The Rise of Extremism in post-2003 Iraq A root-cause approach to why violent actors emerges in the Middle East

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This paper navigates the intricate landscape of academic inquiries into the complexities of violence in the Middle East. Focusing on various research approaches, I attempt to illuminate their differences and contextual applications, emphasising the need for comprehensive investigations into the root causes of violence in 'repressive settings.' Such inquiries offer essential insights into motivational factors and variables influencing the radicalisation process towards violent extremism.

While exploring the utility of radicalisation in understanding home-grown terrorism in European settings, a noticeable disparity emerged between its application in Europe and the Middle East. Drawing from a diverse range of theories in political science, international relations, law, and psychology, this analysis sheds light on the multidimensional nature of the subject.

The significance of historical context is underscored, echoing Mundy's call for a careful examination of historical arrangements, practices, and processes to understand the relationship between organised violence and the Middle East. The exploration of sectarian identity as a framework revealed its role as a political tool rather than the root cause of violence. A pivotal contribution is the identification of state fragility as a crucial variable in the causal model of the rise of violent actors, explaining variations in terrorism occurrences across states with shared historical and religious backgrounds.

Examining pathways towards violence, I highlight temporal aspects and the prominence of models favouring cognitive or behavioural approaches, with step/phase models emerging as valuable tools in

addressing how radicalisation occurs.

Through an analysis of different levels—micro, meso, and macro—it becomes possible to uncover the environmental factors contributing to terrorism. The three-level analysis in International Relations provides a systematic framework, encompassing international, domestic, and individual levels.

In essence, this paper proposes a pathway and framework for researchers to analyse the processes of violence and its emergence, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the region's context and offering valuable insights for future research endeavours.

Keywords: Radicalisation, Middle East, Violent extremism, State fragility, Three-level analysis (or International Relations theory), Root Cause Theory.

هدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم لمحة شاملة حول القضايا الأكاديمية المثارة في محاولة فهم العنف الذي يندلع في الشرق الأوسط. سعى هذا البحث إلى فتح الطريق نحو توضيح الفروق الجوهرية في النهج البحثي المستخدم والسياق الذي تم استخدامه. نتج عن ذلك تسليط الضوء على أن البحث الواسع والحيوي ضروري جدًا للنظر في الأسباب الجذرية للعنف في "البيئات القمعية"، حيث يمكن أن يوفر رؤى هامة حول العوامل المحفزة والمتغيرات الأخرى المؤثرة في عملية التطرف نحو الراديكالية العنيفة، في حين استكشفنا فائدة مفهوم التطرف في فهم ظاهرة الإرهاب المحلي في إعدادات أوروبية، تم التعرف على أن المفهوم موجه بشكل رئيسي نحو فهم الإرهاب المحلي في السياق الأوروبي، وهو يختلف كثيرًا عن الإعدادات الشرقية الأوسط. يلقي تحليلنا الضوء على الطبيعة المتنوعة لهذا الموضوع من خلال الاستفادة من نظريات متنوعة في العلوم السياسية والعلاقات الدولية والقانون وعلم النفس سلط الضوء على أهمية السياق التاريخي، مع التأكيد على نداء **Mundy** لفحص دقيق للترتيبات والممارسات والعمليات التاريخية لفهم العلاقة بين العنف المنظم والشرق الأوسط. أظهر استكشافنا لهوية الطائفة كإطار دورها كأداة سياسية بدلاً من السبب الجذري للعنف. إسهامًا محوريًا هو تحديد هشاشة الدولة كمتغير حاسم في النموذج السببي لظهور الجهات العنيفة، مما يفسر التباين في حدوث الإرهاب عبر الدول التي تشترك في الخلفيات التاريخية والدينية من خلال استكشاف المسارات نحو العنف، نسلط الضوء على الجوانب الزمنية وبروز النماذج المفضلة للتوجهات الإدراكية أو السلوكية، حيث تظهر نماذج الخطوة/المرحلة كأدوات قيمة للتعامل مع سؤال كيفية حدوث التطرف. من خلال تحليل مستويات مختلفة - الميكرو والميزو والماكرو - نكشف عن العوامل البيئية التي تسهم في الإرهاب. تقدم نظرية تحليل الثلاثة مستويات في العلاقات الدولية إطارًا منهجيًا، يغطي المستوى الدولي والمستوى الداخلي والفردي. في جوهره، يوفر هذا البحث مسارًا وإطارًا يمكن للباحثين اعتماده في سعيهم لتحليل عمليات العنف، وظهورها، وتقديم رؤى حول كيفية مناقشتها في سياق المنطقة.

Introduction

The war on Iraq was a significant catalyst for the restarting of al-Qaeda's foot soldiers' recruitment campaign. The expansion of terrorist activities has considerably developed within the Middle East due to the war on Iraq. Michael Schener, a senior intelligence analyst who was in charge of tracking Bin Laden from 1996, writes in his book Imperial Hubris (2004) 'there is nothing Bin Laden could have hoped for more than the American invasion and occupation of Iraq [is considered as] Osama Bin Laden's gift from America'. A compelling statement that proved to be accurate in its assessment or at least in the sense that the war on Iraq would ignite the spark to one of the most extreme groups to emerge in recent history, sending political shockwaves across the world as it shuffles to formulate the expansion of a new political order that did not consider the demarcation of Sykes-Picot Middle East[1], it was developing its own (Mako, 2021; Veen et al., 2017).

Given this understanding of the consequences of the invasion, it prompts a crucial question: Why did the U.S. undertake such a provocative and illegal war?[2] Acts that not only played into the hands of terrorist groups but also escalated violence in the already volatile Middle East, reinforcing the perception of an inherently violent region.[3] Such acts diminish credibility amid world standings and leave the U.S. in a more vulnerable place than it was before the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[4]

Subsequently, it was after the U.S led invasion in Iraq and the collapse of Saddam's regime that we witnessed the waves of violence macerating through a vail of sectarian and religious enmities that rose to the surface after being thus far kept in check by the ejected regime (Rubaii 2019). Across Iraq, incidents perpetrated through vicious car bombs in prominently Shiite districts gave rise to a Shiite militia and death squads. Intern, they took it upon themselves to retaliate, and in no time, the country was hurled into a vicious cycle of sectarian war, primarily 'instigated by the minority Arab Sunni community' (Wilbank & Karsh, 2010).[5]

During Saddam's ruling years and his regime, the Arab Sunni population had long dominated the political landscape, holding sway for centuries in terms of political and economic influence. The US-led invasion disrupted this state structure, thus alienating the Sunni minority. The resentment stemming from these actions gave birth to the so-called 'Sunni Triangle', the vast area between Baghdad in the south, Mosul in the north and Rutba in the East now engulfed in discontent.[6]

While the U.S celebrated its 'victory' in Iraq, the streets were embracing the beginning of violent internal clashes and terrorist campaigns, coinciding with a surge in terrorist attacks on European soil. [7] The notion of 'shock and awe' as a successful strategy was replaced by a new era of 'hearts and minds' (Sageman, 2008b, p. 94). Behind this shift lay the failure of policies in a state-building project and the unintended consequences that unfolded, viewed by some as a success in implementing 'divide and rule' policies (H. Cordesman, 2020). Nevertheless, others see this as a complete success for the 'real' intended outcome rooted in historical approaches derived from the global north seeking to adopt a divide and rule policies to control regions (Rubaii, 2019).

While the Middle East was witnessing the rise of ISIS and the launch of its version of 'shock and awe'[8] campaign, European and U.S. cities became increasingly targeted. Over the past two decades, the western governments grappled with the growing threat of Islamist inspired radicalisation. The rise of home-grown terrorism among European citizens committing international and national violence became a pressing research concern, magnified by incidents such as the murder of Theo Van Gogh, a Dutch filmmaker in Amsterdam and the attacks on the underground system in London (Kundnani, 2012, p. 6).

To unearth the factors around the rise of violent extremism, academia became intrinsic to understand the 'enemy' and the determinants of their 'success'[9] (Maskaliunaite, 2015). Consequently, 'the concept of radicalisation emerged as a vehicle for policymakers to explore the process by which a terrorist was made and provide an analytical grounding for preventative strategies…' (Kundnani, 2012, p. 5). European governments began

formulating counter-radicalisation policies to deter terrorist attacks (Neumann & Stoil, 2008, p. 3)[10], focusing on identifying driving factors and indicators of individual or group radicalisation as part of an early warning system (Kundnani, 2012, p. 5).

