

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ROOTS OF TERRORISM IN IRAQ (2003-2017)

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the causes for terrorism, it is needed to explore the terrorism background, i.e. the political, social, economic, religious, and psychological cradle in which terrorism is nurtured. In fact, better understanding of background and roots of terrorism is the first step towards any efficient anti-terrorism action. It will take too much to review all aspects and roots of terrorism; consequently the present study deals with the most prominent causes of the terrorism (in author's opinion) i.e. social and political factors. To this end, the political and social roots of terrorism in Iraq will be investigated during the past 14 years from 2003 (the fall of Saddam Hussein, and Ba'ath regime) up to present (2017). During the above period, Iraq underwent political system alteration (from single-party dictatorship to a democratic federation) and at the same time it was bombarded with radical Jihadi Salafi thoughts. Such regional upheavals as Arab Spring, and Syria Civil War were also influential in instability and resultant terrorism development in Iraq. To cover the social roots of terrorism in Iraq during this span of time, the issue of propagating Jihadi Salafi thoughts and its relation with sectarianism will be raised. Finally, to clarify the political roots, the author will focus on the effect of inappropriate political system on Iraq after the Saddam Hussein's fall.

Keywords: Terrorism, Sectarianism, Jihadi Salafism, Political system, Iraq.

INTRODUCTION:

Terrorism dates back to first instances of violence utilization to affect political issues. The Sicarii were a group of Jews who killed their enemies to dislodge Roman rulers from the land of Judea. Hashashin, etymology of English word "assassin", refers to a Shiite Ismaili sect living in Iran and Syria during 11-13 century A.D. They caused lots of fear and terror in their era by assassinating Abbasid and Saljoughian political leaders. The word "terrorism" in its contemporary sense means the "government of fear" stemming from Maximillian Robespierre government in 1793 after French Revolution. He killed the enemies of revolution and created a dictatorship to stabilize his rein. He believed that his procedure was required for transition from kingdom to liberal democracy. He was quoted to say: "Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic". (Zalman, 2017) The actions and speeches of Robespierre formed a scheme and foundation for today's terrorists who believe violence leads to a better political system.

Oxford Dictionary defines "terrorism" as follows: "The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims". Based on the above definition, a terrorist action is a violent and unlawful action especially against civilians to achieve a political goal. Terrorism is similar to a disease that propagates in the society because of political system inefficiency. Thus, any attempt to study this phenomenon requires an assessment of weaknesses and problems in the political system and its policy-making. In other words, terrorism can be considered as a function of malfunctions in the political systems. Based on Silke "people are not born terrorist. They do not wake up and decide to plant a bomb on a populated street. We need to realize that terrorism is a process, "Terrorism is a choice; it is a political strategy selected from a range of options" (Cinar, 2009).

To understand why a group of people do terrorist actions, we need to investigate the terrorism foregrounds, and political, social, economic, religious and psychological context in which the terrorist grew up. In fact, clear understanding of terrorism context and roots, is the first step towards fight against terrorism and taking any action against it.

Since it is not feasible to investigate all aspects of terrorism in a single article, the author deals with the most important factors and roots of terrorism in his own opinion i.e. social and political ones. This article aims to study the social and political roots of terrorism in Iraq from 2003 to 2017. Iraq has been one of the most dangerous countries of the world since 2003, suffering from terrorism, civil war, fugitiveness, and political instability. Based on Global Terrorism Index (GTI), Iraq was at the top of list among 163 countries in 2015 with a score of 10. (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015) It repeated its stand in 2016 scoring 9.96 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016). According to the latest statistics, 2,415 terrorist attacks were recorded in Iraq in 2016 ending in 6,960 casualties and 11,900 wounded. Based on the same statistics, Iraq was affected the most by terrorism. More than 40 terrorist groups have launched terrorist attacks since 2003, accounting for two-third of 50,538 victims suffered from terrorism during 2000-2016. (Dudley, 2016).

Based on the above, the author intends to study the political and social roots of terrorism in Iraq. To investigate the social root of recent Iraqi terrorism, the propagation of Jihadi Salafi thoughts and their relation with sectarianism in Iraq will be reviewed. To investigate the political root, the fall of Saddam Hussein, and subsequent lack of appropriate political system in Iraq will be covered.

