

Executive Summary

The wind blows. A scorching breeze forces fine grains of sand to cut through his clothing, but not nearly as deep as the cuts in his soul. A welcomed discomfort; anything to distract from the situation at hand. A classmate, a friend, a brother, all words to describe the bond forged through the crucible of hell that they have been subjected to. He wonders what has he done to deserve this, and why do it? Out of fear? Out of respect? For Allah? Or does anyone truly have a logical answer to this illogical question? As he watches his friend's lips meet his father's hand, tears swell in his eyes. He knows nothing else remains. He chokes back the feelings, there is no room for weakness in this life. As he watches the car disappear into the distance, one word screams through his mind: "Run!" But as time passes, a far more frightening and realistic word shakes him to his core: "Trapped." He knows before long it will be his father's hand outstretched. What little comfort he has stems from the seventy-two virgins that await him after his sacrifice, or at least that is what they tell him... Allah akbar...

This is a fictionalized narrative of a nonfictional scene. Eleven-year-old, Abu Imara al Omri, was forced to kiss his father's hand and kill himself through a suicide car bombing moments later (CNN, Richard). This is the story that over 1500 ISIS recruited children face every day. There is no choice, there is no escape, and there is no hope for any child indoctrinated by this radical Islamic hate group, and if nothing is done, then generations of hate and death will root itself into the foundation and future of this world.

Background

ISIS is a radical Islamic terrorist group that originated from Iraq in early 2004 as an Al Qaeda affiliate. As ISIS evolved over the years, by 2014, Al Qaeda, the antagonists of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, considered ISIS too radical and disowned the group. News headlines and obituaries are filled with ISIS' terrorist footprint and atrocities. ISIS has one goal: the mass murder, genocide, and enslavement of any

infidel and the downfall of western civilization. This goal, no-matter how deranged, is being chased and no measure, including suicide bombing, torture, and child-enslavement and indoctrination, is deemed too far for this group to go (Timeline).

Over the last three years, ISIS has recruited, indoctrinated, and sacrificed children from multiple countries in order to further their global genocide goals. By ingraining their extremist ideas into children, it safeguards the future of their ideals and organization. Children have been trained as spies, executioners, martyrs, and front line soldiers (CNN, Erin). Each child and ISIS member acts as a cell in the ISIS organization; to kill one cell is useless, as each cell contains the motive and ideals to continue the cause with or without the help of others. This system organization should drive fear into the hearts of the entire globe because it guarantees generations of senseless and barbaric murdering based on the ideals of a misinterpreted religion. If we do not intervene immediately, thousands more children and innocent people will be indoctrinated and murdered leading the world down a path that it may never recover from.

The Intervention

To combat child recruitment we must identify how ISIS has been most successful in recruiting children into their forces. According to a documentary done by Frontline, school curriculums have been replaced with Islamic extremism. Instead of traditional schooling, "children learn about jihad and the ways of the caliphate" (Boghani). ISIS has even resorted to "paying families to send their children to ISIS run schools" (Carter). Lastly, ISIS has become a master of propaganda. They have released hundreds of videos and even run their own magazine, as well as, social media outlets.

Success in intervening in child recruitment comes by addressing the above issues, particularly education. What is difficult about this situation is that there is no previous model

for bringing education to areas so heavily influenced by religious extremism and armed conflict all at once. So to find successful interventions we must look to programs that have had success in similar fronts. The international group, War Child, has successfully brought education to hundreds of thousands of children across the world, including those in the Middle East. They have done so by providing psychological support, education, and child protection (War Child Holland). Another group that has seen success in similar areas is the, Global Partnership for Education. Their programs are designed to support governments and streamline funding to maximize education efforts and provide educational targets to be met to track success (GPE).

As for combating ISIS propaganda, governments need to double down on their attempts to battle ISIS online. According to the Brookings institute, governments need to, “view the problem of the Islamic State as a political problem with a media dimension, not the other way around. They need to up the volume of our counter-propaganda efforts, employ credible voices of people who have firsthand knowledge of ISIS violence and, use multifaceted content similar to the multifaceted content that the Islamic State produces (Fernandez). Recently, under a similar framework, the U.S. created the Global Engagement Center to, “more effectively coordinate, integrate and synchronize messaging to foreign audiences that undermines the disinformation espoused by violent extremist groups, including ISIL and al-Qaeda, and that offers positive alternatives,” (Office of the Spokesperson). While it has had success in knocking some ISIS materials offline, more funding is needed to support the program, as well, as its foreign counterparts.

Cost and Benefits

Understandably, with the civil war and War against ISIS going on in Syria, the Syrian economy has greatly suffered. In “The State of the Syrian Economy: An Expert Survey”, Aron Lund puts together an interesting compilation of a number of different reports from different individuals and presents them in one article. According to this article, there are five main

reasons why the Syrian economy is suffering and include “the destruction of the country’s physical infrastructure and productive capacity; outflow of financial and human capital; the fragmentation of the territory and the disruption of trade and other business networks; the collapse of state institutions and services in areas outside regime control; and Western sanctions”. Given these reasons, it is almost simple to see how ISIS has managed to take control of much of the region, from both a control of land perspective and from an economic perspective.

ISIS does not follow the rules and makes money in ways that no respectable government or group of people could. There are five ways that ISIS makes money, two ways of which make up the majority of ISIS’ income. These two ways include controlling many of the oil refineries in Syria and then illegally selling to those who greatly need oil, and by heavily taxing the people who live in ISIS controlled areas. The other three ways include taking ransoms from kidnappings, looting and selling stolen artifacts from Syrian heritage sites, and stealing (Fantz).

With ISIS holding much of the monetary control in Syria, one of the only ways for Syrians to earn much needed money to provide for their families is to join ISIS. The need to provide for one’s family has even fallen on some of the shoulders of young boys, who may be the only men left in the family if their fathers and/or brothers have already died in the civil war (Bender). The poverty that much of Syria is in has played a major role in children being recruited into ISIS, and will continue to play a large role, as without money, the basic necessities required for life cannot easily be met (Biggs).

This is what groups looking to intervene and help children who have defected from ISIS are facing. In addition, they are also facing the issue of having to try to provide food, water, and other forms of aid to a country that is currently a war zone. The Syrian economy itself is in shambles and cannot provide much if any economic support for its people, aid must then be donated or given to the country if the people are to ever recover from ISIS’ reign.

Lessons Learned

The success of ISIS is attributed to the strong political and recruitment efforts being made. The issue of children being recruited as soldiers has become a known international issue and groups are stepping in to protect these children. The Syrian observatory for human rights has begun to look at the increase in recruitment and the other issues related to recruitment of children to use as soldiers. The United Nations is also stepping in and declaring Syria a Level 3 emergency, in order to receive international funding to address these issues.

ISIS thrives off of the poor economic situation in Syria. The lack of money keeps children from going to school and becoming educated. ISIS offers free religious schooling and even will pay some families while recruiting their children. Families are unaware that the religious schooling that their child is receiving, is actually training for war and fighting. If groups were better educated on the issues and there were alternate ways to provide education for children, ISIS's power could be reduced.

The main strategies that will help decrease the number of children being recruited by ISIS is by addressing the educational needs and combating propaganda. One of the main things that we can do to stop the mandatory educational plan is by supporting teachers that are opposing the plan and teaching on their own in secret.

This is an ongoing problem in the Middle East, and will take time, money and strategic effort to stop ISIS in its recruitment of child soldiers.

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