A review on the literature around the rise of violent actors springs up a list of theories steaming from political science, law and psychology.[11] These disciplines provided a lens that attempted to build comprehensive frameworks in understanding the factors and limitations of why and how individuals radicalise in the West. With most research focused on how and why individuals/ groups radicalise in the West (non-repressive settings), there has been a significant lapse in work geared towards understanding the emergence of violence in authoritarian regimes (repressive settings) that statistically suffer the most as a result of terrorism.[12] Even with work conducted to tackle such regions, a debate on comparative works' reliability is still ongoing.[13] Such areas are considered 'repressive' by Della Porta, which she highlights as a remarkable area that provides substantial sources and data to the debate (Della Porta and LaFree, 2012).

This dichotomy of 'repressive' vs 'non-repressive understanding is reminiscent of President George Bush's Manichean ultimatum, ‘either with us or against us’.[14] This dualism that has been prominent within the orient that in its crudest form espouses a parallel cultural difference from which a dynamic and vibrant west contrasted with a failing and static East. The 'us' versus 'them' debate and the question of Middle East violence has been primarily framed in response to Edward Said's (1978) orientalism. According to Etienne Balibar, this represents the split in historical cultures of humanity. The first assumes universalistic and progressive attributes, the other regarded as irremediably particularistic and primitive. Under such conditions[15], it is essential to note that research conducted in these fields have primarily drawn from the literature of social movements, where radicalisation is understood to be an escalation process leading to violence. (Porta, 2012, 6). In contrast, when looking at how we understand the rise of violence in repressive settings, we tend to see the utility of political science and

International Relations (I.R.) due to the political orientation behind major conflicts. Therefore, political opportunities become an instrumental driver behind the recurrence of violence in such regions (C. Lopez, D.P. Johnson 2017).

By further exploring and tracing the origins of the rise of violent actors in the Middle East, Jacoby Mundy (2019) halts all conventional theories that seek to understand the violence in the Middle East. He suggests that 'to form an actual understanding of the relationship between organised violence and the Middle East [we] must first attend to the arrangements, practices and processes that have given rise to this regional effect'. Therefore, to ask questions as to why does the Middle East experience so much violence? Do we also need to ask what is the Middle East? By doing so, Mundy suggests that violence in the Middle East can only be addressed by examining the actual processes whereby regions historically emerge. In doing so, Mundy highlights the importance of historical violent arrangements, practices and procedures that constitute the actual conditions of its conceptual and material possibility. Mundy argues that these practices that have rendered the Middle East a zone of extreme violence are uniquely violent. Therefore, any attempt to theorise the Middle East must consider the very violence that has constituted and reproduced it as a region; otherwise, we will confuse consequence for cause.

Understanding violence in the Middle East

Understanding violence in the Middle East requires a historical perspective that traces the region's emergence and its entanglement with external forces. Jacoby Mundy (2019) sees that 'in order to form an actual understanding of the relationship between organised violence and the Middle East [we] must first attend to the arrangements, practices and processes that have given rise to this regional effect'. Therefore, to ask such questions as to why does the Middle East experience so much violence? we also need to ask what is the Middle East? Mundy (2019) points out that the question of Middle East violence can only be addressed through an examination of the actual processes whereby regions[16] historically emerge. This

examination extends back to the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, where colonial ambitions, epitomised by the Sykes-Picot agreement marked the region's genesis (D. Berdina, 2018). Thus, the Middle East became a product of imperial military thought and action that coincidently emerged at the intersection of two violent practices: capital accumulation and war-making. (Mundy, 2019, 13).

Mundy's approach attempts to illustrate the 'invention' of the Middle East as mainly the product of orientalism. It helped impose an identity upon diverse people and communities who were within themselves attempting to forge their modernity. However, and more importantly, the way the Middle East had conceived in actions such as imperial geography[17], military conquest, political subordination, and extractive accumulation was geared towards exercising power over the people.

During the mid-twentieth century, in the era of the post-colonial world, the U.S. found in the concept of 'regions', a practical technology that served as a profitable mechanism amid internal U.S. political and financial instability. The old global division methods proved outdated for strategic planning; this meant a new system was needed to develop the global strategic framework that enables political and economic control over these lands. The convergence of events, such as the first world war, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the expansion of North Atlantic dominance into the region, introduced the Middle East to a broader western audience. Thus, it began to be encoded into bureaucratic and scholarly discourse. Years that followed saw the North Atlantic powers in coalition with major oil companies exploit the region's oil. After World War II, the Middle East was further realised as a zone from which war-making and global capital accumulation can be achieved (Owen, 1981)

Central to this approach is the concept of political technology[18] is a technique used for measuring land and controlling terrain (Elden 2010, 811-12). The cartographic territorialisation of regions thus served to outline the new colonial domains that often disrupted or repurposed the lived geography of these populations (Lewis and

Wigen 1997, 158-162), which brings Mundy to conclude that the Middle East as a region must be recognised as a territorial project championed by extra-territorial forces. Moreover, Mundy's issue seems to revolve around the lack of agreement on demarcation of the region drawn across ethno-sectarian and religious lines, creating endless contestation between the indigenous population, a trademark of the processes that had given rise to the Middle East and reproduced it. Even more sinister is the evolving transnational arrangements and practices that have affected the Middle East's appearance have been at their core, inherently and intensively violent (David Harvey 1973).

The introduction of racialised cartographies and the subsequent re-inscription of the Middle East as a 'race-space' identifiable through its culture and religion from which perception of these racialised areas came to be understood and, more importantly, assumed to be the truth,[19] a space of culturally inherent authoritarianism and conflict. This is important as it serves as a central launching pad for armed intervention and the masking of violence used during these interventions. These methods conveniently exult any liability resulting from the internal armed conflict that subsequently escalates due to the 'intervention'; instead, it is blamed on the seemingly pre-existing, self-generating and independently agentic socio-cultural entity. In doing so, no regard is taken to such violence's economic and political objectives (Jacoby 2017).

Mundy seeks to demonstrate the dense entanglement of the Middle East and the resulting violence that emanates from it. He proposes a theory that centres around violent practices in the Middle East's constitution and reproduction as a region to pursue financial and political gains, seen as a 'stupendous source of strategic power and one of the greatest material prizes world history' (State Department, 1945). Essential to understanding his theory is the notion of Political technologies for territorial space making[20]. In that, the Middle East as a region must be recognised as a territorial project championed by extra-territorial forces. Therefore, the territory is best conceptualised as a 'political technology', in other words, techniques used to measure land and control terrain.

One of the primary mechanisms for achieving the said western objectives is the formulation of the culturalist narrative. Thus, Jacoby (2017) argues that culturalist discourse has been influential in our current perception (rightly or wrongly) in understanding the rise of violent actors such as ISIL. In his view, this reduces the prospect of identifying political and economic objectives to Western policymakers' advantage. In its essence, culturalism proposes a clash of civilisation, them vs us. As such, within the war on terror, such classification will prove counter-productive considering the importance of mobilising Muslim states as allies. The result has been a more refined form of culturalism that distinguishes between different types of Muslims, namely the distinction between 'good'[21] and 'bad[22]' Muslims (Mamdani 2015).[23] However, the concept of culturalism in its entirety proposes a stumbling block in the case of garnishing regional support from a primarily Muslim based constituency. As such, the introduction of 'bad Muslims' by Mamdani (2015) presented a workable alternative, where the enemy is identifiable through its cultural and extreme ideology.

The rise of ISIL and the U.S. response in what came to be known as Operation Inherent Resolve in 2014 tasked with exposing ISIL's 'true' nature by the then State Department's Centre for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications. An extensive programme was developed to delegitimise its (ISIL's) ideology which was defined as burying its false appeals to religious legitimacy …through rapid response messaging to expose its true nature as a brutal criminal enterprise devoted to the mass murder of innocents.[24] Building on the 'good' vs 'bad' Muslim, state department Powell put it as the war on terror intended to defend Muslims from other Muslims'.[25] In doing so, Jacoby argues that this discourse had three principal elements that provide -a framework for presenting ISIL's motives and for legitimising response from the West. These three elements are highlighted to be faith, sectarianism, and barbarism.

