

# Islamic State of Iraq and Syria's (ISIS') Activities in the Middle East and United States of America's Counter - Terrorism Strategies (2014 - 2017)

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**Abstract:** - Terrorism is one of the contemporary global issues that has challenged the peaceful co-existence of individuals and nations alike. Several measures and strategies have been put in place at the national, regional and global level to combat and eradicate this problem of terrorism in its totality. This paper centers on the activities of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS') in the Middle East and United States of America's Counter - Terrorism Strategies 2014 – 2017. The work seeks to examine the U.S.A counter - terrorism strategies to find out if the U.S.A counter - terrorism strategies have effectively eradicated the rampaging catastrophic activities of the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Middle East. The study made use of Strategic theory as a framework of analysis and documentary method of data collection was employed while relying on content analysis. Amongst others, the findings revealed that U.S.A government, through its counter - terrorism strategies, reduced the activities of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and beyond but did not effectively eradicate the activities of ISIS. In the light of the findings, the study recommends: that U.S.A jettisons her provocative imperialistic foreign policy actions and resort to an overhauled foreign policy grounded on the principle of egalitarianism, justice, equity and fair- play; the U.S reviews her aerial bombardment strategy to minimize civilian casualty; the Iraqi authorities form an inclusive new government which would represent the interest of all Iraqis, not just specific social groups; the members of the global coalition against ISIS deploy ground troops in addition to the aerial bombardment strategy to Syria to fight ISIS.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, ISIS, Middle East, Strategies, and Counter -Terrorism

## I. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has been a major challenge to global development since the early 21st century. It has become a major security issue and the source of instability both at the global and sub-regional levels. Terrorism can be politically or socially motivated, it often arises most times as a result of frustration which often stems from imbalance of power, power disparity, unfair resource allocation, tamper on religious belief, imperialism and the effect of colonialism.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, (ISIS) is a terrorist group that originated from the Al-Qaeda, operating mainly in Iraq and Syria including Yemen, Lebanon and other parts of the Middle East as an unrecognized Islamic state. ISIS, an extremist militant group rules by Wahhabi/Salafi law.

ISIS was formed on the 29th of June, 2014 by Abu Musab who was originally part of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. Since declaring its caliphate on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, the self-proclaimed state has conducted or inspired terrorist attacks in Iraq, Syria and several other Middle Eastern states where its carnage has taken a deadlier toll, these attacks have killed at least 3000 people and injured thousands more, both inside and outside Iraq and Syria (Lederman, 2015). A series of coordinated bombings and shootings across central and northern Iraq killed 98 people and left 240 wounded in March 2014 (Roberts, 2015).

Counter-terrorism strategies have been adopted by nations that are directly or indirectly targeted by ISIS terrorism to cripple their terrorist activities through different military strategies like the deployment of troops in affected areas, spotting and stopping terror plot and so on. The USA in its bid to effectively combat the ISIS has adopted a number of population and enemy centric strategies. These strategies were taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations and networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### USA Foreign Policy in the Middle East and the Rise of ISIS Terrorism

USA relations with the Middle East has been inconsistent and problematic since the reconstruction of the Jewish state, literally, in the Arabian land and the discovery of middle Eastern oil, which became a lifeline of the US economy (Halabi, 2009 & Watkins, 1997). It is inconsistent because US objectives in the region have always fluctuated depending on the geopolitical conditions of ongoing events and political developments.

### *Securing Strategic Access to Oil in the Gulf Region Oil*

Following World War II, the United States began looking for alternative sources of oil abroad to meet its own future demands. The Middle East was very attractive to both the United States government and American petroleum companies due to its proven long-term oil reserves. Arab oil reserves were shown to potentially have much more than the originally estimated 60% of the world oil reserves. In fact, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi possessed more

than 50% of the known reserves amongst themselves alone (Iskandar, 1974). To attest to this high-quality Middle Eastern oil was known to flow freely of its own pressure. This circumstance allowed for much cheaper production costs; the Middle East per production barrel ranged between \$0.10 and \$0.22 cents in comparison to \$0.39 cents in Venezuela, and as much as \$1.51 per barrel in the United States. This is a considerable difference when it comes to the bottom line (Rustow, 1982). As the global demand for oil increased, US Middle East policy became more militaristic and aggressive than ever. Due to the fact that oil reserves have been controlled by in the essence family-owned countries — despotic and hostile regimes such as Saddam’s Iraq and the Saudi Kingdom—, politics of providing uninterrupted flow of oil into the US market has shifted from what is essentially known the “energy policy” to “national security policy” in the minds and rhetoric of American policy makers.

