The Impact of ISIS and the Cubs of the Caliphate on Iraqi National Security

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Abstract

The conflicts in Iraq, from the collapse of the previous regime by U.S. occupation forces to the establishment of new governance mechanisms and their ensuing outcomes, have had severe and long-lasting impacts. These effects began to manifest in the transformation of the Iraqi state and the formation of a fragile political system, leading to a surge in terrorism and the establishment of a new phase of protracted conflict. This period saw the formation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2003 and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2013. These groups generated more intense issues and challenges, with one of the most notable being the recruitment of children and the gross violations against vulnerable groups. Children were recruited and used in military, logistical, and propaganda operations. The exploitation of children by terrorist organizations in Iraq is notably exceptional compared to other terrorist groups, as children are considered a strategic asset and a resource for the new generation of terrorism and violent religious extremism under any pretext. ISIS's focus was not limited to Iraq and Syria but extended internationally, with sleeper cells remaining active in many areas even after its defeat in 2017, resulting in long-term negative effects on national security and the stability of Iraqi society.

Keywords: ISIS, Cubs of the Caliphate, detention camps, Iraqi national security.

1. Introduction

Civil wars are among the most common conflict types, unlike wars between nations, which typically involve two armies in uniforms using conventional tactics. Civil wars, on the other hand, involve unconventional tactics, with small groups of fighters engaging in sabotage, raids, and ambushes. These wars blur the lines between adult and child soldiers. Conflicts, where children are employed as decisive elements, are essentially "guerrilla wars," and the use of children in such wars is a crucial factor for any group to ensure its survival and viability, whether that group is a political party, a rebellious army, or a labor union.

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Syria and the rise of militant (jihadi) groups in Syria and Iraq, images of war crimes committed by these groups against various parties involved in the ongoing conflict have emerged. ISIS has employed a strategy of committing crimes against humanity, such as child recruitment, to instill fear in both allies and adversaries. This organization significantly differs from other terrorist groups that use child soldiers, as children are a crucial component of ISIS. The future and sustainability of

the terrorist organization largely depend on the next generation, who are seen as advanced versions of current fighters and "blank slates" that can be meticulously molded according to the organization's ideology.

This phenomenon confronting Iraq represents one of the most significant challenges, encompassing multiple dimensions: security, internal, political, economic, and legal. Additionally, the increasing challenges posed by neighboring countries play a central role in the resurgence and growth of ISIS's capabilities. The core issue lies in the fact that while this phenomenon is not new, ISIS has evolved into a globally recognized threat, with its expansion into the Middle East and Africa, making it a genuine threat to Iraqi security.

Study Importance

Studying the impact of child recruitment by ISIS on Iraqi national security is crucial for understanding its severe implications. This research aims to raise awareness about the dangers of child recruitment by terrorist groups and to develop necessary measures to mitigate this issue.

Research Objective

The objective of the research is to analyze the overall impact of child recruitment by ISIS on Iraqi national security. It also aims to identify the factors and motivations driving extremism and deviance in the Iraqi environment, as well as to explore the key strategies employed by the organization to recruit and attract children.

Research Problem

Despite the losses inflicted on the terrorist organization in the areas it controlled since 2017, achieving stability in Iraq continues to face several challenges. One of the primary challenges is ISIS's exploitation of children within its ranks to build an army for the future. Consequently, the study seeks to address the following questions: What are the risks posed by the recruitment of children by ISIS in Iraq? What are the main challenges associated with this issue?

Research Hypothesis

The recruitment of children by ISIS contributes to destabilizing Iraq and threatening its security.

2. Methodology

A case study methodology has been employed to understand this phenomenon. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon from all its aspects, aligning with the nature of the study which aims not to generalize but to specifically analyze the Iraqi experience.

Structure of the Research

The research is divided into two main sections:

1. **ISIS's Recruitment of Children: Factors, Strategies, and Objectives**

   - This section explores the underlying factors, strategic approaches, and goals behind ISIS's recruitment of children.

2. **Impact of Child Soldiers on Iraqi National Security**

   - This section examines the effects of child soldiers on Iraq's national security, analyzing the broader implications of their recruitment and use.

Chapter One: ISIS's Recruitment of Children: Factors, Strategies, and Objectives

The phenomenon of child recruitment by extremist groups represents one of the most urgent challenges to both national and global security. In the context of terrorist organizations, this issue has garnered significant attention due to the extensive use of children not only as soldiers but also as operatives for terrorism and propaganda.

The involvement of children in terrorist armed groups is not a new tactic, as it has historical roots. However, the deliberate and systematic approach adopted by ISIS represents a particularly concerning development compared to other terrorist organizations. In ISIS, the recruitment of children is part of a broader ideological and strategic framework designed to indoctrinate and exploit the youngest and most impressionable members of society. This practice poses profound and multifaceted risks and threats to national security, impacting social, psychological, and economic structures. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on this vulnerable group and investigate the underlying causes driving their drift into extremism and involvement with terrorist organizations.

The first requirement: Factors Driving Children Towards Extremist Organizations

Several factors contribute to the vulnerability of children in Iraq to radicalization and involvement in terrorism. These factors range from political influences to complex personal issues. Below, we outline some of these interrelated factors:

Political factors are among the most significant drivers of extremism, violence, and terrorism. Political oppression and instability shape individuals' behaviors, pushing them to express their grievances and seek revenge through violence. Political instability is a widespread phenomenon, particularly affecting developing countries[1]. Iraq, being classified among these nations, continues to face challenges in political stability that have historical roots extending back to the early 20th century. Several factors contribute to this persistent instability and enhance the potential for extremism and terrorism[2]:

1. The American Occupation of Iraq and Its Impact on Conflict Dynamics

The American occupation transformed the Iraqi environment into a hotspot for terrorism, contributing to the emergence of a new generation of extremists across the world and aiding the spread of jihadist ideology. After the United States entered Iraq in 2003 and announced the overthrow of the previous regime, it implemented a series of measures and decisions under the pretext of rescuing Iraq from oppression[3] and promoting individual rights and democracy[4]. However, its policy focused on dismantling the Iraqi state's structure and establishing a framework aligned with its interests. A key example of this was the decision to disband the Iraqi army, which exacerbated divisions, created a dangerous security vacuum, and ignited ethnic and sectarian tensions within the country. This undermined peace and stability[5], making Iraq a fertile ground for the rise of jihadist organizations and movements, and providing them with the opportunity to assert their leadership and thrive[6].

2. Political Instability After the Occupation

The political practices of the Iraqi regime before 2003 were characterized by authoritarianism under the facade of democratic institutions. The misuse and mismanagement of power by this regime led to a genuine conflict with the opposition[7]. This conflict created an environment in the post-2003 era, following decades of dictatorship, which was marked by invasion and state collapse. These conditions ignited internal conflicts that did not cease with the end of the war. On the contrary, they led to ongoing theft, the settling of old scores, and a lack of security. The violation of the law became a routine matter in the absence of oversight.

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[1] **Jamal Shahat Habib**, *Mechanisms of Social Work in Addressing Terrorism and Extremism for Peace and Development*, National Books and Documents House, Alexandria, 2019, pp. 81-82.