The first suggests that the 'enemy' is mobilised by faith, that the main driver is not political or economic objectives, but a particular interpretation of Islam that is brutal offers western policymakers an understanding of the threat that needs elimination. In this instance,

the nature of good Muslim vs bad Muslim provides a starting point from which the battles are identified. Thus, it presents itself as a battle against bad Muslims, who are adopting an extreme form of Islam with no political or economic objective and is horrifically barbaric and backwords in nature. Jacoby comments that by looking at the enemy as being mobilised by faith (extremist interpretation of it), culturalist narrative has the advantage of identifying potential allies and portraying 'our' response as progressive and modern, which gives legitimacy for the violence that will be caused as a result.

The second category sees an internal ancient sectarian hatred that bubbled up once the western occupation's guiding hand ended in 2011. This conveniently absolves western states from any responsibility for the pattern of violence that has emerged in Iraq. This also conveniently conceals the origins of violence and the role of western powers in the rise of sectarian conflict.

The third category is to label the 'insurgents'/ ISIL as barbaric and exceptionally brutal, senseless, cultist and nihilistic, which cannot be reasoned with and can only be confronted with force. Therefore, distinguishing between 'our' violence and 'their' violence. Our violence being the necessary and proportionate, while theirs is senseless and as Mamdani concludes, 'simply the result of evil' (2015).

Jacoby concludes, by viewing ISIL as cancer that needs removing, Western leaders place its use of violence within a moral category, defined as absolute evil, and divorced from any social, strategic, or political context. Thereby impeding critical debate and justifying their strategic preferences, one can see the benefits this approach can bring to Western policymakers, as it identifies a target that is ideological volatile that warrants a national security response. The second seeks to eschew liability from the escalating violence as it erupts due to its inherited 'ancient sectarian hatred'. The third identifies that such barbaric methods espoused by extremist groups only warrants a military response, and therefore, no political or economic solutions could be negotiated.

This modified form of culturalism also has traces in the initial argument that formed the Iraq war basis. The concept of 'us' and 'them', a barbaric sectarian regime that is sympathetic with an extreme ideology, holds one purpose: to destroy western civilisation by all means necessary, including the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Thus, the principle of the refined form of culturalism provides an opportunity to research the cultural and social problems resulting from the war in Iraq gave rise to a conflict that mutated to the level of violence unseen before. [26]

SECTARIANISM

Another prevalent framework in the ongoing debates surrounds the issue of sectarian violence, often portrayed as rooted in ancient animosities, giving the impression that sectarianism is deeply ingrained in the hearts of Muslims in the Middle East (Mamdani, 2005). This perspective presupposes that Islam has perpetually been in internal conflict, suggesting that the ongoing violence is a natural extension of historical feuds between the two primary Islamic sects. Jacoby argues that this narrative conveniently absolves occupying forces of any accountability for the surge in sectarian violence.

In her paper Rubaii attempts to undress the Iraqi conflict 'as a result of divide-and-rule policies introduced by the United States after 2003'... it is then, that 'Iraq saw a rapid segmentation of its population into three geographic parts: A Sunni West, a Shi'a south and a Kurdish north'. (Rubaii, 2019). Relying on a historical context, Rubaii asserts that before the U.S. invasion, Sunnism was more aligned with Iraqi Pan-Arabism and not a defining criterion in the daily political lives of Iraqi citizens. She notes that all segments of Iraqi society felt the impact of the Ba'ath regime. However, post the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, ethno-sectarian identities were manipulated into a fundamental political criterion, giving rise to a clear structural division along sectarian lines (Rubaii, 2019, 126).[27]

Rubaii emphasises the intersections from which sectarian prevalence became a crucial feature in Iraqi politics due to de-Baathification, the disbanding of the Iraqi armed forces, and the creation of sectarian zones divided by concrete T-walls. According

to Rubaii, these measures constituted a systematic labelling and categorisation of people and geographic locations played out over a series of events (political, economic, social) that generated a sense of persecution against Arab Sunnis. Left with little option, they sought alternative methods to safeguard their identity and political standing, rendering them vulnerable to extremists who claimed to protect their interests and grievances. Thus, cities like Fallujah became rebranded and associated with Sunni extremism not because they are inherently sectarian communities, but as a report by (D. Finnbogason et al., 2019) found, most organized violence across the Shia-Sunni divide is driven by states, rebel groups, and militias rather than communities. This suggests that the root of the problem lies not with communities or the people; it is fundamentally political.

This brings us back to the concept of 'good' versus 'bad,' where 'bad' Muslims are now identifiable by a particular geographic location and specific ideological beliefs. As a result, the rebranding of the initial unified anti-imperial resistance in such areas conformed to the language of counterterrorism, effectively pitting one sect against the other. This is evident in the U.S. forces' reliance on predominantly Shi'a security apparatus to quash Sunni rebellion in areas such as Anbar and Fallujah. The outcome of this strategy was a broader rebellion, including Shia forces as enemies. Rubaii concludes that as a strategy, tripartite spatial stratification serves as a pivotal mobilising instrument in implementing manufactured legal and political categories in Iraq. This aligns with Mundy's theory that the creation of regions by North Atlantic powers only serves their benefit in securitisation by playing communities against each other to control space and maximise profit.

F. Gregory-Gause (2014) acknowledges that while sectarian confrontation is an essential element utilised by predominantly local powers, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran, it cannot be understood as a simple Shia versus Sunni conflict. Doing so oversimplifies regional dynamics and motivations of the primarily two regional powers playing a balance of power game and using sectarianism in that game. Gregory-Gause suggests that the emergence of weak states

holds considerable value for regional influence as it creates a domestic political vacuum that can, for the moment, be exploited from a sectarian perspective by local actors to gain support from one of the two regional powers.

For Gregory-Gause, this narrative arises from a crucial factor: the struggle for regional influence for supremacy between the two most competing powers, namely Iran and Saudi Arabia. As we have come to understand, the Middle East as a region was born across ethnonational, ideological, and sectarian fault lines (Iraq being a prime case). These weak states provide an opportunity for the two regional powers to assert their influence by supporting non-state actors effectively in their domestic political clashes. Thus, it became framed as a battle of Sunni versus Shia. In this sectarian framework, Gregory-Gause asserts that although sectarianism has been crucial for both regional powers to exert their influence in weak states, they did not create the state weakness and sectarian identities in these countries; they merely took advantage. This is an essential assertion as it supports the framework that considers the emergence of violence in the Middle East as being born from violent conditions (external policies). The Middle East was created, not inherited from deep-rooted internal ideological or sectarian hatred.

One can also argue that the violent internal struggles created within Iraq as a result of the violent U.S. intervention not only render Iraq as a battleground between local actors but also, in the bigger picture, are geared towards the creation of new state-space in the formation of Sunni, Shia, and independent Kurdish states, something that has been continuously proposed by elite U.S. politicians [28.] This new demarcation of the region is synonymous with the methods used in political technology for controlling terrain. The U.S. actions have manifested into conflicts, bringing further turmoil to the region, which would subsequently benefit from foreign interventions as a stabilising mechanism.

State Fragility

Like Gregory-Gause, Yaqub Ibrahimi (2020) identifies a missing variable required for the causal model of the rise of violent actors in the form of the 'fragility of the State'. In support of this, he cites data showing that almost all Jihadi Salafist Groups (JSG) that have emerged had a profound presence in predominantly fragile states (Haken et al., 2014)[29] This raises the question of why such groups have not appeared or proliferated in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, etc. State fragility as a condition for the emergence of violent groups has been overlooked in the current literature[30]. However, there have been attempts to develop general theories regarding the relationship; these theories fail to address how they are executed through case-oriented qualitative research. Adding state fragility as a conditional variable to causal models will provide crucial data to fill the gap in the literature (Ibid).

By examining three primary institutions of a 'sovereign state', namely legitimacy[31], lack of authority[32] and inadequate capacity,[33] one can determine the state's fragility and how this 'conditional' variable plays a role in the emergence of violent actors the Middle East. Therefore, state fragility would explain the different statehood levels; the higher degree the statehood represents, the lower degrees of fragility and vice versa.

