Islamic State (IS) Caliph's death

What is the issue?

- Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead, but the Islamic State (IS) isn't. The death of its "Caliph" is certainly a blow to the terrorist group.
- The IS is ideologically stronger to survive the fall of its leader, so its ideology is to be overcome in a region free of interventions.

How will IS survive the death of its leader?

- The geopolitical conditions that led to the rise of the group remain more or less intact. Much has been discussed about these conditions.
- Geopolitical tensions, civil conflicts and foreign interventions have been a source of power for jihadist groups such as the al-Qaeda and the IS.
- It is to be remembered Osama bin Laden was a nobody before the Americans and their allies started bankrolling and training the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet Red Army.
- The Taliban was hosting the al-Qaeda when it carried out the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Virginia.
- The al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) rose from the ruins of the Iraq that was destroyed by the American invasion.
- The AQI morphed into today's IS, exploiting the chaos Syria fell into in the wake of the civil war.

What is the difference between al-Qaeda and IS?

- Though the al-Qaeda and the IS are cut from the same cloth, there are tactical and strategic differences in their operations.
- The al-Qaeda was basically a hit-and-run organisation until the IS changed the landscape of terrorism.
- The group would carry out attacks and then retreat to the deserts, caves or mountains where it was hiding.
- It did not expose itself to the conventional military might of its enemies.
- The IS started holding on to territories it captured, established a proto-state in those territories and called it the Islamic State.
- **Revival** - While the al-Qaeda also wants to create a global emirate, the IS took steps to implement its world-view.
- It declared a Caliphate, trying to revive an Islamic institution that ceased to

exist following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War.
- By doing so, Baghdadi tried to place himself in the long list of Islamic Caliphs, the rightful leaders of the global Muslim community, ummah.

What is Salafi-Jihadism?

- Violent jihadism is inherently anti-modern and very unpopular among Muslims across the world; because of this they are involved in extreme violence.
- With their asymmetrical barbarity, jihadist groups have sought to overcome not just the shortcomings in their military capabilities but also the lack of their political capital.
- For Baghdadi's group, violence was both a means and an end in itself.
- The puritanical interpretation of Islam by the IS has echoes from Salafi Islam. The Salafis follow the "pious forefathers" of Islam.
- For them, man cannot interpret the holy book or the Hadith. But Salafism itself is not a monolith. It can be a spiritual way of life.
- There are Salafi organisations whose members dedicate themselves to a "pure" Islamic way of life and have nothing to do with violence.
- But for groups such as the al-Qaeda and the IS, Salafism is a political ideology to attain power.
- Since they cannot attain power through mass movements, elections or revolutions, they turn to violent jihadism as a vehicle to reach that goal, which makes them Salafi-Jihadists.

What does a 'Pure' Islamic State mean?

- Unlike the al-Qaeda, the IS' operations were not confined to carrying out suicide attacks in the West or West-backed countries.
- It wanted to create a "pure" Islamic State where the "true" believers can come and live.
- For the IS, these true believers were Sunni Muslims alone and who followed the IS' diktats, not the Shia Muslims.
- In areas under their control, the **minority communities had to pay minority tax** to the state for protection and could not publicly practise their religion.
- The concept of **nation-states is alien to the IS world-view**, for whom the world is the Caliphate and where the ummah should be living under the leadership of their rightful Caliph.
- The IS is opposed to everything modern liberalism offers - individual freedom, equality, liberty are all completely denied by the group.
- The IS also frowns upon and denies critical thinking, demanding only loyalty

to its cause.

- Where the IS succeeded is in exploiting the contradictions within modern societies - the contradictions that were swept under the carpet by the nationalism.
- **Followers** - It was for the first time in decades that a group claimed to have established a caliphate by erasing the borders of modern states and by calling upon followers to migrate.
- The IS succeeded in attracting tens of thousands of people to its "Caliphate"- from Tunisia to India and the U.S.
- It was also opposed to the diversity of Islam terming Shias, Ismailis, Ahmedias and Alawites as non-Muslims.
- Syncretic traditions of Islam such as Sufism were branded anti-Islam by the IS.

What are the problems in the anti-IS fight?

- The **objective conditions that led to IS's rise remain intact** in West Asia and the larger Arab world.
- The group still has affiliates and arms in several parts of the world.
- The recent Turkish incursion into north-eastern Syria is threatening the limited advances made in the fight against the IS.
- The Shia-Sunni sectarianism that the IS tried to exploit is still burning across West Asia.
- The **IS will be defeated only when its ideology will be defeated**, which is a tall ask.
- The IS isn't an organisation that was created by western imperialism, but an organisation that used the chaos created by imperialism.
- It will continue to do so even after all these setbacks.

What could be done?

- If the IS goes silent, it becomes irrelevant in the global jihadist landscape and all its talk of the expansionary Caliphate will come to an end.
- The group will retain its need to kill in order to survive.
- To stop the group, its organisational and ideological apparatus has to be taken down in a region that is free of foreign interventions and repressions. For now, this looks a distant possibility.

Source: The Hindu



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