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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, POLITICS, AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

ISIS EXPANSION IN IRAQ, A CASE STUDY OF MOSUL VS. ERBIL AND KIRKUK

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This thesis was submitted for distance acquisition of a postgraduate degree in international relations, Strategy, and security Studies at Neapolis University

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Zaman Salih Youns

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract V

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Background Information 1

1.2 Problem statement 3

1.3 Research objective 4

1.4 Research Hypothesis 4

1.5 Significance of the study 5

1.6 Study Structure 5

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW 7

2.0 Introduction 7

2.1 ISIS Violent Activity and Territorial Fight 7

2.2 ISIS Expansion 10

2.3 ISIS Presence In Kirkuk. 12

2.4 ISIS Presence In Mosul 14

2.5 ISIS Presence In Erbil 16

2.6 ISIS Interactions with Iraqi Population 18

2.7 Foreign Intervention 20

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 25

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 31

4.2 Factors Leading to the Rise of ISIS 31

4.4 ISIS Radicalization Among Different Groups In Iraq 39

4.5 Internal Power Struggles and Their Effect On ISIS Expansion 40

4.6 The Kurdish Militia and Fight Against ISIS 41

4.7 Impact of Foreign Intervention In The Fight Against ISIS Expansion 42

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 46

References List 50

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Abstract

This dissertation will examine the circumstances that led to the loss of Mosul and other primarily Sunni cities and investigates why ISIS could not control Erbil and Kirkuk. After three days of fighting between jihadists and the Iraqi Security Forces, Mosul was taken by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in June 2014. The event occurred after the city had been under jihadist takeover since June 2014. After securing Mosul, the extremists attempted to continue their advancement further to the north, moving to Kirkuk and Erbil in Kurdistan. However, their quest in the Kurdish majority populated areas was unsuccessful. In this regard, particular attention will be placed on the more immediate factors that led to the invasion of Mosul by ISIS. To accomplish this objective, the researcher carried out secondary research by analysing journal articles and other reports to get insights on the topic. Content Analysis (CA) was used to analyse the data collected. The findings of the study showed that the Mosul's population dismay with the practices of the central Iraqi government in Baghdad had a great impact on enabling ISIS's advance in the Sunni populated areas, while the Kurdish population were more opposing to the rhetoric and ideologies of ISIS and their opinion with the Kurdistan administration was better that the opinion of Mosul population to the Iraqi central government. Recommendations for both theory and practice will be provided. Most importantly, the government should take advantage of the current stalemate to eradicate the enemy which has led to the unstable situation in the country and avoid re-emergence.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

Since the 1990s, Iraq has been plagued by a series of increasing wars, resultant refugee crises, and crippling sectarianism; the region has been further divided by the rise and collapse of The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS tried to establish a caliphate in Iraqi Kurdistan with the stated goal of retaking the region's Muslim-held territory and reintegrating it into the Muslim world (Steed, 2019). This is evident by how they attempted to expand into the Kurdish Region of Iraq, either by recruiting individuals within the region or by attempting to infiltrate the region from neighboring areas. However, the Kurdish regional government and the majority of the population in the region have been opposed to ISIS and have worked to counter its influence and activities. Iraqi military forces abandoned the field, and Kurdish forces swarmed in to take it from ISIS (Steed, 2019). Several contested territories previously held by Kurdish forces were reassumed by Iraq. The Kurdish Region of Iraq found itself in the center of competing political and cultural demands. This is due in part to its strategic location, as it borders several other countries with significant Kurdish populations, including Iran, Turkey, and Syria. In the past, the Kurdish people faced persecution and repression from the central government in Baghdad, as well as from neighboring countries. This has led to a long history of conflict and unrest in the region. Thus, violence enhanced nationalism, unifying Kurds against ISIS terrorism and the oppressive governments of Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey, while simultaneously making international businesses synonymous with the liberation of the Kurdish people on a national scale and the growth of the Kurdish state (Dent, 2020).

U.S. efforts to establish a stable government in Iraq have led to the country's political authority crumbling along many fault lines, not simply those dividing Kurds, Sunnis, and

Shiites (Abroad, 2019). Thus, millions of people have been forced to leave their homes as a result of the unrest in the region, thereby bringing an end to their previous way of life. Those fleeing persecution were frequently coerced into making perilous travels across borders after being denied the ability to continue with their previous means of subsistence. Thousands migrated to the semi-autonomous Kurdish territory in the northeast of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, due to the relative quiet and prosperity there compared to the rest of the conflict-ridden region (Al-Istrabadi, 2018). The conquest of northern and western Iraq by ISIS is the most violent rejection of the legitimacy of the Shia-led Iraqi state and Shia-centered state development by the Sunni minority of Iraq. Many people join ISIS from outside the territories it currently controls in Iraq and Syria, particularly in North Africa. People of minority religions, including Christians and Yazidis, fled the nation en masse as ISIS forces advanced (Steed, 2019). In response to the central government's alienating actions, locals backed ISIS. This is because some individuals within Iraq were drawn to ISIS due to a variety of factors, including poverty, lack of education, and feelings of disenfranchisement. Local support and participation in the terrorist group's expansion was, thus, its greatest strength. Since there is no clear difference between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish populations in many of Iraq's provinces, partitioning the country along such lines is highly unlikely.

Many people were taken aback by ISIS almost overnight rise to power in the summer of 2014 (Cordesman & Toukan, 2019). From their stronghold in Syria, ISIS forces advanced eastward in June 2014, seizing significant swaths of western Iraq but avoiding direct confrontation with Kurdish forces at first. Due to the withdrawal of Iraqi government forces from the disputed territories in anticipation of an advance by ISIS, the Peshmerga were able to fill the power vacuum and take control of numerous locations, including Kirkuk. ISIS launched attacks on Kurdish-held areas in and quickly took control of large swaths of the contested

territory (Clancy, 2018). Since the Peshmerga launched a counteroffensive, they now control terrain that was formerly under central government control. Kurdish actors found that they could govern these newly acquired territories without immediate military contestation from the central Iraqi government, and so they did so while also meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of the thousands who had been displaced by the ISIS invasion and subsequent battles (Defeat, 2019). The rapid decline of the Iraqi army was arguably even more unexpected than the meteoric ascent of ISIS. Notwithstanding their previous inadequacies, the Iraqi military forces were instrumental in the 2016–2017 battle to retake Mosul. With help from the International Coalition against ISIS, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) appeared to have come a long way in terms of capability development (Abroad, 2019).

1.2 Problem statement

In northern Iraq, the city of Mosul has endured a long history of political and economical deprivation. This exclusion from resources and regime power in Iraq has generated a lack of economic opportunities within the city as well as an absence in public services for its citizens. Moreover, this overcrowded urban center is home to diverse ethnicities with multiple religious affiliations - fostering hard-edged conflicts between communities residing there. This climate of unrest has created the perfect breeding ground for extremist groups to secure a presence, as they are effortlessly able to manipulate these latent social and economic issues in order to offer their followers an identity and sense of purpose. ISIS was no exception; with its ability to capitalize on such grievances it acquired overwhelming support from many citizens, along with willing recruits from among them. Subsequently, the retreat of U.S. troops in 2011 combined with a disintegration of governmental authority resulted in an absence of security and stability throughout the region, granting ISIS access to gain control over the area swiftly. While some in the United States and Iraq were quick to declare victory

over the Islamic State, evidence suggests the group is still very much a threat and has shifted its attention to attacking government institutions (Al-Istrabadi, 2018).

It can, therefore, be said that the above-mentioned underlying social and economic problems were exploited by the ISIS as they gave the locals a feeling of identity and purpose. Contrarily, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's towns of Erbil and Kirkuk have seen some degree of political stability and economic development, which has lessened the attractiveness of extremist organizations like ISIS. Additionally, the KRG has been able to keep a robust security presence in the area, which has assisted in curbing the group's growth. This presents the need to examine these factors in more detail, exploring the ways in which political, economic, and societal differences between Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk enabled or hindered the rise of ISIS. Through an analysis of available data sources, this study aims at sheding light on the complex dynamics that have shaped the group's expansion in Iraq, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the ongoing conflict in the region.

1.3 Research objective

1. To discover how ISIS came to dominate Mosul and the primary causes that contributed to their rapid and vast expansion in Mosul.

2. To explore why ISIS was unable to conquer Erbil and Kirkuk, despite the fact that Erbil and Mosul are neighbouring cities, and why it was able to approach the Erbil checkpoint but was unable to seize possession of it.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this study is based on determining how ISIS came to dominate Mosul but was unable to conquer Erbil and Kirkuk, despite them being neighbouring cities. The research is therefore founded on the hypothesis that ISIS' potential expansion and position in

Iraq is dependent to the region's infrastructural power and development, which is a requirement for ethnonational groups to provide national and security services.

The researcher also hypothesizes that the expansion of ISIS is also dependent on intervention by international countries. This is because many Western and European countries intervene to stop the expansion of ISIS since they are threatened and terrified of Islamist extremists if radical Islam is allowed to continue to spread.

1.5 Significance of the study

As a result, from the group's formation to the present day, this research focuses on the most important negative repercussions of the group's presence and impact on Iraqis. Identifying these negative impacts is crucial because it is the first step toward confronting them, gauging the depth of the divisions they caused into Iraqi society, and striving to treat some of them or save what can be spared. The most significant rationale for such a study lies in the fact that it makes a full contribution to identifying the parts of the threat posed by ISIS whose effects are still inherent or visible in the social sector of Iraq.

