



Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs



IISA'S SITUATION ANALYSIS:

The Islamic coalition against terrorism: a step forward or backward?

Saudi Arabia has just announced the creation of an Islamic coalition to fight terrorism. While announcing the creation of the coalition, Adel al Jubeir stated "It is time that the Islamic world take a stand, and they have done that by creating a coalition to push back and confront the terrorists and those who promote their violent ideologies,"

The coalition, whose full dynamics and structure are yet to be revealed, is to consist of 34 mainly Sunni countries. These countries include military heavy-weights such as Pakistan and Egypt, and economic heavy-weights such as Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The command and control structure is to be based in Riyadh.

Besides establishing what the coalition will actually do, key questions include a) what can the coalition actually accomplish b) why has it been created, and most importantly c) why has it been created now?

To start with the latter, why create a coalition now when militancy, insurgency and terrorism have been rife in the Islamic world for decades? We need to consider a few things. First, this coalition is born out of necessity and pressure and not out of a pragmatic approach. A brief look at the Islamic world will be enough to realise

how Muslim countries face multiple problems and protracted conflicts. Syria, Libya and Afghanistan are just few of the examples. There are multiple conflict fault lines: sectarian, ethnic, tribal and ideological. Add neo-Jihadists groups, and the outcome is a lethal mix of non-state actors and power struggles. IN addition, conflicts are protracting and regional countries are unable to cope with their fall-out. The international community has only added fuel to the fire while once again attacking targets in Syria, Libya and Afghanistan.

Syria, Libya and Afghanistan are in a stalemate after years of military involvements and attempts to resolve conflicts. Regional rivalries amongst sectarian lines grow thicker in Yemen, Syria and elsewhere. The attacks in Paris and the global refugee crisis have reminded the west how inflammatory the situation really is.

The 'why now' question can be assigned multiple factors: the inability of one side to have an upper hand in regional rivalry (i.e. Yemen, Syria), and pressure from the US and its allies on the Gulf countries to act. Moreover, non-state neo-Jihadist actors such as the Islamic State (IS) are growing in capabilities across the Islamic world (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, the Sahel region, and so forth).. This of course

presents a serious challenge to the security of many regional states.

The coalition is literally too late and too little. What can it actually do? The simple answer is not much or nothing. This is due to the poor conceptual and practical backbone of the programme.

Conceptually, it will be difficult to define 'terrorism' in the countries. It would have been easier to call it 'the Islamic coalition against Daesh' or something similar. Most countries define terrorism differently. Syrian moderate opposition is a legitimate opposition for some regional countries who support it, while to others they are just terrorists. Who are terrorists in Egypt and Pakistan for instance (both military heavy-weights of the coalition), and who are the terrorists in Libya where some of the coalition support one side and the other half the other side?

Practically, it is very difficult to see the coalition having any meaningful impact. We have already seen in Yemen that a similar but smaller Sunni coalition has been unable to resolutely defeat Houthi's forces. To make a coalition work, its partners need common enemies, goals and strategies - which this coalition lacks. Although the coalition may have enough

money and military power, these issues will make any realistic military approaches impractical.

So what does the coalition really represent? It demonstrates that Islamic countries are also serious about fighting terrorism, and that they understand western concerns. Nothing more.

It is certainly not a prelude to a ground offensive in Syria or elsewhere.

This is not to say that a united Islamic world response is not needed. It is needed much more than previously, and IISA has been privately arguing for it. However, it needs to be practical enough to work. Instead of fighting against terrorism in a coalition while terrorism itself is a term almost undefinable, both conceptually and practically, as stated above -the leading countries within the Islamic world should create a 'Security Assistance force'-. This could be deployed in areas to protect human security, as well as humanitarian and developmental issues. Much more concerted effort is required to address growing sectarianism and the rift that is emerging and engulfing the Islamic world. Practical approaches on conflict transformations could be more beneficial.

Such approaches could not only help the regional countries of the Islamic world but also the international community. In other words, a coalition is needed - but not the one that has been created, if we are serious

enough to tackle multiple protracted challenges in the Islamic world.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC STRATEGIC AFFAIRS (IISA)

IISA is a think-tank and an intellectual forum for addressing the current and future dynamics of the Islamic-world and its interaction with Western civilisation. Based in London, IISA will create trans-Islamic and global reach. IISA seeks to establish a platform where Islamic-world's dynamics, trends, issue, problems or crises are analysed within the Islamic-world and by working on local models and realities and not against any external standards or perceptions. We will be one of the leading think-tank on the Islamic-world and its role in the contemporary global system. In a short span of time we have attracted great academic support and a reputation for both open and track-II dialogues. IISA is the only think tank initiative that goes beyond national and regional inclinations and addresses strategic and socio-political issues/crisis of the Islamic world in its totality. For more information i.e. our mission statement, current programmes and our academic and regional expertise please visit the following links:

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