately claims it (Kearns, Conlon, and Young, 2014).

Claiming responsibility is a credit-taking action for terrorist organizations. A claim is defined as a public action in which someone states that the group is the perpetrator of the attack on behalf of the organization (Min, 2013). Terrorist groups tend to claim responsibility for attacks when they aim to gain publicity and when the backlash from the government is not likely (Kearns, Conlon, and Young, 2014). On the other hand, terrorist groups are highly likely to claim responsibility for an attack when state institutions rather than civilians are the target of the attack (Kearns, Conlon, and Young, 2014). Incentives for terrorist groups to claim responsibility for an attack, according to an analysis of terrorist attacks between 1998 and 2010, increase for notable attacks that involve suicide bombings and a large number of casualties, when multiple organizations vie for limited support from the public, and when the target is institutionally constrained from backlash (Min, 2013).

Anonymous attacks indicate that terrorist groups are not interested in building grassroots support for their movements. On the other hand, claiming responsibility is an indicator of how a terrorist group is unafraid of retaliatory strikes (Hoffman. 2010). The percentage of terrorist groups claiming responsibility decreased from 61% in the 1970s to 14.5% between 1990 and

2004 (Kearns, Conlon, and Young, 2014). According to the 2019 Annex of Statistical Information, a significant number of incidents were unclaimed in 2019, as was the case in previous years.[4] According to Abrahms and Conrad, terrorist groups claimed responsibility for only one out of seven incidents (US Department of State, 2020).

ISIS is an example of a terrorist organization with a history of claiming responsibility for attacks. The group generally claims responsibility in one of two ways. First, ISIS states its claim through its own Amaq News Agency, which pushes out breaking news reports through an encrypted mobile Android application. Then, the claim is tweeted through the groups' supporters. Second, ISIS uses its official channel, the Nashir Media Foundation, to issue a statement. Nashir acts like the direct voice of ISIS leadership (US Department of State, 2020). Any ISIS claim of responsibility that mentions specifics about the attacker is released in about 24 hours when ISIS calculates that it can reap a political benefit from doing so and the attack serves the group's objectives. For example, ISIS claimed responsibility for the Manchester bombings and the London Bridge assaults in 2017 because it believed that doing so would yield a net benefit such as cash from its sympathizers or an overreaction from its targets. If a claim of responsibility is issued after more than 24 hours has passed and critical information about the attacker is not revealed, then it is less likely that ISIS knew about the attack (US Department of State, 2020).

Terrorist organizations also may tell four lies about attacks: (1) Terrorist groups may falsely claim responsibility for an attack they did not perpetrate; (2) Terrorist groups may commit false-flag terrorism to blame a rival organization; (3) Terrorist groups may blame an attack that they did not commit on a rival group; and (4) Terrorist groups may lie by omission, denying they perpetrated an attack but without blaming a rival group (Kearns, Conlon, and Young, 2014).

ISIS was one of the most reliable terrorist organizations in its early years when claiming responsibility for an attack. The organization claimed responsibility for 143 attacks that happened in twenty-nine countries between 2014 and 2018 (Lister and Sanchez, 2018). When ISIS' popularity began to wane in 2017, however, ISIS-Core in Syria and Iraq have lied and jumped to claim responsibility for many violent attacks in which the group was not the perpetrator (Myre and Domonoske, 2017). Even ISIS falsely claimed responsibility for the Las Vegas, Nevada, shootings in 2019 (NPR, 2019), although the incident was a mass-shooting case by an individual with an assault rifle without any political motives. ISIS also has an appetite for portraying itself as the perpetrator of lone-actor attacks. It is already established that a relatively large number of lone actors aspire to follow the methodology proposed by ISIS (Cengiz and Cinoglu, 2022).

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[4] "Annex of Statistical Information," p.10.

The media research about ISIS attacks in 2019 and 2020 indicates that ISIS-Core has claimed responsibility for several notable attacks in Syria and Iraq; however, the group's franchises in Nigeria, the Sahel region of Africa, Somalia, Egypt, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Libya have selectively claimed responsibility when the targets are military and state institutions. Inspired by ISIS's efforts to take credit, al-Shabaab and the Taliban are two organizations that claim responsibility for attacks they perpetrated. It appears that al-Shabaab recently has been a more reliable organization than ISIS in claiming responsibility for attacks.

