



Sectarian Segregation and The Economic Conflict of Trans-National Islamic Radical Group of ISIS and its Impact on The Middle East Live During Pandemic: A Review

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Abstract- The aggressive movement of Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) indicates its' success as the most powerful ultra-radical group in last decades. This phenomenon clearly shows that the radical groups take benefits of Islamic States conflict in Middle East. Ranges of debates emerged to discuss that the background of the Islamic States conflict was mostly due to their radical ideology. This study however stresses that the development of ISIS movement in Iraq and Syria was at least based on two significant factors; the competition between Sunni-Shia in Iraq (sectarian) and the economic background. These factors emerged from the strong contextual Iraq and Syria local conflict and its' consequences. Moreover, the development of support for ISIS from other countries was a result of the extremists groups have been growing rapidly. The attacks movement is reported further grows by taking the opportunities of global pandemic paused counterterrorism activities. This study thus suggests that the comprehensive strategies and actions from all stakeholders are the key to overcome the global threat of ISIS.

Keywords: ISIS, Middle East, Pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

A rise of radical Islamic groups' actions clearly seen in the last decades of the 20th century. The most obvious one is the emerges of Al-Qaeda at the late 1980s which developed its' group globally. Lately, Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is known not only as the biggest radical Islamic group but also as the most powerful and sadistic group in fulfilling their action and targets strongly makes a strong statement in performing their aggressive propaganda agenda. This phenomenon is contrary occurred from the results of democratic Arab Spring revolutions. Hence, the movement of the radical Islamic groups had not only creates the war crisis in Middle East, but also bear the consequences of global social, economy, religion and resilience (Ric, 2019).

There are multiple background and factors behind the rise of the radical Islamic groups. In general, it was highlighted that the root cause of the radicalization is due to the mixture of causal factors at the macro and micro level (Tinka and Jorgen, 2009). Scholars highlighted that the ideology and identity recognition, political and economy, corrupt regime and social background of the poor are among the most influencing factors indicated in Middle East. Meanwhile studies (Mediel, 2018 and Keiko, 2015) highlighted that the involvement of United States of America contributed to the rise of ISIS. Meanwhile in Indonesia, the emerge of study group and the political freedom were highlighted as the additional factors during the beginning of rise of Islamic groups in Indonesia (Zarkasyi, 2008).

The discussion of the extreme religion ideology is initially known as the basic factor of the extreme movement of the radical Islamic groups in Middle East countries, as they always try to publically portray especially through social media (Saifuddin and Jörg, 2017). However, different findings were presented in the context of global (Clara and Raul, 2019). Clara and Raul (2019) stressed that the role of religious belief plays significantly in the places where Muslims were minority. Their study pointed out that it was not proven that the Islamist propaganda strongly influences ordinary believers' radicalization. Some scholars highlighted that the rise of radical ideology and action to justify their attitudes (Ane and Jason, 2012).

However, the discussion on the factors of the Islamic conflicts keeps moving with the development of the aggressive radical groups' movements. Study of Tinka and Jorgen (2009) simply emphasized that the root cause of their movement could not be seen only from one narrow perspective. For instance, in the context

of Iraq and Syria where the origin of ISIS action started from, there were contextual backgrounds need to be taken into account. The sectarian, social, political and economic factors dominated the basic root of the Islamic State conflict in these areas. However, how were these factors developed to grow would be an important point to explain the significant origin of ISIS global movement as the biggest and most powerful radical Islamic group. This study aims to justify the background of Islamic State group conflict in Iraq and Syria by reviewing the historical development of ISIS and the assessment of the background of its' militant followers from all over the world.

II. THE CONFLICT AMONG THE ISLAMIC EXTREMIST GROUPS IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Basically, Islamic extremist groups known as sadists in Iraq and Syria were emerged from the polarization of Sunni militant opposition groups situated in Iraq that oppose an Iraqi government dominated by Shia Muslim groups. ISIS is well known as a radical group with a strong influence of religious doctrine (Hannase, 2019). Abu Bakar al-Bagdadi is the leader of the Iraqi Sunni Extremist group who named his group as *daulah al-Iraq al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic State of Iraq) which later transformed into *al-Dauala al-Islamiyyah bi al-Iraq wa al-Syam* or Islamic State for Iraq and Syria (Levant) ISIS.