SOCIAL ROOTS OF TERRORISM IN IRAQ:

After the fall of Saddam Hussein and Ba'ath regime in 2003, the political system of Iraq experienced an alteration from a single-party dictatorship to a democratic federation. The surviving Ba'ath members and Sunni Arabs tried to establish Iraqi nationalism as an alternative thought. The victory of sectarianism and tribal relationship over the Iraqi nationalism made Sunni Arabs disappointed with returning to the ruling position. When Shiite Arabs took the rule in a democratic system as the new Iraqi leaders, Sunni Arabs accepted the radical thoughts of Jihadi Salafism which oppose Shiite sect and democracy. This aggravated the Shiite and Sunni religious disputes.

PROPAGATION OF JIHADI SALAFI THOUGHTS AND SOARING SECTARIANISM IN IRAQ:

The intelligentsia believe that religion –Islam or any other religion- is not the existential cause of terrorism. Mark Juergensmeyer says: "Religion is not the problem, but it then becomes problematic because religion brings a whole host of absolutistic symbols and images and justification". This application of the religion facilitates terrorism. (Gibson, 2017). In order to understand the nature of relationship between Jihadi Salafi thoughts and terrorism in Iraq, we need to initiate with Jihadi Salafi thoughts, logic, mental images, and its

symbols. Salafism was an attempt to discover the reasons for down of Muslim power embodied in Ottoman Empire against Christians and western countries. Based on Salafism theorists, contemporary Salafism is an Islamic-awareness movement to revive pure Islam. They try to formulate the certain leadership, characteristics and virtues they believe were most prominent at the advent of Islam. The intended period begins with Muhammad's prophecy in 610 AD, and ends in assassination of Ali bin Abi Taleb in 661 AD. (Hafez, 2007).

Salafism can be divided into three readings or strands and they should not be intermingled: the Purists, the Politicos, and the Jihadists. The Purists believe in nonviolent measures, propagation, education, and purification. They view politics as the root of dispersion and hypocrisy, and avoid it. On the contrary, the second Salafism reading, the Politicos, believe in high importance of politics to achieve social justice. They emphasize that only God has the legislation right. The third Salafism version (intended in present study) is so called Jihadi reading. Jihadis are more radical than other two readings of Salafism. They believe that violence, military actions, and revolution are needed at current context. The differences between these three readings stem from their different interpretations of the contemporary world, and appropriate solution they posit for each problem. In other words, they differ in contextual analysis not in their beliefs. (Wiktorowicz, 2006).

Jihadi Salafism with its interpretation of Islamic concepts (like monotheism) and historical events (like fall of Abbasid Caliphate) try to rule out Shiites from Islamic society and advocates violence to defeat them. Propagation of Jihadi Salafi ideas, has socially led to deep religious conflicts and violence between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Two features are prominent in Jihadi Salafi movement which isolates them from Muslims and especially Shiites. First feature is their strict and radical interpretation of monotheism (*Tawhid*) notion; and the second one is the validity and necessity of excommunication (*Takfir*), i.e. accusing a Muslim of heresy. In their opinion, *tawhid* is not an oral confession to monotheism, but the behavior of a Muslim should not contradict with this confession. Jihadi Salafists believe that any recourse to holy places, shrines, and people contradict with their interpretation of *tawhid*. Consequently, they accuse Shiites of heresy, and reckon violence against Shiites valid or even necessary. In Jihadi Salafi point of view, it is possible to excommunicate (*Takfir*) a Muslim for big sins. They believe that any Muslim should manifest his believe in God by complying with Islamic orders, as well as by his heartfelt faith, and oral confession. Based on this *takfir* feature, Jihadi Salafists rule out a wide spectrum of Muslims from this faith including Sunni followers of Sufism and all Shiites. It should be noted that *takfir* is a political weapon they use against all of their opponents. Jihadi Salafists use historical interpretations, as well as Shiite beliefs (like recourse to Imams and shrines) to excommunicate the Shiites. For example, they claim that the fall of Abbasid Caliphs was caused or at least facilitated by Shiites in conjugation with Mongols. They accuse Shiites of betrayal to Muslim community and Islamic Caliphs, and propagate violence against them. (Hafez, 2007).