1.6 Study Structure

This research is structured into six sections. The first chapter begins with an introduction of the background information on ISIS and their activities in Iraq. The section then discusses the problem statement of the study and justifies the reason for carrying out the research. This is followed by introduction g the research objectives and ends with the significance of the study. The second chapter evaluates literature review on the patterns of Islamic State's continued brutality in Iraq despite the group's loss of territory and how they have managed to continuously terrorize areas in Northern Iraq. This is followed by discussion of the methodology adopted by the researcher to address the research objectives. Chapter four and five investigates the findings on the factors that have influenced the unrest in Mosul, Kirkuk

and Erbil that have provided ISIS with opportunities to expand into these areas. It further provides a concise analysis of the ongoing danger posed by the Islamic State. The research concludes in chapter six summarizing the findings and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines a variety of literature and studies addressing ISIS's activities in the Middle East, particularly in Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk, Iraq. The first section of the chapter examines perspectives on ISIS's violent operations and territorial conflict in the Iraq region since its foundation. This is followed by a discussion of how the Iraqi government's use of military and mobilization groups in reaction to ISIS's development in Iraq affects ISIS's expansion. The chapter evaluates the literature on ISIS's presence in Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk, as well as the impact they had on these cities in their desire for growth in Northern Iraq. The section concludes with a discussion of the role of international participation in the war against ISIS and the economic effects of ISISI activities on the Kurdish economy.

2.1 ISIS Violent Activity and Territorial Fight

ISIS fits the definition of a "hybrid" militia due to the fact that its members utilize both traditional and modern weapons, as well as a mix of terrorist-inspired and more regular infantry tactics (Brahimi, 2021). The local military/political scenario that ISIS may be faced with also factors into the group's decision on how to approach politics and the military. The strategic situation includes a militia's strategy, regional ties, and political ambitions. Since its 2014 split from Al Qaeda, ISIS has ridden the wave of Sunni discontent and governmental weakness to expand its territory, recruit new members, and strengthen its own military might (Defeat, 2019). It easily overran key cities in northern and western Iraq by recruiting disenfranchised former Baathists and Saddam-era officials as fighters and experts. Many Sunnis in these areas saw ISIS as a fighting force that might triumph over the weak Iraqi military and a viable alternative to the Shia-led governing apparatus in Baghdad. During its peak, ISIS and the caliphate it proclaimed were essentially self-sufficient, supporting themselves with taxes and smuggling and drawing on the experience of former members of

the Iraqi army for their military operations (Al-Istrabadi, 2018). The Islamic State was formerly thought to have authority over around 58,372 square kilometers (34.6 percent) of Iraq's land. According to the CSIS Transnational Threats Project, the highest concentration of Islamic State militants in Iraq and Syria occurred that year, with a total of between 10,000 and 25,000 combatants (Ceron et al., 2019).

The militant group Islamic State took control of Fallujah, only 60 kilometers west of Baghdad, on January 4, 2014, six months before its blitzkrieg across the Syrian-Iraqi border and seizure of Mosul garnered international attention (Baba, 2021). According to Asif et al., (2018), the surrender of a city so near to Baghdad sent a grave warning to the government of Iraq about its military capabilities and legitimacy in Sunni-dominated provinces, where the Islamic State had been steadily expanding in strength since the withdrawal of US soldiers in December 2011. The Islamic State also carried out 60.5% more attacks than any other group in Iraq in 2016. U.S. and Iraqi politicians were quick to declare victory over the group after a hard-fought campaign to wrest back Iraqi territory from Islamic State militants (Blanchard & Humud, 2017). This effort included significant security cooperation at local, national, and international levels between Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), Kurdish Peshmerga, and the U.S.-led coalition.

The Islamic State has changed its strategy and maintained high levels of violence despite territorial losses (Hove, 2018). Coalition members from the United States have admitted in public that Islamic State activity has increased in Kirkuk and other contested parts of Iraq. Data collected by ACLED show that the number of attacks in Kirkuk and Salah provinces reached an all-time high in October of 2018 (Gibson, 2019). Attacks in Kirkuk province by Islamic State have more than doubled from 2017 to 2018 until October. Also, Alemian, (2019) cites that the number of attacks in Salah ad-Dine province has increased from the previous year, and the trend is certain to continue in Diyala province from 2017 to 2018.

Islamic State militants were allowed to operate freely in Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din provinces due to the absence of an official military presence in ungoverned space and disputed territories. This is in part because of the increased instability after the Kurdish Peshmerga were removed from the region after the disputed vote (McInnis, 2016).

Jiyad, (2015) argues that the Islamic State maintained its online caliphate as a means of legitimizing its activities in Iraq's contested and lawless territories. The Islamic State's web remained its most effective means of disseminating remarks supporting its anti-Western agenda. Statistics on supposed Islamic State activity in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere in the world were just one propaganda benefit of the new series of weekly videos released by the Islamic State's Hayat Media Center in August 2018 (Ingram et al., 2021). This ongoing endeavor to create and disseminate propaganda online is indicative of the Islamic State's belief that the digital caliphate is one of the most effective means of spreading the Islamic State's radical message. There may be a continual effort, as evidenced by this propaganda campaign, to recruit new members by exaggerating its importance on the battlefield (Tanui, 2020). When compiled, these facts suggest that the Islamic State has survived, is still launching a sizable number of attacks, and is making effective use of the digital (Alemian, 2019). However, Blanchard & Humud, (2017) argues that the Sunni-Shi'a struggle that ensued after 2003 led to poor decision-making on the part of both sides, which ultimately let ISIS seize control of about a third of Iraq. Sunnis sacrificed as much for their leaders' decision to seek aid from outside as those leaders gained from it. This was especially true when they turned to al-Qaeda and later ISIS or neighboring countries (Robin, 2022). After 2003, Muqtada al-Sadr and Harith al-Dhary formed a shaky Sunni-Shi'a alliance, but it eventually crumbled as both men became embroiled in sectarian practices.

The situation reached its peak as a result of al-bad Maliki's government's tactics and miscalculation reactions, which aided ISIS. The major complaints were about corruption,

insufficient security, unemployment, subpar public services, and the numerous terrorist assaults in Baghdad and other cities (Kotinsly, 2021). Particularly targeted by de-Ba'athification and Article IV of the anti-terrorism law, Sunnis were subjected to abuse, discrimination, and arbitrary arrest. Protests flared up in Fallujah, a center of opposition to the United States forces (Ramal et al., 2021). When al-Maliki was reinstated as prime minister in place of 'Allawi in 2010, Sunni leaders had the option of turning the Sunni Street against the government. Cordesman & Toukan, (2019) argue that it was too late to rally the Sunni people against the government, however, as the turmoil in Syria and the rapid rise of ISIS made it impossible to do so. ISIS reemerged as a formidable and active force, particularly in the province of Anbar. Their growth coincided with well-executed propaganda that spoke to the hopes and fears of Sunni Arabs who had lost faith in their government and politicians (Youkhana, 2019).

2.2 ISIS Expansion

Many analysts saw the formation of ISIS as a logical result of instability in the Middle East that erupted during the mass upheavals in Arab countries during 2011 and 2012, which reinforced radical Islamic groups in the region and damaged the existing regimes, and this was the context in which academic study on ISIS took place (Bazrafshan et al., 2021; Hove, 2018; Ingram et al., 2021). ISIS was able to expand its regional reach and establish a jihadi state in Syria and Iraq by taking advantage of the chaos and degraded governmental order that erupted in the wake of the Arab Spring (Strakes, 2019). Furthermore, the group's lectures emphasized and radicalized the sectarian discourse in Iraq, which had been illegal before 2003 but was legalized after the United States' occupation of the country. Following the Arab Spring and, more specifically, the onset of conflict in Syria in 2011, this line of thinking gained popularity across the Middle East (Clancy, 2018).

Jihadists affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) threaten and kill apostates, Christians, Jews, and members of other religious minorities; they also often violate human rights and international law (Massé, 2020). Most communities and religious cults that follow the teachings of Abidullah Baba reject these ideas. In a nutshell, they're a bunch of religious fanatics. According to El Damanhoury, (2020) the members of ISIS are not only extremely cruel, but they have also amassed enough resources to create a regular army. They have evolved from a terrorist group into a formidable military force, capable of delivering more casualties per attack than any other Middle Eastern terrorist group, including al-Qaeda. They are prepared to use WMD to achieve their fanatical goals. The fact that ISIS has the resources and the determination to carry out its threats makes it the most dangerous terrorist organisation in the world right now (Arif, 2019). This organisation has a substantial amount of resources at its disposal, including, weapons, money and resources. It has taken control of a large quantity of high-tech American military equipment that the Iraqi army abandoned. World peace and stability are at stake if this gang manages to acquire more and more weapons of mass destruction.

The rise of the Islamic State is an indication of the region's dysfunctional politics and the delegitimization of state institutions, as well as the proliferation of civil wars in Iraq, Syria, and beyond (Stein, 2022). The harsh socioeconomic and political conditions in Arab cultures, as well as regional and global rivalry, are seen as primary factors in the group's creation and ascension. There are four main causes for the rise of ISIS: Before anything else, ISIS may be understood as an expansion of AQI (Al Qaeda in Iraq), which was itself a product of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Alemian, 2019). Furthermore, the Sunni-Shia division widened and deepened as a result of the government's inability to formulate policies emphasising national identity in the post-Saddam era (Hussein, 2019). Also, a major contributor to the emergence of ISIS was the collapse of the state structure in Syria, which led to the country's slide into

all-out civil war. Consolidating victories won during the Syrian civil war was aided, in part, by the failure of the Arab Spring revolutions and the spillover effect that accompanied it. Since its inception, the Islamic State has claimed and tried to possess many of the characteristics of a modern state, such as effective government and legal systems, a robust economy, and the capacity to offer both simple and complicated public services to its citizens (Robin, 2022). Religious rhetoric is a major focus for this terrorist organisation, which helps to legitimise the group and broaden its base of support. They claim that restoring the Islamic Caliphate, rather than a major sectarian conflict or anti-Western emotion, is their primary motivation. Youkhana, (2019) argues that the Islamic State is not only the most vicious of the Sunni jihadist organizations, but also the most successful militant force globally and far more developed in its combat missions and engagements. Many other well-known radical jihadist groups have distanced themselves from ISIS, publicly condemned its actions, and even fought it directly at times because of its severe and brutish nature.