#### *Supporting and Protecting Israel’s Sovereignty*

The second interest of the United States in the Middle East region is to safeguard the state of Israel and to ensure its stability in the often troubled region. In fact, maintaining a strong Israel in the Middle East solidifies American national security interests there. This perspective has dominated American foreign policy since the mid-twentieth century and continues to shape the current policy (Al Sarhan, 2017).

Since the establishment of Israel, US foreign policy in the Middle East has been more problematic than before. As the US worked hard to keep oil-rich, radical Arabian states from falling under the Communist influence, the US also pushed liberal ideas toward the region while struggling to find a fine line, politically, between securing the Middle East oil and protecting Israel’s interests in the middle of Arabian land (Crosston, 2009 & Halabi, 2009).

After the collapse of Communism in 1989, the US’s main geopolitical concern became containment of Islamic extremism, as these radical formations could ultimately become the primary roadblock to the easy flow of oil and become a serious threat for the security of the most important US ally, Israel, in the region. Following the Six-Day War of 1967, the United States voted and endorsed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. The succeeding American presidents have sponsored some initiatives, agreements, and treaties with some Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to assure the sustainability of Israel.

Despite many political changes, this logic remains true to this day, with Israel serving as a protection against political Islam and other extremists. This policy has also served to reduce the propagation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the region by destroying Iraq and Syria’s nuclear programs (Eisenstadt & Pollock, 2012).

#### *Democratization*

Remarkably, under the Bush Administration US objectives principally highlighted three main doctrines: assist, advocate or force, if necessary, democratic principles and developments in the Middle East, establish a market economy and free entrepreneurship, and create a free-zone bereft of weapons of mass destruction in the region —Israel’s nuclear capability considered exceptional although Israel has neither confirmed nor denied their existence—. These objectives were understood to be the only vital elements for a peaceful Greater Middle East. However, US democratic premises for the Middle East were ill-formed, because the very first principle of democracy denies any aggressive democratization (Anaz, 2001). People must have free will to choose what sort of government they wish to have. Beside all this, the US has never been consistent with its understanding of democracy and interpretations of same.

The international community has many times witnessed that the US is not accepting any grassroots organizations in the Middle East that openly criticize the United States’ foreign policies. After Hamas collected the majority of the popular vote in Palestinian parliamentary election in January 2006, the US, along with Israel, refused to have any kind of diplomatic relations, and showed minimal respect to the Palestinian people’s democratic choice. Not surprisingly, the US denies the legitimacy of the popularly-elected and -accepted Hezbollah, and declares it as a terrorist organization, while it shows full support for the totalitarian regime of the oil-exporting country of Saudi Arabia, a country ruled by a regime which is well known to be one of the worst violators of human rights in the world. This is not even to mention the fact that the majority of 9/11 hijackers carried Saudi citizenship. The US’s inconsistent and contradictory policies in the Middle East made people of the region and other communities of the world become skeptical about the overall democratization efforts and leadership of the US in the post-9/11 world order (Anaz, 2001).

### III. HISTORY / RISE OF ISIS TERRORISM IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

ISIS was formed in 2014 by Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi who was originally part of Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda network. Even though Zarqawi laid the ideological foundation for ISIS, his early years were hardly the paragon of Islamic purity. In his teens, after the death of his father, Zarqawi dropped out of school, engaged in petty theft, and was a heavy-drinker. To prevent his further demoralization, his mother enrolled him in Islamist courses. An introduction to Salafism, a doctrine promoting religious purity and literal interpretation of the Qur’an, had a transformative influence on Zarqawi, and prompted him to commit his life to pursuit of religious glory. His career as an aspiring jihadist began in 1989 when he went to Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen fight against the Red Army.