Some national and regional factors played important roles in growth of Iraqi Jihadi Salafism. The restless war against Shiite and Kurd rebels, and war with the United States and its alliances over Kuwait, as well as war of attrition with Iran for over eight years, attenuated the Iraqi military and economic foundations. These military and economic weaknesses led to deterioration of educational system, as well as, harsh military rules to control the riots. Both harsh military system and weakness in educational system provided a friendly atmosphere for growth and propagation of radical thoughts. The fall of Afghan Taliban led some of Jihadi Salafists who were looking for a safe place to pursue their activities into Iraq, and the weakness and collapse of Ba'ath regime in Iraq and subsequent sectarianism provided a conducive context for Jihadi activities.

Sectarianism and Iraqi people's interactions based on tribal, religious, and political affinity affected the policies of Iraqi government on a large scale and prohibited any national planning to solve the problems. These sectarianism dispositions root in actions taken by governments in the past. The kingdom system followed by Ba'ath rule of Saddam Hussein planted the sectarianism by privileges granted to Sunnis compared to Shiites and Kurds. After the fall of Saddam in 2003, and the alteration of political system to a democratic federation, Kurds controlled the north and northwest of Iraq (called Iraqi Kurdistan), and Arab Shiites dominated other parts of Iraq (Arab Iraq) due to population factor. In absence of national values and common interests agreed by all Iraqis, a reverse form of sectarianism, accompanied by revenge in some cases, continued. The sectarian, ethnic, religious, and social differences interacted with each other to pave the way for terrorist exploitation of these differences. Dissolution of Ba'ath party and depriving its members from political activities encouraged them to use violent terroristic actions against Shiite government in Baghdad. It is interesting that Ba'ath party was not predisposed to hardline Islamic movements, but they made use of religious differences between Shiites and Sunnis to attract new members and strengthen their party using these differences. Jihadi Salafists also used and intensified these differences, along with Ba'ath party, to instabilize Iraq. The incapability of Government to secure and stabilize the country, and counteracts of Shiite militia in response to anti-Shiite sectarianism actions

of Ba'ath party and Jihadi Salafists intensified terrorism and sectarianism in Iraq. Planting bombs in the shrine of 10th and 11th Shiite Imams in Samera can be considered as the onset of measures taken to aggravate religious sectarianism in Iraq.

On February 22, 2006 a bomb exploded in Al-Askar Shrine in Samera. This terrorist attack was preceded by increasing violence of Iraqi Al-Qaeda against Shiite citizens in the past few days. Simultaneously, somehow unsuccessful meetings were held by Iraqi leaders to define some basis for establishment of a united national governments. The Al-Askari Shrine was very important to Shiites, and its destruction after several days of bloody attacks on Shiites intensified sectarianism in Iraq. Shiite militia assembled on streets of Shiite cities, and at the end of the day for example they set 27 Sunni mosques into fire, killed three congregation Imams, and kidnapped one more. (Worth, 2006). During sectarianism violence in February 2006, Jaysh al-Mahdi tried to occupy the position of Shiite security guard in response to the violence. The militia members began to clear mixed Sunni-Shiite districts. Then, they attacked to neighboring Sunni districts, and eventually controlled a large area of Baghdad. (Cochrane, 2009).

The success of hardliners to inflame sectarian war in Iraq, tribal structure of Iraq, and lack of a powerful central government encouraged terrorist groups to exploit the gaps utilizing new techniques. The latest examples include intensifying and utilizing social and tribal differences by ISIS (Daesh). The documents obtained from Haji Bakr in 2014 (his real name is Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khelifawi), the founder of ISIS Intelligent Service, revealed some of the procedures employed by ISIS to exploit tribal and sectarian differences.

Haji Bakr, previously an Intelligent Service Colonel in Saddam Hussein's Airforce, writes about the required marriage of ISIS members with powerful families in each region and tribe. This tactic can be justified since presence of an ISIS member in a powerful family of each region and tribe facilitates diffusion into the region and in case of military occupation of the region he can establish the governing structure aided by his powerful tribe or family. (Speckhard and Yayla, 2017).

