In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

ISIL – The Product of Social-Political Structure

The establishment of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group was not a sudden and spontaneous issue apart from social, cultural and political backgrounds. All political movements and militant parties are the product of social and political structure. The political upheaval in Iraq which created a rift between Shia and Sunni Muslims and the Arab Spring spread in Syria that also fueled sectarianism paved the ground for extremism and emergence of a radical group. The individuals recruited by the militant groups are born into poverty, radicalized in prison, and having low-levels of education and shallow theological knowledge of Islam.

Following the 2003 US attack in Iraq, which led to the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, sectarian violence broke out and it was changed into a suitable hunt for al-Qaeda militants.

In pursuit of this opportunity, a Jordanian man known as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a street thug and former prisoner in Jordan, established al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004 and had the blessing of Osama bin Laden to advance towards a total war against Shia Muslims. The mounting sectarian tensions allowed Zarqawi to gain followers and resources for his fanatical organization.

"Zarqawi himself was deeply sectarian, but also saw that provoking Sunni-Shia confrontation would work in his favor," said Richard Atwood, New York director of the International Crisis Group, whose work focuses on al-Qaeda and ISIL. "He instigated attacks on Shia religious symbols, provoking a sectarian civil war."

Al-Qaeda in Iraq merged with other groups in 2006 and adopted the name the Islamic State in Iraq while still maintaining tenuous ties to al-Qaeda leadership. According to the Wilson Center, on October 15, 2006, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, who took over the group after Zarqawi's death, announced the establishment of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), with Abu Omar al-Baghdadi as its leader.

By 2010, the vacuum between Shia and Sunni Muslims remained unfilled. As a result of political syndrome, anti-government protests erupted across the country in 2011. Security forces cracked down which further fueled the tension.

As ISIL wedged itself into the deepening furrows between Sunni and Shia Muslims, the group also focused its energies on provoking discord within sects. Demonstrating a savvy for identifying long-present tensions, it infiltrated Sunni tribal communities and turned sub-tribes or generations against each other through the selective backing and funding of groups, Atwood explained.

Where hopeful supporters saw potential for change during the 2011 Arab revolutions, ISIL saw a moment of violent disorder that could be leveraged for power. In late 2011, ISIL sent a trusted lieutenant, Abu Mohammed al-Joulani, to set up a cell in Syria.

He established Jabhat al-Nusra, which would gain notoriety in the civil war for its military prowess and extensive use of suicide bombers. For years, al-Nusra hid its affiliation with ISIL and al-Qaeda. They received clandestine support in exchange for sharing its logistical and financial gains with Baghdadi. A study on Jabhat al-Nusra by the Brookings Institute found out that, in 2012, the group still received 50 percent from its funding from ISIL. Revealing ISIL's link to al-Nusra in 2013, Baghdadi urged Joulani to annex his group – the demand which was denied by Joulani and led to bloody struggle that killed thousands of fighters. Subsequently, ISIL built its own cell in Syria.

"After its split from al-Qaeda, ISIL moved more aggressively into the east and peeled off a lot of fighters from al-Nusra. It then moved aggressively against the rebels instead of attacking the regime," Atwood is cited as saying. It is believed that the emergence of the ISIL group and its ilk is strongly related to social, economic and political factors. Their ideology stems from radical environment i.e. seminaries and tribal structures which are filled with strong senses of hatred and intolerance. On the other hand, mercenary fighters are involved in conflicts for pocketing money regardless of ideology – economic issue plays its role here. Hence, ISIL was not formed overnight regardless of social, economic and political backgrounds.

For protecting their group from annihilation, a study by Carnegie Middle East Centre shows that ISIL has six major categories of income; Taxes and fees, natural resources, kidnapping, antiquities, foreign donations, looting, confiscations and fine.

In the years since 2014, ISIL's annual revenue has declined significantly from up to $1.9b in 2014 to a maximum of $870m in 2016.

Even though the territorial and financial realms of ISIL are diminishing, this group is still able to pose threat to the region. ISIL is believed to have supporters among radicals, mainly those who live in tribal belts in Iraq and Syria and even in some war-stricken countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. In brief, the role of ISIL group in destabilizing the region, despite losing ground in Iraq and Syria, should not be undervalued.

جنبش ملی گرسنگان

A Glance at Law of Assembly, Demonstrations and Strikes

By: Mohammad Eshaq Arifi

The draft law of assembly, demonstrations and strikes was rejected by law-making committee and the cabinet of National Unity Government (NUG) for several times and was referred to related institutions for further clarification. Returning from the cabinet, it has been fundamentally reformed with the presence of civil society activists and finally approved.