Nonetheless, Zarqawi stayed in Afghanistan as a reporter, using that time as an opportunity to construct a social network of likeminded extremists itching to resume the fight against the perceived enemies of true Islam. In 1992, he returned to Jordan where he collaborated with his spiritual teacher Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, whose ideological sophistication and advanced knowledge of Islam further strengthened Zarqawi's commitment to the black and white worldview endorsed by Salafism. In 1994, before they managed to execute a terrorist plot they were spinning, Zarqawi and Maqdisi were both arrested for possession of guns and explosives (Warrick, 2015). In 1999, Zarqawi was released from prison through Jordan's King Abdullah general amnesty. By then he already had an operational plan and reached out to Osama bin Laden to get the blessing and organizational support from the AQ leader. They met, but according to all accounts, the meeting did not go very well for Zarqawi (Warrick, 2015). Bin Laden was offended by Zarqawi's radical views on killing Muslims and by his arrogant and disrespectful behavior. Zarqawi's lack of sophistication, criminal past, and tattoos did not create a good first impression on Bin Laden either (Weaver, 2006). Despite that, in recognition of Zarqawi's initiative and drive, Bin Laden agreed to finance him with AQ money to set up a training camp in Herat in western Afghanistan.

Due to Zarqawi's contacts and organizational skills, his terrorist cell grew fast, but in 2001, he was driven out of Afghanistan by the US invasion. He spent the next two years travelling between Iran, Jordan, and Iraq to expand his network further. In early 2003, he established in the western Iraqi province of Al Anbar the Jamaat Tawhidwal Jihad in Iraq, the forerunner of ISIS (Gerges, 2016). At that time, Zarqawi was in close contact with another jihadist group operating in Iraq - Ansar al Islam. His ambitions were lofty and his targets -- correspondingly grand. The major aim has been to remove the western occupation of the Middle East and replace it with Sunni Islamist regime (Crenshaw, 2014).

#### *Expansion of ISIS*

The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) blazed onto the terrorism scene in a spectacular way on 29 June 2014, the first day of Ramadan, with its self - proclamation of the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate that stretched across eastern Syria and much of northern and western Iraq. ISIS leader Abu Bakr al - Baghdadi also declared himself the Caliph and "leader for Muslims everywhere".

ISIS establishment of the Caliphate allows it to exert "state - like" control over physical territory, thereby differentiating itself from all other terrorist groups, including the hitherto dominant Al Qaeda. At the same time, it also gives it an aura of divine sanction, which adds to its legitimacy in the eyes of radicalized Muslims who have bought into the romanticized notion of Islamic Caliphate peddled by ISIS through its tech - savvy propaganda machinery.

ISIS' territorial ambitions extend beyond its territories in Syria and Iraq. It has also declared wilayat (provinces under

the ISIS Caliphate) in parts of Nigeria, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, North Caucasus and the Afghan - Pakistan region.

That ISIS was able to recruit tens of thousands of foreign fighters into its ranks and radicalize many more across the globe with its virulent brand of ideology can be attributed to its ability to fully exploit the internet and social media platforms to seek out potential recruits to its cause. At the same time, it also harnessed the diversity within its ranks to produce sleek propaganda campaigns which are customized to tap into the existing grievances of the communities it is targeting to galvanize into taking up arms. That said, ISIS' appeal has begun to ebb from 2015 onwards as the brutality and extreme violence that it espoused began to turn off would be supporters.

The rise of ISIS is the cumulative effect of the imperialistic decisions, actions, inactions, practices and injustices of the U.S. and her allies against the Middle East (Eze, 2015). As Mclean (1996, p.492) notes, "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter.

Eze (2015) recounted how USA in her quest to foster her adverse imperialistic foreign policy through the instrumentality of naked power, directly and indirectly invaded Lebanon, Cuba, Dominican Republic, bombarded Libya's Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986, and masterminded pro-U.S. regime change and killing of Ghadaffi in 2011. Similarly, the U.S. government invaded Panama in 1989 and removed president Noriega just because he was no longer serving U.S.A interest, unilaterally invaded and effected pro-U.S. regime change in Iraq and death of Saddam in 2003, invaded and effected pro-U.S. regime change in Afghanistan in 2001, formed the backbone of Israeli's continued settlement buildings and occupation of Palestinian lands contrary to U.N. resolution 242 of 1967. So also was U.S.A's invasion of Haiti and ousting of 'recalcitrant' general Cedras for the restoration to power of pro-U.S.A's president Aristide (Eze, 2000). These sudden displacement of longstanding regimes, unleash not just political activism but cultural vacuums and extreme looseness. These hegemonic practices on the part of the U.S. government are irritating to some nationalistic individuals and groups of the victim nations. When they retaliate in their own little way (such as the 1988 Pan-Am Airliner bombing over Scotland or the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S.) it is termed "terrorism" (Eze, 2015 p. 69)

