

## **RIEAS Exclusive**

# **THE IMPLICATIONS OF A VICTORY FOR THE ISLAMIC STATE IN SYRIA AND IRAQ**

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A victory for the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria would have a wide range of economic, social and political consequences. Economically, there would be a significant and damaging effect on the world's oil supply. Socially, not only would Iraq and Syria be affected but any country with a sizable Muslim population. Politically, there would be consequences due to the forming of new alliances between former foes and the type of the state the IS intends to create. It is certain that if they win, the effects will be worse than the troubles in Somalia.

### **Introduction**

The Islamic State is a real threat to the West as well as other Muslim countries. One of its main aims is to join together the Muslim world and former Islamic lands under one state. This proposed state spans from Spain to Malaysia. This has to be a major concern to the West as the IS is essentially devoting itself to a total war policy. This has implications on many levels including social, military and economic.

The Islamic State, formerly known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was a member organisation of Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda disowned them for being too radical and disapproved of their methods. It is under the command of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and follows an extremist Sunni brand of Islam. The ISIs was able to gain territory in Syria and

from there, was able to branch out and expand into Iraq, meeting little resistance. The IS was able to secure Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, and from there declared itself a Caliphate.

The organisation is run very much like a conventional army and state. It has a cabinet and council of provincial governors. The cabinet has a Minister of Oil and a Minister in charge of the transportation of Suicide Bombers.

"I describe Baghdadi as a shepherd, and his deputies are the dogs who herd the sheep [the Islamic State's members]," said Hisham al-Hashimi, a security analyst. "The strength of the shepherd comes from his dogs" (Sherlock, 2014).

While Baghdadi is the leader he does not micromanage. He still gives orders through couriers but allows regional commanders to set their own policy. The formal command structure makes it an army in the traditional sense, with no need of using cells for its current activities.

From a social perspective, the IS will have an impact on Sunni and Shia relations. We can see this already from the bombing of ancient mosques in Iraq. We are seeing a rise in sectarian violence there and religious factions developing their own armies under the command of clerics. However the social effects of an IS victory will not just be limited to the Middle East but also countries with a sizable Muslim population. The populations will mostly be against the Islamic State, but a fringe minority may carry out acts of violence in the name of the IS. This will mean that Western Muslim populations on a whole may be in danger of reprisal attacks and could lead to ghettoization which in turn could create Sharia towns within Europe. Also a humanitarian crisis will lead to more migration to the West which may stir up anti-immigration feelings.

On an economic level, the IS already control oil fields in both Syria and Iraq and are using the oil to finance their operations. However if they gain control of Iraq and Syria they will gain control of their oil production as well. This will have a significant effect on the world's oil price, which will damage the world's economy. Iraq is the eighth

largest producer of oil (EIA, 2012) and not having direct access to such a critical resource will affect prices through the global economy, not to mention providing the Islamic State with a direct funding source.

The effects of the victory will be hard-hitting on many different levels and many different countries, not just Iraq and Syria's Middle Eastern neighbours. This is a global crisis with global repercussions.

### **Economic Issues**

The IS will have the ability to launch economic warfare on a global scale. Economic warfare can be defined as causing damage to a state's economy via market manipulation or control over certain resources such as oil. If the IS gains control over Iraq and Syria it will have grave consequences for the global economy. "Economic warfare is the direct or indirect manipulation of an economy by a state actor or other entity through legal or illegal means." (American Centre for Democracy, 2014) The IS's main power over the world will be its oil supplies and they will undoubtedly use this to their advantage.

Its victory alone in the region will have catastrophic effects for the world's economy as Iraq is one of the world's largest oil producers and an IS victory will mean, at best, limited access to Iraq's oil fields. This will lead to an increase in oil prices which will cause inflationary effects. Oil is the life blood of the world's economy and when prices rose in 1973 it caused a major economic crisis for the West. The world can expect something like this now but worse having just come out of an economic crisis. In this, there is a strong certainty of oil prices rising, as business with a newly established Caliphate will most likely be unreliable and potentially even illegal.

A victory in Iraq and Syria will have major security implications for the Persian Gulf and by extension the Strait of Hormuz. Twenty percent of the world's oil trade goes through the Strait (Energy Information Administration, 2014). Iran threatened to blockade the Strait in the past by threatening to sink an oil tanker. While this is crude, it is highly effective as it would take a while to raise it from the sea bed. It would not be beyond the ability of the IS to perform such a task. There will be a strong likelihood of attacks on the Strait of Hormuz through the Persian Gulf as victory in Iraq would give the IS access to the Gulf and through there, the Strait.