Committing Lethal Attacks

Terrorist attacks are more lethal today than they were in the 1980s and 1990s. According to terrorism databases, tens of thousands of casualties have resulted from such attacks around the world. Through various means, terrorist groups killed around 58 thousand people and wounded about 42 thousand others in 2018 and 2019 (US Department of State, 2020). Almost half of the terrorist incidents in 2019 resulted in more than three casualties per attack (US Department of State, 2020). Of the ISIS-affiliated groups in the terrorism databases, two jihadist terrorist organizations—ISIS-Khorasan (15.4 casualties per attack) and ISIS-West Africa (14.3 casualties per attack)—were the most deadliest, while ISIS-Libya (3.8 casualties per attack) and ISIS-Core (4.8 casualties per attack) had the lowest casualty rates (see Figure 4). It is important to note that while ISIS-Core lost power in Iraq and Syria in 2019, it still managed to end the year with a relatively high casualty rate. Ranked with the lowest casualty rate (1.9 casualties per attack) was the New People's Army (NPA). Given their adherence to a revolutionary ideology, it was not surprising that the jihadist terrorist organizations had higher casualty rates than non-jihadist terrorist organizations. Some non-jihadist groups, while listed among the top-10 known perpetrator groups in terrorism databases, were not included in Figure 4 because of their much lower casualty rates. These groups include, for example, the Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist), the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the National Liberation Army (ELN) (US Department of State, 2020).

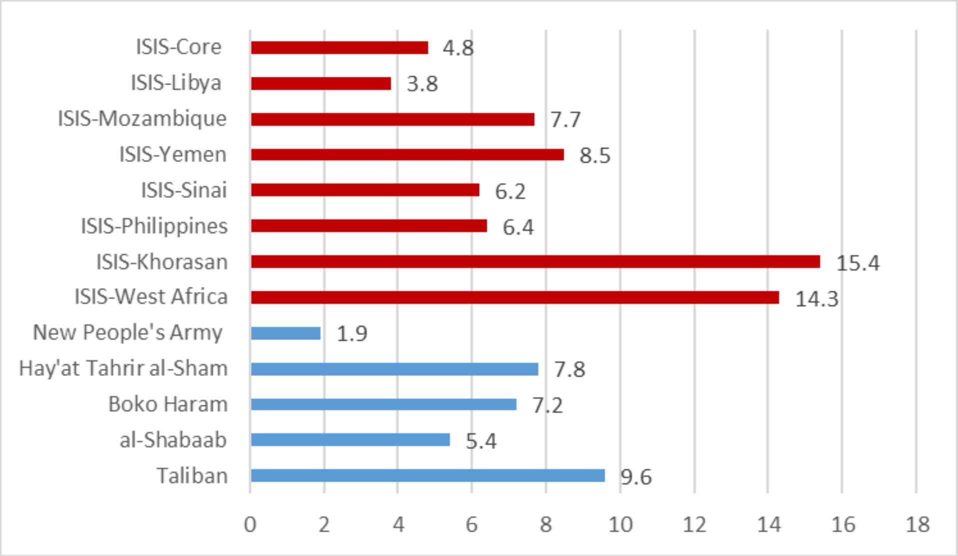

Figure 4. Casualty rate per attack (deaths and injuries), by the terrorist group, in 2019 (US Department of State, 2020).[5]

In addition to being a model for lethal attacks, ISIS also inspired other terrorist groups to follow its practice of beheading its victims and posting videos of the incidents online. According to the author's previous research, ISIS beheaded 717 people between 2014 and 2020, while five of its branded franchises beheaded a combined total of 325 people during that same period (see Figure 5).[6] If one were to assume that Abu Sayyaf and Boko Haram had pledged allegiance to ISIS during the study period, then the number of groups under the influence of ISIS and likely to use its tactics would be higher. Moreover, criminals and drug cartels also have mimicked the ISIS tactic of posting videos of its beheadings online (Koch, 2018). For example, hitmen from a Mexican cartel used ISIS-style execution on a rival and posted it on social media (Sinclair, 2017). In another example, the Mexican criminal syndicate Los Zetas created an ISIS-style beheading video to spread fear among rival cartels (Ramirez, 2017).

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[5] The red bars represent ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups, while the blue bars represent non-ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups.

[6] These ISIS-branded franchises are ISIS-Mozambique beheaded 163 people, ISIS-Khorasan 60, ISIS-Libya 51, ISIS-Sinai 40, and ISIS-West Africa beheaded 11.

