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## Upsurge of ISIS in Middle East and Miseries of Women and Children

### ABSTRACT

*A proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have emerged in Middle East since April 2013, as a result of socio-political uncertainties in this region. It is also considered as one of the results of Iraq war's failure (2003) and outcomes of unfinished "Arab Spring" drive. Although ISIS is the regional phenomem, but the role of extra regional factors cannot be ignored, especially the role of Western youth as central and paraphernalia command of ISIS is eye catching. Compared to other regional and international extremist groups, ISIS had the matchless capability to assemble male and female individuals in violent activities in the Middle East for many reasons. Even children were also openly employed in Iraq and Syria. Although, ISIS has defeated in the second half of 2017; but it was left with lots of miserable stories of brutality especially with reference to women and children.*

*This research paper gives an analytical view of manipulation of women and children in extremist activities of ISIS. Such activities are addressed by probing the issues that motivated armed clusters to establish a political annex and how such guerrilla groups affected the strategic outlook. The agony of this constant violent movement in Middle East is the miserable condition of the local women and children. On the other hand, ISIS schema was an attractive paradise for the European youth generally and young girls specifically. During war, women and children were the most dejected victims especially in religious conflicts therefore study is mainly focused on this very basic humanitarian aspect. Yet, inspite of the importance of real-life implications of this issue, the available literature on the topic is still scarce therefore this research is based on few books, articles, rare print, electronic and social media reports and sources.*

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**Keywords:** *ISIS; Women; Children; Middle East; Human Rights; Civil War.*

## **Introduction**

ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham), also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) or *Daesh* emerged in Middle East as a result of socio-political instability in this region. In late 2012, initial cells & structures of ISIS raised rapidly in Iraq and Syria. Primarily, it was taken as the planned sectarian confrontation among Iraqi Sunni and Shia population during the Iraq War (2003). The actions of US led alliance force has also been mentioned as an outcome of post war factor, a research fellow at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute, referred to this factor as an "enshrining identity politics as the key marker of Iraqi politics".

ISIS was being viewed as guerrilla group instead of a terrorist group till mid-2014. Citizens of Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities considered them to be strong armed group as a former US army intelligence officer at the Institute for the Study of War, labeled this group as "not a terrorism problem anymore", but rather "an army on the move in Iraq and Syria, and they were taking terrain. They had shadowed governments in Baghdad and outskirts, and they were struggling to expand it. At first, they wanted to get hold in Baghdad and to destabilize Iraqi government and state." Lewis has called ISIS "an advanced military leadership". But there is another point of view described by visiting fellows, Chatham House, London define ISIS as an extremist Islamic State which was active to attract militants from all over the world for the establishment of Caliphate. There were thousands of trained fighters including "Chechen snipers, Saudi car bombers, and Western misfits like American Douglas McAuthur McCain" who are committed with the cause of ISIS.

## **ISIS- A Militants Group**

### **Origin of ISIS**

The Vicar of Baghdad in his interview expressed that during ISIS hold, the political situation in Iraq was the result of the policies of Iraqi President al-Maliki who sidelined the biggest group of Sunnis during his rule. And, as a result, Al-Qaeda established a strong opposition group to protect Sunnis interest.

Ibrahim Awwad al-Badri, a 43-year-old dissident known as Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi was the proclaimed ruler of Syria and Iraq. He was arrested by US forces "in late 2004 or early 2005" during their occupation in Iraq, but no charges were proved against him, therefore; he was released in 2009. He joined Al Qaeda in Iraq and was declared leader of his group in 2010 when Abu Omar al-Baghdadi was murdered by US and Iraqi militaries.

