Dealing with Defeat of the IS - II

Click here for Part I.

Why in news?

Syrian Democratic Forces recently declared the total elimination of so-called caliphate and 100% territorial defeat of ISIS.

How did the ISIS evolve?

- ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) has been in Iraq since the 2000s.
- For a long time it held no territory at all, but it was a no less deadly or destructive force then.
- Starting in 2014, it took large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria.
- At one time, it was literally the size of Great Britain.
- This was the time when it declared itself the Caliphate i.e. the region or rule of a chief Muslim ruler.

How significant was the territory for ISIS?

- ISIS collected taxes from millions of people in the territory it controlled.
- This allowed ISIS to become the world's richest terrorist group.
- It used that safe haven to make a number of innovations.
- This included learning how to manufacture their own weapons, their own rockets and mortars, making ISIS self-sufficient.
- So the territory under its hold was crucial to the height they reached as a terrorist organisation.
- The loss of territory means they no longer have the ability to collect taxes.
- They would also no longer have the most visible symbol of their brand which allowed them to recruit tens of thousands of foreign fighters.



Does loss of territory mean IS's defeat altogether?

- When coalition forces liberate an area, there's an intermediate period when fighters retreat and there are no attacks.
- But after coalition forces withdraw, it becomes an area of insecurity.
- In 2011 American troops pulled out of Iraq, and IS was considered defeated then.

- At that point, CIA estimated that the group had just 700 fighters.
- Now, it has tens of thousands of fighters, and continues to exist as a physical insurgency in Iraq and Syria.
- Evidently, ISIS lives on and today it is much stronger, deadly and destructive than it was in 2011.
- It has lost its territory but it still has thousands of ISIS fighters just in Iraq and Syria, and many more outside Iraq and Syria.

How prevalent is its influence?

- **Outside Iraq and Syria** - ISIS's presence is strong and growing in Afghanistan, in the Philippines and in West Africa.
- E.g. ISIS's Khorasan province (in East Asia in the Philippines) and ISIS's West Africa province are groups that are robust on the ground
- According to a recent United Nations report, in Afghanistan, ISIS has 2,500 fighters.
- There is enough evidence to suggest that there is connective tissue between these affiliates and ISIS's core group in Iraq and Syria.
- **Money** - Reportedly, some of the ISIS operatives that were caught fleeing ISIS's last territory in Syria were carrying huge amounts of cash, like $20,000.
- There are also reports that ISIS has invested some of its cash in local businesses.
- **Leader** - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the Caliph of the Islamic State.
- He is the person to whom every fighter pledges his allegiance.
- He is learnt to be somewhere in Iraq and Syria, and continues to remain an important symbol for the group.

What about India?

- India is in many ways an example of countering radicalisation.
- India has the third largest Muslim population in the world.
- Yet, only less than 100 persons have travelled to join the group in Iraq and Syria.
- Low numbers clearly point to the fact that despite the difficulties, India manages the issue in the right way.
- But reports suggest that the Khorasan province must be looking at India.
- ISIS is always pushing a narrative of Muslim victimhood.
- So there is also the Rohingya issue which must be attractive to ISIS.
- But the irony is that ISIS's message has been most receptive amongst Muslims that have experienced little or no discrimination themselves.
- [E.g. Huzayfah, the Canadian recruit profiled in Caliphate, was treated well in Canada but decided to join the group

- In contrast, Muslim communities that have experienced real trauma and discrimination have been mostly immune to ISIS recruitment.
- E.g. Rohingya Muslim, and Uighur Muslims from China have largely been immune to ISIS influence, with little exceptions
- This is where probably the ISIS propaganda falls flat.]
- There have been ISIS flags on certain occasions in Kashmir too.
- The extent of ISIS's support in Kashmir Valley is unclear and the amount of coordination with ISIS's central organisation is unknown.
- However, denying the presence outright would not be correct and there is a need for India to take a cautious approach in this.

Source: Indian Express