However, Ibrahimi highlights that state fragility is formed by both historical and external causes. Historically, in relation to colonial legacies, ethnicity, and religious cleavages, whereas externally, it could be the end of the Cold War, the shift of world powers leading to new visions and policies designed to favour the new world order. This notion of historical context seems to play a vital role in understanding the emergence of violent actors (see Jacoby 2017, Mundy 2019, Abu-Nimer 2018, Rubaii 2019, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies 2017) and thus should be considered and analysed in relation to the emergence of violent actors in the Middle East.

In research conducted by the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies in 2017, the common factors in the root cause of extremism in the Middle East compared against those in other regions show that Western intervention and political opportunity seemed to be the most antagonistic the area. [34] By reviewing literature around the root causes of violent actors in the Middle East, there seems to be a unifying thread that links political interference and western policy to the rise of conflict in the region. As a result, it can be inferred that any research undertaken to analyse the rise of violent actors should incorporate a thorough understanding of historical policies that gave 'rise of the Middle East as a precursor to understanding the rise of violent extremism in the Middle East (Jacoby 2017, Mundy 2019).

Keeping in line with policies that are resolute in seeking advantageous footholds in the region, Mohammed Abu Nimer (2018) argues that even considerations for transforming violent extremist (VE), which is a central framework that has been primarily adopted by western government agencies when it comes to describing many of their countering violence extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) activities, especially in the conflict areas are geared towards policies that safeguard the western interest and are predominantly driven by religious identity and theological reasoning and fail to address the issue from its root causes.[35] As such, the focus is primarily geared towards external factors (in the case of radicalisation in the West), i.e. the problem is inherently 'Islamic', which has further contributed to the ongoing institutionalisation of Islamophobia in Western societies and, as such, allows these countries to absolve responsibility for V.E. in general. This observation seems to mirror Mundy's and Jacoby's views. A quick example Is the historical underpinnings of creating such violent groups in Afghanistan rooted in the cold war dynamics between the U.S. and USSR.[36]

The author points out the fundamental issues with such intervention programmes, is that it was developed from an 'idealist' power paradigm, instead of it emerging from a 'realist' paradigm. The central difference between the two is that the former is concerned

with securitisation and a power balance to establish order and stability, a formula cooked up by states perusing self-interest (Jervis 1999). On the other hand, and as such is the recommended approach to intervention programmes should utilise the values and methodologies provided by the 'realist' paradigm. This will factor in human relationships, justice, compassion, collaboration, mutual recognition, nonviolence. This supports claims that the interest rests predominantly favouring Western policymakers over the areas that need these interventions.

Understanding How individuals radicalise vs Why individuals radicalise: Steps/phase models.

Assessing the extensive literature on radicalisation presents a challenging task due to its conflicting approaches and theories. The Youth Justice Board (2012) contends that much of the research on al-Qaeda-influenced radicalisation is subject to certain limitations, often relying on anecdotes and a limited number of case studies. Furthermore, the quality of scholarship is frequently criticised as "impressionistic, superficial, and often pretentious, venting far-reaching generalisations based on episodic evidence."[37]

In response to terrorist attacks in New York and other European cities, governments hastily sought solutions to address these threats. The interest in understanding the causal factors of radicalisation led to numerous efforts to define and model presumed pathways towards radicalism. However, prior to the increased focus on comprehending 'what goes on before the bomb goes off[38],' the field of social science was characterised as 'literature that had so much written based on so little research' (Schmid & Jongman, 1988), a critique also shared by Silke (2001), who acknowledged that research primarily relied on a circular process where researchers referred to each other, resulting in conclusions based on limited foundational knowledge. Post 9/11 studies in this area inherited this knowledge gap, particularly in the realm of Islamist-inspired terrorism (Silke 2004; Horgan 2003; Ranstorp 2006; Taylor & Horgan 2006).

However, one thing seems to bind scholars together, which acknowledges that radicalisation is a process developed over time. Models of these process have been numerous, but distinguishing its endpoint of these processes depends on whether the model favours a cognitive[39] or behavioural approach' (Hardy 2018). As a result, one of the most prominent outcomes of such efforts has been developing steps/phases models (Veldhuis & Staun 2009). They were designed to deal with the question of 'how radicalisation occurs'.

There have been many efforts to map out the pathways towards terrorism by utilising the phase models (Coensel 2018; Sageman 2004, 2007;(Gill 2007; Mogghadam 2005; Danish Intelligence Service PET, 2009; Silber & Bhatt, 2007). The primary emphasis of these models focuses on the 'chronological' sequences of the phase from which they can retrace episodes in the individual's journey towards radicalisation (Coensel 2018). Veldhuisan & Staun (2009) agree that this was a necessary way to untangle the chain of events; however, 'this backward reasoning is accompanied by considerable theoretical and methodological problems' (Veldhuisan& Staun, 2009-10).[40]

Furthermore, Hafez and Mullins (2015) suggest that 'uniform and linear processes' are not successful in addressing the various background and circumstantial realities. Borum (2010) further points out that these models' lack social scientific and empirical basis. As such, they run the risk of implicitly discriminating against and stigmatising minority groups.' The observations made against phase/ step models suggests further inquiries needed to address the shortfall of available data that can identify demographic characteristics, coupled with data on the social and psychological transformation that proceeded to get involved in terrorist activity.

Veldhuisan & Staun (2009) provide this example to help illustrate the shortcomings of phase models when they ask; To what extent we can compare the various Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks and their previous radicalisation processes? For example, does it make

a difference that the London attack bombers were British citizens with predominantly Pakistani heritage while the Madrid bombers were overwhelmingly from a Moroccan background? Similarly, what role does the local and national context of the attacks, and thus the radicalisation processes of the examined subjects presumably undergone? How are these contextual influences reflected in such models? These limitations had been highlighted by (Crenshaw, 1981-380) as she comments on the then-current state of the research and identifying that the study "…lack logically comparability, specification and a rank ordering of variables in terms of explanatory power"—conceding that there is a "need to establish theoretical order of different types of levels and cause" (Ibid), a similar perspective is offered by I.R. in the form of the 'level of analysis' theory which we will discuss in more details later (Homer-Dixon, 1991; C. Lopez, D.P. Johnson, 2017).

Another highlighted critique of phase model revolves around the issue of selection bias. The criticism in this instance suggests that such models only consider specific cases of observation 'that have a specific value of the dependent variable, which is the cases of successful radicalisation'. As a result, the model disregards vital cases from which individuals do not commit terrorist activities.
The importance of acknowledging 'unsuccessful' radicalisation cases is that it provides further data to examine instances with those 'successful' cases of radicalisation to understand better when and how such processes are more or less likely to develop'. (Veldhuisan & Staun, 2009-10)

As a result, these models cannot "distinguish between people who radicalise for ideological reasons and those that radicalise as a product of social interaction dynamics". This brings some to argue that "phase models run the risk of applying too general characteristics to attribute radical identities to people who are not necessarily radicalising, let alone planning a terrorist attack". These fears are further extended to include the risk of stigmatising and discriminating against minority groups, leading to counter-productive effects, and motivating rather than preventing people

from radicalising (Ibid).[41]

ROOT CAUSE (WHY)

Academic researchers found it hard to agree on the root causes of terrorism in general, some studies (Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research) found more than fifty different causes. "The root causes of terrorism ought to be investigated on various level of analysis" (Schmid 2013). "Causes for radicalisation that can lead to terrorism ought to be sought not just on the micro-level but also meso and macro-levels", something Crenshaw (1981) believes to be a vital consideration of the "environment in which terrorism occurs and address the question of whether broad political, social and economic conditions make terrorism more likely in some contexts than in others" (Crenshaw, 1981-380). The above observation holds significant validity in relations to this paper, especially when you consider theories suggesting the Middle East had been primarily created as a region to serve foreign political goals (Mundy 2017), which remains to date a source of aggravating regional inhabitants (Farasin et al., 2017).

At the micro-level, Schmid (2013) associates this level of analysis with the individual, for example, pertaining to identity problems, failed integration, feelings of alienation, marginalisation, discrimination, relative deprivation, humiliation (direct or by proxy), stigmatisation and rejection, often combined with moral outrage and feelings of (vicarious) revenge.

Meso-levels (group level) on the other hand, is concerned with the broader radical milieu. At this level, consideration towards the supportive social surrounding serves as an assembling point
that bridges the gap between the terrorist and the aggrieved communities, with direct access to a young cohort susceptible to radicalisation.