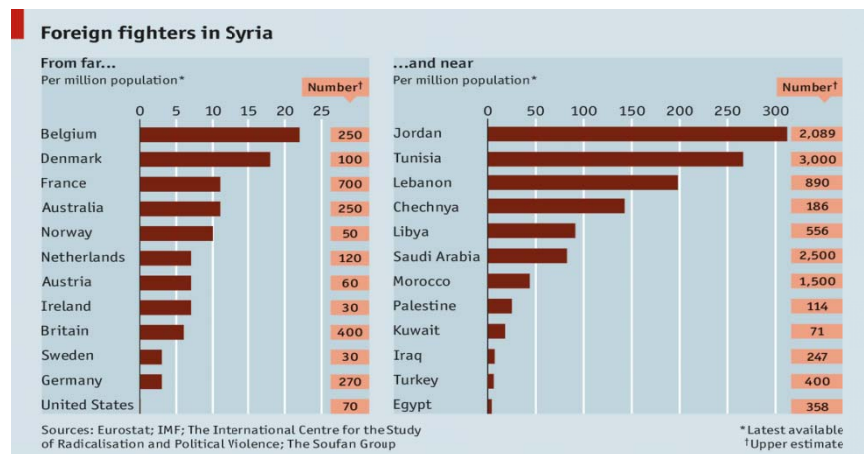
Syrian political instability in 2011 provided him a chance to enlarge his group. In 2014, Al-Qaeda released a statement regarding dis-association with ISIS. Baghdadi's rigid version of Islam has been imposed in towns of Al-Bab, Deir Hafir, Raqqa, Dier el-Zour, Tal Afar, where the group has authoritarian hold.



ISIS was considered as one of the richest terrorist organizations, generating revenue with non-traditional sources and modes in the Middle East. Wall Street Journal reported that the organization's main source of revenue was oil deals, forced taxation and blackmailing (kidnapping, ransom). According to New York Times, The Islamic State in Iraq & Syria controlled territory of hundreds of kilometers that was greater than many countries and later on it took control of the greatest oil fields of Iraq and Syria, with yielding power of 75,000 barrel oil and also shared gas fields. The city of Raqqa was ISIS's supposed capital. From Raqqa (Syria) to Mosul (Iraq) orthodox Sunnis had strong economic hold, even on public transport and they demanded 'protection payment' from Christians and other religious groups who wanted to live in these areas.

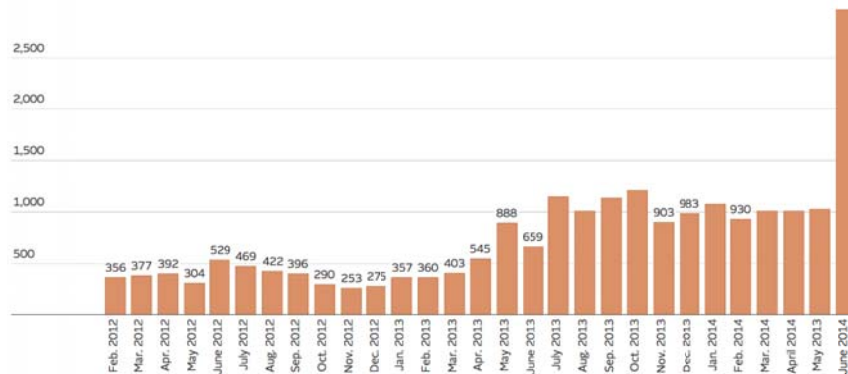
Islamic State had also promoted business with local natives from some of the same areas whose administrations were trying to stop their rise. ISIS took the control over sale of oil, wheat forms and local markets; and had captured a vast market with buyers and business deals and transactions. ISIS leaders wanted to establish a state with protected borders, legislation and authority of implementation of rules and regulations without any interference. Researchers noted that this is a major difference in agenda of ISIS and other terrorist organizations. For example, AlQaeda as expressed: "This is not a classic insurgency;" so that the whole Middle East was passing through the political changes and outcome of so called "Arab Spring" since 2010. There were many volunteers from Western countries, Middle East

and North African (MENA) countries, fighting for the cause of ISIS. Following table is showing data of foreigners active with ISIS in Syria and Iraq:



Participation of foreign element enhanced once war activities in Syria and Iraq, and this violent situation raised killing rate in affected areas. Following data in tabular form show the high rate of casualties:

### Iraqi civilian casualties, 2012-2014



### ISIS - Women and Children

ISIS had a very harsh attitude towards almost every section of under influenced society but local women and children were suffering quite farther. They stopped girls from attending going to schools, women from

jobs in offices and their visit at public places without “Mahram” (father, brother or husband etc.). In many reports, it has been observed that ISIS uses women as a victim in violent activities to terrify people and get control over the communities.