[2] **Saadi Ibrahim**, *Political Instability in Iraq After 2003*, Regional Studies Journal, University of Mosul, Iraq, Issue 1, 2018, p. 41.

[3] **Raji Al-Bayati**, *The American Strategy for the Invasion of Iraq: The Rise and Decline of ISIS*, Sama for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2017, pp. 66-133.

[4] **Furqan Adil Jabbar & Hussein Mezher Khalaf**, *Colombia: Assessing The Roles of The European Union in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building*, Conflict Studies Quarterly, Issue 47, April 2024, pp. 3-19.

[5] **Raji Al-Bayati**, *The American Strategy for the Invasion of Iraq: The Rise and Decline of ISIS*, Sama for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2017, pp. 66-133.

[6] **Mona Hamdi Hikmat**, *Extremist Thought and Domestic Countermeasures: The Case of Iraq*, Political Issues Journal, College of Political Science, University of Al-Nahrain, Iraq, Issue 66, 2021, p. 377.

[7] **Hameed, Muntasser Majeed**, *Hybrid Regimes: An Overview*, IPRI Journal, vol. 22, no. 1 (June 2022): 1-24.

The consequences of this situation were reflected in Iraqi society, further widening the gap between the ruling political elite and the effective implementation of their political agenda.[1]

Following the collapse in 2003, the political system was expected to be prepared for operation and stability. However, the implementation showed a significant discrepancy between what was written in the Constitution and what was visible on the ground. The plan followed by the political system, which was based on sectarian quotas and consensus among various components for power-sharing, had negative repercussions on the entire system and its functioning. Consequently, these programs and performances turned into a competition and defense of the personal interests of the leaders and the political parties to which they belong[2].

3. Identity Crisis and Sectarianism

Ineffective political participation and corruption have created a sense of frustration that extremist groups exploit to their advantage[3]. The Iraqi identity and its problems are not new but extend back to the early days of the establishment of the Iraqi state.[4]

The fall of the Ba'athist regime alone was not sufficient to revive a unified Iraqi identity, due to several factors. Prominent among these were the American occupation and the focus on achieving external interests at the expense of domestic concerns, including the matter of a unified identity, which is a purely Iraqi issue. This led to the various components within Iraq trying to assert their roles and express their presence after long periods of marginalization. This feeling was further deepened by the political representation being tied to sub-identities[5], which resulted in a political system based on identity, centered around sectarian and ethnic divisions with active parties focused on sects. This implies that sectarianism became an unavoidable reality due to the leaderships in power, who lacked the necessary skills to avoid identity conflicts and, instead, exacerbated them[6].

2. Economic Factors

Most experts in social sciences and studies agree that economic imbalances and deprivation, along with their consequences such as poverty, inflation, and the dissolution of an individual's economic situation, create a fertile ground for terrorist organizations and activities. Many of these organizations often emerge in economically disadvantaged areas. According to reports from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), suspected terrorists frequently operate in what are termed "failed states.[7]" Economic factors play a significant role in responding to extremist ideologies; they are crucial in generating aggressive and violent behavior.

Major Economic Factors Driving Deviance[8]:

1. **Instability of Institutional Framework:** The lack of a stable institutional framework for managing Iraq's economy prevents the effective allocation of natural and human resources.

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[1] **Kholoud Mohamed Hussein & Wathab Khattab Mandeel**, *Violence and Its Impact on Political Stability in Iraq from 2003 to 2013: A Study of Internal and External Factors*, Journal of Legal and Political Sciences, University of Diyala, Iraq, Issue 2, 2021, pp. 11-17.

[2] **Hameed, Muntasser Majeed.** *Political Structure and the Administration of the Political System in Iraq (Post-ISIS)*. Cuestiones Políticas, vol. 37, no. 65, 2020, pp. 346-361.

[3] Harriet Allan (ed.), Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review. Royal United Services Institute, UK, 2015, p. 14.

[4] **Hameed Fadhil Hassan,** *Iraqi National Identity: Past and Present Crises, Causes, and Solutions*, Political Science Journal, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Issue 49, 2015, pp. 60-64.

[5] Same sourse.

[6] **Hameed, Muntasser Majeed.** *State-Building and Ethnic Pluralism in Iraq after 2003*. Politeia, vol. 104, no. 1, 2022, pp. 110-129.

[7] Sarafa Ogundiya and Jimoh Azmat, Nigeria and the Threats of Terrorism: Myth or Reality, Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, vol. 10, no. 2, 2008, p. 175.

[8] **Suhad Ismail Khaleel and Ali Fares Hamid**, "Countering Extremism: Approaches, Strategies, and Operational Environment," Al-Nahrain Center for Strategic Studies, National Security Advisory, Iraq, Issue 2, 2019, pp. 102-104.

2. **Low Wages Relative to High Prices:** The disparity between low wages and high prices of goods increases economic pressure on individuals, potentially leading them toward deviance or extremism.

3. **Economic Backwardness from Ineffective Policies:** Ineffective economic policies that do not align with the country's social reality contribute to the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

4. **Unemployment:** Both real and disguised unemployment contribute significantly to extremist movements, as they foster frustration and create a conducive environment for radicalization.

5. **Education:** There is a close link between poverty and school dropout rates, with most dropouts coming from the poorest families. This reflects an inverse relationship between income levels and school dropout rates.

Third: Social Factors:

The fundamental explanations for extremism often trace back to social conditions as root causes. Society, being the environment where individuals grow and develop their sensory and moral perceptions, provides the backdrop for material and moral balance. When disruptions occur in these factors, they inevitably lead to imbalances in an individual's thinking and behavior. When individuals experience a lack of justice and personal dignity within their society, they may resort to expressing their discontent in ways they believe will convey their message. The spread of social problems and increasing individual suffering can drive people toward deviant behavior and extreme opinions, turning society into fertile ground for the growth of phenomena that conflict with societal norms[1] and traditions. Notable social causes driving deviance include[2]:

1. **The Decline in the Role of Socialization Agencies:** The diminishing role of socialization agencies in Iraq, deviating from their proper frameworks for fulfilling their role as social and educational systems, both before and after 2003, and their transformation into ideological incubators supporting extremism.

2. **Misinterpretation of Religion:** The prevalence of narrow sectarian loyalties, has created a favorable environment for spreading extremist ideologies and increasing complex ignorance.

3. **Family Breakdown:** Family disintegration due to improper parenting methods, lack of education on proper social norms and roles, or the exercise of wrong roles such as authoritarianism and coercion. This suggests a direct relationship between family dysfunction and the likelihood of child deviance[3].

4. **Weak Educational and Social Role of Educational Institutions**: The reliance on rote memorization and repetition in these institutions produces students with a mindset that is more receptive to indoctrination.[4]

Fourth - Technological Factors: In our rapidly advancing era, where technology evolves at a tremendous pace, its impact on various aspects of life is profound. While we benefit from its numerous advantages, we cannot ignore its negative aspects, particularly concerning its role in the spread of extremism and terrorism.

Young people face significant risks due to their easy access to a vast amount of information on the internet, which promotes certain Western ideas through various technological means. These ideas often conflict with Eastern values and ethics, exploiting the vulnerability of this age group. Moreover, the promoted content

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[1] **Jamal Shahat Habib**, Source previously mentioned, p. 83.