2.3 ISIS Presence In Kirkuk.

Kirkuk, a city home to a diverse population, is the provincial capital where Islamic State has launched the most attacks so far in 2018. The city of Kirkuk has long been under threat from the Islamic State. The city of Kirkuk was the target of a concerted raid and suicide attack by Islamic State extremists in October of 2016 (Ahram, 2016). Around 76 Kurdish Peshmerga and allied fighters were killed during the raid, despite the fact that they were subsequently repelled by Peshmerga forces (Walsh, 2018). About a year after the Kurdish referendum, the ISF began operations to retake Kirkuk from the Peshmerga. An estimated 85,000 Iraqi people were uprooted during the battle in October 2017 (Munoz & Shanks, 2019). The oil and gas fields in and around Kirkuk were impacted by these seizures and are once again under Baghdad's control. Truckloads of oil extracted from these wells were being sent into Iran until the U.S. imposed sanctions in late October 2018 (Stein, 2022). The caliphate

continued to spread its narrative, despite having lost large swaths of land. The leaders of the Islamic State (IS) incited violence in order to protest the existence of PMF and Shia and to push their followers to engage in "jihad" or battle against the Shia forces in Iraq and Syria (Massé, 2020). The number of attacks by Islamic State in Kirkuk province more than doubled between 2017 and 2018 (Arif, 2019). Considering the province of Kirkuk's and Iraq's diverse population, the central government of Iraq must plan for their long-term security. The situation on the ground was influenced by a variety of sectarian movements at many levels, including local, federal, regional, and global (Bunker, 2021).

The city of Kirkuk was among the hardest hit by the crisis. As ISIS posed a threat to Kirkuk, the city also played host to a covert power struggle between various anti-ISIS armed organizations (Davis et al., 2018). The safety of the people, whether they were already there before the crisis or had fled to Kirkuk to escape ISIS attacks, is in jeopardy as a result of the current situation. This change has had a disproportionate impact on the Turkmen people. As a result, the distribution of the Turkmen people in Iraq has shifted significantly as various regions have been invaded by ISIS or have become front lines in the fight against them (Tanui, 2020). For instance, several Turkmen villages in and around Mosul have been evacuated, and an estimated 95–97% of the population of the Tal Afar area, where the Turkmens made up the majority, has been uprooted (Ingram et al., 2021). Turkmen refugees from Tal Afar settled in Najaf, Karbala, and Babel, while others moved to Dohuk, Erbil, and Kirkuk. Some Turkmens had also emigrated to Turkey from Tal Afar and other cities within Turkmenistan (Han & Hakimian, 2019). In addition to the city of Tal Afar, the district of Tuz Khurmatu in the province of Saladin, which is populated primarily by Turkmen, has also seen refugee influxes.

Whether the culprit is ISIS, the Iraqi Army, Shiite militias, the Peshmerga, or any other armed groups, the forced migration or internal displacements of the Iraqi people for security

reasons have detrimental societal impacts on Iraq in the long-term. This migration is driven by political factors, as are the authorities' decisions to either prevent people from returning to areas liberated from ISIS or to allow them to do so (Gibson, 2019). Security conditions are not the primary driver of policy responses to displacement; rather, political ambitions are the primary motivator. To attain ethnic and/or sectarian concentration in the regions under their control is a primary goal of the political agendas of various actors.

2.4 ISIS Presence In Mosul

Since 2004, ISIS has had a significant presence in Mosul, where it has established a massive and intricate network involving former government personnel and the local populace. As a result, Mosul has become a key propaganda weapon and the nucleus of ISIS' proto-state. Instead, Sirte was chosen because it was the first big city ISIS conquered and administered outside of Iraq and Syria where it could not rely only on the local populace (Michaels, 2022). Mosul, which was overrun by ISIS in 2014, is a great example of a region with intense sectarian conflict and strong groups in the military and PMUs. Since 2004, ISIS has had a significant presence in Mosul, where it has established a massive and intricate network involving former government personnel and the local population (Beccaro, 2018).

According to Broekhof et al., (2022) the use of PMUs to liberate the predominantly Sunni city of Mosul from ISIS drew attention to the issue of sectarianism and identity politics inside the armed forces. The involvement of the militias was debated, but the liberation of Mosul in coordination with U.S. coalition forces was largely successful. Before the battles began, the provincial council of Nineveh made the decision that PMUs would not take part in the liberation of the city (Beccaro, 2018). Baghdad ignored the council's worries and rolled the new recruits into the army. Once again, identity politics were a major factor, as the religious background of those who would enter to combat ISIS was a topic of discussion (Michaels, 2022). The majority of Mosul's Sunni public feared an assault by Shia PMUs or

Kurdish Peshmerga, despite the fact that most of these groups are themselves minorities. In this light, it is essential to evaluate the opinion of Iraqis on the militias and the state's employment of them if the rebuilding efforts in cities like Mosul are to be successful.

ISIS's growth, precipitated by the Syrian crisis, and its invasion of Mosul prompted a shift in the government's approach to the forcible relocation of Iraqis. ISIS, the Iraqi Army, the mostly Shiite militias, and the Peshmerga, each with its own agenda, have begun carrying out displacements and forced migrations (Ashour, 2022). After the invasion of Mosul, it was claimed by UNHCR (2014) that 300,000 people were displaced from their homes in a span of less than a week. About 200,000 more people were compelled to evacuate the area after the ISIS invasion of Sinjar on August 2, 2014 (El Damanhoury, 2020). In this setting, Kurds Shiites, Yezidis, and Turkmens were the most oppressed groups due to attacks by ISIS. Furthermore, numerous Sunnis who did not back ISIS operations fled their homes for safety concerns. After the increased attacks by ISIS in June and August of 2014, particularly in Mosul and its surrounding areas, around 1.2 million Iraqis reported becoming internally displaced, as documented by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (Davis et al., 2018).

As with other Sunni-majority cities in Iraq that were formerly controlled by ISIS, the reconstruction of Mosul was expected to be a lengthy and difficult process requiring cooperation from all parts of the country (Clancy, 2018). Although many PMU recruits were fighting for Iraq, Prime Minister Abadi remarked in a March 2017 speech at the United States Institute of Peace that others were motivated by something else, and he emphasized the necessity to bring the militias under state supervision (Beccaro, 2018). The solution offered by Abadi is to absorb militias into the state, so that they remain active but answerable to Baghdad. After Islamic State terrorists were defeated in Mosul in 2017, the CSIS Transnational Threats Project conducted interviews with internally displaced Iraqis who had

returned to the city (Brahimi, 2021). However, they soon left again because nothing had been restored.

2.5 ISIS Presence In Erbil

Erbil city in Iraqi Kurdistan is at the epicenter of two wars, both of which are being fueled by the world's most dreaded terrorist organization. Nevertheless, it has avoided both the fighting in Syria and the murderous push of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant into neighboring Iraq. Locals take great pride in Erbil's reputation as an "untouchable" city (Yassen, 2019). After the American withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, ISIS ramped up its attacks on Iraqi government targets, waging huge insurgencies in areas like Anbar province. As a result of its brutality, al Qaeda's head, Ayman al-Zawahiri, disavowed the group that had once been an affiliate of al Qaeda and had grown into Syria and played a key role in that country's civil war (Habibi et al., 2019).

Erbil was shielded from ISIS's march by Kurdish security forces, which have effectively constituted an army since the U.S. invasion converted Kurdistan into a quasi-independent state (Arvisais et al., 2022). Despite being better affluent than other Iraqis due to oil money, residents in Erbil have been obliged to accept new neighbors as a result of the conflict. More than half a million people evacuated the city of Mosul, Iraq's second largest, during the group's siege of the city, with many relocating to the city of Erbil, where they are now living in improvised refugee camps. Those who had the money rented hotel rooms and others are staying with family and friends (Ashour, 2022). The city welcomed, Syrians as well, making Erbil the center of everything and everyone affected by the militants. However, Habibi et al., (2019) argues that in some regards, the Syrian conflict prompted more alarm than the ISIS campaign in Iraq. After the group took over Mosul, ISIS weapons and soldiers began to flow through the border between the two countries. It is thought that most of these weapons have made their way into Iraq and are being used to fight Maliki's forces (Brahimi, 2021). Erbil is

one of the last safe regions in the region as the conflict in Syria and the ISIS insurgency in Iraq intensifies with an increasingly penetrable border. Intervention from other countries could determine how long this situation lasts (Alzyoud, 2022).

The diagram show that was ISIS controlled the places around Mosul towards Erbil and Kirkuk.

