

## **Critically analyze the US-Russia relations in context of ISIS and its impact on the security situation of Middle East (CSS-2017)**

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State (IS), and by its Arabic language acronym Daesh (Arabic), is a *Salafi jihadist* unrecognized proto-state and militant group that follows a fundamentalist, Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam. ISIL gained global prominence in early 2014 when it drove Iraqi government forces out of key cities in its western Iraq offensive, followed by its capture of Mosul and the Sinjar massacre.

This group has been designated a terrorist organization by the United Nations and many individual countries. ISIL is widely known for its videos of beheadings of both soldiers and civilians, including journalists and aid workers, and its destruction of cultural heritage sites. The United Nations holds ISIL responsible for human rights abuses and war crimes, and Amnesty International has charged the group with ethnic cleansing on a "historic scale" in northern Iraq.



## How did ISIS grow to become so powerful?

- **Feelings of disenfranchisement:** Sunni communities in Iraq and Syria felt alienated by Shiite- and Alawite-led governments. ISIS played on these feelings, pushing forward a sense of victimhood and giving these communities a means to feel in control through violence. They also advanced a twisted interpretation of Islam that found ripe fodder among disenfranchised youth in the area.
- **Unlikely bedfellows:** ISIS partnered with the lieutenants of Saddam Hussein's secular regime (who used to hate *ihadis*) to perfect their tools of repression along the same lines that Saddam used.
- **Syrian chaos:** There is little doubt that as US allies (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey) ploughed money and arms into the Syrian civil war much of it ended up in the hands of ISIS (and other *jihadi* groups).
- **Iraqi chaos:** After the US withdrawal from Iraq, the atrophied Iraqi army was over-equipped and underprepared (and very corrupt) to deal with ISIS. Much of the weaponry ended up in ISIS's hands.
- **Racketeering and extortion:** Before ISIS formally controlled Mosul, it would run a racketeering business (similar to that used by the US mafia) under the nose of the Iraqi government. Businesses and individuals had to pay them a "protection fee" to stay safe.
- **Taxation and exploitation:** Properties belonging to religious minorities or regime sympathizers were promptly appropriated (e.g. churches, gold, hard currency), and once ISIS controlled territory and people it began taxing them like any state would.
- **Selling oil:** It is the Middle East, so oil is always involved. While technically shut out from the international markets, ISIS could and did still find markets for its oil (usually in neighbouring Turkey whose government was sympathetic to many of the Syrian *ihadis*).

## US-Russia

**Russia–United States relations** is the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation, the successor state to the Soviet Union. Russia and the United States maintain diplomatic and trade relations. The relationship was generally warm under Russia's President Boris (1991–1999) until the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999, and has since deteriorated significantly under Vladimir Putin. In 2014, relations greatly strained due to the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and, in 2015, by sharp differences regarding Russian military intervention in the Syrian Civil War. Mutual sanctions imposed in 2014 remain in place.

## US-Russian Presence in the Middle East

The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the major powers like US sought another pretext to mark its military presence in the Middle East. This began from Syria and ended in Iraq. Fearing the rising control of ISIS in Syria, United States led a coalition of European states to start airstrikes. But that was not only the aim behind this intervention. Another goal was to topple Syrian government led by President Assad. Seeing this scenario, Russia jumped into Syria at the request of Assad to cope the challenge to its favourite government. Russia also came under the pretext of fighting against the ISIS. This entire development made the fight against ISIS as the center point of U.S-Russia relations.

## US-Russia relations in context of ISIS

In context of ISIS, the US-Russia relations can be seen as in their random oscillation



between cooperation and conflict. Initially, when Russia started airstrikes in Syria.– the US entry – the cooperation was sought in fight against ISIS. Later, both the power began their separate efforts against ISIS in the Middle East thus finally parting their ways. Currently, US has almost been knocked out by the Russian presence in the Middle East under the pretext of fight against ISIS.

## **Three different phases**

### **Cooperation**

The entry of Russia into the Middle Eastern chaotic situation, there emerged its chances of cooperation with the United States. It happened to some extent. Both the countries shared information about ISIS hideouts and dealt them with combined airstrikes.