To formulate the law of assembly, demonstrations and strikes that directly relates to public and security order, the current draft would be discussed on the basis of two major approaches. First, it was the "security-centered" view which prioritized the maintenance of order and public security and upheld citizens' general rights and freedoms. This view will be paid further heed in countries embroiled in unconventional situations such as war and instability and will be the cornerstone of drafting legislative documents. The second view expressed in this regard was "citizen-centered" or citizen-orientated issue which paid more significance to the rights and liberty of citizens rather than considering it from the security perspective. That is to say, the main reason behind approving the law of assembly, demonstrations and strikes was to support the citizens' fundamental rights and liberties and leaves no room for restricting their general rights and freedoms.

It is an undeniable fact that the freedom of assembly, demonstrations and strikes are considered the citizens' fundamental rights in the country which have been reflected explicitly in the second chapter of Afghanistan's Constitution. It is self-explanatory that observing the rights and liberty of citizens is viewed as a basic principle in all democratic systems while drafting law. However, there are some issues like providing security and public order, protecting the lives of citizens, etc. which allow restriction in legal and political system.

It seems that the initial plan for this law was based on the theory of "authenticity of security" and therefore the "principle of permission" for conducting assembly, demonstrations and strikes is recognized while many restrictions were also considered for citizens' rights and liberties. Consequently, many members of Committee of Law and human rights organizations expressed their disagreement about the plan. Based on the suggestion made by Sarwar Danish, the Second Vice President and chairman of the Committee of law, the draft was referred to a specialized committee for collecting the different views of committee members, observing the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens and further clarification. Danish said that fundamental rights and civil liberty in Afghanistan were great achievements as people gained through years of battels and sacrifices. According to him, agreeing against the fundamental rights of individuals are not allowed with the provisions of the constitution. However, the state and human rights and civil institutions are responsible to uphold and develop those rights. On the other hand, Viewing the country's exceptional circumstances in terms of security and maintaining public order, Danish said that the introduction or modification of laws and regulations should be based on a mechanism to keep a reasonable balance between protecting individuals' basic rights and public order so as to ensure justice in the best possible way. Hence, the law of assembly, demonstrations and strikes was approved in the last meeting of Committee of Law.

It is worth saying that several major issues were reformed and agreed upon in this law: the most important issue considered in this law was the permission system similar to "earlier notice and record" so as to safeguard people's rights on the one hand and deem some restrictions on the other hand to ensure the public law and order and as well as citizens' rights, safety and welfare. For instance, the second item of article 20 – which let the police not allow conducting assembly, demonstration and sit-in based on security situation – was reformed in a way that the high political officials such as interior minister in the capital and provincial governors in provinces are the qualified authorities for identifying the security situation. This issue will allow neither exploitation of the security situation regarding the freedom of assembly, demonstrations and sit-in nor the endangerment of citizens' rights and safety. In terms of conceptions and terminologies, the terms of ethnic, linguistic and factional conflicts were replaced with preaching hatred, discrimination, war and violence, which are also backed by legal and international instruments. The second issue added to this law forbad police from carrying or using weapons in demonstrations rather they can only use other common tools to control demonstrations. Considering the sensitivities and protracted fluctuation regarding the mentioned law, one will conclude that establishing legal and civil infrastructure with the intention of "citizen-centered" society was highly significant for the Committee of Law. Therefore, this law was reformed and approved in the last meeting after a long and controversial discussion.

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The Gulf Crisis: A Battle of Megalomaniacs

By James M. Dorsey

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The absence of prominent scholars was in part a reflection of ambivalence among Qatari rulers towards Wahhabism which they viewed as both an opportunity and a threat: on the one hand, it served as a tool to legitimise domestic rule, on the other it was a potential monkey wrench Saudi Arabia could employ to assert control.

Opting to generate a clerical class of its own would have enhanced the threat because Qatar would have been dependent on Saudi clergymen to develop its own. That would have produced a clergy steeped in the kingdom's Wahhabism and inspired by its history of political power-sharing that would have advocated a Saudi-style, state-defined form of Islam.

Qatari religious authority is not institutionally vested. Qatar has, for example, no Grand Mufti as does Saudi Arabia and various other Arab nations; it only created a ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments 22 years after achieving independence. "Saudi Arabia has Mecca and Medina. We have Qaradawi -- and all his daughters drive cars and work," said former Qatari justice minister and prominent lawyer Najeeb al Nauimi. It is against that backdrop that the Brotherhood was woven into the fabric of Qatari society from day one when by design or default Qataris contacted a bookseller in Cairo, a member of the Brotherhood, who helped them import the staffing of their bureaucracy and education system. Despite Saudi Arabia being the Gulf's behemoth, the UAE, and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed's finger prints are all over the Saudi-UAE-led alliance's demands, particularly with regard to the insistence that Qatar adhere to the designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization and the reform if not shuttering, of the controversial Al Jazeera television network. In effect, the UAE's efforts to counter Qatar pre-date the first time-round withdrawal of the Saudi, UAE and Bahraini ambassadors in 2014. The UAE and Qatar have been involved in a covert war since 2011 that involved massive investments in public relations and lobbying firms and the establishment of a United Nations accredited network of fake NGOS and human rights groups.