[2] **Dunya Jawad**, "Terrorism in Iraq: A Study of the True Causes and an Analytical Study of the Causes of Terrorism in Iraq and Its Social and Political Variables," Journal of Political Science, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Issue 43, 2011, p. 132.

[3] **Abdul Rahman Ibrahim Hamad Al-Ghantousi**, "The Impact of Subjective and Objective Factors on the Spread of Extremism Among Muslim Youth," Series of Publications by the Iraqi Artists' Union, Baghdad, Issue 2, 2021, p. 188.

[4] **Hassan Saad Abdulhamid**, *Public Policies for Combating Terrorism in Iraq*, Democratic Arab Center for Strategic Studies and Economic Policy, Berlin, 2017, p. 13.

tends to focus on stimulating base instincts and showcasing deviant behaviors, which can lead young people to stray from their values and push them toward deviant behavior[1].

These massive advancements in communication and information systems have created a fertile environment for terrorist activities, which are manifested in the following[2]:

1. **Rapid Spread of Misleading Ideas:** Technology enables these groups to disseminate their toxic and misleading ideas quickly and easily, exploiting young people's desire to engage with sensational content.

2. **Secure Communication:** Technology provides secure communication channels that are shielded from security oversight, facilitating terrorist groups' ability to coordinate and plan their destructive activities.

3. **Organizational Connectivity:** It facilitates organizational connections between groups and cells, making it easier to exchange information and field ideas to achieve their goals and coordinate terrorist actions. This connectivity also allows them to easily access and recruit young people and minors, gaining their support.

4. **Youth Recruitment:** Terrorist groups use social media to attract and recruit young people, capitalizing on their humanitarian concerns and emotions. They also spread misleading propaganda that glorifies violence and jihad.[3]

Technological tools pose significant risks to the security of nations and societies. This risk is exacerbated by the inability to control how terrorist groups utilize these modern technologies from any location around the world. As technological advancements continue to progress rapidly, the challenge of protecting individuals from cyberterrorism becomes increasingly difficult. Consequently, this situation represents a direct and serious threat to both national and international security.

Fifth - Personal Factors: Various personal factors drive individuals towards extremism and terrorism, often arising from feelings of repression and injustice. Individuals may react either spontaneously or strategically to defend themselves. These factors include:

1. Weak Superego and Dominance of the Lower Self: Weakness in the superego and the dominance of the lower self or what is referred to as the "self-commanding evil" can contribute to extreme behavior.[4]
2. Ignorance and Weak Religious Commitment: Ignorance and a lack of religious awareness can make individuals, particularly children, more susceptible to manipulation through religious rhetoric and exploitation of weak beliefs[5].
3. Frustration in Achieving Personal Desires and Status: Individuals who feel thwarted in achieving their personal goals or status, and who perceive themselves as less respected than others, may turn to extremism as a means of asserting themselves[6].

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[1] **Khaled Al-Juraisi**, *Youth Deviance and Treatment Methods According to the Book and Sunnah*, King Fahd National Library, Riyadh, 1999, pp. 38-40.

[2] **Suzie Mohamed Rashad**, *The Problematic Relationship Between the New Terrorism Phenomenon and Digital Media*, Journal of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 160-164.

[3] **Samah Abdelsabour**, *Digital Terrorism: The Use of Social Media by Armed Groups*, Future Center for Research and Advanced Studies, Egypt, Issue 2, 2014, pp. 43-44.

[4] Asmaa bint Abdulaziz Al-Hussein, **"Causes of Terrorism, Violence, and Extremism: An Analytical Study"**, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia, 2004, p. 19.

[5] Ramadan Abdelhamid Mohamed El-Tantawy, **"Causes of Extremism Among University Students and Methods to Mitigate It: Their Perspective"**, Journal of the College of Education, Egypt, Issue 71, Damietta University, 2016, pp. 8-9.

[6] Faleh Al-Quraishi, **"The Psychology of Takfir and Terrorism: Its Cultural Sources, Causes, and Methods of Confrontation"**, Iraq Center for Studies, Iraq, 2022, p. 140.

4. Desire to Imitate Parents and Blind Following: A desire to imitate parents or blind adherence to them, combined with spiritual emptiness due to unemployment and poverty, along with a tendency towards personal desires, can lead individuals towards extremism[1].

It was essential to study and analyze the reasons behind children joining terrorist organizations to develop effective disarmament and reintegration programs in the future. Neglecting any aspect of these factors would lead to the failure to address the fundamental issues.

The second requirement: ISIS Strategies for Recruiting Children

Since 2014, the terrorist organization ISIS has employed a multifaceted approach to recruit and militarize children. This approach involves various methods to indoctrinate and integrate them into the organization. These strategies include:

First: The Historical Path of ISIS's Ideology in Recruiting Children

ISIS's ideology regarding child recruitment is derived from several systems of exploiting and recruiting children. The most notable of these systems include:

1. The Ottoman System: The terrorist leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi likely adopted a simulation approach similar to the Ottoman system, as seen in the stereotypical use of children. The Ottomans practiced this system in Central Europe through Emperor Murad I, who would take children from the Balkan provinces, forcefully convert them from Christianity to Islam, and make them his slaves, demanding total loyalty and obedience[2]. ISIS followed a similar approach with religious minorities, particularly the Yazidis when they entered the Sinjar region in 2014 and kidnapped approximately 6,417 Yazidis, mostly children. The method of indoctrination resembled the Devshirme system, involving forcing them to convert to Islam, studying religious sciences, the Quran, and Islamic jurisprudence, and then teaching them a violent curriculum in the form of jihadist fatwas, with the expectation of blind obedience to the emir[3].

The ISIS organization often invoked the Ottoman Empire as the last true caliphate in the Islamic world to justify and bolster the credibility of its actions, attempting to obscure its violent and terrorist ideology under the guise of defunct Ottoman legitimacy.

2- **Ba'ath Party (Saddam's Regime)**: Dictator Saddam Hussein established a paramilitary training structure that included children as young as 16 years old, a decision made by the dissolved Revolutionary Command Council. Thousands of teenagers were subjected to military training for a few weeks in preparation to become future volunteers in "Saddam's Fedayeen[4]" (Fedayeen Saddam). Various groups were formed from the 1970s until 2001, including the "Youth Vanguard" and "Saddam's Cubs." These formations aimed to desensitize children to violence through training techniques that focused on killing and beating[5], thereby attempting to reinforce his authority by recruiting these children and indoctrinating them with Ba'athist political teachings to prepare them for military readiness[6].