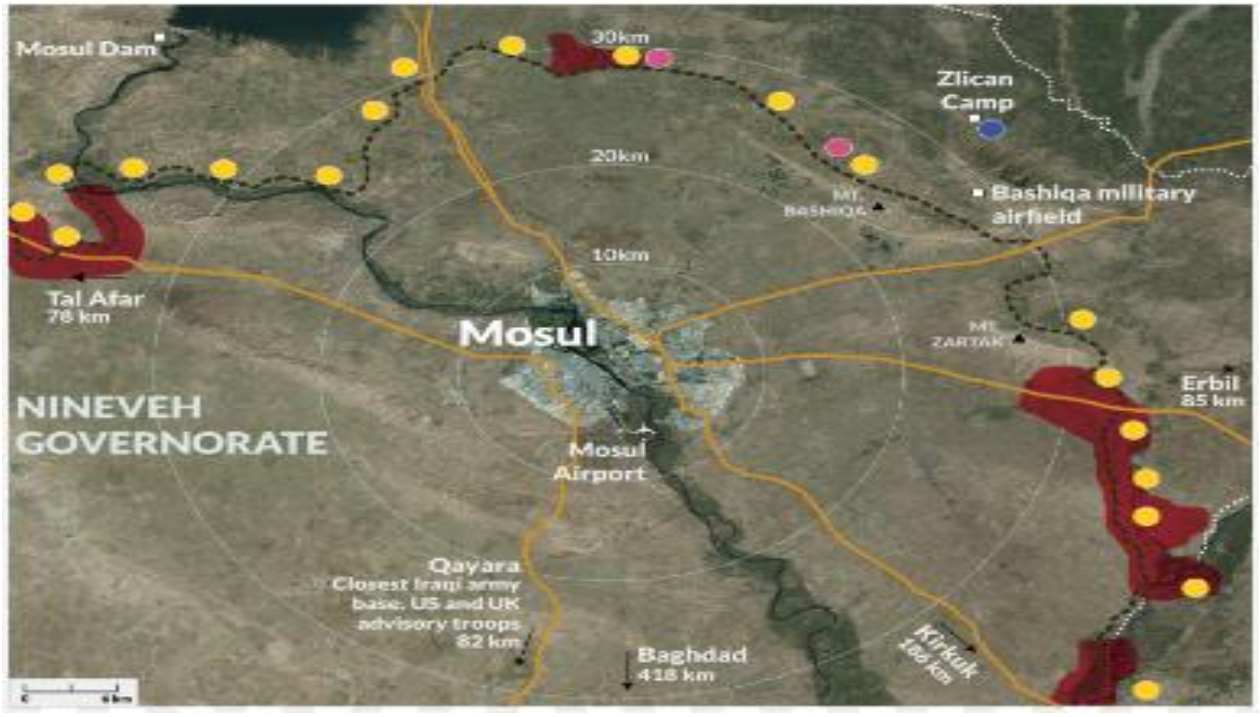
Mosul

ISIS controlled some areas around Erbil and Kirkuk

Erbil	Kirkuk

ISIS reached Sufaya village near Erbil

ISIS reached Daquq village near Kirkuk



2.6 ISIS Interactions with Iraqi Population

There have been social repercussions in Iraq as a result of the situation in Syria. As a result of these interconnected societal effects, new humanitarian crises have emerged, from which we will likely not see a quick solution (Broekhof et al., 2022). Most humanitarian crises have a human cause and are a direct result of the armed war that has ensued. Every armed organization in Iraq uses its military might to oppress and acquire dominance over the country's inhabitants, or at least over those who are militarily weaker than its members. Humanitarian crises have taken on new dimensions as a result of the conflict in Syria and the growth of ISIS through its severe attacks and wins in Iraq (Arvisais et al., 2022). The Syrian crisis triggered a rise in the frequency and severity of encounters with displaced people in Iraq. As a result, it is clear that the IDP problem in Iraq is now a more serious threat to the social fabric of the country due to the Syrian catastrophe (AlMomani & Hazimeh, 2019).

Along with the formation of a humanitarian crisis, Iraq's demographic borders began to shift as a direct result of these tactics of displacement, and specific ethnic/sectarian concentrations arose in different parts of the nation (Brahimi, 2021). There is little doubt that the current situation in Iraq threatens the country's social fabric and its future, and also poses a substantial risk of further radicalization (Habibi et al., 2019). Displacement has been a political tool in modern Iraq. First appearing in the 1970s, this doctrine underwent two major shifts during the Saddam era: the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and the Gulf War of the early 1990s (Alzyoud, 2022). Displacements during this time were state-led activities conducted out by security forces, mostly against the Kurdish population and also, to a lesser extent, the

Arab Shiites. At least one million Iraqis were said to have been displaced within the country by the year 2003. After 2003, however, the Sunnis and Turkmen became the primary targets of displacements carried out by militias and other paramilitary groups rather than the state (Al-Istrabadi, 2018). According to the UNHCR, the number of internally displaced Iraqis increased from 1 million in 2006 to 2 million in 2007 as a direct result of policies taken after 2003 (Dora, 2021). The Sunni Arab population made up the vast bulk of those who were forced to flee their homes in these areas. During the first five months of 2014, 480,000 Iraqis were displaced just in Anbar due to heightened clashes between the security forces and radical organizations in the city, and this was before the ISIS conquest of Mosul (Michaels, 2022).

Despite the Iraqi Army's inability to provide an effective line of defense against ISIS's advance, the army's combat efforts against ISIS have contributed to the ongoing upheaval of Iraqi society. The Peshmerga's activities during the anti-ISIS campaigns also created long-term security concerns for the Iraqi population. For instance, there is evidence to show that the Peshmerga blocked residents, particularly Arabs, from returning to their houses following ISIS's defeat (Ingram et al., 2021). According to Human Rights Watch's (HRW), the Peshmerga imprisoned Arabs in "the security zones" retaken from ISIS (Rached & Bali, 2019). The local security forces and the Peshmerga stopped the displaced Arabs from returning to their houses in Erbil and Ninawa due to safety concerns. But Kurds, who had been sharing these districts with Arabs, were exempt from these regulations. Furthermore, KRG soldiers also committed various plundering crimes against Arabs and their homes after retaking them from ISIS. Security measures across the country were stepped up in response to widespread fear and the threat posed by ISIS (Hameed, 2020).

2.7 Foreign Intervention

After the US invasion in 2003 and the subsequent ouster of Saddam Hussein, the topic quickly rose to the forefront. Iraqis under Saddam Hussein and the Baath party appeared to be more separated according to their danger to the authoritarian government than along religious lines (Ashwarya, 2019). After Saddam's ouster by the United States, Shia Muslim anger at his tyranny grew. The majority of Iraqis, Shias, felt especially oppressed by Saddam and were therefore relieved to see the United States take action. However, the Sunnis' sense of powerlessness and victimhood under the new Shia-led government has only grown after the regime change (Rached & Bali, 2019). The de-Baathification of the Iraqi bureaucracy greatly diminished the influence of Iraq's Sunni Muslim elites. The new Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, used increasingly sectarian rhetoric, and the exclusion of Sunnis in the nascent post-invasion state structure only deepened the rift (Yılmaz & Sevdeen, 2019). As a result of the United States' withdrawal from Iraq, the country's Sunni-majority provinces felt increasingly isolated and threatened by its dictatorial and sectarian prime minister. However, several local Sunnis first applauded the ISIS march as a revolution against the central authority, before being ruthlessly co-opted by ISIS. Many refused to believe that ISIS was behind the attacks on the government, instead blaming tribal groups and defecting ex-military officers (Hameed, 2020).

Middle Easterners are instinctively skeptical of Western interference in the region given its catastrophic record. Many also oppose Iran’s expanding influence, as well as Iraqi Kurds’ territorial expansion and ambitions for independence (Dora, 2021). Those who don't necessarily share the Islamic State's ideology may be drawn to the organisation simply because of the involvement of so many different groups. After all, being a part of a coalition of Sunni groups that do not share its terrorist outlook has aided with its fast development in Iraq (Rached & Bali, 2019). They battled alongside the organization because of their

animosity for the former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, who has now resigned, and Sunni marginalization generally since Saddam Hussein's overthrow (Baser & Toivanen, 2019).

Throughout 2014, a year in which ISIS captured some important areas in Iraq, including Mosul, the Iraqi government repeatedly appealed for "the assistance of the international community" to "defeat ISIS and protect our territory and people" from the growing threat posed by this terrorist organization (Minardi, 2019). U.S.-led coalition airstrikes against ISIL in Iraq began on August 8, 2014, in response to this call. As President Obama emphasized, this was done "at the request of the Iraqi government" and to "assist forces in Iraq" fight a terrorist group that resorts to inhumane means (Ergun, 2018). Up until February 3rd, 2016, the United States-led coalition had launched 6,763 airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq (Ergun, 2018). According to the United States government's page on Operation Inherent Resolve, nine countries have contributed to the effort thus far: the United States, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Krause, 2018). While several additional nations have offered logistical support or have joined the coalition effort to enhance partner capability in Iraq, these countries have not yet committed military action in Iraq under the US-led (and Iraq sanctioned) coalition (Minardi, 2019).

Iraq has repeatedly said that the coalition led by the United States is conducting airstrikes only with its "express consent." In a letter submitted to the President of the UN Security Council in September 2014, for instance, Iraq stressed that: To strike ISIS locations and military strongholds, Iraq asked the United States of America to lead international operations in accordance with international law and the applicable bilateral and multilateral agreements, and with appropriate consideration for total national sovereignty and the Constitution (Ergun, 2018). The legitimacy of this request and the legitimacy of intervention by invitation have never been contested by any state. Instead, this request has been used to justify military action against "the substantial threat of continuing attacks from ISIS coming out of safe

havens in Syria," not simply in Iraq (Gause III, 2019). At the same time as the United States-led coalition has been bombing Iraq, the Iraqi government has given permission for other states to intervene on its territory. Despite political objections, no country has yet questioned the legal foundation of involvement by invitation (Ortiz-Ayala, 2021). It is worth noting that the UN Security Council never authorized the use of force in Iraq under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, despite holding multiple sessions and adopting a resolution about the situation in Iraq on 29 July 2015 (AlMomani & Hazimeh, 2019). With regard to the war against the ISIS, the UN Security Council "urged the international community, in conformity with international law to further enhance and expand support for the Government of Iraq (Han & Hakimian, 2019).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

2.8.1 Grievance Entrepreneurship

According to the principle of grievance entrepreneurship, people or organizations can take advantage of actual or imagined complaints to increase their influence and power. According to this idea, people or organizations would try to gain support by locating and emphasizing issues that are important to the general public, such as marginalization, injustice, and disenchantment with the government (Kurer et al., 2019; Milano et al., 2019). In relation to your argument, this hypothesis would imply that ISIS was able to capitalize on local concerns in Mosul, such as marginalization and government disenchantment, in order to gather support and enlarge their influence. This model may be used to explain why ISIS was successful in taking over Mosul but failed to do so in Erbil and Kirkuk. It emphasizes how the group utilized perceived or actual injustices experienced by the people to rally support and draw in new members.