With this in mind, we can see how important this factor becomes, at least when considering Iraq. As it stands, Iraq has a median age of 19.4 years[42], making it a country with one of the most youthful populations globally, with potential access to many aggrieved young individuals. Furthermore, Iraq is a triable society (Hassan, 2007)[43] with its leaders enjoying regional influences. The largest tribes boast having more than a million members (Amatzia, 2005)[44].

By gaining access to its leaders, terrorist groups may be able to access a large pool of recruits and use certain areas as a launching pad for terrorist activities across the country (Ibid).[45]

Regarding the notion of radical milieu[46], Peter Waldmann and Stefan Malthaner in 2010 both argue that radical milieu considers that radicalisation is also "the result of political and social processes that involve a collectivity of people beyond the terrorist group itself and cannot be understood in isolation. Even if their violent campaign necessitates clandestine forms of operation, most terrorist groups remain connected to a radical milieu to recruit new members. Because they depend on shelter and assistance given by this supportive milieu, without which they are unable to evade persecution and to carry out violent attacks […] sharing core elements of the terrorist's perspective and political experiences, the radical milieu provides political and moral support" (Waldmann & Malthaner 2010).

When it comes to the macro-level analysis (societal level), the researcher is concerned with the role of government and society, both at home and abroad. These concerns revolve around the radicalisation of public opinion and party politics.[47] Including tense majority-minority relationships and the lack of socio-economic opportunities for the whole sector of society leads to mobilisation and radicalisation of the discontented, some of which might take the form of terrorism (Schmid, 2013). Similarly, Veldhuisan & Staun's 'root cause' model suggests that to deal with phase models' critique, researchers should look at the causes of radicalisation, which considers the external circumstances. These circumstances contribute to the pathway of radicalisation and examine cases that do not turn to violence**.** For Veldhusian and Staun, this is critically important, as it provides comparative data to analyse why some individuals do not radicalise, which can help shape better de-radicalisation programmes.[48] A view that is shared by Yaqub Ibrahimi, who in his search for data on radicalisation in the Middle East, acknowledges that current state of research lacks consideration for why some countries suffer from terrorism and others do not despite the shared characteristics of the region. His suggestion is to include a conditional variable which is concerned with state fragility

(Ibrahimi, 2020).

The 'root cause' attempts to identify in what way certain 'strains' and 'grievances' affect people (Lakhani, 2014). Bjorgo (2005-4) suggests that terrorism is often "an extension and radicalisation of various types of conflict" which makes it obvious that "the root causes of such conflicts are also root causes of terrorism". Noricks (2009) cautiously observes that "the root causes for terrorism are not the proximate causes of terrorism, but rather factors that help establish an environment in which terrorism is more likely to occur". This form of enquiry is a top-down level of investigation. Generally, this type of analysis looks at the political, social, and economic circumstances of a particular society. Furthermore, (Crenshaw 1981, Bjorgo 2005) argue that there is a need to distinguish between 'preconditions' and 'precipitant' root causes,[49] Where preconditions 'set the stage for terrorism over the long run', and precipitant are more 'specific event that immediately precedes the occurrence of terrorism'[50]. The precondition root causes cited within the radicalisation accounts are numerous in which the socio-economic, social and historical spheres are the backbone of the approach.[51]

Out of the numerous factors for this category (Preconditions), some hold particular relevance, at least for this paper. One of which is a concept that suggests social "facilitation", which (Gurr,1979) found extremely powerful in bringing about civil strife in general. As a concept, it focuses on the social habits and historical conditions that sanction the use of violence against the government, making it morally and politically justifiable. This may be a viable concept to bear in mind, especially within the context of Iraqi political history, where a political change in Iraqi history seemed to inherit rebellious and violent episodes, others (Mundy 2017) would argue that the 'inherited' social (violent) habits are not region or area-specific, but it is an imported function utilised to secure regional dominance.

The second condition that creates motivations for terrorism is the lack of opportunities for political participation (Farasin et al., 2017). The assumption conceives those regimes that deny access to power and persecute dissenters create dissatisfaction. In such cases,

grievances are primarily political.

As such, there seems to be a need to examine the various factors at different levels and how they come together in aggravating violent change and the production of terrorist groups. In support of this view, Neumann (2006-750) explains that "certain conditions provide a social environment and widespread grievances that, when combined with certain precipitant factors, result in the emergence of terrorist organisations and terrorist acts". He also suggests that structural factors and underlying grievances determine the operational base and provide recruits and ideology. In contrast, Precipitant factors offer a window of opportunity, determine leadership and organisation, and help shape the political agenda. More broadly, the literature of political violence, particularly on ethnic violence (Varshney, 2001; Horowitz, 2003), see the inclusion of a broader range of events and phenomena. However, the importance is that participants in violence need to identify these precipitant events as significant.[52]

At this stage, it is worth contextualising the concept of 'ummah' related to Muslims' global kinship (Baker, 2015). We can identify the plausibility of foreign intervention as precipitant factor in this specific case through this concept. An individual bound by the concept will perceive a duty confined in him/her to act having subscribed to the ummah concept, which can 'evoke strong anger' (Sageman, 2008). Moreover, this concept's utility can be seen in extremist groups' recruitment campaigns both in Afghanistan and Iraq. In attempting to sum up the methodological frameworks under the root cause approach Ibrahimi (2018) divided these approaches into three categories which includes, single factor approach[53], multi-causal/multi-level approach[54], and multiple root cause.

In the first approach, scholars primary focus is on causes that belong to a single level of analysis. In this case the focus can be seen on individual centric approaches, linking jihad as the personal motivational factor driving the rise of terrorist groups (Bourm, 2010; Mazarr, 2004; Lester, Yang & Lindsay 2010). In the second approach we see scholars shift towards a group centric method, where the focus is on Islamist ideology as a cause of terrorism (Egger and Magni-Berton, 2019; Corbin, 2017; Tibi, 2012). The

last approach looks at the international level involvement such as the US post-cold war foreign and military policies to be the primary driver of the emergence of terrorist groups (Choueiri, 2010; Gerges, 2011; Bere, 2017; KKIENERM, 2018). With all the above approaches, there is a fundamental lack of consideration revolving around the multi-level factors involved in the emergence of violent groups and therefore, single factor approaches lack considerations of vital data provided at other levels.

The second category concerned attempts to integrate causes of terrorism into a multi-level/ multi-causal level framework (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Moghadam, 2006; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). This multi –level approach has provided key insights into the root-causes of terrorist activities, attacks, and violent radicalisation. However, there is a fundamental difference in the approach I set out to examine compared within this category. [55]. We can see numerous examples of this approach, for instance in Moghadam (2006) the focus addressed causes of suicide attacks by utilising the multi-level approach. Others such as Kruglanski and Fishman (2005) were concerned with the psychological levels of analysis to understand behavioural patterns at the individual, group, and organisational level. Therefore, the utility of the multi-level analysis in both cases are used to arrive at the driving forces behind the occurrence of terrorist activities, attacks, and terrorist behaviour, rather than arriving to the conditions and factors that bring about the formation of terrorist groups (Ibrahimi, 2018).

The last group in this cluster attempts to utilise multiple root causes to understand the emergence of terrorist groups. These studies mostly focus on social and political (Basuchoudhary & Shughart, 2010; Krueger & Maleckova, 2003; Schmid, 2005), economic (Enders & Hoover, 2012; Piazza, 2010), and religious causes (Bar, 2004; (Jackson, 2007). This approach provides useful insights into understanding the multiple dimensions of the rise and fall of terrorist organisations. However, this approach lacks a systematic framework that can organise the root causes of the rise of terrorist groups, which brings Ibrahimi (2018) to suggest the adoption of 'the level of analysis' framework provided in IR. The practicality of the 'three level of analysis' framework introduced by IR as a

methodological process permits for a systematic categorisation and integration of the root causes on all three levels of assessment, that is the individual, group and international level which considers the direct and interconnected impact of those causes on the emergence of terrorist groups in a single account (Most & Starr, 1989).

The effectiveness of the 'three level of analysis' theory in International Relations (I.R) understanding the rise of violent actors/ groups in Iraq.

As we have come to see, concepts such as radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism are primarily forged out of internal and external factors[56] that help shape human belief and behaviour. Meaning that outside forces combined with internal forces can reflect adversely on human behaviour and thought, in some instances, it turns into a violent means of political/ social expression. We have also learned that extremism or terrorism could be categorised as the result of a 'process' or a 'pathway' that developed over time; it's end-product can be violence, this in its simplest forms can be understood as the radicalisation process.