Thus, Saddam Hussein's legacy extends throughout the administrative and bureaucratic structures of ISIS. This is due to the decision by Paul Bremer to dissolve the Iraqi army, which led many former officers to join insurgent groups ranging from al-Qaeda to ISIS. These officers played a significant role in planning military operations and transferring their expertise and agendas to the organization. This, in turn, affected recruitment practices, as the ideological overlap—particularly the use of fear to ensure compliance—and the rhetoric and punishment methods borrowed from the former regime, were evident. Additionally, the

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[1] Hassan Saad Abdelhamid, **"Public Policies for Combating Terrorism in Iraq"**, previously mentioned source, p. 13.
[2] Noaman Benotman and Nikita Malik, "The Children of the Islamic State", Quilliam Counter, London, 2016, pp. 21-24.
[3] **Hasso Hormi**, *ISIS and the Recruitment of Yazidi Children*, Rose Hallat Printing, Erbil, 2019, pp. 63-66.
[4] **Anthony H. Cordesman and Arleigh A. Burke**, Saddam's Last Circle: The Core Forces Likely to Protect Saddam in the "Battle of Baghdad", Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, 2003, p. 9.
[5] **Noaman Benotman and Nikita Malik**, *The Children of the Islamic State*, Quilliam Counter, London, 2016, p. 25.
[6] **Peter W. Singer**, *Facing Saddam's Child Soldiers*, on the Brookings website, 2003. Link, date of visit: July 30, hour 6:18.

term "Cubs of the Caliphate" was borrowed from "Saddam's Cubs." The former officers greatly contributed by bringing the secretive Ba'athist mentality and skills into the organization. Therefore, the rise of ISIS was not a coincidence but rather an outcome of the occupation's failure to eliminate the entrenched mindset and positions of its members[1].

ISIS adopts a program for the recruitment and indoctrination of children, as children are not born into extremist movements but are trained and educated to foster a desire to become part of the group. This process consists of six phases, which are:[2]

1. **Grooming (Enticement):** This is the initial exposure to ISIS's ideas, standards, and practices through propaganda, participation in public events, and indirect contact with active members (recruiters).
2. **Education:** Direct exposure to the recruit, accompanied by intensive indoctrination and training sessions.
3. **Selection:** Recruiters focus on evaluating each child's competencies and interests, then select children to join as new trainees. This process is known as "legitimate peripheral participation."
4. **Submission:** This involves physical and psychological coercion through intense training, isolation from family, wearing the organization's uniform, and deepening commitment through acts of loyalty and sacrifice, alongside showing discipline and solidarity during shared hardships.
5. **Specialization:** Enhancing skills and undergoing specialized training to develop specific competencies within the group.
6. **Positioning:** Assigning the recruited child to a role that matches their skills, with some selected for public appearances to attract new members to ISIS.

Third: The Goals of ISIS in Recruiting Children

The recruitment of children by ISIS serves not only to increase its human resources but also to achieve strategic and tactical advantages. By using children, ISIS creates emotional dilemmas for both international and local forces during their operations to expel ISIS and its members. This emotional response can hinder military actions, providing extremist groups with clear benefits by leveraging children as expendable assets in their conflicts. Thus, children become crucial to the sustainability of ISIS and similar terrorist organizations[3]. Therefore, ISIS's interest in securing an entire generation of children and youth lies in their commitment to the organization's values. They aim to cultivate a generation that is devout, dedicated to their principles, and aspires to recognition as more than just a rebellious group. Instead, ISIS seeks to be seen as an ambitious organization with goals that extend beyond regional and local control, striving to establish a complete society based on the values and norms they believe in.[4]

Objectives of Recruiting Children:

Children do not merely represent a military asset or a desperate attempt by ISIS to replenish its ranks after losses. Instead, they are a valuable and symbolic element crucial for the organization's survival, often referred to as "cubs" and projected to become "better fighters than the current ones[5]." Therefore, ISIS's objectives in recruiting children are as follows:

1. **Children as a Leverage for Organizational Continuity**: Children serve as a critical tool for the renewal and continuation of the caliphate, ensuring the organization's long-term survival and persistence.

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[1] **Liz Sly**, *The Hidden Hand Behind the Islamic State Militants? Saddam Hussein*, on the Washington Post, 2015. Link, date of visit: July 30.

[2] John G. Horgan et al., *From Cubs to Lions: A Six-Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State*, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, UK, 2016, pp. 11-13.

[3] Iman Seepersad, *Child Soldiers: Strategic Recruitment and Systematic Use*, Published by Generation for Rights Over the World, France, 2023, p. 10.

[4] Matthieu Guillier et al., *Protection of ISIS-Related Children in Northeast Syria and Iraq; and Repatriation Prospects of Foreign Minors*, Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations, Switzerland, 2021, p. 11.

[5] Ibid, p. 11.

2. **Children as a Source of Gains for Armed Leaders**: Due to their impressionable nature, children are a source of significant advantages for armed leaders, as they can be more easily controlled and retained within the organization[1].

3. **Children as a Strategic Choice**: For ISIS, children represent a smart choice because they symbolize the group's aim for continuity and growth. Importantly, they form a ground force driven by unwavering beliefs and loyalty.

4. **Children as the Future of Long-Term Conflict**: ISIS views children as the future against adversaries and aims to prepare a generation ready for extended conflict.

5. **Children as a Threat to Adversaries**: Children become a means of threatening any individuals, groups, or nations that challenge or seek to undermine ISIS's ideology. This is due to the systematic approach the organization uses to recruit children and secure their complete loyalty.[2]

Chapter Two: The Impact of Child Soldiers on Iraqi National Security

Since its emergence in Iraq, terrorism has followed a strategy aimed at undermining the country's national interests across all sectors of comprehensive power (military, security, economic, scientific, technological, political, social, cultural, media, etc.) to sustain and achieve its activities and goals. This strategy began with Al-Qaeda under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and continued with the terrorist organization ISIS, creating a state of security chaos to establish a foothold in Iraq for ongoing terrorist activities and goal achievement. It is undeniable that ISIS and its "Cubs of the Caliphate" represent a significant threat to Iraqi security. The impact of this threat is evident in its extent, origins, and forms, manifesting in the spread of violence and the adoption of new strategies for armed violence in various parts of Iraq and the Syrian-Iraqi border. These effects take various forms, which will be discussed in two sections:

The first requirement: Detention Camps and Their Risks to Iraqi National Security

After more than four years since the International Coalition declared the defeat of the last strongholds of ISIS and its prominent leaders, the threat from its displaced elements in the camps along the Iraqi-Syrian border remains ongoing. This heavy legacy of ISIS, which descended upon refugee camps following the Baghouz incident in 2019, has become a ticking time bomb for Iraqi security and the international community at large. Despite the extensive security campaign carried out by the Syrian Democratic Forces, with the support of international organizations and the International Coalition, to purge the camps of ISIS-affiliated elements, the attempts by fleeing members of the organization in Syria to carry out attacks and create security breaches within the sites continue. This has led to the inability of the forces responsible for camp security to curb the activities of extremist cells inside[3]. Among the most notable of these camps are:

1. **Al-Hol Camp:** Located in the far southeast of Hasakah Province in northeastern Syria, near the Iraqi-Syrian border, Al-Hol Camp was established in 1991 during the Gulf War by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to house Iraqi refugees during the war. It was reopened during the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003. Al-Hol is one of the largest and most crowded refugee camps since the 1990s, largely due to the ongoing instability in Iraq. However, after 2013, the camp transitioned from being a haven to a hotspot for extremism and security concerns, transforming from a refuge for those fleeing ISIS to a site for reconstituting the organization and recruiting new members[4].