Osama Bin Laden also exposed how the U.S. and her allies (like Israel) caused the September 11, 2001 catastrophic attack on the U.S. World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. In his video tape (released by Al-Jazeera on November 1, 2004 cited in Eze, 2015) titled 'Our acts are reaction to your own acts' addressed to citizens of the United State, Bin Laden dismissed as rhetoric claims by U.S. presidents George W. Bush that the attack occurred because Islamic extremists "hate freedom" saying "if Bush says we hate freedom, let him tell us why we didn't attack Sweden, for example".



#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Strategic Theory was employed in analyzing ISIS activities in the Middle East and United States of America's Counter - Terrorism Strategies. Strategic theory argues that states and other competitive entities have interests that they will pursue to the best of their abilities. Interests are desired end states such as survival, economic well – being, and enduring national values. The national elements of power are the resources used to promote or advance national interests. The strategic theorists Colin Grey, Thomas Schelling and so on, maintain that there is a deployment of available resources to gain any objective and this is an endeavor to relate ends to means.

They further argued that actors behave rationally in pursuit of their aims. That is, an actor's decisions are made after careful cost – benefit calculation and the means chosen seem optimal to accomplish the desired end.

United States of America has a clear cut objective in the Middle East which is to combat the rising activities of terrorist groups like ISIS. The strategic theory states that political actors formulate objectives that are guided by interest. Hence, USA has devised some courses of action (ways) which are political (diplomatically), military, economic and social to combat these terrorist activities. Consequently, USA has deployed resources (means) to pursue the greater end. These means are both tangible and intangible in nature.

#### V. U.S COUNTER TERRORISM STRATEGIES AGAINST ISIS

##### *U.S Counter- Terrorism through Aerial Bombardments*

On August 7, 2014 President Barack Obama authorized a military operation involving limited airstrikes targeted at jihadist positions in Iraq. It is worth noting that such measures were taken with the consent and at the request of the Iraqi government. As indicated in the State Department background brief below, the Iraqi government had to request for United States air support because the defeat of the Iraqi forces in Ramadi was the partial result of what is in many ways a more effective ISIS bombing effort.

On the one hand, US forces were to support Iraqi forces, and on the other, to provide humanitarian aid to civilians, airdropping water and food. In announcing the decision, Obama emphasized that he had consulted with other governments and the UN. The President assured the public of the fact that the United States would not engage in another war in Iraq. He also ruled out the option of using American ground forces. Not only due to the fact that another long-term operation of such a large-scale would strain the US budget, but Obama believed it would be ineffective in solving the crisis.

Immediately, following the announcement in September 2014, the American air campaign was extended to Syria. The targets of the airstrikes were buildings occupied by IS leaders,

training grounds and arsenals, among others. Although the army of al-Assad also fought against the jihadists in Syria, the Obama administration indicated that it would not cooperate with the regime. It is worth mentioning that unlike in Iraq, where American airstrikes were carried out with the consent and at the request of the Iraqi government, the operation in Syria carried out by the Americans had no such legitimacy for its actions. This could have been met with the defensive reaction of Al-Assad's forces, considering that US aircraft entered the airspace of Syria illegally. Given that the jihadists were also a threat to the Syrian government, the Americans assumed that the airstrikes would be met with the passive reaction of the regime (Dearden, 2014).

The United States air power had been liberally engaged in airstrikes against ISIS. These strikes have reportedly killed or gravely injured many key ISIS leaders and facilitators, disrupted cohesion in the leadership. They have also broken up ISIS's attempts to bring together large numbers of forces and equipment, constrained the group's ability to use mass firepower against Iraqi security forces. Moreover, the airstrikes have constrained ISIS's commercial activities such as oil smuggling and black market commerce.