2.8.2 Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory examines how social groups unite and mobilize to pursue common objectives and effect social change. It explores the mechanisms, plans, and driving forces behind the emergence and growth of social movements. The theory examines how people or groups join together to create a shared identity and how they mobilize resources, such as people, organizations, and money, to accomplish their objectives (Milano et al., 2019). It also looks at how social movements grow, develop, and ultimately succeed or fail in achieving their goals. In addition to examining the causes of social movements, social movement theory also examines the political opportunities and limitations, media coverage, and reactions of opponents and authorities (Kurer et al., 2019). A wide range of social events and movements, including those that have a political, economic, and cultural dimension, may be studied using the broad theoretical framework known as social movement theory.

2.8.3 Political Economy

Political economy studies how politics, economics, and society are interconnected. It examines how a society's economic and political structures interact to determine how income, power, and resources are distributed. It considers demographic factors affecting economic and political results. According to the notion, the political and economic systems are intricately linked, and any changes to one would ultimately result in changes to the other. In addition, political economy examines how various economic systems, like capitalism, socialism, and mixed economies, influence political results. It also looks at the potential effects of various economic structures on social inequality, poverty, and wealth distribution. This theoretical framework offers a comprehensive view of how political and economic institutions impact various social groupings and how they shape society as a whole (Momodu, 2020).

2.8.4 Power Vacuum

The idea behind the power vacuum hypothesis is that when a strong state or actor leaves a territory, a power vacuum is left behind, which other states or actors would try to fill. As players compete for control of the territory, this may result in more competition and war. Because there is no reliable, legal government in place, a security vacuum permits non-state actors or criminal organizations to fill it and take control of the populace. According to the notion, these actors take advantage of power vacuums to increase their influence and level of control over the populace. According to the power vacuum argument, the lack of a powerful and stable administration in Mosul may have facilitated the growth of ISIS in the area (Momodu, 2020).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

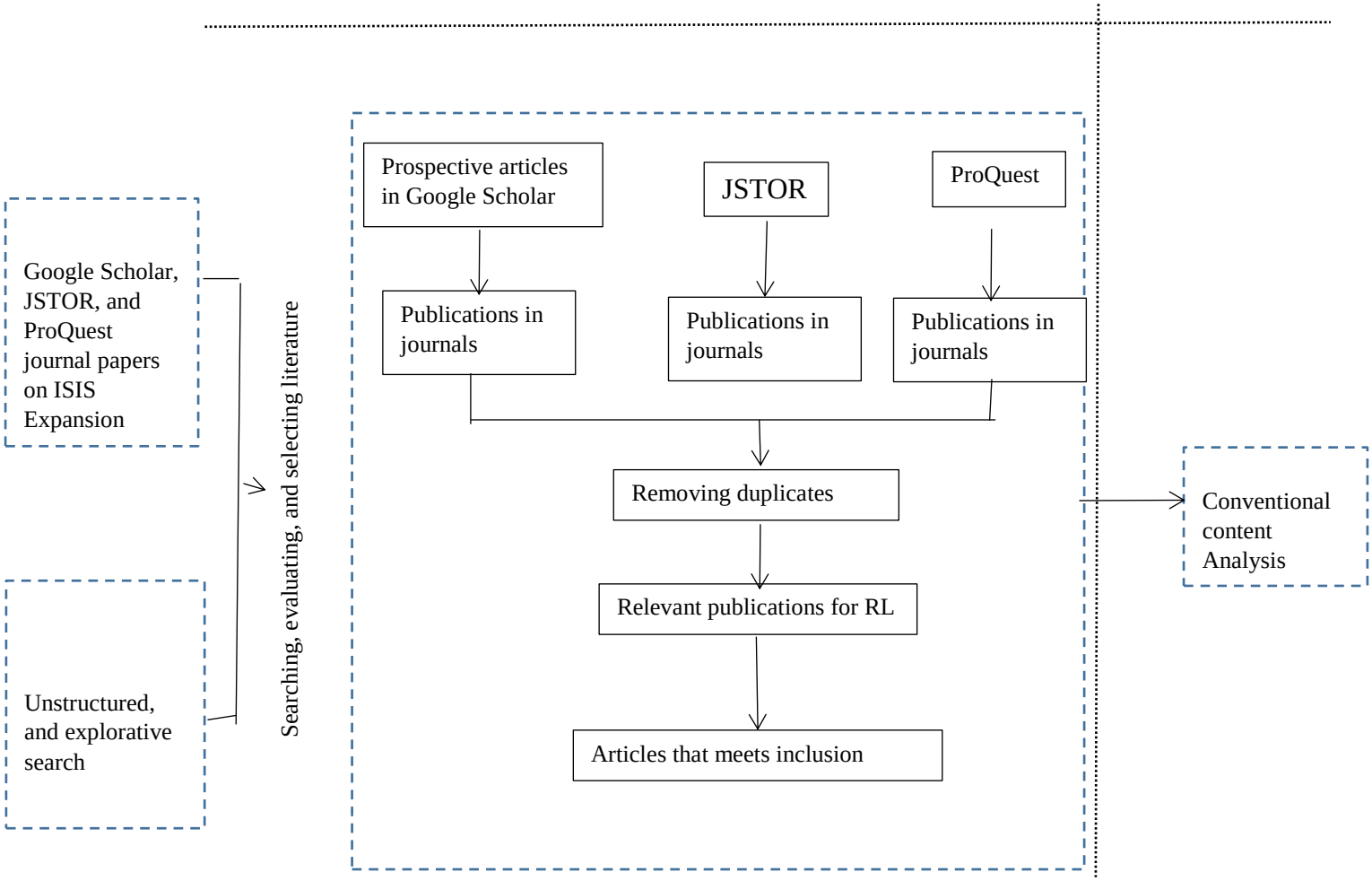
This chapter outlines the research technique utilized to determine what contributed to ISIS's quick growth in Mosul and why the group was unable to take control of the nearby cities of Erbil and Kirkuk, the main objective of the research. The study used secondary data sources, such as journal articles, papers, and other academic publications, to guide its qualitative methodology. The chapter's main sections outline the research design, data collecting and analytic methodologies, steps to assure the study's validity and reliability, and any constraints. The basic premise of the technique was that foreign intervention and the strength and development of the region's infrastructure are both necessary for ISIS' prospective growth and status in the country.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for the current study, centering on a systematic literature review in order to collect and analyze data. Systematic literature reviews offer an extensively broad yet impartial view of already-existing studies concerning particular subjects. Specifically in this case, the researcher carefully evaluated the factors that empowered ISIS's growth to Mosul but not Erbil or Kirkuk.To ensure that only the most reliable and credible sources were included in the review, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was developed. The literature review then started with an extensive exploration through numerous English and Arabic databases to identify applicable resources such as scholarly journals, books, reports, and news articles. Data was collected from these sources using a predetermined format and analyzed utilizing qualitative data analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

According to Rowley and Slack (2004), when conducting a professional literature review, articles in scholarly and research journals should be the primary source of information as they have been peer-reviewed before being accepted for publication. The content was supposed to specifically focus on ISIS encroachment of Mosul or explicitly demonstrate its relationship with it. Consequently, only such publications are deemed suitable sources of reference material.After thorough consideration, it was determined that several databases were ideal for our literature search to ensure a broad variety of reliable, peer-reviewed scientific journals. While some of the reviewed journals included the most relevant articles within their review, others included journals outside the realm of terrorism. The following diagram shows the process of searching the journal articles from beginning to the end.



(Source: Researcher, 2023)

Usually, during the selection process after the topic has been conceptualized, the articles were selected using inclusion criteria. To guarantee that the studies have gone through a meticulous review process and been backed by experts in the field, they had to be peer-reviewed research articles printed in scientific journals. Additionally, since the focus is on Iraq, these articles should be written either in English, Kurdish, or Arabic to capture local trends. Besides, the articles must correlate to the primary research topic or exhibit a clear association with it. This criterion guarantees that the studies compiled for review are pertinent to your inquiry and provide valuable information for analysis. Moreover, these pieces of work had to be published from 2014 to date; this ensured that the review would be based on state-of-the-art findings and contemporary materials. The ISIS attacked Mosul in 2014, thus the articles had to be published from the time they launched attacks to this date because the group is still active. By stringently following these inclusion criteria, this systematic literature review extensively probed the existing research on the subject and aid in forming a theoretical framework to steer our examination of the case studies.

The researcher also used some exclusion criteria to remove articles that could not help with the research and ensure that studies that do not contribute to the research question and might bias the analysis are not included. To identify studies with insight into the reasons why ISIS expanded to Mosul and not Erbil or Kirkuk, we used criteria that excluded any materials irrelevant to our research. We omitted work done in other countries than Iraq, as well as projects conducted before the emergence of ISIS and those that lacked a succinct methodology. Furthermore, all non-English, non-Kurdish, or non-Arabic publications were removed from consideration when undertaking this analysis. The researcher made sure to be judicious in the selection process and only included research studies that were high caliber, appropriate, and recent. The systematic review of the literature gave us a thorough

examination into existing topics on this subject matter which facilitated the development of a theoretical framework for analyzing individual case studies.

3.4 Data Analysis

Analyzing literature for this project relied on the method of Content Analysis (CA). CA is a way to interpret what written data means or signifies by organizing relevant information into categories that are specific to the research and providing an understanding of whatever topic was explored (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The three primary approaches used in carrying out CA are conventional, summative, or directed analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Summative CA is a numerical approach that aims to analyze the contextual usage of words, and its findings may be studied through descriptive statistics associated with certain phrases in particular contexts. On the contrary, Directed CA requires pre-defined data codes and categories for deducing them from the collected data. It primarily serves as an instrument to enhance credibility of a theoretical framework or connection suggesting an idea further. Conventional CA is the most inductive type of content analysis, allowing for new insights and categories to arise from critical and reflexive examination (Vreugdenhil et al., 2022), and it is the one that was used in the current study. This approach surpasses other types since it provides a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon than any other technique, which was utilized in this paper's literature review. As opposed to preconceived notions being applied prior to data collection, conventional CA focuses into an exploratory process that puts depth before breadth – providing only significant findings instead of raw data (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). To identify key themes and future possibilities, an accumulative approach was taken. The selected research papers were sequentially examined from oldest to newest, noting topics associated with current trends and possible future developments for each publication.