ISIS is an ultra-radical group founded in Iraq in early 2013. ISIS militants disbelieve that any group that did not join theirs or refuses to form Islamic State and pledged their elected leaders. Specifically, this group strongly stated that a believer who does not pledge allegiance to ISIS and its leaders is *halal* to kill. It also forbids democracy, elections and Presidential elections. Furthermore, ISIS, with their understanding, also infidel all leaders who do not apply the law of God, disbelieve opposition nationalists, Islamic groups and all the state institutions (Najih Ibrahim dan Hisyam, 2014).

Technically, ISIS sees any entities other than their groups and irrespective of their ideas is to be eliminated. It is definitely fanatic and sadistic. This group is growing globally with the inseparable ideology, political and economic issues from the development of Islamic groups especially those with the basis of establishing an Islamic State and adheres to the theology of jihad.

Abu Bakar al-Bagdadi was the third al-Qaeda leader in Iraq after Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and Abu Umar al-Bagdadi. After the death of the two leaders of al-Qaeda, al-Bagdadi then announced himself as the leader of al-Qaeda and then proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq. Al-Bagdadi led a Sunni group with the extremist fighters to fight the Iraqi Government which was controlled by Shia groups due to ideological differences that triggered sectarian and religious conflicts in the country which was previously controlled by the Sunni regime.

Al-Bagdadi as the leader of ISIS also forced his will to rule and carry out many executions openly and accessible through the media. This strategy aimed to control some important areas, one of them was the city of Raqqa in East Syria, the only major city that has fully controlled by Syrian armed opposition groups. ISIS also controlled the big territory from the Turkish border to the East Syria desert which is an oil-producing region. Hence, the al-Bagdadi's courage to proclaim the founding of an Islamic state caused many of the Arab and foreign armies under al-Qaeda group left and joined the ISIS group led by al-Bagdadi. Nevertheless, the occurrence of war and the split of opposition groups against Assad benefited government forces and regains control of several areas controlled by the opposition groups. This situation also created a concern for militants of armed opposition in the West, Turkey and the Gulf.

Basically, the dispute between al-Qaeda represented by al-Nusrah group and ISIS was actually not caused by ideological differences as both parties aimed for the establishment of an Islamic state. The root of the dispute was caused by political problems, namely the struggle for power and differences in the methods of movement and group arrogance. In its military movement, ISIS was too sadistic and extreme in carrying out executions of those who are opposed to its ideology. While the al-Qaeda failed to follow these methods. Due to the declaration of the establishment of an Islamic state, ISIS was able to recruit thousands of militants and succeeded in attracting jihadists from various countries such as Europe, Middle East Africa and Indonesia. With large number followers, ISIS has managed to control about one third of Iraq's territory and several areas in Syria.

Iraqi intelligence sources stated that ISIS had recruited big hundreds of thousands of followers and millions of USD that the majority of which was obtained from oil sales from occupied territories in Iraq and Syria. With strong financial background, ISIS also has high technology and expensive weapons that was to fight the opposition groups.

Besides marginalize the al-Nusrah group, ISIS also opposes al-Qaeda's authority led by Al-Zawahiri. Indeed, from the perspective of the readiness to establish an Islamic state, ISIS was stronger over al-Qaeda. ISIS clearly had sufficient territory, a large number of militias, modern weapons and financial strength obtained from oil sales in their controlled territory. In addition, ISIS is also moving faster than Zawahiri in proclaiming the Islamic state.

Nonetheless, the existence of ISIS could not avoid any major concerns and risks as ISIS occupies some areas with the potential to be attacked by American forces with far more complete and modern weapons. America could be reluctant to strengthen the military of the Russian government, but the ISIS movement caused America to fight ISIS directly and strengthen the Maliki regime in Iraq, a government formed after the American invasion of Iraq ('Akum, 2014).

Currently, ISIS has begun to lose its existence in the conflict areas of Iraq and Syria. BBC News (2019) reported the ISIS control has shrunk drastically from 2015 to 2019 in Iraq and Syria (Figure 1). As the ISIS influence had drastically weakened, the group's territory had also being narrowed. Yet, the existence of this group for nearly a decade has resulted in huge losses for the Iraq and Syria that could be seen from the destruction of cultural heritages, the the economic fall to the death toll. (Roger, 2020). After the death of ISIS's leader Abu Bakar al-Bagdadi, the group's territory in Syria and Iraq continued to decrease due to various military attacks supported by the United States and Russia.

