Terrorism and it’s implication on global security in the 21st century(The ISIS experience in the middle east 2020-2025)

BY

EZEAMALU ROSELINE CHISOM

GOU/U22/IRE/577

PROJECT PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY, UGWUOMU NIKE ENUGU STATE

JULY, 2026.

TERRORISM AND IT'S IMPLICATION ON GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY (THE ISIS EXPERIENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST 2020-2025)

BY

EZEAMALU ROSELINE CHISOM

GOU/U22/IRE/577

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

GODFREY OKOYE UNIVERSITY, UGWUOMU NIKE, ENUGU STATE

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE (B.Sc) IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

SUPERVISOR: REV.SR.DR. LUCY UMEH

JULY, 2026.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the project entitled “TERRORISM AND IT'S IMPLICATION ON GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY (THE ISIS EXPERIENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST 2020-2025)” submitted by me to Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu state in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of (B.Sc) in International Relations is a record of the bonia fide project work carried out under the guidance and supervision of Rev. Sr. Dr. Lucy Umeh

_____

EZEAMALU ROSELINE CHISOM DATE

GOU/U22/IRE/577

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that this research entitled “TERRORISM AND ITS IMPLICATION ON GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY (THE ISIS EXPERIENCE I. THE MIDDLE EAST 2020-2025)” was undertaken by Ezeamalu Roseline Chisom with the registration number GOU/U22/IRE/577 presented to the department of Political Science and International Relations of Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu has been assessed and approved for oral defense by the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

_____

REV.SR.DR. LUCY UMEH DATE

SUPERVISOR

_____

PROF. SAMUEL UGUOZORDATE

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

ASSOC. PROF. JOHN ODO DATE

DEAN FMSS

_____

EXTERNAL EXAMINER DATE

DEDICATION

I Dedicate this Research work to God Almighty for giving me the strength, wisdom, grace, knowledge, understanding and enabling environment in carrying out this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For every iceberg floating there is a greater structure beneath the sea; to every tree standing there is a strong root that you don’t see; and to every great movie rolling there are greater crew behind the scenes. To this beauty of a building (this Project) You have been a corner stone.

I want to use this opportunity to thank God for his protection, grace and guidance during the period of m`y project research. My profound gratitude goes to my humble and reliant supervisor, Rev.Sr. Dr . Lucy Umeh who motivated me and developed my intellectual ability beyond this research work, because of him, I can confidently present this work whenever and wherever. I would also like to express my gratitude to the esteemed Head of my Department, Prof. Samuel Ugwuozor for his diligence and persistence in ensuring that my department's researchers and I could conduct our research with sufficient direction and clarity.

To the renowned lecturers in my field of study (Political Science and Internationa Relations); Sr. Dr. Lucy Umeh, Mr. Ezechi Kingsley, Dr. Mrs. Francisca Ifedi, Mr. Anthony Oyinshi, Mr. Ejike, Rev. Fr.Dr. Ogbuka, Dr. Mbaeze Netchy, Dr. Alex Ogonnaia , Dr. Amadi Cletus, Mr. Ajibo Christian,Dr. Young, Mr. Okonkwo W. O ,Mr Nweke, Mrs.Chioma I sincerely extend my profound gratitude to you for being consistent, patient and reliable and also for their impeccable effort in building me academically in the field of International Relations. I also extend my profound gratitude to the Dean of Management and Social Sciences Prof . John Odo . To my Parents, Mr and Mrs Ezeamalu who have been my strength and standing blocks and for their financial and emotional support which without this work would have not been completed, I sincerely appreciate you And my course mates who we all labor together for this course, may the good lord strengthen us all.

I am indebted in a special way to my friends,well wishers and loved ones for their love and support. May the Good Lord reward and bless each and every one of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page

Declaration

Approval Page

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Table of Content

List of Tables

Abstract

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.3 Research Questions

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.7 Limitations of the Study

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

CHAPTER: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.2 Thematic Review

2.3 Theoretical Review

2.4 Empirical Review

2.5 Summary of Reviewed Literature and Identified Gap

2.6 Gap in Literature

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.2 Application to the Study

3.3 Research Design

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

3.6 Logical Framework

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Evolution of Terrorist Tactics in the Middle East (2020-2025)