Huff post video reported originally aired on June 27, 2014, hosted by Marc Lamont Hill. According to report, in Northern Iraq, many women had been caught by ISIS fighters and being abducted, abused, photographed naked to bring shame for the families and in most cases, families disowned such women. In report, it was mentioned that all these women were compelled to live in a school, movie-theater and a local sports center under strict guards. These women were sold to ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria and in few instances; they were sold to different people and considered to be their properties.

ISIS activities show pure human rights violation and such activities should not be consider as human act. ‘Islam is a religion of peace and knowledge for all without any gender discrimination. Women harassment and human rights violation at all levels was the common practice in ISIS controlled areas as reported by BBC News World in BBC News Night on November 13, 2014.

Kindness with weaker, old and children is the key feature of Islamic traditions but ISIS leadership’s interpretation and implementation of rigid rules was not the revival of Islamic states of olden times as CNN reported “While CNN cannot independently confirm the claim, it follows reports by survivors who describe ISIS fighters grabbing families and separating the men from the women and children”.

ISIS released video clip showing Syrian woman being stoned to death by group of men, even her own father was in the gathering because of allegation of adultery without any reliable evidence. A very insensitive attitude was reported by Johan Hall for MAILONLINE on October, 2014.

ISIS’s rigid and inhuman point was also expressed by Simon Tomlinson and Tom Mctague in MAIL ONLINE on August 14, 2014. They reported that “ISIS wants to impregnate Yazidi women and smash our blond bloodline’: Fears grow for the 300 women kidnapped from Sinjar.”

Another BBC report on December 19, 2013 reflecting the situation concerning many ISIS followers who were involved in theft, smoking, drinking, and illegal sex cases. There were many people, who belonged to rival rebel groups, faced cruel and harsh punishments from ISIS authorities. In this regard, Amnesty spoke about the pre-teen children to get more than 90 lashes during investigations at Sadd al-Baath on the bank of Euphrates River at al- Mansoura.

CNN reported about serious human right violations in many cases regarding women and children who belonging to different ethnic groups

and non-Muslims. The cruel people posted pictures of 'Beheading Children' on Facebook is another evidence.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW):

"Human Rights Watch has documented violence against ethnic and religious minorities, reporting that tens of thousands of families have already fled their communities near Mosul in fear for their lives. Village residents have described horrific attacks by ISIS fighters, who "seize local men and pillage homes and places of worships," Human Rights Watch said. The militants have summarily executed villagers and Iraqi soldiers alike, slaughtering a group of soldiers in Tikrit in June 2014. Human Rights Watch also said ISIS extremists reportedly killed 40 Turkmen, including children, in four communities in Kirkuk in June 2014".

HRW also published a report, consisted of a chain of discussions and interviews, that ISIS had "systematically" detached young women and teenage girls from their families and forced them to marry fighters. ISIS tried to justify such criminal acts through their self-religious interpretations, denying Islamic teaching where is zero tolerance regarding such brutal actions.

#### **Miseries of Western Young Muslim Women joining ISIS?**

The important and interesting phenomenon of recruitment of western women for ISIS was psychological, emotional and religious blackmailing aspect, "Regardless of what attracts them, women jihadists serve a fleeting purpose for ISIS. They are unaware that they will progressively lose their freedom as they empower ISIS, through their actions".

Many young women belonging western countries left their homes without permission and intimation to their parents being for sake of Jihad and reached in Syria and Iraq and got married with fighters. These young ladies were called "jihadi brides".

The concept of "Holy Worriers" was very attractive for western Muslim young women. Grounds were prepared for that appealing propaganda from last few decades through various religious organizations and groups, active in European countries in the name of religious education. Muslim families, settled in Europe, could not merge properly in western social setup because of many reasons. Therefore, young generation is neither aware of Islamic concepts nor modern social trends. For example, one very common thought in such cases was: many youngsters including boys and girls were under socio-economic stress during recent economic recession period started in 2007 and still going on with its low intensity. This stress and pressure pushed them to be a self-proclaimed worrier and earn worldly life pleasure with "concept of Jannah" (paradise) in life

hereafter. This argument was proved by many Facebook, twitter and other social media messages reported.

Majority belonged to teenage group, as expressed that in April, 2014, two girls aged 15 and 16 from Austria went to Syria and afterwards were traced by Interpol. Another case, in May 2014, 16, years old British twins left Manchester and landed in Syria to be jihadi brides. They called their parents that they left their home for the noble mission and were not willing to come back. FBI reported in July 2014, about a 19 years old Muslim convert, Denver nurse who was employed online. She reached in Syria via Turkey and contacted to a Tunisian man who was working for the cause of ISIS.