Although not universally agreed upon, the emergence of theories from the various disciplines provides boundaries from which we can understand processes scientifically, which lends itself for empirical validation. In this instance, how does one utilise these theories to understand the rise of violent actors in Iraq, able to investigates the root-causes on different levels at the same time offer a systematic level of analysis? As such, the utility of the IR's 'three level of analysis' framework proposes to be a fitting model to adopt. I.R. theorists argue that war is the contingent outcome of the interaction among variables operating at 'three levels of analysis'. The international level explores variables operating exclusively 'above' states, such as anarchy and power distribution. The domestic level explores variables that work solely within states, such as regime change and bureaucratic design, and ideology. The individual-level explores how individual psychology (i.e., beliefs, culture, personality) contributes to the outbreak of war. (Lopez, 2017; Ibrahimi, 2020).

The fundamental idea for this approach appears within the philosophical tradition of realism. Early realist, often referred to as 'classical realist', emphasised that states prioritise their survival, jealously guard their security, and seek to maximise their power relative to other states. Realist thinkers from Thucydides 5th century B.C to E.H Carr in the 20th century argue that competition for control determines the nature and scope of state behaviour and not justice, morality, and ethics (see Lopez 2017, 986). This approach seems to be driven by the idea that human nature is the driving force behind states seeking power and security, bringing the likes of I.R. theorist Hans Morgenthau to argue that humans possess an animus dominandi (a desire to dominate others)

However, critics of classical realism found it hard to accept 'human nature' as an explanation for conflict, primarily as it proved difficult to support such a notion with scientific justification (Blainey, 1973, 54). In short, although realist agreed on the competitive nature of international politics and the importance of power, they were sometimes ambivalent about ultimate causes (Lopez, 2017, 986).

It was here that Kenneth Waltz, regarded as the paragon of neorealist thinking, introduced the three-level of analysis (causes of war) at the individual level, state level and international level (also known as structural realism), by that rejecting the individual-level human nature as he saw it, no fixed trait of human nature could explain the observable variation in war and peace (Waltz, 1959).

He argued that states' competitive behaviour emerges not because of internal human drives. Instead, it is a consequence of competitive pressures that established the structure of the environment in which states find themselves, i.e., in a world of similar entities jostling for survival. Waltz suggests that analysis should begin by identifying the fundamental principle by which the international system is ordered; this principle is anarchy. Under anarchy, states (assuming rational and prioritising their survival) share one functional attribute; each must provide for its survival and not rely on others' assistance. In other words, anarchy compels self-help behaviour among states. Therefore, wars occur when states attempt to increase

their power, leading rivals or coalitions to rise to pre-empt or counter them (Lopez 2017, 987).

Naturally, there have been a few theories behind the causes of war steaming from domestic interest and institutions whereby states find themselves at war for the sake of particular interest instead of the general or national interests. John Hobson and Vladimir Lenin provide one example of such. Both argued that one explanation for the spread of imperialism was the insatiable thirst for resources and profit to satisfy domestic financial interests (Hobson 2013; Lenin 2010). However, examples such as the one above provides a discussion on interstate wars, something that in recent history (post-WWII and the cold war) had drastically reduced, at least when concerned with the global north's development of nuclear deterrence, interdependence and democracy that were intrinsic to overcoming future escalations.[57] Similar factors are missing in relations to the global south, where the states are weakly developed and destabilised by conflict (Lopez 2017, 992). As such, there has been an apparent shift from concerns over interstate wars towards internal, civil wars that are mainly taking place in developing, autocratic regions (global south).[58] This opens up the debate on whether civil wars or interstate wars have distinct or similar causes (Muellr 2009; Pinker 2013; Fearon and Laitin 2003).[59]

To understand these causes of internal wars, scholars have broadly provided three types of explanations. The first is concerned with political grievances (Sunni loss of political power), economic opportunity (Sunni led accusations against Shia led government of economic disparity towards Sunni communities). Weak governance 'failed states' (weak judicial and security structures).

Level of Analysis Theory

First used by Singer (1961), the term level of analysis formulated the structural causes on international events into two levels, the state, and the international system (Singer, 1961). It was subsequently advanced in Waltz's famous work, 'Theory of international politics originally published in 1979, and later

transformed by Most and Starr's (1989) into a framework composed of individual, group, and international levels.

Most & Starr (1989) model included two flexible set of variables, the first belonging to willingness and the other to opportunity. In this approach, the first level of analysis examines the individual actors and their willingness to act. On the second level the examinations look at group actors and the opportunities that motivate their behaviour. The third level examined the context that determines the actor's behaviour (Most & Starr, 1989, pp.35-36). In other words, the willingness to act on one level is primarily influenced by the available opportunity presented at the other, and the opportunity at one level could be reshaped by the willingness for action at another level (pp.23-46). Therefore, the individual's willingness to act at the first level is principally interrelated by the opportunity, both in terms of capability and possibility, provided at the second level. Likewise, the group dynamics at the second level is influenced by both the individual willingness at the first level and the opportunity at the third level.

With this framework, Most & Starr (1989) successfully developed both an analytical framework that investigates causes of international phenomena at every single level, and a theoretical context which provides the basis for examining the significance of the relationship among causes belonging to different levels (Ibrahimi, 2018).

Homer-Dixon (1991) lends a hand by providing categories for the three levels of analysis. In the individual level, individual psychology and motivations are used to explain 'civil strife, including strikes, riots, revolutions, and wars' (Homer-Dixon, 1991, pp.104-5). Scholars, in this level of analysis 'suggest that individuals become aggressive when they feel frustrated by something or someone, they believe is blocking them from fulfilling a strong desire' (Ibid). Within the Iraqi context, these are seen in scenarios such as the army's disbandment leaving thousands of disgruntled officers and soldiers without financial security (Hashim 2006).

In group level, group identity variables such as nationalism, ethnicity, ideology, and religion are used to explain causes of conflict (Ibid). These can be seen in religious and ideological rallying of an aggrieved community, which can spur and motivate conflict. Others can be found within nationalist and remnants of the old guard who found themselves dislodged from the political arena. Through the utility of various factors, including sectarian narrative, grievances began to emerge quickly, resulting in deep desires to regain the lost state (Haddad, 2011). On the international level of analysis, Homer-Dixon (1991) considers the international system or 'external constraints as a determining force behind the occurrence of international events such as conflicts and wars, these external constraints can encourage and even force actors to participate in war, this can include the war on Afghanistan and Iraq (Waltz, 1979).

By looking at the emergence of groups such as ISIS, the empirical evidence and research shows that such violent groups emergence was the outcome of multiple causes that belong to all three levels of analysis (Burke, 2006; Choueiri, 2010; Gerges, 2011; Williams, 2005; wright, 2006) while also indicating that the interconnection among causes belong to all levels of analysis had a significant impact on the rise of such terrorist groups. In other words, while causes belonging to willingness and or / opportunity at every level of analysis factored directly into the emergence of such groups, they also mutually influenced and even reshaped one another through the process of the formation of this organisation. For instance, while the individual jihadist's willingness to do battle against the enemy was present at the first level of analysis, their motivation was also influenced by the opportunity provided by a jihadist ideology and the group dynamism at the second level (Gerges, 2011).

Likewise, while jihadism at the second level of analysis, provided a religious justification to individual jihadis recourse to violence, external influences such as the post-cold war politics was intrinsic influencer found at the third level (Murden, 2002; Turner, 2010; Zunes, 2014). As a result, it is empirically justified to conclude that the emergence of AQ was influenced directly by causes belonging to all three levels and their interconnection.

Moreover, and as we have come to see, much of the literature on security studies looks at the root cause of the emergence of Islamist violent groups at specific context or in different level of analysis. therefore, if we were to assume that the causal determinants are to hold, then it is fair to wonder why such groups (ISIS) have not emerged in every Muslim country where these elements persist, such as Qatar or Saudi Arabis for instance, yet we see them proliferate in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Somalia.

For instance, why did individual Jihadi's personal desire for jihad (at the individual level) and the Jihadi Ideology (at the group level) and the US post-cold-war foreign policies in particular the Middle East (at the international level) produced groups such as ISIS in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria but not in other neighbouring countries? There must be other factors that are accountable for this different outcome in relatively similar countries in terms of the presence of the root cause of violent Islamist groups.