4.2 Proxy Networks and Regional Power Rivalries (2020-2025)

4.3 Global Security Implications of Terrorism in the Middle East (2020-2025)

4.4 Discussion and Summary of Findings

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

5.2 Conclusion

5.3 Recommendations

REFERENCES

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the topic Terrorism and its implication on global security in the 21st century (the Isis experience in the middle east 2020-2025). The objectives of this research are as follows ;To Analyze the major trends, transformations, and operational tactics of terrorist groups in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025.To Examine how state-sponsored proxy networks and regional rivalries intensified terrorism and contributed to global insecurity within the study period.To Assess the broader implications of Middle Eastern terrorism such as migration pressures, maritime insecurity, economic disruptions, and geopolitical tensions on global security.This study employed Relative deprivation theory propounded by Ted Robert Gurr, ex post factory research design documentary method of data collection and content analysis. The study was conducted with the following findings ; Terrorist organizations like ISIS have abandoned territorial control to mutate into decentralized, highly resilient networks that rely on asymmetric tactics, drone technologies and digital coordination and it confirms that terrorisim in the Middle East has evolved from a regional issue into a globally interconnected security threat, generating widespread political, economic, technological and humanitarian consequences ranging from refugee crisis and energy market instability to increased international militarisation. This study recommends the following ; To foster regional cooperation and break down proxy networks and Strengthen mechanisms for Digital Counter terrorism and Global Security.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background to the Study

Terrorism has continued to be one of the most persistent and destabilising threats to international peace and global stability in the twenty-first century. Although extremist violence is practiced in a number of different regions, the Middle East remains the global epicentre of terrorism, insurgency and proxy warfare (Institute for

Economics & Peace, 2023). The period 2020-2025 has particular importance because the terrorism of the region shifted from territorially-based insurgency into more decentralised, technologically-advanced and network-based operations.

After the territorial collapse of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2019, analysts looked forward to the decreasing of jihadist activities. However, this did not occur. Instead, ISIS reorganized into small, mobile insurgent cells operating across Iraq, Syria and parts of the Levant; conducting ambush attacks, assassinations and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks (United Nations Security Council, 2021). The group increasingly depended on online recruitment, encrypted communications and propagating propaganda - revealing its ability to adapt even when it lost territorial control (Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate [CTED], 2022). Likewise, Al-Qaeda affiliates in Syria and Yemen emerged again by taking advantage of governance gaps, long-lasting civil wars and widespread socio-economic grievances (International Crisis Group, 2021).

A great characteristic of Middle Eastern terrorism from 2020 to 2025 was the escalation of proxy warfare. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) increased its support to armed non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq, pro-Iran in Syria and the Houthi movement in Yemen (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). These networks were financially supported, equipped with advanced weaponry, cyber-skills and drones, that allowed them to launch cross-border missile strikes, sea attacks and sabotage operations (Berti, 2022). This development made the distinction between terrorism and state-sponsored violence blurry, which complicated counter terrorism responses for the international community.

Meanwhile, the Houthis in Yemen were able to expand their increased operational capabilities and increasingly targeted commercial shipping routes, oil infrastructure, and neighbouring states using ballistic missiles and weaponised drones (United Nations Panel of Experts on Yemen, 2023). Their activities destabilised strategic maritime corridors, such as the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Strait of Hormuz - regions important in the global oil supply and international trade (International Maritime Organisation, 2024).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict also saw new escalations between 2021 and 2024 with more rocket attacks and the use of drones by advocacy groups in Gaza (European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2023). This period further saw tensions between the Iran-backed militias and the US forces in Iraq and Syria increase, with drones being used to attack the coalition bases and diplomatic missions (NATO Strategic Communications Centre, 2022). These episodes were demonstrations of how localised terrorism in the Middle East could quickly bring global powers into the fray, stepping up geopolitical tensions.

The impact of terrorism in the Middle East is not limited to the region in any way. It contributes to increasing flows of refugees, price volatility in energy, blocking of trade routes, and increasing digital radicalisation (UNHCR, 2022). The use of drones, cyber tools, online propaganda and proxy militias is part of an overall shift in terrorism being a multidimensional threat impacting security systems globally (Schmid, 2021). Understanding the patterns, drivers and implications of terrorism in the Middle East from 2020-2025 is therefore important in exploring the role modern terrorism plays - and plays into - the contemporary global security environment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite all the efforts in cooperating the counter-terrorism approach, military undertakings, and international peace-keeping operations, the Middle East remains the world's most volatile terrorist hub (Global Terrorism Index, 2023). During the period 2020-2025, terrorist activity in the region did not reduce, rather it became complex and complex. Extremist organisations embraced new technologies such as drones, cyber tools, encrypted communication platforms and those based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for propaganda (CTED, 2022). They also cultivated closer relationships with state-supported proxy networks and increased operational capacity and regional influence (Berti, 2022).