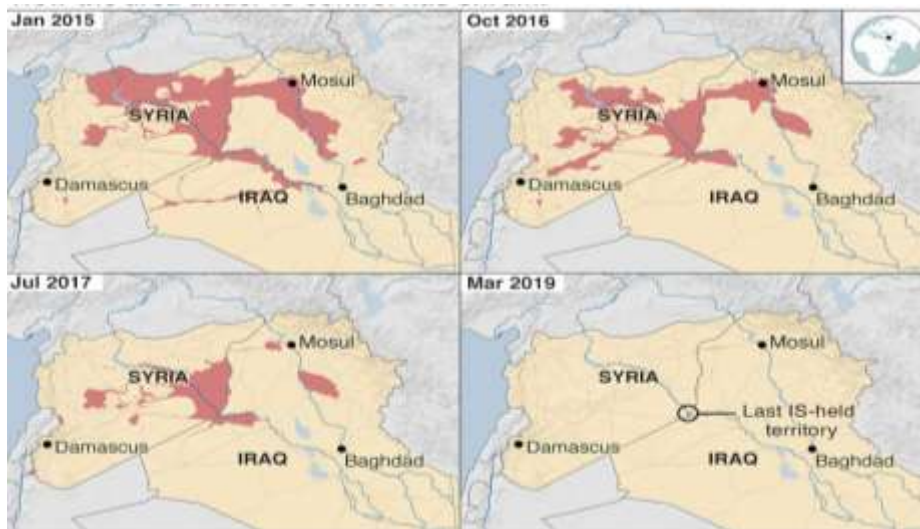


Figure 1: The rise of shrunk area under the control of ISIS from 2015 to 2019

Source: BBC News (2019)

This group also succeeded in recruiting great number of militants from Southeast Asia especially Malaysia and Indonesia through the Global Jihad narrative propaganda (Kirsten E. Schulze and Joseph Chinyong Liow, 2019). The rapid development of ISIS's influence certainly created a serious globally including Indonesia. Hence, the Indonesian government was highly expected to be fully ready to look for prevention strategies over the spread the ISIS influence in Indonesia as the largest Muslim community. The delay of the strategies will target Indonesia of recruiting ISIS militants.

It is unfair to conclude that ISIS is the most sadistic group in history. However, this assumption could be real when seen from the recent actions of ISIS. It is clear that this group considers itself as the God's army from heaven to kill and slaughtering the opposition of God's law. Ironically, the target of this group is general towards all oppositions includes minorities ethnic groups (Yazidis), adherents of minority religions (Christians) and Islamic groups that do not take allegiance to them. Furthermore, this group created the global phenomena by rapidly developing and recruiting followers from different parts of the world including Indonesia (Fredy and Erwin, 2019).

The ISIS' lost on the charismatic leader Abu Bakar al-Bagdadi during the military attacks by the United States did not make his followers from around the world stop the terrorism acts. This fact could be seen from the terror attracts Paris, Pandegelang (Indonesia) and London that indicates the movement of this group. In the development of the ISIS phenomenon in Indonesia around early March 2015, the media was enlivened by the news about the disappearance of 16 Indonesian citizens in Turkey who allegedly joined ISIS. However, the Indonesian government finally overcome this problem and succeeded in repatriating a number of Indonesians who were suspected of joining ISIS. Following this case, the ISIS phenomenon in Indonesia need indeed to be watched out as the government reported that there are around 514 Indonesians later had joined ISIS.

III. SECTARIAN CONFLICT

The fast development of ISIS group forms a global phenomenon. The basic concern to describe this phenomenon is the background of ISIS fast development in Iraq and Syria. The complexity of sectarian is a

fundamental cause of Islamic State conflict in Iraq and Syria (Ranj, 2018). John Brewer (1992) defined sectarianism as “the determination of actions, attitudes, and practices about religious difference, which result in them invoked as the boundary marker to represent social stratification and conflict”. This definition justifies the character and movement of ISIS in executing their action in enforcing the extreme religious difference over the Islamic groups. One key factor is the problem of sectarianism as cause of competition between Sunnis and Shia. Sectarian conflict had become the root of conflicts and the future of the modern Middle East (Jeffrey et al., 2019). As discussed earlier, the ISIS group emerged from the existence of Sunni militant opposition groups in Iraq that oppose the Iraqi government under the control of Shia Muslim groups.