When a state becomes lawless its neighbours are affected as the similar situation of Somalia, which became a haven for pirates, demonstrates. The IS in the right circumstances, could develop a pirate navy and this will affect shipping in the Gulf. Attacks could come in the form of piracy or suicide attacks on jet skis. This will destabilize the Gulf and the Strait. The Strait is a major trade route for the region and a blockade there will cause disruption of global trade and regional trade. This will mean that to protect the Gulf and the Strait the West will need to send a task force to secure AL Faw Port and the Iraqi coastline. From its territory it will be able to threaten the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and thereby affect trade in the region both in oil and other goods. By sending troops to gain control of the Iraqi Coast, it will protect shipping and will limit the IS's ability to blockade the Strait. However its access to oil and its revenues will give the IS their international reach, so even if the IS cannot attack the Strait from Iraq they could contract the attack out to another terrorist group. The Strait must have adequate protection.

To summarize on an economic level, the IS will cause the disruption of oil supplies. With a victory in Iraq it will limit the world's oil trade and the trade in the region due to its access to the Straits of Hormuz. This will enable the IS to launch an economic war against the world and its effects could cause long term economic damage to the world's already fragile economy. Oil supplies in the region must be safeguarded and states with large oil reserves must be offered protection.

### **Social Issues**

Victory for the IS will cause social problems around the world. Firstly, it is already dividing Muslim communities as many young Muslims are taking up arms for the Islamic State to the despair of their parents. This is done by exploiting the disillusionment of the Muslim youth around the world. If the IS can bring about a victory it will draw more Muslims to its cause. Secondly, its victory will bring an exodus of people from the region, most likely to Europe. Europe is recovering from an economic crisis and has large public support across the continent to stop mass migration. This exodus will add support to the anti-immigration parties and will have long term social effects on the makeup of these countries as the exodus will no doubt be in its millions. Thirdly, in the region and across the globe

this will inflame the Sunni- Shia divide and will lead to sectarian violence, which is already being seen against moderate Sunnis.

Extremist Islam, well before the foundation of the group called the ISIL, has been able to exploit the disillusionment of Muslim young men across the world, in particular Europe. These young men found structure and friendship in the arms of extremist Islam. It is not necessarily a class problem as Muslims from many different classes join terrorist groups but rather one of inclusion. They find it hard to identify themselves with the country they or their parents moved to. Islam gives them a form of identity and therefore, it is up to moderate Imams and mosques to fulfil this need and in turn, help social inclusion. Otherwise non-Muslim countries, with a large Muslim population will see their citizens fight for the IS abroad and may come back to engage in terrorist activities.

States must have a strategy that deals with extremism at its source. However, more short term measures must be adopted for states to safeguard its citizens. Firstly, passports should be rescinded if an individual is suspected of being involved or trying to get involved in terrorist activities. Secondly, if an individual has returned from a place where terrorist activity is common and is believed to be at least sympathetic to a terrorist group's ideology, the state must question them about their activities while in that country. Thirdly, the state could issue a travel ban to certain countries for all its citizens, with permission granted for humanitarian reasons. Bordering countries could be asked to inform Western governments when Western citizens try to cross the border in to Iraq and Syria and refuse entry. This method may be less intrusive on people's individual freedoms. States that fail to do this will see blood on the streets and the creation Sharia towns within European countries.

There would be a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of an IS victory in Iraq and Syria. Already refugees are crossing the surrounding borders. These people will need a place to go as neighbouring countries will most likely face skirmishes on their border regions where the refugee camps are currently placed. If the IS win, the camps will be in a destabilized region. States that border the IS will have their own refugee problem involving their own citizens. Previously displaced peoples will need to be moved and they will most likely go to the West. A large proportion of these will go to Europe. Europe has still not recovered from its economic crisis. There is a large public support across

the continent for the anti-immigration parties. This will give more political support for those parties. In parts of Europe the ethnic and social make up will change and the further immigration will add to this change for better or worse. Again this will still drum up support for anti-immigration parties.