THE POLITICAL ROOTS OF TERRORISM IN IRAQ:

Iraq is a newly established country resulting from the collapse of Ottoman Empire after World War I. In absence of any political will and participation of people living in three provinces (Vilayet) of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, Iraq was established based on secret agreements between France and Britain, the winners of the World War I. Britain's agreement with Sunni Arabs led to an artificial country called Iraq. Consequently, the governing structure and political trends in Iraq have naturally failed to comply with people's will. At the first step, Britain suppressed national movements of Kurds in Mosul to annex them to Iraq to create a kind of population balance for Sunni Arabs against Shiites. One of the reasons for political violent acts, coup d'etat and continuous civil wars in Iraq is the permanent efforts of minority Sunni rulers to control the Shiite and Kurd majority. Sunni Arabs added Mosul province (composed of Kurdish regions) aimed to balance Sunni population deficit against Shiites, but the ethnic and national orientations of Iraqi Kurds void these plot from the very beginning. Consequently, Iraqi Sunni Arabs evaded from democratic political systems, and preferred dictatorship. This is true in other Middle-Eastern countries, but its intensity is proportional to population deficits of Sunnis in Iraq. Most parts of Middle East is ruled by military, kingdom, theocratic, and single-party dictator regimes. As a result of cruel procedures and severe legal limitations imposed by the regimes, the civil societies are underdeveloped in the region. Harsh suppression has compelled all political parties to act secretly. This weakens the trim opposition in favor of extremists. (Windsor, 2003).

The consistent and long-term political pressure, underdeveloped civil societies, and lack of democratic culture have paved the way for political hardliners to adopt a harsh and terroristic policy in Iraq. This violence has different manifestations at different times. Once it was supported as Arabic socialism, and Ba'ath Party values, on other occasions it was supported in the name of religious values, but it stems from something else.

Some researchers believe that we need to pay attention to what terrorists do rather than what they say. (Fine, 2008). Robert Pape provides a good example. He claims that there is no specific relationship between Islam and suicide attacks. Suicide attacks can happen anywhere. The terrorists of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) commit suicide attacks, as well. This is not an Islamic group. Now, it should be asked what terrorism stems from. Robert Pape believes that these terrorist attacks stem from willingness to end land occupation not religion. To end suicide attacks, we need to end military presence, and take the inquiries and interests of people in occupied land into account. This a better solution (Pape, 2005).

FALL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN AND LACK OF PROPER POLITICAL SYSTEM IN IRAQ:

Since establishment of Iraq in 1920s, this volume of terror is unprecedented. After nearly a century of diverse Sunni governments, the United States and its allies ended the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This worried Sunni Arabs about their new status in Iraq. In Iraq with a new democratic federation, Sunni Arabs face the same problem that their ancestors faced when Iraq was established: Sunni minority population versus Shiite majority. Sunni Arabs had to choose from four different alternatives: returning to the ideology of national Iraqi government, forming a majority in Sunni regions, riot to change democratic political system, and being the relative minority in the country.

Sunni Arabs and survivors of Ba'ath party initially hoped to rule the country based on Iraqi nationalism ideology. Thus, they advocated it to compensate their minority status. This political plan was manifested in Iraqi National Movement (INM). In 2010 Iraqi parliament election, the overall alliance of Sunni Arabs and survivors of Ba'ath party could obtain 24.8% of the votes and enter into the parliament as the first Iraqi party. (CJPME, 2010) Anyway, the nationalism intended by INM was reckoned as an attempt by Sunni Arabs to rule, and it was not supported. This is crystal clear, because INM won votes only in Anbar, Diyala, Nineveh, and Salah al-din (mainly Sunni provinces) with respectively 11 out of 14, 8 out of 13, 20 out of 31, and 8 out of 12 seats. INM failed to win a single seat in three Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Arbil, and Solaimaniyeh, and in other regions except for Baghdad (24 out of 68 seats) and Kirkuk (6 out of 12 seats) it failed as well. Sectarianism, tribal, ethnic, and religious interactions (even in Sunni Arabs) lead Iraqi nationalism to defeat, and disappointment of Sunni Arabs from pursuing this option.