Johan Galtung (1973) in his conflict theory defined conflict as an inherent and recognized existence in social and political life. In most places, conflicts are much influenced by ideological differences and religious sects that create violent conflicts. Conflicts arise from religious school competition (madhhab) could degrade government and create chaos in the social and political order of life. Hence, the consequence of the minimal role of the government to deal with conflicts causes a prolonged crisis.

This situation occurred in Iraq and Syria. During the establishment of ISIS, the Iraqi government was dominated by Shia groups. The regime of President Nur al-Maliki from Shia group was very repressive and discriminatory against Sunni. It was as if the power of the Shia group is an antithesis of the Saddam Husain's regime which as a representation of the Sunni who was repressive to Shia when in power. al-Bagdadi used the situation to gain support from the Sunni community to run his agenda to establish an Islamic state of Iraq. Evidently, al-Bagdadi succeeded in recruiting thousands of militants from Iraqi Sunni groups by igniting hostility towards the Iraqi Shia regime.

Abdullah al-Baridi also stated the same point of view that the plague of conflict in the Middle East was strongly influenced by the doctrines of fundamentalism among Sunnis and Shia. He defined Shia-Sunni fundamentalism as al-tashaddud (fanaticism) and al-tatarruf (radicalism) in imposing their religious teachings and infidelity one another. Shia scholars hold the thought that Sunnis must be fought as they are considered Najis (unclean). Muhammad Sadiq as a Shia cleric once stated that the Wahhabis are Najis, even more najis than dogs. Likewise, the Sunni fundamentalist group sees the Shia as very negative by viewing them as more dangerous than Jews.

The debates on the Sunni- Shia fundamentalist are inseparable from the discussion on the conflict area in the Middle East. For instance, the conflict in Palestine especially between Hamas, Fatah and Israel is always linked with the influence of Shia -Sunni sectarianism. The same situation occurs to the conflict of Iraq, Syria and Yemen that indicates an ideological and political rivalry between Sunni- Shia groups.

The loss of al-Bagdadi from the ISIS leadership and the fall in military and finance strongly influenced the weakening of the Sunni militant group in the Middle East Region. Although still considered dangerous, the weakening situation of Sunni has reportedly been great opportunities for Iran and its supporting followers. Military groups supported by Iran in Iraq and Syria area have increasingly prevailed by the fall of ISIS (Mohammad, 2017). This situation further confirms the power of sectarianism background in the ISIS conflict in Iraq and Syria.

IV. POLITICAL ECONOMIC OF CONFLICT BUILDING IN IRAQ

Economic is a disentangle factor in ranges of conflicts (Kaldor, 2007), including the Islamic groups conflict. In contrast to other radical Islamic groups, ISIS is rapidly gaining popularity and control over most parts of Syria and Iraq. It is clear seen that the rapid acceleration of the ISIS movement is inseparable from the socio-economic factors. Iraqi intelligence reported that in early 2015 ISIS had recruited tens thousands of militants with abundant of wealth.

Al-Sumaria News on December 10, 2014 reported that the ISIS group receives more than US \$ 3 million or Rp 35.8 billion every day from crude oil smuggling, human smuggling, robbery and extortion. As results, it makes ISIS as the richest terrorist group in history. The total profit from oil sales by ISIS reaches US \$ 3 million every day. Thus, it is estimated that the wealth of ISIS has reached trillions of US \$ to date.

According to the Social Movement theory pointed out by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004), the significant support for Islamic groups is strongly related to socio-economic factors. The radical groups are mostly frustrated with their economic condition. Hence, ISIS then exploited the social economic conditions of people in Iraq and Syria which were the majority poor due to the ongoing conflict in the two countries. With the financial power, it was easy for ISIS to recruit the poor and arm them to fight the government and all those who oppose their group. The aggressive movement of ISIS shows that the ideology and illusory views of establishing an Islamic State made them no longer consider values in gaining wealth and oppressing innocent people. This situation could be seen when they claimed that Yazidis Ethnic in Iraq had become halal in the name of jihad.