2. **Roj Camp:** Opened in 2015 by the administration of Northern and Eastern Syria in the town of Derik, Roj Camp was initially intended to house and receive families and individuals fleeing from Hasakah and from Iraq due to ISIS attacks and internal conflicts in Syria and Iraq. However, after

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[1] John G. Horgan and others, editors, op. cit., pp. 2-5.

[2] Kara Anderson, "Cubs of the Caliphate: The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the Islamic State," International Institute for Counterterrorism, Israel, 2016, pp. 34-38.

[3] **"Trenches and Minds of ISIS at the al-Hol Camp: Cubs in the Terrorism Trap,"** Al-Ghad Newspaper, 2022. Available at https://alghad.com/, accessed on April 13, 2024.

[4] **Fatima Hussein Fadel Al-Mufaraji,** "Places of Extremism and Terrorism: Syrian Camps as Exemplified by al-Hol," Journal of Political Science, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, Iraq, Issue 64, 2023, pp. 192-194.

2017, the camp shifted from being a shelter for displaced persons to a site primarily for housing foreign ISIS families, while Iraqi and Syrian families were kept separate[1].

Although the primary objective of opening these camps was to shelter the displaced, they later transformed into arenas brimming with extremism. Among the main reasons contributing to the empowerment of extremism within the camps are:[2]

1. **Presence of a Diverse Population**: The camps host a mix of individuals from 60 different nationalities alongside Iraqis and Syrians.
2. **Lack of Strict Regulations**: There are few restrictions on individuals within the camps, and there is contact with the outside world, specifically with ISIS elements.
3. **ISIS's Ability to Implement Strategies**: ISIS has been able to implement its strategy to raise a new generation of terrorists, including children and women.
4. **Overlap Between Camps**: The overlap between the Al-Roj camp and Al-Hol camp, involving both ISIS families and displaced persons, has intensified the risks due to increased interactions among camp residents.

The end of the organization brought with it concerning and dangerous long-term effects, which pushed external members to adopt a new approach focused on destabilizing security and undermining local stability. This is evident in the camps housing the organization's families, where efforts to reorganize are underway amid global silence and slow responses from countries regarding their fate. This delay has led to a firm determination among individuals to remain loyal and uphold the caliphate banner. Consequently, camps, especially Al-Hol, have become the right arm of ISIS due to the massive human legacy left behind. This has resulted in a new terrorist threat due to the dense concentration of individuals around and within what is termed the "ISIS Operations Room."[3] As a result, this situation has produced several risks to Iraqi national security, including:

A. Women and Child Recruitment:

Children in the camps, such as Al-Hol and Al-Roj, grow up in a harsh and extremist environment that closely resembles the brutal conditions prevalent in ISIS-controlled areas before 2019, particularly within the departments for migrants and loyalists. This harsh environment is largely attributed to the influential women of the organization, who are actively involved in recruiting and preparing a new generation of young fighters. These women continuously train and indoctrinate the children, branding those who do not share their beliefs as infidels[4]. These activities are part of a broader strategy by these women to turn the camps into centers for indoctrinating thousands of children, referred to as "cubs," into ISIS's ideology and extremist views. They teach these children not only the principles of ISIS but also how to handle weapons and commit acts such as beheadings to continue the legacy of their parents.[5]

Therefore, children are considered one of the most perilous challenges facing societies, as many of them have received training from the organization and continued their training inside these camps, while some were born and indoctrinated there. This situation raises significant concerns about instilling brutality in future generations.[6]

B. Communication and Smuggling Operations:

The control of the camps (al-Hawl, al-Roj) may potentially weaken over time, coinciding with the increasing influence of the terrorist organization (ISIS). The camps have become akin to ISIS-controlled cities under

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[1] **"ISIS Children in Detention Camps and Rehabilitation Centers: Risks, Issues, and Containment Measures,"** Al-Furat Center for Studies, Syria, 2023, pp. 10-13.

[2] Ibid., pp. 10-14.

[3] Reber Khalaf, "Camp Detainees and Prisons: The Ongoing Threat of ISIS's Legacy in Northeast Syria," Al-Furat Center for Studies, Syria, 2020, pp. 4-7.

[4] Mohamed Hassan, "Camp al-Hol: The Unofficial ISIS State," Kurdish Conflict and Crisis Research Center, Iraq, 2022, p. 5.

[5] **Amna Fayad,** "Camp al-Hol: ISIS's Renewed Ammunition," Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt, 2023, p. 15.

[6] **Reber Khalaf**, *Source previously mentioned*, pp. 11-13.

the guise of refugee camps, lacking sufficient power to repel external or internal attacks. The situation grows more perilous day by day, particularly as the camps transform into "ISIS academies[1]." ISIS has managed to solidify its grip inside by propagating its ideology and replicating the structure of the previous caliphate through various forms of communication and smuggling. These operations are carried out by influential women, in line with al-Baghdadi's directive to surrender collectively to the Syrian Democratic Forces to infiltrate the camps, regain strength, and prepare for ISIS's resurgence in the future. Hence, the camps, especially al-Hawl, are referred to as the "ruling layer of ISIS."[2]

D. Murder and Targeting Operations:

The camps have become a battleground between ISIS cells, internal security forces, and refugees. There has been an increase in violence and crime within the camps, particularly following the attempted escape from al-Ghuwayran Prison, which revealed torture sites, hiding trenches, and weapons. As a result, murder and intimidation operations within the camps have surged to unprecedented levels. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have described the camps as environments where terrorist cells conceal themselves to reorganize.[3]

E. Armed Threats:

In February 2024, after a security operation conducted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the detention camps, a large cache of weapons and pro-ISIS fighters was uncovered. This signifies that the Iraqi-Syrian border is once again exposed to security threats.[4]

Specifically, with the Turkish incursion and the potential reduction in U.S. support to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) due to the Israeli war on Gaza since October 7, 2023, and the resulting preoccupation with this conflict, the risk levels are heightened.[5]

D - Money Smuggling: Internal smuggling operations rely on fundraising campaigns conducted through mobile phones. This step forms a new source of funding for ISIS, with estimates suggesting that bank payments to camp residents have exceeded $500,000[6]. These fundraising campaigns are organized via social media by women, using emotionally provocative titles such as "Sisters in Captivity" and "Birds in Bondage." The funds are transferred by sympathizers through official remittance systems (source).[7]

These activities collectively form a dangerous miniature caliphate within the camps, reflecting the ineffectiveness of security measures due to limited guarding, coupled with the large size of the camps that facilitates smuggling and breaches. This, in turn, has strengthened ISIS's network internally, posing a grave risk in the event of their escape and the loss of control over them.

The second requirement: The Impact of ISIS and the Cubs of the Caliphate on Iraqi National Security

The expansion of terrorist activities and child recruitment exposes national security (state security) and human security (individual security) to a range of challenges, as these are crimes against humanity that

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[1] **Ali Taher Al-Hamoud and Ahmed Qasim Muftan**, "The Human Legacy of ISIS: Returnees, Detainees, and Rehabilitation Programs," in Muhammad Abu Rumman et al. (Eds.), *After the Caliphate: Ideology, Propaganda, Organization, and Global Jihad*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Amman, 2021, p. 170.