As of August 9, 2017, the coalition had conducted 13, 331 strikes in Iraq and 11,234 in Syria, for a total of 24,565 strikes in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. (US Department of Defense: 2017). The unclassified data on the key targets is uncertain, but most (80% or more) seem to have been flown in close support of active ISIS operations in areas like Kobane, Bajji, and the Mosul Dam areas where there were little risk of killing civilians and relatively few seem to have been "strategic" in the sense they struck at ISIL directly (US Department of Defense: 2017).

##### *U. S Counter - Terrorism through Training, Advising and Supplying Of Equipment to Local Allied Forces*

The second element of the US military strategy against ISIS, which is the training of local security forces and providing military equipment, including heavy machine guns and ammunition, was designed not only to enable defense against the attacks of jihadists, but also effective retrieval of occupied territories and hostages, and the eventual defeat of ISIS terrorists. USA ground forces, limited to less than 3,600 as of mid-2015, have focused on a programme of forming, training, equipping, and mentoring demoralized Iraqi and Syrian security force units to allow them to take the lead in pushing ISIS back from territories gained across the countries in 2014-2015.

U.S. contributions to training efforts in Iraq were made in part through the Iraq Train and Equip programme originally authorized in late 2014. Congress authorized and provided \$1.6 billion in funding for the U.S. training efforts in Iraq in the FY2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, Section 1236 of H.R. 3979, P.L. 113-291) and FY2015 appropriations act (H.R. 83, P.L. 113-235). Congress authorized and appropriated \$715 million for the Iraq training

programme in the FY2016 NDAA (P.L. 114-92) and Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113). Continuing resolutions for FY2017 adopted by Congress in 2016 (H.R. 5325 and H.R. 2028) provide funding for the programme and others funded as Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) at the FY2016 appropriated levels through April 28, 2017. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY2017 (NDAA, P.L. 114-328) extended the authorization for the Iraq training programme through December 31, 2018, and authorized \$1.16 billion for the Iraq and Syria training programmes in a new combined “Counter-ISIL” fund.

For Syria, the United States Congress authorized and funded a train and equip programme for vetted Syrians in 2014 for selected purposes, including supporting U.S. efforts to combat the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria and promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to Syria’s civil war (Section 1209 of H.R. 3979, P.L. 113-291). The programmes had limited results as of September 2015, Russian military intervention in Syria, and support by some Members of Congress for broader civilian protection missions led the Obama Administration to alter the programme beginning in October 2015. Obama Administration officials described their intended overall approach to the redesigned programme as “transactional” and performance-based, with Syrian beneficiaries receiving U.S. support as opportunities present themselves and relative to their effectiveness in the battlefield and the alignment of their actions with U.S. interests.

The revamped train and equip programme has since shifted away from training and equipping “New Syrian Force” units of vetted new recruits toward “equipping and enabling ...a select group of vetted leaders and their units” inside Syria who are fighting the Islamic State organization under the rubric of a Kurdish-Arab coalition force in northern Syria known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and a force known as the “New Syrian Army” (NSA) in the southeast. Equipment, including some weaponry and ammunition, has been provided to SDF and NSA forces, and U.S. special operations personnel have been deployed to Syria to advise and assist the SDF in operations against the Islamic State.

The United States’ Appropriations acts for FY2015 and FY2016 did not provide funds specifically for a Syria train and equip programme account, but Congress had reviewed and approved the Administration requests to reprogramme more than \$1.25 billion in monies from other accounts for the programme since 2014. The omnibus appropriations act for FY2016 allowed the Secretary of Defense to use funds from the Counter - terrorism Partnerships Fund for efforts to assist appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition, if the Secretary outlined a detailed and clear plan for the use of such funds and provides such justification to the congressional defense committees in a reprogramming request. The FY2017 NDAA (P.L. 114-328) extended the authorization for the Syria training programme through December 31, 2018, and

authorized \$1.16 billion for the Iraq and Syria training programmes in a new combined “Counter-ISIL” fund.

#### *Global Partnership against ISIS*

At the beginning of September 2014, US authorities announced the creation of a broad international coalition to fight the ‘Islamic State’. In the end, 74 countries made a commitment to fight against these terrorists. The actions of the international coalition were to focus on: providing military support for the allies fighting the jihadists; obstructing the flow of foreign fighters; eliminating the sources of financing for the organization; and providing humanitarian aid. Some countries would provide military support through the provision of weapons, equipment, provision of advice and training. Others were directly involved in the air campaign against the jihadists (Department of State, 2014).

