

## Dealing with Defeat of the IS - II

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### 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**

