

# THE FALL OF IS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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The military defeat of the Islamic State, declared with the capture of Baghuz in Syria, the last sliver of its territory, had been in the making for months. Since 2016, when Iraqi forces started a determined push to take back territory usurped by the post-al Qaeda “Caliphate”, the group has steadily lost territory. The fall of Mosul in mid-2017 marked a significant milestone. Around the same time, a US-backed coalition had started retaking IS territory in Syria. Raqqa, the self-declared capital of the IS, in Syria, and the last big city it held in that country, was freed from the IS in October 2017. There was a terrible civilian toll and to this day, the city remains uninhabitable, while Iraq struggles to rebuild Mosul. At the height of its power, the IS controlled almost a third of Syria and a long boot-shaped piece of territory in Iraq, like a dagger through its heart, stopping just north of Baghdad. In these areas, the self-styled “Caliphate” attracted thousands of young people from across the world, including to the great shock of those countries, from North America and Europe. It also attracted donors from which it raised billions of dollars. Plus it sold oil from the large fields in Syria and some in Iraq under its control to a shadow world of clients. It inflicted great brutality on all that lay in its path — people, architecture, libraries and museums.

However, the IS as an ideology had long crossed over the steadily shrinking geographical borders of the so-called Caliphate. In that sense, declaring victory over the IS may be premature. While thousands of IS fighters and their families have dispersed from their strongholds in Syria and Iraq into the deserts, the group is present in Afghanistan where it is known as the Islamic State of the Khorasan. In the manner of al Qaeda at its height, the IS now has independently operating franchises across the world, and individuals and small bands of individuals ready to carry out terrorist attacks in several parts of the world.

Only a handful of IS-inspired youngsters have been detected in India, some after they had left for Syria, but fortunately, most as they were being radicalised by online mentors. Earlier this month, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj told the OIC foreign ministers that India's multiculturalism and diversity had ensured that extremist ideologies had not taken hold. But there is no room for complacency. Religious co-existence has been undermined much in recent times, and the situation in Kashmir has deteriorated. The IS is sure to react to its defeat, and to see the multiple faultlines of this region as an opportunity. India cannot afford to let down its guard.

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