Two factors drive Bin Zayd's obsession with the Brotherhood and Jazeera: the fact that the Brotherhood had built a substantial power base within the UAE military, and the results of private surveys conducted among Emirati nationals some years ago that showed that the ruling family of Abu Dhabi, that also controls the UAE's federal government, had low approval ratings.

Distrust of the Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia dates to the emergence of the opposition Sahwa movement in the kingdom and the Brotherhood's backing of Saddam Hussein in the wake of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The two events prompted then Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud to declare after 9/11 that the group was at the root of all the kingdom's problems. The move, however, to outlaw the Brotherhood was Bin Zayed's initiative. Bin Zayed took advantage of the fact that by 2014 Saudi King Abdullah's concentration span was approximately two hours. It was at the end of a meeting with Mohammed, who was backed by the head of the Saudi court Khaled al Tuwaijri, that Abdullah agreed to declare the Brotherhood a terrorist organization. It was a decision that was at stake in the power struggle that occurred as Abdullah lay on his death bed and that in the initial phase Mohammed lost. Abdullah's successor, King Salman, not only replaced all of Bin Zayed's allies in the Saudi court, but also made overtures to the Brotherhood. Ultimately, Mohammed's back door into influencing the Saudi court and stiffening Saudi resolve was Salman's son, Mohammed bin Salman, who in a palace coup recently became crown prince.

One major difference and advantage that Singapore has in its positioning of itself is that Indonesia is not Saudi Arabia even if it may be flexing its muscles somewhat, and Malaysia is not the UAE. Qatar has benefitted in the current crisis from the fact that Saudi Arabia despite its financial muscle and moral authority as the custodian of the two holy cities cannot bank on a lot of empathy in the international community. Qatar also exploits the notion that even though big states bullying small states is a fixture of international relations, the Saudi-UAE campaign has taken that to new heights. The demands tabled by the anti-Qatar alliance involve the kind of reshaping of policies and curtailing of sovereignty normally imposed by an occupying force. If successful, the diplomatic and economic vanquishing of Qatar would serve as a precedent for more global powers like China and Russia, not to mention the Trump Administration.

It would legitimize tendencies already displayed by Russia, which, in effect, continues to adhere to the Soviet-era Brezhnev doctrine of "limited sovereignty" within its sphere of influence, as well as by China in the South China Sea. Singapore's conclusions from the Gulf crisis in terms of ensuring that it has the capacity to defend itself and stand up for its national interests are lessons that Qatar too is drawing with the boycott forcing it to diversify its suppliers of essential goods and services, expand the network of ports its vessels can call on, and enhance its ability to produce at least some basic items like dairy products. Saudi Arabia and the UAE appear to have learnt little from their failure to marshal widespread support for their boycott campaign among Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike. If anything, Omar Ghobash, the UAE's articulate ambassador to Russia, suggested that the two states may risk weakening their position if a potential effort to force the kingdom and the Emirates' trading partners to choose between doing business with them and dealing with Qatar, fails. It would be a choice many cannot afford to make, and would likely reject as a matter of principle.

Nonetheless, Muslim nations in Asia would be most vulnerable to a more forceful UAE-Saudi campaign that would be designed to force them to align themselves with the two Gulf states. Countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan, two of the world's most populous Muslim states, as well as India, home to the world's fourth largest Muslim population, fear that Saudi Arabia could threaten to lower their annual quota for the number of pilgrims allowed to perform the hajj and expel millions of migrant workers and expatriates in a bid to force them to join the boycott of Qatar.

The continued inability of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to generate a groundswell of support for their campaign against Qatar suggests that Abu Dhabi and Riyadh need to change their approach. Three options currently present themselves: negotiate a face-saving way out of the crisis, tighten the economic noose around Qatar's neck, or seek to engineer regime change in Doha. Despite the jury being out on what the Gulf will look like once the crisis is resolved, what is certain is that the resolution of the crisis will have far-reaching consequences for future norms underlying international relations. No one will be watching the crisis with bigger Argus eyes than small states in the Gulf and beyond, looking for lessons learnt for their own positioning in disputes in geographies near and far — the South China Sea, to name the most obvious example.

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