Interestingly, different trends could be seen in the economic background of the ISIS' foreign militants. Krueger (2006) stated that large Muslim population countries tend to have more citizens join the Iraqi groups. However, it was found by Klor (2018) that there were correlations between the number of ISIS foreign fighters with the country's GDP per capita and Human Development Index (HDI). In this context, the HDI considers the residents' wealth according to their health, income and education backgrounds. Figures 2 and 3 show the correlation between the number of foreign militants with the GDP and HDI. Excitingly, the number of ISIS foreign followers Indonesia, from India, and Pakistan (sum population of over 560 million Muslims) equals 793, that is much smaller over ISIS foreign militants from Ireland, Austria, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden (with sum of less than 1.4 million Muslim populations) for over 900 ISIS foreign militants. The more developed countries with the rapid urbanization and economic activities mostly tend to have the social and environmental issues to deal with (Yola and Siong, 2017).

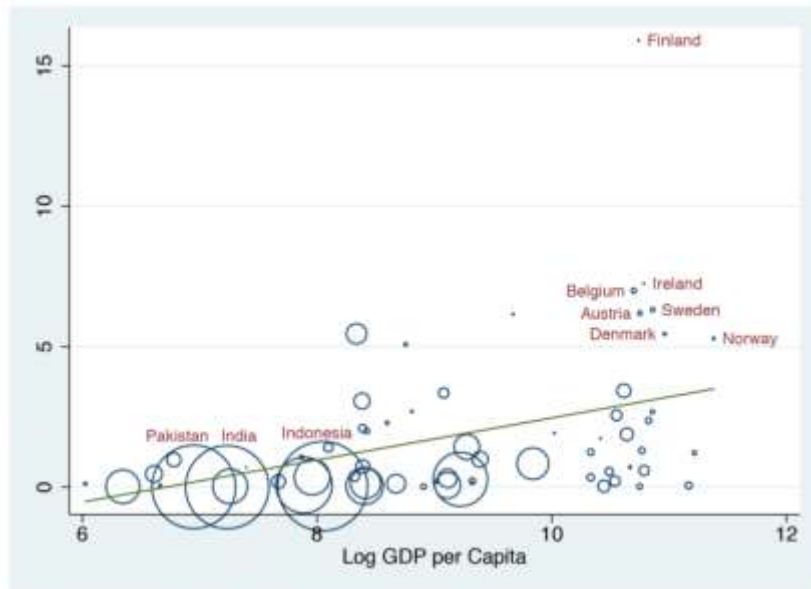


Figure 2: Relationship between ISIS Foreign Militants (per 10,000 Muslims in population) and GDP per Capita

Source: Klor, 2018

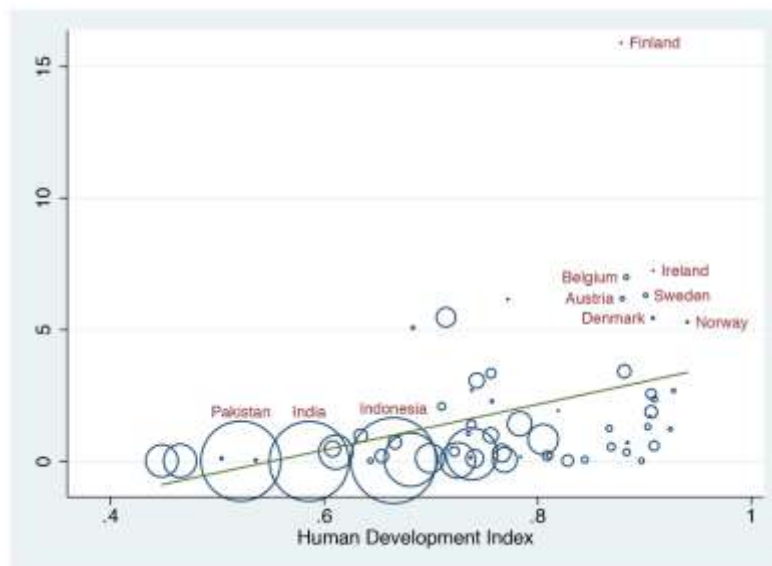


Figure 3: Relationship between ISIS Foreign Militants (per 10,000 Muslims in population) and Human Development Index

Source: Klor, 2018

The data show that poverty of the background country was not the main reason of foreign militants to join ISIS. The foreign militants from the countries with the positive economic condition, small income inequality, and good political atmosphere were reported likely to join the ISIS movement. This phenomenon indicates that there are other contextual local factors that drive the foreign militants rather than the economic reason.