[2] **Christian Vianna de Azevedo**, "ISIS Resurgence in Al-Hawl Camp and Human Smuggling Enterprises in Syria: Crime and Terror Convergence," *Journal of Perspectives on Terrorism*, Leiden University, Netherlands, Issue 4, 2020, pp. 45-52.

[3] **Abbas Ali Mousa et al.,** The ISIS State in Al-Hawl: Purges, Torture Sites, and Radical Schools for Extremists, and Gender Segregation, Dura Media Foundation, 2022, available at https://drawmedia.net/ar/page_detail?smart-id=11049, accessed March 19, 2024, 9:30 AM.

[4] *Al-Hawl Camp: The Time Bomb of ISIS*, Political and Security Studies Division, General Media Directorate, Popular Mobilization Forces, Iraq, 2024, p. 18.

[5] **The same source, p. 18.**

[6] **Ikram Ziyada**, "ISIS Reorganizes Again Inside Camps in Northern Syria," 2023, available at Europarabct, accessed March 20, 2024, 2:50 PM.

[7] **John Saleh**, "Women of ISIS and Al-Hawl Camp," **Fikr Forum for Policy Analysis**, 2021, available at Washington Institute, accessed March 20, 2024, 2:52 PM.

violate individual rights and freedoms, negatively affecting national security across various sectors. Some of the most notable impacts include:

First - The Impact of ISIS and the Cubs of the Caliphate on Iraq's National Security:

A- Reviving Sleeper Cells:

Despite the defeat of ISIS and its loss of control over most of the territory in Iraq and Syria, the organization remains a significant threat. Sleeper cells are one of the primary tools used by ISIS to carry out terrorist attacks and disrupt social stability in liberated areas. Reports indicate that ISIS maintains a substantial covert presence in both Iraq and Syria, with an estimated 10,000 active fighters in the two countries. The organization aims to:[1]

- Reactivating its cells in various areas of Syria and Iraq, and carrying out assassination operations against civilians and military personnel.
- Launching terrorist attacks against Iraqi security forces and the army, as well as targeting locations where international and regional forces are stationed[2].

The process of reactivating sleeper cells is based on the "Wall Demolition" strategy that the organization has followed since its early establishment leading up to the formation of ISIS. A directive was issued to loyal members via the *Al-Naba* newspaper, published by ISIS's Central Media Office, calling for the freeing of prisoners and the release of detainees. This has become one of the organization's primary objectives due to its losses after 2019 and the shortage of human and military resources. This shortage is attributed to the significant operations conducted by Iraqi security forces, which led to the arrest of prominent leaders, particularly in 2020 and 2021. Therefore, the organization is attempting to launch attacks on sites that contain its members to fill the gaps and restructure itself. This action is essentially in accordance with al-Baghdadi's directive before his targeting in Baghouz[3].

Most reports and intelligence information from the United States and United Nations members in 2023 indicate that the terrorist group continues to struggle. The new generations within the group, which have not experienced multiple setbacks, are planning to expand the group's activities and carry out external attacks. There is a potential for the organization to experience a resurgence.[4]

B. Terrorist Operations: After the military defeat, the organization realized its inability to re-establish the caliphate in a tangible form on the ground. Consequently, it transformed its caliphate into a virtual form and adapted its operations accordingly. ISIS shifted to guerrilla warfare and began operating in various locations within Iraqi provinces and the desert, integrating with local populations and relying on Iraqi elements rather than foreign ones. This shift is due to the ease of interactions and the familiarity of these local elements with the geographical locations and regional issues. Terrorist operations and destabilizing security are among the key combat strategies of ISIS and mark the resurgence of its activity in Iraq. In late 2023 and early 2024, several Iraqi cities witnessed sporadic activities and operations[5].

C. Juvenile Detention Facilities:

The issue of prisons in Iraq is among the most complex problems due to their nature, which creates an environment conducive to extremism and the recruitment of new members. This complexity is exacerbated by the large number of juveniles with various criminal backgrounds, particularly those linked to ISIS. Keeping these children in detention centers aggravates the problem of radicalization rather than correcting their behavior, due to the violence they may face and the large numbers which facilitate the spread of

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[1] **Siham Abdulrahman**, "Counterterrorism: Risks of ISIS Sleeper Cells in Iraq," **European Center for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies**, 2022, available at Europarabct, accessed March 29, 2024, 12:02 PM.
[2] Same source.
[3] **Ali Najat,** "Hitting the Walls: ISIS's Strategy for New Revival," Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning, Iraq, 2022, pp. 3-7.
[4] **Jeff Seldin**, "Signs Emerge IS Struggling to Keep Up Fight in Iraq & Syria," VOA, April 2023, https://www.voanews.com/, accessed March 29, 2024, 10:40 AM.
[5] **Othman Al-Mukhtar,** "The Rise of ISIS Activity in Iraq and Syria: Activation of Cells and Media," 2024, available at https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/, accessed March 30, 2024, 1:59 AM.

influence among them. In a closed environment, children often have no choice but to accept and submit, starting with the reception of new arrivals, forming personal relationships, and then beginning brainwashing processes through a "one-on-one" approach. They are filled with distorted religious ideas, engage in ideological exchanges, and are influenced by others. This radicalization is particularly problematic if there is no separation between extremist prisoners and common criminals, which will undoubtedly speed up the process of radicalization due to isolation from the prevailing society.[1]

Indeed, the continued detention of children associated with ISIS, whether as fighters or non-combatants, exacerbates the challenges faced by the Iraqi government and poses increasing future risks to security. These children act as ticking time bombs threatening societal peace, particularly as they grow up with the belief that Iraq is an enemy. This results in the accumulation of feelings of hatred and a desire for revenge, further fueling potential future conflicts and instability.

D. Border Areas: The desert of Badiya, located on the Syrian-Iraqi border, is a significant stronghold for ISIS due to its expansive terrain extending into the Iraqi desert, reaching the Hamrin Mountains and the Makhmur area. This region serves as a crucial base because of its complex terrain and mountains that aid in camouflage and concealment. It also allows for the establishment of training camps for military and ideological indoctrination of individuals who have been smuggled from detention camps and prisons. Additionally, it facilitates the activation of smuggling networks and provides logistical support. This is attributed to the lack of effective military force to combat the organization in these areas, which has created a space for their activities under the strategy of hit-and-run and positioning.[2]

E. Loss of Security Stability:

It can be said that the security situation in Iraq and its successive crises reflect what happened in European liberal democracies, as embodied by Austrian poet **Erich Fried** in his 1978 collection **"One Hundred Poems Without a Homeland.[3]"** Iraq has been marked by a series of crises since the 1980s, continuing through 2003, when the American occupation introduced a new approach to Iraqi society. Due to limited democratic thinking, some Iraqis joined various terrorist groups sequentially, leading to the rise of ISIS. This has resulted in Iraq being in a constant state of emergency, with a reduction in rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression. The society remains chaotic and unstable, unable to respond in an organized manner. This has produced generations of terrorism that continue to this day, with the recent experience creating a generation not only of Iraqi origin but also from diverse social backgrounds worldwide. This poses a threat to Iraq's future security, potentially leading to the resurgence of terrorism through detained and escaped children as sleeper cells in various locations, and a more dangerous resurgence of conflict.[4]