- The United States, EU and Russia could begin to cooperate against ISIS by taking small, concrete, pragmatic steps, mirroring their cooperation in the initial phases of the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan. These steps could include sharing intelligence on ISIS and cooperating in joint special operations against key targets. Russia could also supply advisors, training programs and more arms to the Iraqi forces and Kurdistan forces, in coordination with the West.
- First time in the counterterrorist struggle, the United States, European Union and Russia share a common concrete enemy in the form of ISIS. None of them can afford to tolerate the existence of a terrorist quasistate, which is actively training its nationals and interested in acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Nor can the US, EU and Russian leaders sit and wait for ISIS to decide if it should escalate from executing citizens of Western and post-Soviet states to launching sustained terrorist campaigns against them.
- The United States has banked on a diplomatic strategy of trying to enlist Russia's cooperation in Syria; the Kremlin has continued to jolt the White House with its unilateral military and political moves. This is the beginning of a genuine effort to see if there is a way to deconflict, but also to find a way forward that will be effective in keeping a united, secular Syria that can be at peace and stable again without foreign troops present, and that's our hope."

### **Conflict**

In the second phase, both US and Russia began to contend over the control of the Syrian areas conquered from the ISIS. Both established their separate zones of influence thus leading the operation to their own separate interests.

- The official said that raises the prospect that, despite its stated focus of fighting the Islamic State, Russia may take the opportunity to attack Syrian opposition fighters who are focused on battling Mr. Assad's government and who are also backed by the United States. Mr. Putin has been dismissive of the Pentagon program to train and equip the moderate Syria opposition — an effort that has yielded only a small handful of fighters. At the same time, new volunteers have been arriving to replenish the ranks of the Islamic State even more quickly than they are killed.
- **United States' concern,** Russian surveillance drones have conducted about half a dozen reconnaissance missions from a recently bolstered base near Latakia. The drones have flown over Latakia, western Idlib, and western Hama, according to a



senior United States official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential intelligence assessments.

- The idealists and neoconservatives point to Russian acts of violence, such as its bombardments in Syria or Chechnya or its support for the separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The Russians, for their part, cast back at America and its Western allies the West's own acts of aggression and accompanying untruths.

### **Parting of Ways**

Finally, both the powers parted their ways in the fight against ISIS. This led to an apparent rise in Russian influence in Syria. It ultimately knocked out the US or at least marginalized it.

- In 2016, Putin pulled off yet another surprise by announcing a partial withdrawal of his forces from Syria and a *de facto* end to the military campaign. According to Putin, the partial withdrawal was undertaken because the objective of the campaign has been accomplished. Since some Russian military presence is to remain in Syria and Russia's military infrastructure remains intact, military activity can be resumed at any point. For the present, Putin is suspending a costly and risky campaign, keeping his options open and, most importantly, remaining the key external player in Syria and the unmistakable diplomatic winner.
- Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, commander of the US-led task force fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria, had the authority to pull the Marines from Kuwait and send them to Syria for a short deployment, NBC News reported.
- The ISIS militants in Syria are being fought by the Russian-backed Syrian military, as well as by Syrian rebels under the Free Syrian Army banner with Turkish and Jordanian backing.
- The US military alliance with the SDF and YPG has strained its relations with Turkey, which views the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party. The party has waged a 30-year insurgency in Turkey.
- Meanwhile, in the other major flank of the assault on ISIS, Iraqi forces aim to push out the militant group from the western parts of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul within a month.

## **SECURITY SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST**

### **Impact of Relations on the Middle Eastern Security**

The U.S-Russia relations adversely affected the security situation in the Middle East. The rift of interests between them did not help the Middle Eastern governments to act jointly rather it polarized their action. It further hampered fight against ISIS except when the relations were in the first phase of cooperation.

The Middle East lies on the world's largest "shatterbelt"—an area described felicitously by American geographer Saul Cohen as the region of contact between the world's great sea and land powers. Today, another Middle East heart beats inside the shatterbelt, raising the pressure of conflict and see security conditions. World powers such as Russia, China, the United States, and Europe are assessing their regional interests and the measures they will take to achieve them. But amid the great instability, a new Westphalian order is emerging in the Middle East.