Fox News reported that ISIS was using social media for attracting western female, expressed in a talk aired on September 19, 2014.

“Women are drawn to ISIS for a number of reasons. First, they are responding to ISIS’ leader, Baghdadi, who has called upon them to help build the new Islamic State. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s “caliphate” needs women to assume the traditional roles of marriage and childbearing. Others respond to ISIS’ call for skilled workers – doctors, nurses and engineers.”

It is revealed through many evidences that skilled and trained female workers were the special target of ISIS as expressed in report entitled, “Ten Percent of Western Recruits to ISIS are Women” by Ahmed Charai, Joseph Braude, September 2014. ‘The Nation Interest’ website had shared the story of Umm Ubaydah, a converted western woman. She went to Syria and got married to a Jihadi fighter and also joined ISIS media team and posted ISIS agenda among English language international community through different social media websites. This is one example and there were many others who were working for the propagation of the ideas of ISIS in similar manner.

In another case, two teenage Somali American women left Minnesota for Syria and did this “hijra” (holy migration) under religious inspiration. Such kind of women migrant, figure was very high in the “Islamic State” according to UK and French study estimate. Such examples clearly depict that the western liberal societies failed to safeguard women, who had been groomed in a liberal environment from extremist agendas.

Human Rights Watch website displayed the facts regarding the miserable condition of children in these words “This evidence of torture and abuse of children by ISIS underlines why no one should support their criminal enterprise.”

Children were facing unbearable psychological and physical torture as reported in Mint Press news; one of the school teachers shared the story from Mosul about the process of ‘Brainwash’ under severe terror and

violence. ISIS followers imposed their ideas and agenda in tender minds and this way native people lost the uniqueness of their local traditions, history and culture. He also added that our children were the major target of that misery. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein expressed his serious concerns about the ISIS recruitment of children as "Future Jihadi" force. ISIS was encoding a generation of Iraqis and Syrians, in an attempt to guarantee its own future. That forced brainwashing was not appropriate in Islam at any level of civilized society. That was cruelty and clear human rights violation.

ISIS was using small children as 'human shields' and there were "unconfirmed number of children used either as human traffic or other dark purposes..... ISIS had ordered boys as young as 13 years old to carry weapons, guard strategic locations or arrest civilians, and had used other children as suicide bombers...," reported by Al Arabiya News.

According to other reporters, a great number of "women and children have been jailed, sexually abused, and sold for around \$10 each in slave markets located in the al-Quds area of Mosul."

Another detailed United Nations report on "ISIS Abuse of Women and Children" published in New York Times (Jeffery Marcusoct, October 03, 2014) reflecting the miserable condition of women, children, and suppressed groups in occupied areas of Syria and Iraq by ISIS.

## **Analysis**

First, a concept of Muslim Caliphate is associated with ancient concept of rule during the era of early Islamic history when a territory was ruled by one supreme religious and political leader. ISIS desired to implement that concept without following relevant rules and teachings of Islam in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and various other territories in the Middle East and revived the concept of Muslim "Ummah" (Nation).

The second important point is that Islamic teachings are very women friendly and give proper status and respect to Muslim women and same is for the children. In religion "there is no compulsion in religion". In ancient world history, women were treated badly, therefore, Allah revealed following verses for female child criticizing the attitudes of such parents and societies who undermine female children, the Holy Quran states:

"...kill not your children because of poverty - We provide sustenance for you and for them". (Al-Quran 6:151)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The ruler is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. A man is the shepherd of his family and is responsible for his



flock. A woman is the shepherd of her husband's household and is responsible for her flock"

Third, this particular issue is made even more complex for the Islamic State. According to available evidences within ISIS's unrecognized state, forces had been killing civilian children, they had specifically targeted Christian children and non-Sunni, data is not available about how many of such executions took the form of beheadings. This is awful crime against humanity and international community. It also not reflects Islamic thought and culture.

Fourth, it is not just ordinary war or political conflict. ISIS had been a tangible fact with established administrations' agenda and plan in Iraq and Syria. Leaders of ISIS were not so much worried regarding their budgetary and military assets. However, their capacity to administer was not proved and tested. The Arab Spring, which had officially provoked the ruin of the legislatures of four nations before permitting the Islamic State to flourish in Syria, is just piece of the setting for this mishap of history.