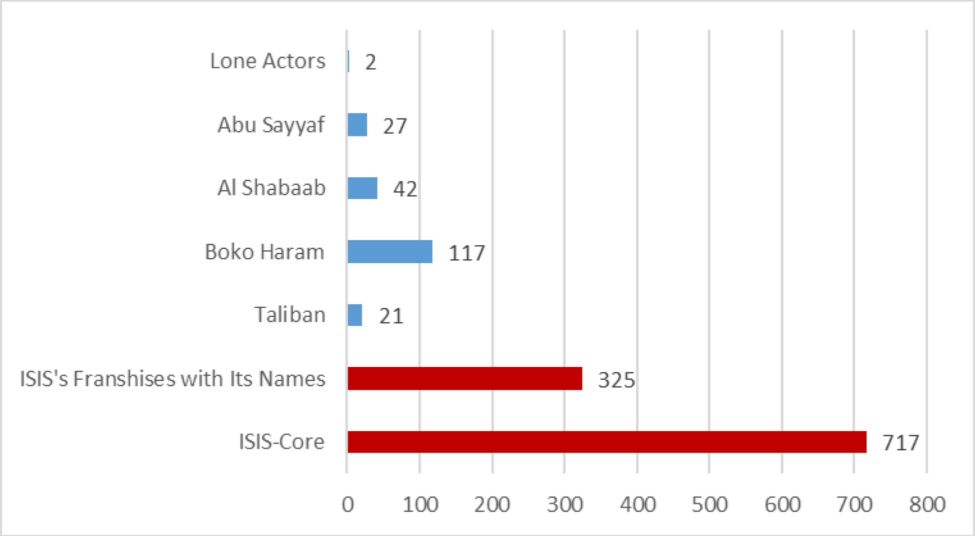

Figure 5: Beheadings between 2014 and 2020.[7]

Media and Social Media

Terrorist groups commit violent attacks to get attention, gain recognition, and develop respect and legitimacy. To spread the word about their goals and their means of achieving those goals, terrorist groups rely on traditional media coverage of their attacks and proclamations and on social media to promote and publicize extremist narratives, generate propaganda, facilitate radicalization and recruitment, reach new audiences, reinforce popularization, advocate for violence, and hostility, and hack into websites to broadcast propaganda videos.

ISIS has been an influential model for how to use social media effectively. The group has used English-language digital magazines, such as Dabiq and its successor, Rumiyah, to compile ISIS propaganda for readers across the globe (Udami, 2018). Moreover, the group owns online news outlets such as the Amaq News Agency, al-Bayan radio, and the Halumu and Nasher news sites (Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2019). ISIS's capacity to use social media has been quite effective when the group mimicked AQAP's model in the Arabian Peninsula, whose digital magazine inspired the Boston Marathon bombers in 2010 (Ward, 2018). ISIS' resourcefulness in the use of social media has enabled the group to mobilize an estimated 40 thousand foreign nationals from 110 countries to join ISIS (Ward, 2018), and to control around 45 thousand social media accounts at the end of 2014 (Berger and Morgan, 2015). In a report published in 2018, it was noted that ISIS used social media platforms to recruit, radicalize, and coordinate terrorist attacks in Arica (Kate Vox and William Marceillano, 2017).

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[7] The red bars represent ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups, while the blue bars represent non-ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups.

Influenced by the social media capacity of ISIS, other terrorist organizations have come to understand the importance of using social media to advance their cause. The Taliban, for example, has used Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram to disseminate information about its skirmishes with the Afghan government (Taylor, 2019). The Taliban owns media studios such as Mana-ul Jihad, al-Hijrat, and al-Emarah (Johnson, 2018). On its English Telegram channel, al-Emarah, the Taliban broadcasts in different languages with the former two commanding 4,236 followers in 2016 (Ward, 2018). Boko Haram is another organization that has been influenced by ISIS, resulting in changes in how it uses social media platforms and videos and the creation of multiple social media accounts (Slutzker, 2018).

Financial Resources

The last component of the ISIS model is its vast financial resources. At its peak, ISIS generated revenue of $2 billion from a combination of private donations, taxes, ransom payments, and commercial revenue streams (Conner, 2018). Oil smuggling was one of ISIS's critical funding sources. The smuggling activity was so profitable that ISIS became the world's richest terrorist organization after it seized some of the world's most profitable oil fields in Iraq and Syria in 2014 (Shelley, 2014) after which ISIS fighters sold 100 trucks of oil per day, bringing in nearly $1 million per day (Conner, 2018). In the same year, ISIS seized a bank in Mosul and pocketed $425 million, and generated $36 million from selling stolen antiquities (Conner, 2018). ISIS also generated significant revenue from excavators and smugglers in ISIS-held territory (Homeland Security, 2016). Other ISIS revenue sources included extortion, taxation, and robbery. Taxation alone generated roughly $360 million annually for the terrorist organization (Homeland Security, 2016). The group's ransom fees totaled between $35 and $45 million in 2014 (Homeland Security, 2016). An additional source of income for ISIS was the financial assistance it received from supporters in the permissive Gulf States (Homeland Security, 2016).