The Resolution 2170 of the UN Security Council in 2014 was to serve as the legal basis for the actions of the international coalition. This resolution called on all Member States to help stop the flow of foreign fighters into the ranks of the jihadists and suppress the financing of extremist groups in Iraq and Syria through more effective border control, and to improve the exchange of information and cooperation between specific government organizations (Security Council, 2014a).

The United States’ assessment was that if it were to act alone, it would find itself quickly adrift in a complex social, political, ethnic, and religious struggle. Thus, Washington worked hard to form a coalition of states that—despite competing ultimate aims—have come together to confront ISIS. By the end of 2017, the coalition included 74 member countries, with the United States carrying the bulk of the military burden (BBC News, 2018). Although not a member, Iran has made substantial contributions of material and manpower, reportedly including two brigades of volunteer Revolutionary Guards units and a large number of Guards officers. Russia, unwilling to join the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition, began pushing a limited number of its own military forces into Syria in August and September 2015, offering to lead its own military coalition to strike at ISIS if Syria’s Assad were to agree. Though often maligned, the United States’ construction of its now four year-old coalition has meant that ISIS has been confronted with a set of encircling adversaries in a much shorter period than has been previously witnessed against a militant jihadist organization.

#### *Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Civilians in Iraq and Syria*

In the three years after Abu-Bakr al Baghdadi declared his so-called ISIS caliphates, over 3.4 million Iraqis have been displaced (IOM, 2017). 11 million Iraqis were found to be in need of humanitarian assistance with just over half haven received aid (OCHA, 2017e). Still, there are over 3 million Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) with up to 860,000 from Mosul alone (Amnesty International, 2017b; OCHA, 2017e). The US has been providing food, medical supplies, emergency and basic health care, shelter materials, clean water, hygiene education and supplies, and other relief

supplies to civilians affected by the ISIS toll in Iraq. In July 2017, the US announced more than \$119 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Iraq. The US government has now provided more than \$ 1.4 billion in humanitarian assistance for the Iraq crisis since 2014 (DoD, 2017).

While the protracted conflict in Syria sent ripples across the entire region and beyond, the civilian population in Syria has been victim of countless horrors and human rights violations.

In response to humanitarian crisis occasioned by the lingering war, the United States has funded several humanitarian projects in Syria in response to the ISIS crisis. Though nearly all of Syria's population was affected by the conflict, Syria's youths have been paying the heaviest toll. To keep children healthy, the U.S. government funding has ensured vaccination campaigns for measles, rubella, and polio for millions of children in the region. The UN estimated that at least 3 million children had dropped out of school since the onset of the crisis, with approximately 2.2 million children out of school inside Syria. Through USAID and other government agencies, the U.S government provided funding support programmes to enhance Syrian children's access to schools and safe learning spaces, as well as counseling for Syrian youth, the majority of whom have witnessed violence firsthand.

It is clearly evident from the foregoing that humanitarian assistance to Syria by USAID and state agencies was dominant.

United States' humanitarian assistance since the crisis began is more than \$1.7 billion to help those suffering inside Syria, as well as refugees and host communities in the neighboring countries.

Overall, the United States humanitarian intervention in Iraq and Syria is a strategy that is targeted at winning the hearts and minds of the local population against the ISIS. The hearts and minds strategy sought to win the population allegiance to the government by providing basic necessities like security and infrastructure. Control over the population is the goal of both the terrorists and the government. The underlying philosophy is "first control the population, and all else will follow."

#### VI. USA COUNTER - TERRORISM STRATEGIES AND THE ACTIVITIES OF ISIS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

The United States has played a central role in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and her counter – terrorism strategies have impacted on the activities of the ISIS. The organization has rapidly lost control of its remaining territories

The core of the territory of the ISIS was from 2014 until November 2017 in Iraq and Syria, where the organization controlled significant swathes of urban, rural and desert territories. Since ISIS made international headlines by

invading Iraq from Syria in June of 2014, its territories have shrunken considerably. The terrorist group's steady loss of territories culminated in the fall of its de - facto capital of Raqqa, Syria.