To analyze the publications, current and future topics from each paper were contrasted with those previously identified. For this process, five papers were analyzed in a single cycle to create the preliminary categories along with their features. Then that same procedure was repeated for the following set of five papers until all had been examined. As the literature analysis progressed, at times it was necessary to re-examine already analyzed papers in order to confirm or redefine the information established. As such, it was necessary to define, add, merge and reconstruct categories according to new insights derived from each newly examined publication until a unified structure of categorization was eventually achieved. After all of the categories were established, various subcategories were researched and investigated to create an in-depth overview for each category both concerning current topics within the research topic and potential directions that it could take. In Sections 4 and 5 these outcomes regarding existing themes as well as future prospects are detailed with a subsection devoted to every finalised classification. To better understand the recurrent themes in ISIS expansion, each publication was assessed by probing its core problem statement, research objectives and pertinent background information. The methodology employed as well as any outcomes obtained were also examined for a comprehensive take on this field of study. By analyzing individual studies from both an objective-specific and general perspective, the aim was to thoroughly delineate the categories of recurring topics within ISIS expansion in the three Kurdish cities.

3.5 Study Limitations

Although the reliability and validity of the study are maintained at the highest level, there are shortcomings present that cannot be ignored. For instance, it heavily relies on secondary data sources, which could not present an accurate and comprehensive view of the situation. Besides, the analysis won't be generalizable to other locations or wars and focused only on the unique instance of ISIS advance in Mosul, Erbil, and Kirkuk. The investigation may also

be constrained by the lack of relevant material and the researcher's personal prejudices and viewpoints. The study also remained constrained because it relies only on data that was perhaps incomplete at the time of data collection and was made publicly available.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher considered the ethical implications of the research and took steps to ensure that all steps involved on the research adhere to ethical standards. This included obtaining the necessary permissions and approvals from relevant authorities before conducting research in the region. Ethical considerations are an important aspect of conducting research. Research ethics refers to the principles and standards that guide research practice, and is concerned with ensuring that research is conducted in a responsible and respectful manner (Pietila et al., 2020). It is important for researchers to consider the ethical implications of their research and to take steps to ensure that their research is conducted in a responsible and respectful manner.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the study's results on the variables contributing to the establishment of ISIS in Mosul and its possible spread in Iraq. The key idea, as stated in the preceding sections, is that ISIS' possible expansion and position in the country is based on the region's infrastructure power and development, and international intervention, among others. To comprehend the establishment of ISIS in Mosul, it is necessary to evaluate the region's political, economic, and social conditions before the group's inception. Mosul's insecurity and lack of government, as well as sectarian tensions and frustrations among the population, offered excellent ground for the group to take root.

There are six major sections obtained from the review:

4.2 Factors Leading to the Rise of ISIS

The researcher identified 30 articles covering the factors that led to the rise of ISIS in Iraq. All of the articles were published between 2014 and 2022. The explanation behind this is that while the group had been formed earlier, it did not attach Iraq until 2014 when the Iraqi and U.S. forced had deserted Mosul City. Therefore, literature on the factors leading to the rise of Islamic State is concentrated within the 9 years of its existence in the country. Since June 2014 when the group declared itself as an Islamic State, it has been associated with numerous attacks, some of which has been fatal and devastating events in human history. All of the research is based in Iraq.

The findings show that while a variety of elements have driven the emergence of ISIS, politics in Iraq has always been a primary factor in cultivating turmoil. Additionally, it is not only linked to the rise of terrorist factions but can be directly attributed to an increase in insurgency as well. It is abundantly clear that insurgent movements will survive and thrive if they are able to establish themselves within an area where there is a weakened military

presence -- making this reality even more concerning for citizens living under such conditions. Robinson (2015) asserts that terrorism will always find the resources it needs to thrive in areas where there is an abundance of finance and no administration, oil, especially, being a key factor. This view has been further reinforced by the media's widespread portrayal of ISIS as a saviour for disgruntled Sunnis - which ultimately led them to join its ranks. The exploitation of Islam by terrorist organizations is not a new phenomenon. Hostilities between Sunnis and Shias living in the same region have been prevalent for centuries, with nowhere more evident than during the Syrian civil war, where groups like ISIS made full use of it as their opportunity to regroup (Valasik & Phillips, 2018). A review of the current and past literature showed that the following factors were responsible for the rise of ISIS.

4.2.1 Local Politics

Out of the 30 studies on factors contributing to the rise of ISIS, 4 of them mentioned local politics as a major factor, pointing to political actors and discriminatory policies as contributors to the current political chaos in Iraq and the broader Middle East. A study by Pettersson & Öberg (2020) showed that the ancient differences between Kurds and Arabs, as well as Sunnis and Shiites, have only deepened the political rift in Iraq. These widening divisions gave way for ISIS to capitalise on the power vacuum left behind by exploiting popular support from its Sunni constituents (Romano, 2014). The longstanding ethnic tensions of Iraqi Kurds with government forces since 1980 are yet to be sufficiently addressed after numerous violent outbreaks of Shiite-Sunni disputes years later. In 1991, the Kurdish uprisings only exacerbated Iraq's instability. Despite U.S. attempts to quell the civil war between 2003 and 2008, the 2010 election delivered a confusing result that gave Iran more influence over Iraq and secured Shia control of government organizations—ostracising Sunni citizens in its wake (Brennan, 2014; Romano, 2014). As a result, when tested in 2014 during an ISIS attack, the army failed due to a lack of local support. To summarise, the three

studies show that ISIS used Iraq's political turmoil to portray itself as the saviour of the marginalised Sunni minority.

On the same issue of internal politics, one study by Arvisais and Guidère (2020) howed that the policies of Prime Minister Maliki's Shiite government caused further alienation for the Sunni population instead of incorporating Sunnis into the national army and providing them with equal representation. Furthermore, unemployment, alongside inadequate economic opportunities, became a frequent issue in these areas. This exacerbated tensions between Shiites and Sunnis, leading to a perception among Sunnis that their rights were being oppressed under an authoritarian regime. The government's policies of marginalisation and arrests of Sunni leaders led to increased tensions and widespread demonstrations by Sunnis calling for justice and greater representation in government. Overall, researchers have attempted to pin the origins of ISIS on a person or political objective; most of these investigations point to politicians who have sought to profit from ISIS. Furthermore, the researcher asserts that they blame political actors for the upheaval in the Middle East.

4.2.2 Finances

Only three of the reviewed articles cited financial support as a contributing factor; two of them were peer reviewed (Al-Istrabadi, 2018) while the other one was Schweitzer and Einav's (2016) report to the Institute for National Security Studies. Although previous researchers have not agreed on the most powerful organisation in terms of finances, the three sampled for this section agreed that ISIS is the world's wealthiest. In a bid to find out the funding sources for the group, Arvisais and Guidère (2020) identified that the members have gained control of several economic resources in both Syria and Iraq, including gas fields and oil wells, phosphate and cement plants, food storage facilities, and farmlands. ISIS has also stolen banks and obtained numerous weapons and equipment. The group also uses extortion, taxes, and ransom money to gain wealth (Al-Istrabadi, 2018). Donations are received from

Islamic organizations and individuals in Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, Schweitzer & Einav (2016) hold that the group has been linked to illegal activities such as the trafficking of women, antiques, drugs, and human organs. All of these methods have contributed to ISIS's prosperity and financial stability, thus acquiring power to acquire the required weaponry and manpower to continue with their atrocities.

4.2.3 Propaganda

Four articles considered propaganda as a major factor contributing to the success of ISIS. From the research, ISIS has successfully used social media and web forums to construct a wireless 'caliphate,' fighting both on the ground and online (Alfifi et al., 2019; Bahari & Hassan, 2014; Michaels, 2022; Napoleoni, 2014). They have been successful in attracting disaffected and vulnerable youngsters through the identification and dissemination of their ideology through these forums. This is especially noteworthy because, while social media has previously been used solely by states to influence public opinion, it is now possible for individuals and other groups to use it to achieve their aims as well. Napoleoni (2014) states that while some terrorist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, have exploited social media, statistics reveal that ISIS has been exceptionally successful in attaining its goals through the use of various forms of social media.

To spread fear and build its influence, ISIS has relied heavily on social media to share news of its transgressions (Michaels, 2022). Additionally, the group also uses propaganda to depict a life of peace within held territories and showcase its purported benevolence with images featuring playtime with children or distribution of aid packages. The use of photos, videos and music has made these messages alluring enough that it's enabled them to draw in both locals and foreigners alike. The group adopted the black flag as a symbol for all Muslims and utilised a multitude of methods to manipulate its population (Bahari & Hassan, 2014). Their propaganda targeted different audiences such as governments, enemies, international

communities, local people and areas outside their region - which proved significant in facilitating territorial growth (Alfifi et al., 2019). Moreover, media production played an indispensable role in furthering this cause.

4.2.4 Exploiting Islam's Ideology

The researcher identified two articles with the finding that the Islam ideology has been exploited to promote ISIS atrocities. ISIS is a jihadi-Salafist Islamic group that aims to bring back the Islamic Golden Age by waging a holy war, or jihad, against internal and external foes. The group adheres to an extreme interpretation of Islam, supporting the promotion of religious violence and holding that those who disagree with or oppose the group's interpretation are infidels (Schmid, 2015). Salafists ardently believe that all Muslims must be unified in their mission of spreading and practising Islam, and this can only happen by purging the land of any other culture - particularly Western. Therefore, it is an obligation of every Muslim to fight against those who oppose them, from foreign nations such as the West to local leaders perceived as tools used by external powers (Crenshaw, 2017). By fabricating a Salafi ideology, ISIS manipulates innocent individuals and legitimises its power. The group claims that it is engaged in defensive operations against Western governments that have colonised Muslim states. Nevertheless, the notion of Muslims being persecuted globally is simply untrue; most mistreatment of Muslims occurs inside their own countries instead. Furthermore, the argument that the only way to build real Islam is through the sword is not supported by Islamic history or Quranic scriptures that urge harmony in the Muslim community.