Other terrorist groups have mimicked ISIS's income model and aimed at generating revenue from multiple sources. For example, Boko Haram increased its kidnapping involvement and relied on revenue from extortion, looting, and thefts from banks and villages (FATF, 2016). Al-Shabaab is another terrorist organization that has generated revenue from taxation within its territories and the extortion of elders and businesspeople outside its territory (Levy and Yusuf, 2019).

Legitimizing State Terrorism

The ISIS model has influenced other terrorist groups to adopt its tactics while at the same time creating unintended consequences in terms of counter-terrorism efforts. It would not be wrong to say that the presence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria has legitimized state terrorism. Upon witnessing ISIS' brutality in the Middle East, several states have signaled their approval of terrorism by sponsoring terrorist organizations or creating militia groups that are involved in attacks targeting civilians. These states have pursued their interests and only pretended to fight against ISIS. For example, Russia is interested in protecting the regime of Bashar Hafez al-Assad to keep its military base in Tartus open. In contrast, Iran is in favor of keeping the Assad regime in power because Assad supported Iran during its war against Iraq in the 1980s and because of the Assad regime's hostile relations with Saudi Arabia. Iran has sponsored Hezbollah and Kataib-Hezbollah and provided training programs to Shia militia groups, the members of which Iran later transferred to Syria. Turkey is another country that has exploited its troops' presence in northern Syria as part of the fight against ISIS. In reality, however, ISIS is a tool for the Turkish government's efforts to affect internal politics in Syria. For example, whenever the Turkish government lost votes in elections or tried to change Turkey's agenda, the government assigned the Turkish army to conduct military incursions in Syria. Saudi Arabia and Qatar also have sought to overthrow the Assad regime by supporting opposition groups regardless of whether they are terrorist organizations. The ongoing civil war in Syria has led to many cases of arms and money being transferred to al-Qaeda and ISIS groups in Syria (Cengiz, 2020).

Conclusion

Terrorist organizations that are powerful and capable of plotting sensational attacks have become a model for other groups to mimic in terms of organizational structure, ideology, tactics, and targets. The terrorism history has recorded anarchist, left-wing, separatist, and revolutionary groups that have served as model organizations. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Shining Path in Latin America, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Tupamaros in Uruguay, and the Basque Homeland and Liberty (ETA) group in Spain were examples of organizational and operational models that inspired other terrorist groups to change and update their ideologies and tactics.

Terrorist groups that exploit Islam have dominated the terrorism landscape and become model organizations after the September 11 attacks in the United States. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were popular terrorist organizations until the early 2010s when ISIS emerged and developed in Iraq and Syria. No one had predicted the emergence of such a brutal and deadly organization when ISIS began to invade territories in Iraq and Syria and declared itself the Caliph of the Islamic world. The organization's bloodshed and violence turned eyes toward the region, and ISIS, at its peak in 2014 and 2015, enjoyed its popularity by hosting more than 40 thousand militants from more than 110 countries. Helped by the growing instability in Syria brought on by civil war, ISIS was able to rapidly seize control of vast swaths of territory and rule with its version of Islamic law.

The ISIS model was firmly in place. It was a model that enabled the terrorist organization to control territory, expand its Salafist ideology globally, create branded affiliates in fourteen countries, claim responsibility for terrorist attacks regardless of whether the organization was actually behind the attacks, use traditional media and social media to further its goals, inspire lone actors and homegrown extremists in the Western world, and use beheadings as a tactic for intimidating its enemies. Influenced by the ISIS model, the group's branded affiliates and other jihadist organizations that may or may not have pledged allegiance to ISIS have mimicked ISIS' ideology, tactics, and targets. The number of terrorist groups that control territory and act like a de facto state and use beheadings as a strategy to intimidate their enemies increased.

Moreover, the ISIS model also has led to self-serving pseudo-counter-terrorism efforts in Syria. States that have chosen to justify their presence in Syria by claiming to be fighting against ISIS have either engaged in acts of state-sponsored terrorism to target civilians or sponsored terrorist groups in their fight to overthrow the Assad regime or keep the Syrian leader in power. The world has failed to see such a deadly terrorist organization's emergence but needs to learn important lessons from the global fight against ISIS. It is crucial to analyze how the ISIS model developed and how other terrorist groups have been successful in mimicking it.

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