In October 2014, ISIS territories in Syria and Iraq were at its maximum. The radical Islamist group controlled land stretching from central Syria all the way to the outskirts of Baghdad including major cities like Mosul, Fallujah, Tikrit, and Raqqa.

Although the regions ISIS controlled were mostly desert, it encompassed an array of ethnic and religious groups, including Assyrian Christians, Yazids, Kurds, Shiite Arabs, and Sunni Arabs. Many of the non – Sunni groups were the victims of targeted violence by ISIS, which perpetrated genocide against the Yazidis and Assyrians (Kranz and Gould, 2017).

The terrorist group had lost all of its major urban strongholds and is now confined to the sparsely inhabited border territories between Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, experts said that the sparse desert area that ISIS had fallen back on is part of the same Sunni – majority that fueled its rise (Kranz and Gould, 2017).

The territorial losses for the jihadists include the strategic Syrian town of Tal Abjad on the border with Turkey and the Iraqi cities of Tikrit, Baijiu and Rawa among others, which is associated with loss of control over a refinery.

In early 2017, ISIS controlled approximately 45,377 square kilometers (17,520 square miles) of territories in Iraq and Syria, this represented a substantial decline from the groups territorial peak in late 2014, when it controlled between 100,000 square kilometers (39, 000 sq mi) (Eklund et al, 2017).

The loss of territories was certainly painful for the organization. A smaller territory meant a loss to the organization's budget, due to lower revenues from taxes and fines. The Iraqi government announced in December 2017 that its war against ISIS was over, almost four years after the group first seized parts of the country.

Aside Tal Abjad, Tikrit and Baijiu, the loss of control over the stretch of motorway between the jihadists' Syrian fort — Raqqa and the Iraqi city of Mosul, that greatly complicated supply lines, were equally a major blow to ISIS. In fact, the Islamic State no longer occupies the vast areas of northern and western Iraq and central and eastern Syria that it once held and exploited. From 2014 through 2017, it lost large number of territories it had captured between 2014 and 2017, and thousands of personnel. These losses resulted from military operations by the U.S.-led international coalition and a number of U.S. - backed local forces (Blanchard & Humud, 2018).

However, although ISIS has experienced a lot of setbacks in Iraq and Syria by the country's army and popular forces, it



still claimed responsibility for carrying out attacks across the region from the town of Hajin, on the banks of the Euphrates in Syria and operates in desert regions around the Iraq – Syria border (Richard Hall, 2018).

The ISIS is still active in Iraq and Syria, due to the shortcomings of the counter - terrorism strategies of the U.S government. One, America's highhanded strategy has not restored Iraq and Syria as states capable of governing their territories. Rather, it reopened the competition for control by local and regional actors, many unfriendly to the United States. By focusing single-mindedly on liberating the territories, while postponing a serious discussion on what comes next, the U.S government has strengthened the grip on Syria by President Bashar al-Assad, whom the United States once wanted to overthrow, and increased the influence of Iran, the Shiite Popular Mobilization Units it supports, Hezbollah, and Russia.

Two, the strategy of forming a global coalition partnership against ISIS also had its own defects. While a coalition is crucial, its members, particularly those from the region, also added new layers of complications to the politics of the undertaking, without necessarily making a major military contribution. While it is important symbolically that Gulf countries participate in bombing raids, their most important military contribution was to give the United States access to facilities from where to launch the strikes or train Syrian militias. No alliance members further, appeared willing to provide what was missing most in the intervention, namely ground troops. Politically, regional allies provided cover for the United States, but also brought their own goals and past baggage and present dilemmas into the alliance. The difficulties began with the definition of the problem. For the United States, ISIS constitutes the greatest danger in the region. For regional powers, ISIS is a danger, but not necessarily the major one. And joining in the fight against ISIS could have serious domestic repercussions, because there are probably active cells in all countries and because many ordinary Sunni citizens sympathize with the organization.

Three, the American strategy is preponderantly military with little or no political strategy. According to the famous Counter-Terrorism Strategist, David Galula (1964), counter-terrorism is 80 percent political and 20 percent military. But the American strategy has been 20 percent political and 80 percent military. Military action in Iraq and Syria has moved ahead without a political strategy to accompany it. Although the administration argued that defeating ISIS required the formation of inclusive governments, neither Iraq nor Syria had such government. US policy in Iraq under the Shite exacerbated sectarian division and created a fertile breeding ground for the Sunni discontent from which the ISIS Iraq took root. The absence of a real political strategy tends to undermine any military success.