Taking this question into account Ibrahimi (2018) suggests considering the degree of state fragility in Muslim countries to be responsible for this contradictory outcome. By examining three primary institutions of a 'sovereign state' namely legitimacy, lack of authority and inadequate capacity, one can determine the state's fragility and how this 'conditional' variable plays a role in the emergence of violent actors in the Middle East. Therefore, state fragility would explain the different statehood levels, the higher degree the statehood represents, the lower degrees of fragility and vice versa.

Moreover, Ibrahimi (2018) further elaborates, that state fragility is developed due to both historical and external causes. Historical pertaining to colonial legacies, ethnicity, and religious cleavages whereas external could be the end of the cold war, the shift of world powers leading to new visions and policies designed to favour the new world order. This notion of historical context seems to play a vital role in understanding the emergence of violent actors (see Jacoby 2017, Mundy 2019, Abu- Nimer 2018, Rubaii 2019, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies 2017) and as thus should be

considered and analysed in relations to the emergence of violent actors in the Middle East.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has undertaken the ambitious task of delving into the academic complexities surrounding the understanding of violence in the Middle East. My objective was to navigate through the varying research approaches, shedding light on their differences and the contexts in which they are applied. The analysis underscored the pressing need for extensive research into the root causes of violence in 'repressive settings,' offering crucial insights into the motivational factors and variables influencing the radicalisation process towards violent extremism.

While examining the utility of radicalisation in comprehending home-grown terrorism in European settings, it became clear that a significant gap between its application in Europe and the Middle East exists. The exploration of literature incorporating theories from political science, international relations, law, and psychology illuminated the multifaceted nature of the subject.

Emphasising the paramount importance of historical context and echoing Mundy's (2019) assertion that understanding the relationship between organised violence and the Middle East requires a careful examination of historical arrangements, practices, and processes. The scrutiny of sectarian identity as a framework revealed its significance in understanding the rise of violence, albeit as a political tool rather than the root cause.

Crucially, this paper identified state fragility as a pivotal variable in the causal model of the rise of violent actors. This variable explained why terrorism and violence manifest in some states and not others, despite shared historical and religious backgrounds.

The exploration of pathways towards violence illuminated the temporal nature of the process, with models favouring cognitive or behavioural approaches. Notably, step/phase models emerged as prominent tools to address the question of how radicalisation occurs.

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Examining different levels of analysis—micro, meso, and macro—this paper delved into the environmental factors contributing to terrorism. The three-level analysis theory in International Relations provided a systematic framework, encompassing international, domestic, and individual levels.

In essence, this paper proposes a pathway and framework that researchers can adopt to analyse the processes of violence and its emergence. It contributes to a nuanced understanding of the region's context, offering valuable insights for future research endeavours.

Reference

[1] See Berdina Michael D. Berdina (2018)

[2] Declaration made by the then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in which he branded the 'Iraq war was illegal and breached the UN charter'. Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan | World news | The Guardian accessed 18/01/2021

[3] Israel minister: Arabs are inherently violent – Middle East Monitor accessed 21/12/2020

[4] US senate intelligence committee report, vice chairman, Democratic senator Jay Rockefeller stating that -"*our credibility is diminished. Our standing in the world has never been lower. We have fostered a deep hatred of Americans in the Muslim world, and that will grow. As a direct consequence, our nation is more vulnerable today than ever before*" Iraq war 'waged on false intelligence' | World news | The Guardian accessed 18/01/2021

Few Support Bringing More Syrian Refugees To U.S .... https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/israel_the_middle_east/few_support_bringing_more_syrian_refugees_to_u_s

[5] Although some of this sectarian violence was perpetrated by Islamist Shiite militias that sprung up in southern Iraq in the immediate wake of the invasion,

[6] How the "Sons of Iraq" Stabilized Iraq. https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/pdfs/2788.pdf

[7] Places such as Madrid and London.

[8] A term used to describe the beginning of the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003

[9] Here I am alluding to ISIS and its affiliate's ability to recruit and engage in terrorist activities

[10] According to Peter Neumann, the concept of radicalisation was very limited in the academic literature prior to the 9/11 attacks. The rise of this concept seems to be intimately linked, as a result with the terrorist attacks and gave it that Islamic focal point.

[11] Other disciplines have also ventured to provide answers, see for example Maskaliunaite, Asta. (2015). Exploring the Theories of Radicalization. International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal. 17. 10.1515/ipcj-2015-0002.

[12] The 10 most affected countries to terrorism are all in the Middle East, Asian and Africa
https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2016/11/18/countries-most-affected-by-terrorism/?sh=5865a8fd30d9

[13] See: Mundy (2019)

[14] Some have argued that ISIS represents a barbaric cult and its approach stems from cultural and religious practise, removing any political or economic reasoning behind such campaigns. By doing so the assumption implies that there is no political motivation behind the establishment of ISIS, and as such, are viewed as people belonging to an innately barbaric cultural and religious traditions that cannot possibly exist within a progressive and multicultural west. This gives policy makers a military intervention, importantly, at the same time exalting their troops of the scope of the violence used when engaging with such groups.

[15] These conditions reflect the social and political environment- in non-repressive settings, this means non-authoritarian regimes/democratic systems.

[16] The idea of region developed in both modern political thought and practices as a 'government technology', of territorialisation to render peoples and places amenable to application of state power (Mundy 2019).

[17] Cartographic practices.

[18] This term is central to the birth of culturalist narrative (how cultures have been framed and the purpose behind such definitions- Us versus Them

[19] These 'truths' helped develop a distant parallel society that was based on barbaric and ancient feuds, a stark contrast, and a threat to the way of life western society.

[20] The emergence of the 'region' as a technology of rule in modern European geographical thought can be seen in several cartographic practices, these include maps that delimited large territorial areas premised on

assumptions of relative racial homogeneity -- Iraq is an example of such practices which could be used as a relevant illustration.

[21] RAND defines good Muslims as those who are 'liberal Muslims' who are 'analogous to the European Christian Democratics'.

[22] Referred to by G Bush as those who are countering the good Muslims- they are a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has through evil intent hijacked an otherwise peaceful faith-

[23] Note: these bad Muslims are not motivated by politics, but rather by zealotry and blind obedience, they are concerned with advancing their antipathy to contemporary western values. Therefore, the west's war on terror is not a civilisation conflict, rather a struggle against radicalisation and fanaticism. This is a clear indication of 'just' intervention for the greater good. One can pose an argument to suggest, just like the west is concerned with advancing their form of modernisation as political objective and as 'just', so too can political Islam see their limited response as a political form of defence as legal and 'just'.

[24] See GENERAL ALLEN OPENING STATEMENT AT (house.gov)

[25] Quoted in Croft, Culture, Crisis, 74.

[26] This paves the way for intervention. The second process is to feed and evoke vulnerabilities such as sectarian tensions. This process falls in line with Mundy's idea of cartographic territorialisation, the continuation of new demarcation and the unrest it brings with it to the region. Top US officials considered breaking Iraq into three sections, Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia fragments. A recipe to further aggravate local and regional tensions.

[27] however, this claim is strongly opposed by Shia authors who claim that under the Saddam's regime Shia were the primary target of the regime referencing economic, political, employment and educational targeted deprivation for the Shia community.

[28] One of the US politicians who suggested a three-state solution to Iraq was Vice President Joe Biden. In 2006, when he was a senator and a senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he wrote an op-ed in The New York Times advocating for partitions between Iraq's three ethnic groups. He argued that the best way to govern Iraq "is to maintain a united Iraq by decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group … room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests"

[29] There is data showing that almost all jihadi groups were formed in predominantly Muslim majority states. Data also shows that ten out of the top twenty most fragile states of the world are Muslim majority states.

[30] See for example J. A. Piazza, “Draining the Swamp: Democracy Promotion, State Failure, and Terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern Countries,” Studies in Conflict, Terrorism 30, no. 6 (2007): 521–39; J. A. Piazza, “Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?,” International Studies Quarterly 52, no. 3 (September, 2008): 469–88; Karin von Hippel, “The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths,” The Political Quarterly 73 (2002): 25–39; Peter Tikuisis, “On the Relationship between the Weak States and Terrorism,” Behavioural Science of Terrorism and Political Aggression 1, no. 1 (2009): 66–79; Ted Robert Gurr, “Economic Factors,” in The Roots of Terrorism, edited by Louise Richardson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 85–102.