When Iraqi nationalism disappointed Sunni Arabs, they could try to have their own geographical boundary just like Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), i.e. forming a majority in Sunni regions. To this end, they needed a unanimous agreement to pursue a regional government, based on by-law 119 of Iraqi Constitution. Based on the above by-law, two methods are provided for regional government opinion-poll: 1) request of 1/3 of provincial council members 2) request of 1/10 of provincial representatives. (Parliament of Iraq, 2005). Sunni Arabs were able to have their own regional government but they would lose Kirkuk and Baghdad. In 2006, this was recommended by Joe Biden and Leslie Gleb (American senates) to create three autonomous regions (Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd) and a federal government in Baghdad (Biden, Joseph and Leslie, 2006). This proposal was harshly rejected by Sunni Arabs. This is due to Sunni Arabs' mentality who dream themselves as traditional rulers of all parts of Iraq. They were not willing to change this mental image, and on the other hand they did not intend to lose some important parts with Sunni settlers (e.g. parts of Baghdad and Kirkuk provinces).

The regional upheavals like Sunni riot against Alavi government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and Sunni's conflict with Shiite government in Baghdad led to an alliance between Sunni Arabs of Iraq and Syria to form Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The rapid fall of Mosul and warm welcome of Mosul Sunnis to ISIS troops attests that they considered Iraqi army as occupiers. In other words, the convergence of Sunnis in Iraq and Syria stems from their political losses in both countries, due to democratic federation in Iraq, and single-party political system in Syria. The regional imbalance in both countries was against the interests of Sunni Arabs. Their attempts to balance the situation in their own favor has caused revolutionary violations and terrorist actions. Wilkinson says, "Revolutionary violence stems directly from conflicts within and between a country's political institutions. Revolutionary violence is seen as the product of conflict about legitimacy, political rights, and access to power. It often results from the refusal or incapacity of government to meet certain claims made upon it by a powerful group or a coalition of groups".(Cinar, 2009).

Based on ISIS defeats, it is anticipated that the present stage of Sunni Arabs policy will end soon. Finally, they will wonder between the mentioned alternatives. It should not be ignored that after defeats and heavy losses and casualties, Sunni Arabs will forget their totalitarian images and dreams of governing in Baghdad. This mentality alterations opens two alternatives to Sunni Arabs: 1. Being a relative minority in Iraq 2. Forming a majority in Sunni regions. It is evident that the second alternative will be more profitable to them. Hence, with defeat of ISIS in Iraq, Sunni Arabs will attempt to form a regional government.

CONCLUSION:

This study, from psychological, religious, economic, social and political causes of terrorism studied the last two factors. In author's opinion, these two factors are the most prominent causes of terrorism in Iraq from 2003 to 2017. The investigation of social roots of terrorism in Iraq showed that extremist image of Shiites propagated by Jihadi Salafists leads to violence to solve the issue. This is one of the main causes of sectarianism development in Iraq. Jihadi Salafists *takfir* Shiites to excommunicate them from Iraqi Muslim community,

especially among Sunni people. A part of their success in igniting sectarian disputes in Iraq stems from incapability of Iraqi government of establishing security and social equality. Other part stems from extreme reaction of Shiite militia to these terrorist actions. Because of these factors, Iraq is indulged in terrorism which affects different social strata and groups of people. In the study of the political causes of terrorism in Iraq, it became evident that Sunni Arabs lost their ruling position due to fall of Saddam Hussein and establishment of a democratic federation in Iraq. Sunni Arabs knew that they cannot control Iraqi government due to relative Sunni population deficit compared to Shiites, and sectarian basis of political activities in Iraq. Consequently, they launched extremist actions against Shiites and democracy. The ultimate defeat of ISIS in Iraq can alter Sunni Arabs' mentality to forget their past stand as governing minority in Iraq, and pursue a democratic federation system. They can form an autonomous regional government based on present constitution of Iraq. This alteration in political structure of Iraq, will remove a major part of problems leading to terrorism. Baghdad government's experience in war against terrorism helps to solve terrorism problem politically. Providing security, educational facilities, fighting with extremist thoughts, social equality, and prevention from sectarian revenge are some of the measures that Iraqi government can take to this end.

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