The fundamental problem is that while key terrorist groups such as ISIS lost control of territory, security in the world did not calm. Instead, terrorism took on new and multidimensional forms including maritime attacks, drone warfare, cyber-radicalisation and proxy-driven escalations, which prove the inadequacy of counterterrorism strategies (United Nations Security Council, 2021). International trade routes, especially through the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz, saw more and more disruptions as a result of attacks on commercial shipping and energy resources (International Maritime Organisation, 2024). These disruptions impacted worldwide supply chains and increased geopolitical tensions between major powers.

Furthermore, flows of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Yemen worsened and challenged the neighbouring countries, as well as the political instability in parts of Europe (UNHCR, 2022). The entanglement of world powers into the Middle East proxy conflicts-particularly between Iran, the United States, Israel, Turkey and Gulf States-has highlighted the importance of terrorism in the region as a fueling blockage for wider international tensions (NATO Strategic Communications Centre, 2022). These developments expose fundamental weaknesses in the counterterrorism systems across the globe, which have not been able to match the technological sophistication and the strategic evolution of contemporary extremist groups.

Therefore, a systematic review of terrorism in Middle East from 2020 to 2025 is a necessity. Such an inquiry is warranted to comprehend the changing nature of extremist strategies, their proxies, and technological innovations and their impact on global stability and the threats they pose to international peace, diplomacy, and economic security.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How has the proxy networks & regional power rivarlies contributed to terrorism in middle East between 2020-2025?

2.What global strategies can be employed to curb terrorist activities in the middle East ?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study has both broad and Objective study:

The broad objective of the study is to examine the implications of terrorism in the Middle East on global security in the 21st century, focusing on the period 2020–2025.

The specific objectives are to:

To Analyze the major trends, transformations, and operational tactics of terrorist groups in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025.

To Examine how state-sponsored proxy networks and regional rivalries intensified terrorism and contributed to global insecurity within the study period.

To Assess the broader implications of Middle Eastern terrorism such as migration pressures, maritime insecurity, economic disruptions, and geopolitical tensions on global security.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has both Academic and Practical significance. They Include:

Academic Significance

This study is a contribution to contemporary studies of terrorism mainly by focusing on the transformation of Middle Eastern terrorism in the post-ISIS era. Few scholarly works have attempted to adequately assess the period spanning from 2020 to 2025, which is important for the development of hybrid terrorism and extremism prone to proxies (Schmid, 2021). By analysing new trends such as the attacks through the use of drones, maritime terrorism, cyber-radicalisation and the expansion of proxy militias, the study contributes to the theoretical debates around non-state armed actors and modern conflict dynamics (Berti, 2022). It also provides empirical evidence to link the regional terrorist activities with global security issues thus enriching the research in international relations, strategic and global governance (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023).

Policy and Practical Implications

The research provides useful insights for policy makers, intelligence agencies, anti-terrorism units and international organisations such as the United Nations and NATO. By pinpointing the ways terrorist groups and proxy actors use modern technologies and exploit regional instability, the results can help build up efforts at coordinated counterterrorism and maritime security (United Nations Security Council, 2021). The research also goes to the development of policies geared towards protecting world shipping routes, stabilising energy markets and preventing extremist radicalisation across digital platforms (International Maritime Organisation, 2024). Additionally, by showing up humanitarian consequences including displacement and migration pressures, the research study shows useful advice for humanitarian agencies and peacebuilding organisations working in conflict affected zones (UNHCR, 2022).

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study is interested in terrorism-related events, actors and dynamics in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025. Geographic coverage includes Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine and parts of the Gulf region -- areas most affected by the terrorism and proxy ACTs. The political, military, economic and humanitarian dimensions of terrorism are considered, including focus on spillovers across the globe, such as migration, energy security, maritime threats, and the role of the major powers. It does not give country by country descriptive chronology but synthesizes patterns and representative case studies.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the examination of terrorism and its implications on global security in the 21st century, with particular emphasis on the ISIS experience in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of data, including academic journals, books, reports from international organisations, policy documents, and security databases. As a result, the findings are dependent on the accuracy, reliability, and availability of these published sources.