[31] Legitimacy- the extent which a state enjoys popular support domestically and acceptance internationally.

[32] Authority- states capability in exercising monopoly over the use of violence within its territory-in some instances you find more than one armed group that can challenge the state militarily.

[33] Capacity- the availability of vital resources- the state’s economic capability to appease its citizens.

[34] Such factors include the socio-economic standing, the rule of law, Western intervention, ideology, politics and modernity.

[35] Root causes in this instance refers to nature of the governance system, institutional corruption, social class divides, gaps between rich and the poor, tribal divisions and loyalties, security military structures, weak educational systems, social norms and structures that support all forms of exclusions, basic human rights violations etc..

[36] CIA directly supported Arab volunteers who came to Afghanistan to wage jihad against the soviets, the US helped create an environment where radical Islam can flourish.

[37] Schmid and Jongman, 1988:177 (cited in YJB)

[38] Peter Numann explaining the purpose of studying radicalisation.

[39] Cognitive can refer to the why, looking at political and social issues that changes the mindset to adopt radical views in order to gain rights. Behavioural can refer to the physical participation, conducting of terrorist activities to bring about change.

[40] They argue for example, that data alone is insufficient, as with the quality of data used to form the basis for these models. There is a need to look at social and psychological changes in the individual prior to the terrorist attack. See Veldhuisan & Staun, 2009 for more details on these issues.

[41] (PDF) Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237624856_Islamist_Radicalisation_A_Root_Cause_Model

[42] See Iraq population (2021) live — Countrymeters

[43] For more information about tribes in Iraq see IraqTribalism_v2.pdf (dyn-intl.com)

[44] See Baram, Amatzia. Report. US Institute of Peace, 2005. Accessed February 5, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12496 Baram, Amatzia. Report. US Institute of Peace, 2005. Accessed February 5, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12496..

[45] See for example the case of Umar Husayn Hadid, who led terrorist campaigns and provided a safe haven for high target terrorist leaders such as Musab al-Zarqai.

[46] This is an important point specifically in Iraq. The environment harboured certain resentments and conceded on their chosen enemy (primarily US coalition and Shia Arabs of Iraq)- from the perspective of group dynamics, it was 'easier' to recruit people as the grievances was shared, the enemy was clear, and 'society' applauded the 'armed resistance'.

We also this panning out in the case of Umar Husayn Hadid- Was a local Jihadi from Falujah, worked his way to the top of insurgency, also known for harbouring ISL leader Zarqawi.

[47] One example is the 'Anbar tent' demonstrations, rallying aggrieved Sunni's under the pretence of 'Sunni pride' (in reference to the imprisoned women)- this became a rally for Sunni 'leadership' to launch sectarian cries against the majority Shia government.

See Alaa Hassan 26/02/2015 Iraq's sit-ins continued for a year and ended with an "armed revolution" Aljazeera.net

بثورة مسلحة"اعتصامات العراق تواصلت لعام وانتهت" (aljazeera.net)

[48] In essence, the theory revolves around the individual and how a sense of deprivation is formulised from the surrounding social, political or economic settings, that the individual feels an entitlement too, especially within the context from others around him/her. (Walker and Smith, 2002). These espoused disadvantages are then developed into frustration from which anger could be a result that could possibly be directed into terrorism (Sageman, 2008).

What this approach therefore argues, is that there is a need to examine the causes of radicalisation from the perspective of the individual, from which an examination of a combination of different factors at the macro-level and micro-level influences the behaviours.

[49] Precondition factors are understood to set the stage whilst Precipitant factors are miscellaneous sparks that trigger developments such as the use of terrorism. See Davis and Cragin, 2009. However, with trigger factors it is important to note that these are not referred to be an automatic mechanical event which is deterministic. Also see Noricks (2009) http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG849.pdf, for categories of permissive factors.

[50] precipitant factors are regarded as an event or incident that help catalyse or trigger a change in behaviours, particularly a move toward violent action (Noricks, 2009-13). Factors pertaining to this approach are predominantly concerned with Muslims' social, economic, and political welfare worldwide. In this regard, the foreign policy of western countries is argued to be such a factor. An example of this is the U.K. government policy towards countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, which Mohammed Sidique Khan cited as a reason for his role in the July 7th bombings in London (Francis, 2012). However, some do not subscribe to this line of inquiry, adding A.Q. extremism in the West (such as the U.K.) existed long before the 9/11 attacks and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

[51] Crenshaw (1981-381) identifies a need to further divide these preconditions into a further classification that considers the 'enabling/permissive' factors necessary to understand the "opportunities for terrorism to happen and situations that directly inspire and motivate terrorist campaigns". The most commonly cited enabling/permissive factors suggest lack of political opportunity, perceived illegitimacy of the regime, economic inequality, social instability resulting from modernisation processes, and cultural and ideological factors. Such disadvantages can have a prominent effect on the process of radicalisation. [51] They help to establish a context in which opportunities for terrorism are created.

Regarding the 'enabling/permissive' factors, Crenshaw (1981) identifies the 'direct cause' that instigate circumstances to go beyond creating an environment where terrorism is possible, but rather, provide motivation and direction for the terrorist movement.

The first condition for the direct cause of terrorism is concrete grievances among an identifiable subgroup of a larger population, such as ethnic minority discriminated against by the majority. A social movement develops to redress these grievances and gain either equal rights or a separate state. Within the context of Iraq, these conditions could be seen developing and gaining substantial momentum in bringing about these changes. The case of Anbar would be an exceptional case study from which these conditions can be tested. We must also consider Crenshaw's caution that the existence of such conditions is not necessary or a good case for terrorism.

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As not all those discriminated against, turn to terrorism, nor does terrorism always reflect objective social or economic deprivation. However, for terrorism to occur, it seems like the government is singled out to blame for widespread suffering.

[52] There is also a well-grounded argument that does not prescribe to the evidence presented in assuming that large-scale structural forces are considered causal factors within radicalisation. This argument is born from the observation that many individuals who experience such conditional strains are not radicalised (Horgan, 2008).

As a result, a current trend considers these strains not to be a causal factor as such, but relatively to have a role as a facilitator enabling such environments where it becomes more likely for terrorists to develop (Noricks, 2009). Therefore, it's suggested that considering these strains should be envisaged as 'background contributing factors' (Korteweg et al., 2010, 19). 'Thus a better method is to try and identify predisposing risk factors for involvement in terrorism… as a prelude to some form of risk assessment for prediction of involvement' (Horgan, 2008, 84).

[53] See for example Borum, 2010; Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011; Lester, Yang, & Lindsay, 2004; Mazarr, 2004.

[54] See for example Kruglanski & Fishman, 205; Moghadam, 2006; Ross, 1999; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009.

[55] Primarily, my aim is to understand the emergence of violent groups/ actors, which is a different proposition to that offered in this category that investigates events and activities purported by terrorism, as such the subject matter and focus are entirely different.

[56] These factors have been extensively addressed, such as socio-economic, political factors, foreign intervention, deprivation etc…

[57] This upsurge in intra-state conflict seems to be influenced by two significant dynamics. First, the two world wars successively undermined and weakened the colonial empires of the great European powers. In turn, it enabled a wave of national liberation wars and secessionist movements across the globe. The second surge followed the end of the cold war when nationalist and separatist movements of civil conflicts that had been suppressed or fought as proxy wars between the superpowers were given a new life.

[58] Civil wars have killed more people than inter-state wars since 1945, which Is why they have become an important policy issue.

These wars tend to reflect numerous related problems including inequality, control of resources, poverty, famine, migration, economic development an terrorism. (Lopez, 2017).

59 In essence, Interstate wars have some distinct and clear cut actors; usually, nation-states pursuing political aims, and as such, tend to have clear frontlines and a clear winner or loser (Lopez 2017). In sharp contrast, civil wars/ intrastate conflict is assumed by actors that include sub and trans-national guerrillas, private entrepreneurs, and international networks whose economic and political interests may be as nebulous as the organisations they operate. Furthermore, the frontlines of these often-interactable conflicts are unclear, and the fighting may end or fizzle without a clear winner and loser.