V. ACCOMMODATION OF TRANSNATIONAL JIHADIST GROUPS

The next question that then arises, why did ISIS easily recruit trans-national militants? Basically, the success of ISIS in recruiting members from various countries is strongly influenced by the support of radical Islamic groups in various places. Almost all radical groups especially the al-Qaeda network carried out allegiance to ISIS when al-Bagdadi proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Boko Haram in Negeria, Anshaar Bait al-Muqaddas in Gaza and Sinai, al-Jama'ah al-Salafiyyah li al-Da'wah wa al-Qitaal in Algeria, al-Syabaabab in Somalia, and other radical groups in the world have supported the establishment of an Islamic State by ISIS and sending militants to Iraq and Syria.

Indonesia is no exception. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Jemaah Anshar al-Tauhid (JAT) and other radical Islamic groups in Indonesia took part in allegiance to ISIS and were willing to go to Iraq and Syria in order to strive to establish an Islamic State. Since then, members of these radical groups have managed to leave for Iraq and Syria through the border of Iraq and Syria. In the Indonesian context, it is indeed not easy to prevent from the penetration of ISIS movement as Indonesia is currently exposed to open life. The freedom and trend of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsAp and accessibility to international mobility are among the major factors for the government to oversee the development of ISIS movement.

Jamaah Anshar al-Daulah (JAD) led by Aman Abdurrahman is the most dominant group in supporting ISIS in Iraq and Syria. JAD militants and their families were sent to join ISIS in the Middle East (Vijayalakshmi, 2018). However, in the context of Indonesia, the de-radicalization is the most contextual strategy to overcome ISIS movement. It is clear that the radical groups in Indonesia are the major supporters that run the ISIS recruitment in Indonesia. Evidently, ISIS followers are members of the radical groups from different parts of Indonesia such as Solo and Poso. Lastly, the synergy of all stakeholders; government, Islamic mass organizations and the community need to work together to oversee the radical idea and movement. ISIS followers always looking for loopholes to take action, as could be seen during the case of Wiranto or Pandegelang attack in 2019 (Quinton Temby, 2020).

VI. JIHADIST MOVEMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC

The Covid 19 pandemic crisis has caused major impacts on almost all global sectors, especially on the economic and health area. Particularly, the pandemic crisis also contributes the impacts on the counterterrorism activities. Contrary, the Jihadist see this situation as the opportunities to pay the developing attacks. This trend can be seen from Figure 4 data that presents the significant increase of ISIS attacks in Iraq and Syiria from March to May 2020 when the global pandemic started. It is very clear that the jihadists use the critical situation where most of the authorities concerns likely focuses on the pandemic response instead of the national securities.

This trend indicates that besides the Jihadists and the extremist groups are showing their commitment in undertaking the attacks, they also present that the militants and groups are economically strong and the on-going conflicts keep moving. It makes a forced response from the US to still run the counterterrorism agenda even tough limited to certain activities such as airstrikes and remote surevailances.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The rise of radical Islamic groups' movement is strongly related to the systematic support in the global scale. This situation is clearly seen in the transformation of ISIS. The rapid development of ISIS is strongly influenced by the support of the radical Islamic groups from different countries such as Boko Haram, Jamaah Anshar al-Tauhid (JAT) Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jemaah Anshar al-Daulah (JAD) from Indonesia. ISIS succeeds to recruit members from various countries by the involvement of these radical groups.

In the context of Iraq, the main factors of ISIS movement are classified into three. First, the factor of competition between Sunni and Shia group. Many Iraqis actually disagree with ISIS ideology, but then they prefer to support ISIS rather than supporting a government controlled by Shia. Secondly is the economic factor. ISIS wealth is very abundant as it is considered as the richest Islamic group that controls many oil fields in Iraq and Syria. The poor were forced to join ISIS due to the financial guarantees provided by ISIS. Thirdly is the ideological factor. It is clear that the Iraqi jihadists were indeed strong due

to the conflict situation especially after the fall of Saddam Husain regime. These factors are suggested to fulfill the discussion on the contextual root of Islamic conflict in Iraq and Syria, specifically on the topic of sectarian and economic background.

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