The current conflict is as much about the Sunni Shia divide as it is about a force to eradicate Western influences in the Middle East. The Sunni Shia divide goes back to the death of Mohammad and who would be his successor. This developed into war, schism and conflicts over beliefs with the IS destroying ancient Shia mosques. The Shias are the majority in Iraq while the IS is a Sunni force. Due to this there has already been incidents of reprisal attacks against Sunni civilians (BBC, 2014). Militias have been set up by Shia religious groups as a way for them to defend their historic sites, which are under the command of Clerics. However this is not a divisive issue just in Iraq and Syria but elsewhere in the Middle East. Mariam Al Mansouri the United Arab Emirates' first female pilot was disowned by her family for attacking Sunnis.

"Our family is proud of all free men who defend their cause and of all those who take up arms to defend the honour of their nation [the Islamic Nation]. We are proud of the Sunni heroes in Iraq and the Levant and all those who take up the banner of righteousness wherever they may be." (Thornhil, 2014).

The Sunni Shia divide is one of the causes of this and unless community dialogue can be established, more bloodshed will follow.

To summarise, the IS is already causing huge social upheaval across the world. It will have a better ability to recruit young, disillusioned Muslims than it does now as its victory will create a powerful magnet which people will be drawn to. This will cause problems for Western countries such as Britain and France as their own citizens may take up arms against the government. A victory will create a major humanitarian crisis as the region will be destabilised and an exodus of people will head to the West. This in turn, will create a backlash and increase support for anti-immigration parties. As the IS is Sunni and relations with the Shia have turned violent and more violence will follow beyond the Middle East's borders.

## Political Issues

The IS is becoming a strong political force. Clausewitz said that "war is a continuation of politics by other means".

The IS politics come from political Islam and its desire for a global Caliphate. This means it has global desires and may seek to create a global terrorist network and to have other extremist Islamic groups fall under its control. However, there are other political implications such as the mending of the relationship between the West and the Middle East and whether the conflict could be seen as a Clash of Civilizations. The term Clash of Civilisations was created by Samuel P Huntington. The proposed theory states the world is no longer trying to triumph one ideology against another but it is now a world where civilizations would compete against each other. One of these civilizations is the Islamic and another is Western.

Despite the difficulty of trading with the IS in oil, as previously stated limited quantities will become available at the right price to the right buyer. Already there are Kurdish businessmen buying trucks of oil from the Islamic State (McElroy, 2014). This is giving the Islamic State about one million dollars a day. The IS is also gaining revenues from taxes, the looting of banks and museums as well as ransoms. The Islamic State is self-financing and this is dangerous. If it were to win, its oil wealth could be used to finance other groups with similar ideologies thereby giving it a global reach and effectively making it a global power. This could be the first steps of an Empire, as any land gained by the financed groups would become at least nominally part of the Caliphate. The IS, if managed competently as it appears to be, can be a power on the world stage. Recently a Pakistani Taliban faction swore allegiance to the IS (Dawar, 2014). The Taliban are a tribal group in Afghanistan and Pakistan, at the moment this is only one faction. However, younger fighters from both countries were enthusiastic about the IS. But this, in my opinion, is only the beginning. The more successful the IS is, the more popular it will become, so more groups will pledge loyalty.

Domestically, it is trying to build up support by making sure "the trains run on time". The IS is trying to build up the appearance of respectability. They are adopting the methods of Hezbollah by providing healthcare, welfare and education. The IS is also going out of its way to act like a state. It is making sure energy and water are being adequately taken care of. Their leader in one of his messages called for "scientists, scholars, preachers, judges,

doctors, engineers and people with military and administrative expertise". They have reopened schools, at least for boys, and they have a police and judiciary to enforce Sharia Law. From this they are getting a reputation for honesty and fair play.

"A local goldsmith told the New York Times that the taxes are far cheaper than the bribes residents had to pay when Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad was in control "I feel like I am dealing with a respected state, not thugs," the goldsmith said"(Dreazen, 2014).

This is granting them a degree of respectability, drawing parallels between them and the Third Reich. The IS generate? law and order and have eradicated previous corrupt regimes. However, also like the Third Reich, as they bring in improvements, they are also committing acts of genocide and violence against groups they detest.

The IS have a clear vision of what their state should look like. It combines radical Islam with a functioning government. "ISIS is the most dangerous terrorist group in the world because they combine the fighting capabilities of al Qaeda with the administrative capabilities of Hezbollah," said David Kilcullen. This means that by building up popular support in their current territory, they are building up a power base and will get more difficult to remove the longer they are there. The IS's policies give it soft power and a better support base, both at home and abroad, which will encourage new members.