F. Political Impact:

The Iraqi decision regarding the withdrawal of coalition forces from the country, combined with the increase in terrorist attacks across Africa, Iraq, Syria, and even Europe, significantly impacts global counterterrorism efforts and regional security. This withdrawal may trigger a series of political and security problems, potentially providing the terrorist organization with an opportunity to regain local power. Despite its weakened state in Syria and Iraq, the organization remains capable of diversification and restructuring itself in various locations. While it may not reach the same level of control it had between 2013 and 2017, it could still renew its forces and seize significant portions of territory, surpassing its current activities in shadow governance and rebuilding its operations. This could undermine the counterterrorism successes achieved over the past five years and partially bolster the resurgence of the

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[1] **Wafaa Sindi, "**Affiliated with ISIS: Challenges of Return and Reintegration for Women and Children," United Nations Development Programme, Iraq, 2022, pp. 55-57.

[2] **ISIS and Jihadists in Syria**: Reasons for the Resurgence of ISIS," European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies, 2023, available at https://www.europarabct.com, accessed March 31, 2024.

[3] **Arman Matlar,** *Comprehensive Surveillance: The Basis of the Security System*, translated by Mirai Younes, Antoine Abdullah, and Raymond Shaheen, Printing and Publishing Company, Lebanon, 2013, p. 174.

[4] **Azhar Abdullah Hassan Al-Hussaini**, *Electronic Recruitment and Its Implications for International Security (The Case of ISIS)*, Journal of Sustainable Studies, Iraq, Issue 4, 2023, p. 507.

organization, particularly due to the large number of its followers and detained members in northeastern Syria.[1]

Second: The Impact of ISIS and the Caliphate Cubs on Iraq's Human Security

Terrorism has employed a strategy of tearing apart the Iraqi fabric in various forms, including the destruction of cultural heritage and historical sites, as well as fostering division among different ethnic and sectarian groups through heightened sectarian and identity-based rhetoric. The impacts on society, particularly on children, can be categorized as follows:

A. Stoking Sectarian Tensions:

ISIS has reverted to its original form as a rebellious movement focused on reopening sectarian issues as a primary goal to re-establish its base, similar to what happened in previous years. Drawing inspiration from the Quran and Hadith, ISIS manipulates religious narratives to fit its terrorist agenda, distorting the true teachings of Islam. This approach reflects its refusal to accept the decline of its extremist movement. The organization has once again employed sectarian incitement, attempting to rekindle and exacerbate sectarian conflict. ISIS fighters and the trained generations in various regions and detention centers have vowed to continue the fight. Their preparation of children is based on a millennial perspective and an intergenerational conflict framework that differs from most revolutionary groups. Given the significance of this aspect, ISIS has resumed its violent engagement with the ethnic, sectarian, and religious diversity in Iraq[2].

B. Destruction of Cultural Heritage:

The exploitation of cultural heritage by terrorism is a grave phenomenon that threatens identity and civilization, serving as a means to prolong conflict by destroying archaeological sites. ISIS aims to eradicate all memories of Mesopotamian civilization that existed before Islam, seeking to prevent future generations from recognizing their historical heritage, which is a fundamental structure for building society. By targeting cultural heritage, the organization has intensified conflict and deprived populations of their cultural identity. In this context, Gabriel Martínez-Gros, a professor of medieval history at the University of London, pointed out that ISIS views everything that existed before Islam in the land of Islam as something that should not exist[3]. This represents the highest degree of ideological monopoly, instilled through a crusade against everything unrelated to Islam[4], particularly by indoctrinating children. Additionally, the organization seeks to persecute minorities and eliminate cultural diversity by labeling other religions as infidels and enemies of Islam.

C. Economic Impact: After its defeat in Iraq, the organization attempted to regain its strength by adopting various strategies, including economic warfare. This involved attacking farms, facilities, and infrastructure, particularly targeting fuel stations, oil wells, and oil and gas pipelines. Key aspects that the organization exploited to disrupt the Iraqi economic system include:

1. **War on Towers:** Despite its battlefield defeat, ISIS has been working to regain its strength, drawing on fighters who replicate the experiences of both al-Qaeda and ISIS. To assert its presence on the ground, ISIS has employed various combat tactics that inflict economic damage. In 2021, the group launched over 400 attacks in Iraq, accounting for 80% of their global economic warfare operations. The former leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi, ordered campaigns aimed at economic sabotage in Iraq to threaten and harm the Iraqi economy. From May 1 to May 8, 2021, over 75 major energy towers were targeted in northern and northeastern Iraq, including the Mersad line connecting to Iran in

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[1] **Haroun Y. Zilina and Ilana Winter**, *One Year on the Map of ISIS Activities Worldwide*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 20, 2024, available at link https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/am-wahd-ly-khrytt-anshtt-tnzym-aldwlt-alaslamyt-ly-alsyd-alalmy , accessed April 6, 2024, 7:40.

[2] **Brian Glenn Williams, "ISIS and Military and Strategic Adaptations in the Post-Caliphate Phase,"** in Mohammad Abu Rumman et al., editors, as previously mentioned source, pp. 127-130.

[3] **Virginia Soner, "ISIS and Cultural Heritage in Syria and Iraq (Issues and Actors at Different Levels),"** translated and published by Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning, Iraq, 2022, pp. 3-5.

[4] Samantha Mahod and Halim Rane, "Islamist Narratives in ISIS Recruitment Propaganda," The Journal of International Communication, UK, No. 1, 2017, pp. 23-25.

Diyala Province. On July 3, 2021, 61 energy towers were damaged, along with transmission towers. Nearly 200 electricity towers were destroyed, with these attacks concentrated in Anbar, Diyala, Salah ad-Din, and the Jurf al-Nasr area.[1]

2. **Destruction of Agricultural Land:** It is widely agreed that ISIS used oil to fund its operations and excavated reservoirs to store it. When ISIS was defeated, military operations caused explosions in the pipelines, leading to oil spills into agricultural land. The situation worsened with rainfall, as the spilled oil was buried by Iraqi security forces and left untreated afterward. This led to soil contamination and absorption of petroleum and oils, resulting in losses for farmers and a reduction in cultivated areas near the pipelines previously controlled by ISIS.[2]

D. Social Impact: The social impact can be represented on two levels, as follows:

1- **Direct Impact:** The violence and brutal methods employed by ISIS have had a profound effect on the social fabric of Iraq. The main impacts are[3]:

- **Escalation of Sectarian Divisions:** ISIS's actions have deepened sectarian rifts, not only among Muslim communities but also affecting other groups. This has posed a serious threat to Iraqi national unity.
- **Breakdown of Family Bonds and Changes in Social Behavior:** Many Iraqis have lost family members due to violence, leading to the disintegration of families. Additionally, Iraqi society has become more focused on survival, with individuals primarily concerned with securing basic needs and distancing themselves from the broader social and political issues, as a means of coping with the ongoing instability.
- **Individual and Societal Discrimination Against ISIS Children**: The terrorist acts have led to the breakdown of social bonds among individuals, with fear and suspicion dominating relationships. This has led the Iraqi social system to adopt a practice of *stigmatization* and exclusion for those associated with the organization. Children have faced prejudice and both official and social rejection. Tribal leaders have decided to expel families with presumed connections to ISIS and prevent their return, treating children and women as accomplices to the crimes committed by the organization, subjecting them to forced eviction and expulsion. This decision has generalized the belief that these children are dangerous and different from ordinary individuals, leading to a clear divide between "us" and "them." Consequently, those affected are sent to camps, and even those who have been in camps since 2016 refuse to return due to fears about what will happen.[4]

2- **Indirect Impact**: This refers to the psychological effects on children that are not immediately visible but have significant repercussions for security:

A- Given the circumstances of upbringing and environment, these factors play a significant role in shaping a child's development, personality, thinking level, and psychological state. This has serious psychological repercussions for children recruited by terrorist organizations[5]. For example, the experience of children in ISIS—spending their formative years in terrorist operations and extremist detention centers—results in their development being heavily influenced by principles of violence and power. This creates a substantial psychological burden on their lives, compounded by repressed fear. Even after leaving conflict zones, this

[1] **Ali Najat**, *ISIS and the Possibility of Repeating the Tower War Tactic Scenario*, Riwaq Baghdad Center, Iraq, 2022, pp. 2-11.
[2] **How ISIS Caused Contaminated Oil Spills in Iraq**, on Asharq Al-Awsat, 2024, available at https://aawsat.com/, accessed on 1-4-2024 at 10:27.
[3] **Emad Allo**, *Social Implications of ISIS Expansion*, article published on Al-Zaman, 6-9-2014, available at https://www.azzaman.com, accessed on 28-3-2024 at 4:35.
[4] Adnan Yassin Mustafa and Asmaa Jameel Rashid, **"Children of ISIS: The Legacy of Conflict and the Darkness of the Future,"** Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning, Iraq, 2022, pp. 102-105.
[5] Azhar Abdullah Hassan Al-Hussaini, **"Online Recruitment and Its Implications for International Security (The ISIS Model),"** previously mentioned source, p. 508.

fear persists, leading to long-term effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and difficulties in social adaptation.[1]

B. Loss of National Belonging: The absence of a normal childhood and growing up amidst violence leads these children to lose their sense of belonging to their countries. This inevitably fosters a strong sense of revenge in the minds of recruited children, which can drive them to engage in numerous violent acts and behaviors against others, believing they are avenging their nation and cause. Consequently, it becomes easier to exploit and manipulate them into carrying out attacks against their communities.[2]

3. Conclusion and Findings:

The threats posed by the terrorist organization ISIS are not confined to a single form, especially after its defeat post-2017. Instead, these threats have manifested in various forms, with one of the most significant being the issue of children. The presence of children within ISIS ranks is not merely about increasing the organization's manpower; it carries a tactical advantage and serves as a defensive line against potential adversaries. This is because any forces, whether international or local, are likely to respond emotionally during the evacuation of ISIS when children are involved. The inclusion of children in terrorism presents significant risks. Beyond the immediate threat, the extensive violations and the adoption of new methods for camouflage and concealment, combined with the use of social media for propaganda and recruitment, make it increasingly difficult for Iraqi security forces to pursue and control these individuals. This complexity results in adverse impacts on Iraq's national security across all dimensions.

The research has led to several key conclusions, including:

1. **ISIS's Focus on Securing a New Generation:** ISIS's commitment to securing an entire generation of youth and children reflects their deep belief in and dedication to their values. They aspire to be recognized not merely as a rebellious group but as a comprehensive social system with unique norms and values that they hold dear.
2. **Symbolic and Strategic Role of Children**: For ISIS, children are not merely a desperate attempt to replenish their ranks but are a crucial symbolic and strategic asset. They are essential for the continuity of the organization and its extremist ideology.
3. **Children as Strategic Investments:** Children represent a critical investment for the future, with their young age providing clear advantages for both ideological indoctrination and operational purposes.
4. **Importance of Ideological Indoctrination:** The resurgence of ISIS relies more on those who have been indoctrinated and raised with the group's principles rather than former members. Those raised in this environment demonstrate a profound difference in loyalty and commitment compared to initial recruits, particularly in their dedication to the caliphate.
5. **Long-Term Legacy of Violence:** ISIS aims to leave a lasting legacy of violence and radical ideology among children. This deliberate strategy is intended to deepen the roots of violence and extremism, with children becoming the enduring embodiment of this legacy for the foreseeable future.
6. **Current and Future Risks:** The immediate danger posed by these terrorist groups includes the ongoing recruitment of children amidst the silence of governments and international bodies regarding detention camps. The future risk involves the continued delay in dismantling these camps and rehabilitating their occupants resulting in losing control and the spread of extremist ideologies. This situation may lead to the recruitment of individuals who were not previously members of the group, including refugees from Iraq and Syria, increasing the risk of a resurgence of the organization and a potential loss of security control.

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[1] Mustafa Ibrahim Salman Al-Shammari, **"Child Recruitment in African Conflicts and Its International Dimensions,"** Journal of Political Science, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, No. 64, 2022, p. 183.
[2] **"Children of ISIS in Camps and Rehabilitation Centers (Risks, Issues, and Containment Strategies),"** previously mentioned source, p. 33.

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[2] **Arman Matlar**, *Comprehensive Surveillance as the Basis of the Security System*, Translated by: Mirai Younes, Antoine Abdullah, and Raymond Shaheen, Printing and Publishing Company, Lebanon, 2013.

[3] **Amna Fayad**, *Camp al-Hol: The Renewed Arsenal of ISIS*, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Egypt, 2023.

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[5] **Children of ISIS in Detention Camps and Rehabilitation Centers (Risks, Issues, and Containment Strategies)**, Al-Furat Center for Studies, Syria, 2023.

[6] **Ikram Ziyad**, *ISIS Reorganizes within Camps in Northern Syria*, 2023, Accessed March 20, 2024, Available at: https://www.europarabct.com/.

[7] **Brian Glenn Williams**, *ISIS and Military and Strategic Adaptation Mechanisms in the Post-Khalifa Phase*, in Muhammad Abu Rumman and Others, Eds., *Post-Khalifa State: Ideology, Propaganda, Organization, and Global Jihad*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Amman, 2021.

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[11] **Hassan Saad Abdulhamid**, *Public Policies for Combating Terrorism in Iraq*, Democratic Center for Strategic and Economic Policy Studies, Berlin, 2017.

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[22] **Suzie Mohamed Rashad**, *The Issue of the Relationship Between New Terrorism and Digital Media*, Journal of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt, Issue 1, 2019, pp. 160-164.

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[24] **Samah Abdelsabour**, *Digital Terrorism: The Use of Social Media by Armed Groups*, Future Center for Research and Advanced Studies, Egypt, Issue 2, 2014.

[25] **Siham Abdulrahman**, *Combating Terrorism: The Risks of ISIS's Sleeper Cells in Iraq*, European Center for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies, 2022, Available at: https://www.europarabct.com/.

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