4.2.5 The Arab Uprising of 2011 and the Syrian Civil War

Three articles had it that through the exploitation of extant religious tensions in Syria, ISIS managed to cultivate a transnational Sunni resistance which eventually legitimised their presence. The opposition leaders' lack of a unified vision for the nation and the international

community's negligence in providing basic services such as security, administration, or energy only fueled local discontentment with regime rule (Broekhof et al., 2022). All these opportunities allowed ISIS to fill power voids and further consolidate its control over Syrian territory. By conveying the illusion that ISIS would provide a better life, it allowed the group to attract supporters with minimal effort (Gerges, 2016). More so, taking advantage of its ability to dissolve the border between Iraq and Syria, it quickly moved people, weapons and resources across both nations. Such action was enabled by the U.S. invasion and their failure to stand up against Syrian tyrant leaders, which ultimately led to paved the way for ISIS' emergence (Blanchard & Humud, 2017). As Syria crumbled as a nation and social fabric, it became a proxy battlefield for regional hostilities, which provided immense inspiration and motivation for potential ISIS recruits. As a result of all of these, ISIS has become a formidable force within the region.

4.2.6 Infrastructure

ISIS's growth in Mosul was significantly affected by the region's power and progress in terms of infrastructure, as stipulated by the previous researchers. It was easier for ISIS to take control of Mosul than it was for other neighbouring cities, such as Erbil or Kirkuk, because of the city's inferior infrastructure and development. This includes elements like bad governance, a lack of fundamental services, extreme levels of poverty, and restricted access to healthcare and education. Unlike Mosul, Kirkuk and Erbil had far more developed infrastructure, which gave them a better chance to fend off ISIS. These cities have greater access to fundamental services and resources, more developed economies, and reasonably stable and functional governing institutions. In spite of their proximity to Mosul, ISIS had far harder difficulty establishing authority in Erbil and Kirkuk (Cordesman & Molot, 2019).

The level of security forces and foreign aid in Mosul was vastly different from Erbil/Kirkuk, which made a significant impact on ISIS' growth. The Iraqi government had little presence or

training in the former, whereas there were well-trained troops present with advanced weaponry to resist them in the latter cities. Furthermore, international coalition members provided unwavering support for defending these areas from invasion by ISIS, resulting in their containment and limiting their reach into those regions. The study also discovered that the existence of ethnonational groups in Erbil and Kirkuk, who had more efficient ways to offer national and security services, impeded ISIS's spread and made it harder for them to control and impose their authority. These factions were better equipped to resist and defend themselves against the extremist group because, unlike in Mosul, they had the backing of their local populations (McEvoy & Aboultaif, 2022).

4.3 ISIS Crisis In Mosul

This was identified as yet another major theme in the reviewed articles, possibly because when ISIS was sweeping across the country in 2014, literature shows that the largest prize they could claim was Mosul City (Boduszyński, 2016; Smith et al., 2014). For this reason, many researchers have concentrated on the study of the status of Mosul since the 2014 invasion. A total of 10 of the reviewed articles attempted to explain the past and current status of the city since the takeover by the extremist group. During the attack, the fighters managed to force the Iraqi military and many residents out of the country's second-largest city. Mosul was a key source of pride and profiteering, proving that the group could construct a legitimate state. Human rights violations and the enforcement of harsh Sharia rules were hallmarks of the assault. This resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents and serious casualties. The seizure of Mosul was part of a broader onslaught in which the organisation took control of much of northern and western Iraq. This enabled them to operate in the region while also obtaining funds by extorting locals and looting historical landmarks (Atran et al., 2018). The Iraqi security forces were initially tasked with responding

to the emergency, but due to deficiencies in training, equipment and coordination, they failed to make any major progress despite international assistance.

In 2016, the Iraqi government, supported by foreign allies such as the United States, began their mission to reclaim Mosul (Blanchard & Humud, 2017). What ensued was a long and bloody battle with fierce combat in its streets that resulted in an alarming number of civilian casualties. To make matters worse, ISIS had booby-trapped the city with explosives and established tunnels for transporting soldiers and supplies – making it difficult for coalition forces to break through. After months of intense fighting against insurmountable odds, Mosul was eventually freed from its grasp and returned under the full control of the Iraqi government in 2017. Ergun (2018) holds that up until February 3rd, 2016, the U.S.-led coalition had launched 6,763 airstrikes against ISIS in the country.

The presence of ISIS in the City had devastating effects. Many individuals were murdered, wounded, or forced to flee Mosul as a result of the battle, which had a terrible humanitarian impact on the city's citizens. The supply of fundamental services, including water, power, and healthcare, was severely hampered by the substantial infrastructure loss (Cockburn, 2015). Again a million people were reportedly displaced by the war, according to the United Nations, and many of them had a difficult time going back home and starting over. Additionally, the crisis in Mosul has wider ramifications for the area and Iraq. The war in the city led to the country's continuing instability and to sectarian strife (Salihy, 2019). The emergence of ISIS in Mosul also brought attention to the problem of extremism in the area and the capability of terrorist organizations to seize control of urban areas. Although the defeat of ISIS in Mosul was a significant triumph, the city and the surrounding region will need ongoing international assistance to solve the humanitarian crises and the causes that led to the emergence of extremist organizations in the first place.

Despite ISIS's proclaimed defeat in Mosul, the city still has security issues. Militias and other non-state entities have grown in power in the conflict's aftermath, filling the security void left by the withdrawal of government forces (Saeed et al., 2021). These militias have been charged with violating human rights through extrajudicial executions, kidnappings, and intimidation. Additionally, inhabitants in the city feel exposed and unsafe due to the weakened government security personnel. Many city dwellers have complained that they don't feel secure moving around and that their personal safety is in danger, particularly women and minorities, as there might be what they refer to as sleepy ISIS (Yousef & Butti, 2022). Because of this, it is challenging for locals to resume their regular activities and for companies to run. This has also generated an atmosphere of dread and mistrust. The absence of restoration efforts and the scarcity of essential utilities such as power, water, and healthcare exacerbate the problem. Many inhabitants continue to live in makeshift camps or damaged homes, and there is a significant lack of jobs and economic prospects, which adds to the overall sense of insecurity.

4.4 ISIS Radicalization Among Different Groups In Iraq

Out of the pool of the research articles identified, only one of them talked about how the different groups of individuals are radicalized. This research by Rasheed (2015) uncovered a multitude of variables that resulted in the radicalization of distinct factions within Iraq. These components include feelings of exclusion, sectarian divisions, economic status, and overseas activity. All these components combined to develop an environment where radical behavior could thrive. It was shown that various age groups were exposed to different radicalization-related triggers – especially young people, who are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to the ideology and propaganda of ISIS via social media platforms or the internet (Rasheed, 2015). Thus, they felt empowered by their sense of identity and purpose as part of this strong movement gaining momentum. Many of the young men who joined ISIS were

drawn to participating in a violent uprising against alleged oppressors (Rasheed, 2015). The group also used religious and ideological justifications to entice women to join their ranks and contribute to the establishment of the caliphate (Perešin, 2018). The group also promised them a better life and the chance to escape their difficulties. Women were also specifically targeted with messages emphasizing their role in establishing a new Islamic society (Rasheed, 2015). The group's story of injustice and retribution, and its assurances of financial support and help, was more persuasive to inmates and ex-convicts who already felt disenchanted with society and the government (Rasheed, 2015).

4.5 Internal Power Struggles and Their Effect On ISIS Expansion

The results of the research identified two articles demonstrating that internal power competition was a major factor in ISIS' growth in Mosul. Prior to their emergence, instability from political and economic issues had already caused a vacuum of control which permitted extremist entities an opportunity to gain traction within the city. The presence of many armed organizations and militias in Mosul created an unstable environment ripe for exploitation by extremist groups like ISIS (Merone, 2021). These entities often operated independently from the central government and were motivated by multiple factors, including resource access, territorial control, power dynamics as well as sectarian or ideological differences. This resulted in a disorganized atmosphere where ISIS was able to manipulate tensions among these preexisting divisions while simultaneously increasing its influence over the city (Steed, 2019). These armed groups and militias often fought among themselves for control of key resources such as oil, water, and food. Control over resources, territory, and power was only a few of the reasons why these organizations, which frequently operated independently of the main government, were motivated (Merone, 2021). Ethnic, religious, and ideological divides also played a role in them. Extremist organizations like ISIS were able to take advantage of

the differences and establish a foothold in the city because this generated a climate of turmoil and lawlessness.

ISIS was able to recruit from the populace that had been left out and suffered as a result of the power conflicts of the armed groups and militias as they increased their dominance over Mosul. They were able to position themselves as a respectable rival to the current power system, which had failed to give the populace security and stability. Foreign nations' engagement, notably in the form of assistance for certain militias and armed organizations, significantly aggravated the situation in Mosul. This backing solidified the power conflicts and made it possible for extremist organizations like ISIS to profit from the anarchy (Merone, 2021).

4.6 The Kurdish Militia and Fight Against ISIS

A total of 6 articles had their focus on strength and intrepidity of Kurdish militia forces acted as a formidable barrier against ISIS's attempt to seize control over Erbil and Kirkuk. Home to many Kurds, the KRG in Iraq is an area vibrantly rich with its own unique traditions, language, and customs (Bowie, 2017). The Peshmerga, KRG's military force, was crucial in thwarting the advancement of extremists, making them an integral part of this ongoing saga. The Peshmerga, who are well-trained and well-equipped, were able to effectively defend the towns of Erbil and Kirkuk against ISIS (Ham, 2016). They were able to seize control of a vast amount of land, including the strategic oil-rich city of Kirkuk. They also got assistance from the international community, which supplied them with weaponry, training, and information (Bowie, 2017). The Peshmerga's ability to dominate crucial territory, cities, and critical resources, including oil fields, aided in reducing ISIS's financial backing and stifling its progress.