Fifth, the ISIS group was responsible for promoting imbalance and disparity in the Middle East region. This is a real fact that the group got approval and appealed a huge number of supporters, many of them from Western countries. Data, in this study, reflects that western governments were not very successful to stop their citizens to fight for ISIS. Moreover, distressing factor was the economic capability of ISIS and many scholars and researchers considered it one of the richest Jihadi groups in the world. Ineffective role of rich Arab States, as well as western countries, to counter brutal activities of ISIS created doubts about their policies towards terrorism.

Sixth, the ISIS group was also very active on social media and it had started an effective propaganda campaign by using major social media. Take the example of "Jihadi brides", through analyzing available data on "Twitter", they used twitter as platform for attracting young girls in different counties. Several accounts were created for the promotion of their agenda and attracted teenagers and young people. Many cyber experts agreed that the anonymous announcements made by ISIS were regarded as effective threats. It was also reported that "Intelligence researchers have analyzed the activities within the Iraqi Internet Service Providers (ISP), discovering a significant increase in the number of cyber-attacks during recent months". Twitter administrators removed many accounts associated with ISIS but they recreated and publicized new accounts the next day. ISIS social media experts also approached alternative social media sites, such as Quitter, Friendica and Diaspora; however, those sites administrators also removed some suspicious accounts and data related to ISIS followers. However, more coordinated efforts were required to control social media to protect male and female youth from extremist elements.

Seventh, it was hard to believe that Iraqi army had failed to stop the expansion of ISIS. There were alliances of nations supposedly with better armies and powerful weapons and they had not made a difference in the war against those terrorists. It was revealed that the nations allowed ISIS to excel with their agenda. The civilized world may not believe what different political leaders allowed that cruel group to do to innocent children, women and elderly people. As in one of the editions of Dabiq, the Islamic State's slick, English magazine, "the group offers a theological justification for capturing "infidel" women to be used as sex slaves. The brutal group is holding thousands of Yazidi women and girls and subjecting them to horrific violent, sexual abuse". Writer also added:

"After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shari'ah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's authority to be divided as khums [the obligatory tithe of one-fifth of all war spoils that jihadi fighters must pay to the caliph."

Another report has verified all those evidences published in 'Independent' by Rose Troup Buchanan (October 2014), "ISIS justifies capture and sexual enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women and girls"

Finally, available evidences are proving that all these quoted incidences and discussion reflect the most horrible aspect of the continuing dispute in Middle East. Women and children were the ultimate victims of such crisis. Although ISIS has been defeated when its de facto capitals, Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, were captured after long and bloody blockades in the second half of 2017 but after this defeat, it has been undoubtedly revealed that ISIS have been engaged in the enslavement of women and forced children to become suicide bombers.

## **Conclusion**

During the early period of ISIS brutality, Iraqi US-trained forces had not the strength to control and counter such brutality on their land efficiently. Competent army officers had left army or they were discouraged and sidelined by the ruling groups. Therefore, due to incompetent soldiers, poor law and order situation, the number of issues raised. Political instability, extensive socio-political immaturity, lack of visionary and capable leadership promoted extremism and sectarian tension in Syria and Iraq.

Eventually, ISIS and its allied forces had been fighting on two major fronts in North Western Iraq and a far bigger area of Syria. Therefore, in Iraq, ISIS had been antagonized by motivated force of volunteer's militia -

called al *Hashed al Shabi* or Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). In Syria, these terrorist dominated by strong resistance from President Bashar al-Assad's loyal army, Hezbollah Lebanon and other Iranian-backed forces as well as from Russia. Role of Persian Gulf States especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates was making the state of affairs more complex. Similarly, U.S and European powers also played very confused role by confronting with Iran and Russia.

The agony of ISIS issue is "gross human rights abuses" that may be regarded as war crimes. These crimes are not only against women and children, these are against humanity. Forced recruitment of children and the abduction of girls and young women who were sold as sex slaves are the black spots on the profile of ISIS and its leadership having no link with Islamic concept of humanitarian values and Islamic Socio-political system. Such alarming conditions required common efforts to completely abolish and put an end to ISIS brand of dangerous games.

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