Four, even the military strategy was problematic. The United States has committed to fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) from the air, without American ground

troops. In Iraq, the crucial follow-up on the ground is left to the remains of the Iraqi army, a yet-to-be-formed national guard, the Kurdish peshmerga, and, de facto, assorted Shi'a militias. In Syria, the follow-up on the ground rested in the hands of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a divided and so far ineffective organization that has been unable to make much headway against the regime of Bashar al-Assad, losing out to ISIS and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra. The U.S. military estimated that transforming these various groups into effective fighting forces will take many months. It is not surprising that General Martin E. Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, told a congressional committee on September 16, 2017 that "under certain circumstances" he might recommend the deployment of some personnel on the ground.

Five, data compiled by Airways, a nonprofit group that tracks reports of civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria, estimated that at least 3,100 civilians were killed in American led airstrikes from August 2014 – March 2017. Much of the increase in the Airways data coincided with the operations to retake Mosul, Iraq, the Islamic State's largest stronghold, and Raqqa, Syria, the group's de facto capital.

The increase had also led some human rights groups to question whether changes in procedure were responsible. (George & Szlanko) 2017 averred that in December 2015, under President Barack Obama, some Americans and allied advisers in the field were authorized to call in airstrikes in Iraq without approval from an operation center. President Trump has also shifted more authority over military operations to the Pentagon. Lama Fakih, the Deputy Middle East Director of Human Rights Watch, in a statement in Human Rights Watch: 2017 said that "making it easier to call in airstrikes will almost necessarily afford civilians fewer protections from being injured or killed."

Six, the strategy of provision of humanitarian aid to civilians in Iraq and Syria has been criticised by seasoned analysts like Dettmer. In his 2014 report on Daily Beast, he averred that the aid convoys had to pay - off ISIS emirs (leaders) for the convoys to enter the eastern Syrian extremist strongholds of Raqqa and Dier ez - Zor, providing yet another income stream for ISIS militants, who are already funding themselves from oil smuggling, extortion, and the sale of whatever they can loot, including rare antiquities from museums and archaeological sites.

Seven, the strategy of training, advising and supplying of equipment to local allied forces had the defect of the American weaponry provided to fight ISIS in Syria being repurposed and some of the rebel groups trained to fight ISIS defecting and joining al - Qaeda linked Jabhat al - Nusra.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The ISIS inspired terrorist attacks in the Middle Eastern states and beyond and the attendant carnage have assumed a deadlier dimension, with obvious implications for humanitarian casualties, especially the USA citizens, her

allies and her places of interest across the globe. The counter-terrorism strategies deployed by the U.S government to combat the ISIS menace and mitigate the attendant humanitarian casualties succeeded in reducing the activities of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and beyond, but the terrorist group has not been effectively eradicated. ISIS is still active carrying out attacks and other allied activities owing to the weaknesses of the U.S counter – terrorism strategies discussed in preceding paragraphs.

### VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to guide policy implementations

Consequent upon the adverse imperialistic foreign policy of the U.S as a major cause of ISIS terrorist activities in the Middle East, this study recommends that the United States of America jettisons her provocative imperialistic foreign policy actions and resort to an overhauled foreign policy grounded on the principle of egalitarianism, justice, equity and fair-play as well as welfare (not warfare). This shall engender a genuine global peaceful co-existence and socio-economic cum political development, devoid of subjugation of man by man and nation by nation.

As regards the critique of the preponderance of military strategy over political strategy, the researcher recommends a political strategy that will occasion a lasting reconciliation and the development of a consensus between religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq. The researcher proposes that the Iraqi authorities form an inclusive new government which would represent the interest of all Iraqis, not just specific social groups. The divisions in the country, the researcher opined created a suitable ground for the development of terrorism.

With respect to the defect in the global coalition against ISIS, the researcher urges the members of the global coalition against ISIS to deploy ground troops in addition to the aerial bombardment strategy to Syria to fight ISIS since the crucial follow-up on the ground was left in the hands of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which has been regularly accused of having ties with extremists groups such as ISIS.

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