Furthermore, the existence of Kurdish militias offered a respectable alternative to ISIS' ruthless leadership. According to Galvan-Alvarez (2020), ISIS's attractiveness to the local

community was further diminished by the Kurds' ability to offer services like security and government to the populace. Locals were able to live their regular lives free from the threat of violence and repression because of Peshmerga's ability to restore a feeling of normalcy in the regions under their control. ISIS found it more difficult to draw in fresh recruits and keep the allegiance of current ones as a result. Emboldened by a fierce sense of nationalism, the Kurds courageously joined together to fight ISIS in an attempt to protect their culture and homeland (Galvan-Alvarez, 2020). This strong collective spirit made it difficult for ISIS to gain control over Kirkuk and Erbil due to the high level of patriotism emanating from both Peshmerga forces and citizens. By fighting against this violent extremist ideology, these brave people defended what makes them unique - their Kurdish identity.

Unlike Erbil and Kirkuk, Mosul is much more diverse in terms of its population makeup; thus making it a target for ISIS radicalization. Not only did Mosul house many ethnic and religious minorities, but it also had large clusters of Arab communities living within it too. These conditions, combined with dire economic hardships, made the city susceptible to extremist ideologies like that of ISIS' (Galvan-Alvarez, 2020). By preying on marginalised groups such as Sunni Arabs who were feeling alienated from their surroundings, these organizations could easily gain traction amongst locals- furthering their cause. Gaining a foothold in the city was made possible by the group's ability to position itself as a remedy for the perceived injustices and prejudice suffered by these groups (Arvisais and Guidère, 2020) . As a result, it was able to gain the support of certain demographic groups, which it then used to seize the city.

4.7 Impact of Foreign Intervention In The Fight Against ISIS Expansion

The investigation done for this report revealed that international engagement was crucial in the struggle against ISIS spread in Iraq (Trenin, 2016). The capacity of ISIS to seize and maintain control of land in Iraq was directly impacted by the international community's

participation, particularly that of the United States and its coalition allies. On the one hand, the USA helped the Iraqi government and security forces battle ISIS by providing them with vital support. This assistance also included logistical and intelligence support and military supplies, including guns and manpower (Trenin, 2016). Air assistance was also given to the Iraqi security forces by the coalition, weakening ISIS's ability to defend its holdings and remain open to ground assaults. The Iraqi security forces could then conduct counteroffensive operations and retake vast portions of territory that ISIS had previously controlled. In addition to that, foreign actors provided other powerful weapons and support to both Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga soldiers (Trenin, 2016). The United States and its coalition allies equipped them with ammunition, trucks, and other necessary tools that enabled their ability to stand up against ISIS. In addition to this material aid, they received instruction from those same countries, which helped hone their combat strategies for maximum efficiency on the battlefield.

Along with military action, the international community against ISIS also prioritised diplomatic isolation of the organisation by refusing any sort of legitimacy and seeking to financially and logistically isolate the organisation (Hussein, 2019). The coalition worked diligently to financially and logistically isolate ISIS and attempted to deny the organisation any recognition or legitimacy. Disrupting ISIS' oil trade was one of the coalition's primary financial isolation strategies. The organisation was using the money from oil sales to support its activities after seizing many oil fields in Syria and Iraq. The coalition reduced its income and operational funding by focusing attacks on the group's oil infrastructure. In addition, the alliance enforced sanctions against entities and people connected to ISIS, denying them access to global financial networks and reducing their ability to raise money. The alliance has also attempted to physically isolate ISIS by interfering with its ability to supply weapons and transport troops. ISIS's smuggling routes for fighters, weapons, and ammunition were

targeted by the coalition, which contributed to the depletion of the organisation's military resources and personnel (Hussein, 2019). In addition, coalition members exchanged intelligence and cooperated to thwart the group's efforts at recruiting and communication. As a result, ISIS had fewer militants at its disposal and had a harder time obtaining weapons.

As part of their global effort to combat ISIS, the international community also imposed diplomatic isolation on them by refusing to recognise it as a legitimate entity and denying them statehood (Hagans, 2021). Additionally, they labelled the group as terrorists to strip away any recognition or legitimacy. This was backed up with economic sanctions against those connected with ISIS, preventing any financial support from coming through. It was all part of a united front that sought to eradicate this threat once and for all. This caused the group's gradual collapse, leaving it incapable of effective coordination. Moreover, the coalition induced other states to reject ISIS recognition diplomatically and restricted its capacity to reach deals or interact with different nations internationally. Furthermore, in cooperation with global partners, the coalition sought to block ISIS from creating diplomatic ties or offices within their countries - making communication more difficult and access to resources inaccessible (Hagans, 2021). This further contributed to the group's diplomatic isolation.

The international alliance greatly impacted ISIS's capacity to raise money for its activities. Besides the oil trade, extortion, theft, ransom, smuggling, and access to the banking system, the alliance also attacked the group's many other revenue streams. Targeting and destroying the group's oil infrastructure by the coalition substantially decreased its financial backing and hampered its capacity to function. A significant factor in restricting the group's capacity to raise money for its operations was the coalition's efforts to block the group's access to the banking system and freeze its assets. The coalition's efforts to target the group's revenue streams from extortion, theft, and smuggling also hindered its ability to generate revenue

from these activities. In short, the coalition's efforts to disrupt the group's funding significantly hindered its ability to operate and expand (Araz & Othman, 2022).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Overall, this thesis has sought to identify the primary factors behind ISIS's rapid and far-reaching success in Mosul, as well as their inability to conquer Erbil and Kirkuk. Through a case study of these three cities, it was discovered that the region's strong infrastructure was one of the major contributors to ISIS's control over Mosul. It became evident that because of its limited infrastructural development – particularly in terms of socioeconomic and political stability –ISIS could easily consolidate itself as well as spread quickly within Mosul. The citizens of the city were more likely to be receptive to the promises made by ISIS, such as security and better administration; thus, many joined this extremist group. The people had been exposed to dismal governance, limited job opportunities, and inadequate public services. Moreover, the literature suggests that local law enforcement's breakdown, along with sectarianism and political turmoil in the country, all enabled ISIS's success in Mosul.

It can as well be concluded that many factors led to the failure of ISIS in their attempted takeovers of Erbil and Kirkuk. These two cities had much more advanced infrastructure than other regions affected by ISIS' advances, and they were bolstered by international aid and support from outside states. Additionally, local populations proved resilient against ISIS propaganda due to increased solidarity among its citizens. All this combined created a formidable defence that thwarted any attempt at conquest on behalf of the terrorist organisation. The KRG also played a crucial role in preventing Erbil and Kirkuk's fall by providing the region with security and military support. The involvement of coalition troops and other foreign players, including the sending of advisors and special forces, as well as the supply of military assistance and information sharing, also contributed to fortifying these cities' defences and halting ISIS's growth. Additionally, the paper contends that these cities'

geopolitical, financial, and oil-resource importance rendered them less desirable targets for ISIS.

This research has also driven home the point that infrastructure and development significantly influence a region's vulnerability to extremist groups like ISIS. When socioeconomic and political stability is lacking, coupled with sub-optimal governance, it creates an ideal environment for these terrorist organizations to thrive. The findings demonstrate how this vacuum allows them to gain traction quickly and efficiently expand their reach. Considering the identified causes of ISIS expansion also brings forth the conclusion that infrastructure and development significantly influence a region's vulnerability to extremist groups. Additionally, the research highlighted that the intervention of international countries could be a major factor in preventing or inhibiting the expansion of ISIS in certain regions. This research reveals the significance of comprehensive intervention, including diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian aid, alongside military measures. These insights can be beneficial when formulating future studies on security pertaining to similar extremist groups in the Middle East and beyond. Additionally, this stresses the need to tackle root causes such as poverty, unemployment issues, poor governance systems, as well as political and sectarian divisions if a regime wants to avoid these terrorist organizations from emerging and keep the world stable.

5.2 Recommendations

Looking at the findings of the study, the researcher provides the following practical recommendations:

1. The Iraqi government should consider increasing investments in infrastructural development to create a stronger and more secure environment. A major reason as to why Mosul was attacked by ISIS while the neighbors such as Kirkur and Erbil survived the assault

was due to poor infrastructure. Therefore, the currency of infrastructure in the region is a major consideration while thinking of ways to eliminate the group.

2. The socioeconomic causes of radicalization and extremism should be one of the the main focus of Iraqi government and international allies. These factors are strong indirect causes of ISIS expansion and if ignored they could lead to the revival of the sleepy ISIS the residents have feared over the years.

3. Iraqi government and its international allies should adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism, considering the complex causes that, besides security and military measures, could result into ISIS expansion.

4. To avoid the recurrence of comparable conflicts and the rebirth of extremist organizations, investment in long-term development plans and good governance initiatives would be crucial.

5. The government should with local communities to promote reconciliation and social cohesion to prevent further divisions that have caused marginalization of some communities in the past who ended up joining ISIS. This includes the protection of religious and social minority groups and increasing their representation in the political arena as a way fo reducing radicalization.

Besides these practical recommendations, the following theoretical recommendations are also viable:

1. Future researchers should consider studying the ethnical dynamics in Iraq which in the past have been used by ISIS to spread the Islamic ideology. The study would help in understanding how different areas in the country are affected by such campaigns, providing empirical evidence on how the government should deal with the spread of propaganda.

2. Future studies should look at the downside of international intervention in the fight against ISIS group. While collaborating with other actors could seem benefitial, it could be sparking agony amongst the remaining ISIS members and might be acting to facilitate its advancement considering they are jihadists. This presents the need for a study on the negative impacts of engaging foreigners in domestic security affairs.

3. Another theoretical proposal for this work is to have future researchers look at how infrastructure shapes non-state entities like ISIS' ability to spread and sustain authority in a particular area. This might involve researching the effects of both social and physical infrastructure, such as healthcare and education systems, as well as roads and other forms of transportation infrastructure.

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