Currently, I do not think it is beyond them to challenge Iran. Firstly, Iran's Sunni population is mistreated by the Islamic government. For example, the Iranian government doesn't allow them to build their own Mosques and bans them from praying together at the end of Ramadan (Dehghan, 2011), so already it may have sympathetic supporters. If Iran falls to the IS then more Islamic militant groups will swear loyalty. Iran has been supporting Shia militias around the Middle East and has sent aid support to the Assad Regime. President Assad is an Alawite which is a sect of Shia Islam. While government members are Shia, the majority of the population are Sunni. Iran and the US need to reevaluate their relationship. It was not wise of Obama to cut Iran out of the coalition. There is an opportunity in this crisis for bridge building. The IS continues to get stronger and if Iraq falls it will not be long before Iran asks America for military assistance.



This conflict may lead into something more sinister, a Clash of Civilisations. The leader of the IS had declared himself ruler of all Muslims. The IS is rejecting borders, national identities and minority groups to create a huge Muslim state by symbolically crossing into Iraq thereby destroying the Sykes Picot agreement.

"The breakup of the geopolitical architecture of the Sykes-Picot agreement engulfed much of the Middle East, and is especially fatal for religious minorities. One of the objectives of the Islamic State is reborn from the ashes of the remains of this geopolitical architecture dating from the Sykes - Picot is simply to exterminate all religious minorities" (Neff, 2014).

This is securing their power base by the removal of opposing beliefs. It has already set itself against the West by stating its wish to invade parts of Europe such as Vienna, Rome, Greece and Spain. Already, more Muslims are attracted to its cause and it will set itself up against the West by way of terrorist attacks. It will do all in its power to subvert the West to achieve its survival.

To summarise, in certain ways, the Social effects of the IS are the most devastating of all the effects IS's victory will achieve. It will cause more chaos and internal strife across the West. More immigration means more support for anti-immigration which will inevitably lead to deeper division across the West. Its victory will increase Islamophobia and draw more young Muslims into the arms of radical Islam to find acceptance and safety. Communities will be more divided than ever and this will result in the creation of Sharia towns across Europe and communities will seek to divide themselves. Policing these communities will be difficult at best and this will cause more radicalisation as there will be no way to stop it. The Sunni Shia divide will cause more bloodshed and Sunni communities in Shia majority countries will face backlash and persecution. However, the victory of the IS will mean that civilisations may group together more, as has been witnessed in other geopolitical events around the world. The IS's plan is to create an Islamic Civilisation to take on the West and victory in Iraq and Syria will help the IS along that path to world domination.

## Conclusion

The rise of the IS is taking the world down a very dark path. Division and strife will be common because of it. The IS's plan is to create an Islamic super power and with a victory in Iraq and Syria they will be part way there.

Oil will give them the money to secure domestic support to hold their long term position. The longer they are in power the harder it will be for them to be removed. They are building a functioning government which at the moment is low in corruption. Their oil will finance their terrorist activities and allow them to gain more support from Islamic terrorist groups. They will be able to use their vast wealth to control them and coordinate terrorist attacks. The IS is, in my opinion, proving the Clash of Civilisations theory to be right as the world is becoming more polarised. Nations will group together based on common cultural and social foundations and the IS will be able to exploit the Islamic links to recruit new members and to gain new territory.

The economic consequences of its victory will cause fluctuations in the stock market. Due to the limited supply of oil, the price will rise and that will offset the recovery process, particularly in Europe. It may disrupt the oil flow from other countries in the region particularly through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The IS may invade surrounding oil rich countries. While the world may not be able to gain access to Iraq's oil it should start safeguarding other supplies in the region and to do this it needs to make sure that the Persian Gulf is protected from pirates, this at least would contain them.

In the short term, more support for anti-immigration will be seen as an exodus of refugees flees from the region. This will cause the longer term social effect of ghettoisation and the possibility of Sharia towns across Europe. Radicalisation across the West will become rife and difficult to police. Terrorist attacks planned by Western citizens on behalf of the Islamic State will become commonplace. More immigration will be seen as Sunni refugees flee persecution. This, however, sets new problems as there are Sunnis that may harbour sympathies to the Islamic State and may try to help them.

An IS victory is a symbol of a failure to spread the value of human rights to the Middle East and that people can move past what divides them. The IS is an organisation that embodies everything the modern world is against.

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