The study is also geographically limited to ISIS activities within the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria, although reference is made to the global security implications arising from the group's activities. Furthermore, the study covers the period from 2020 to 2025, and therefore does not include developments that occurred before or after this timeframe. Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of ISIS, the role of proxy networks and regional rivalries, and the implications of terrorism for global security during the period under review.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Terrorism: The systematic use of violence or intimidation by non-state actors to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives, often with transnational effects.

Global Security: The collective mechanisms, structures, and systems used to maintain peace, protect international order, and address threats that transcend borders.

Proxy Warfare: The use of armed non-state groups by states to pursue strategic objectives indirectly, usually by supplying funding, training, weapons, and intelligence.

Radicalisation: The process through which individuals adopt extremist ideologies that justify violence or terrorism.

Hybrid Terrorism: A form of terrorism combining traditional insurgency methods with cyberwarfare, drone attacks, propaganda, and other modern tools.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, pertinent literature related to the issue of terrorism and its repercussions for global security is cited with special reference to the ISIS experience in the Middle East from 2020 to 2025. The chapter explores the importance of some concepts of terror, international terror, global security, hybrid terrorism, proxy warfare, maritime terrorism and cyber-radicalisation. It also examines pertinent theories and studies of the persistence, evolution and impact of terrorism in today's international system. This review aims to provide a theoretical and empirical framework that will inform the study, to highlight knowledge gaps and to provide a starting point for analysing the effect of terrorism on security in the world in general, and of ISIS activity and related regional dynamics in particular, in the review period.

2.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1.1 Terrorism

Due to these political, ideological, religious and contextual differences, terrorism cannot be explicitly defined as it is a multi-dimensional and ever-changing phenomenon. Terrorism, according to academics, as a phenomenon is not fixed but dynamic, and changing along with everything from social, technical, to geopolitical developments with respect to political conflict (Hoffman, 2021). According to the United Nations' Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT, 2021), terrorism is the intentional attempts to kill or inflict severe harm on civilians for the intent of intimidating a population or compelling the government to change policy. This definition emphasises two of the key features of terrorism in that it is deliberately violent and is used as a strategic political tool intended to cause fear.

Modern Terrorism has an more non-linear evolution, in that it has shifted from structured state like organisations to fluid and decentralised networks, that have a more hybrid nature. Although there are still new terrorist teams today such as the IRA, or the PLO, these teams are typically very structured, the modern day ones operate by autonomous cells that are tied to one another by ideology, digital communications and common goals of the operation, as described by Schmid (2021). The use of tactical changes contributes primarily to technology and innovations, particularly in the use of encrypted communication platforms, drones technologies, cyber warfare capabilities and online propaganda platforms, which are essential tools in the facilitation of extremist groups to operate internationally while avoiding state detection (CTED, 2022).

Although, due to historical, religious, and geopolitical issues, the nature of terrorism in the Middle East is a bit different. This sectarianism, especially between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims and other groups in the region, has been exploited by both the state and non-state actors to promote extremist ideas and ideologies. The absence of power structures and an effective working government, as a result of foreign military interventions, including the 2015 Saudi-led invasion of Yemen and the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States, gave IS group such as ISIS an opportunity to develop influence as a result (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Governments are lacking in authority in the Middle East as well.Incapable governments is another cause of terrorism in the Middle East. The fragile governance structures in Syria, Yemen and parts of Iraq, create ‘ungoverned spaces' for extremist groups to train fighters, hide weapons and even conduct a cross-border operation with little to no military resistance, as UNDP documented in 2022. Middle eastern states yet again feature on the list of the worst states by the impact of terrorism in 2023 (Global Terrorism Index 2023, Institute for Economics & Peace), with this connected to ongoing wars, socioeconomic grievances, entrenched corruption, widespread displacement, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups.

An outstanding characteristic of terrorism in the middle-east in recent times is the employment of advanced and unconventional tactics. Hybrid warfare, which involves using a range of insurgent warfare means (such as suicide bombing and guerrilla warfare) together with more contemporary weapons like drone strikes, cyber warfare and the use of sabotage methods on vessels and the co-ordinated dissemination of disinformation, has become an integral and increasingly important component of the activities of terrorist groups. For example, the Houthis have been able to use Iranian-provided ballistic missiles and UAVs to hit targets in Saudi Arabia and the UAE - demonstrating a previously unseen level of military sophistication among non-state armed groups (UN Security Council, 2023). Similarly, ISIS has also been using drones for surveillance purposes and for the production of propaganda, and its online branding and presence allows for the recruitment of members across the world and the dissemination of pro-daraq propaganda (NATO StratCom, 2022).

Moreover, Middle Eastern terrorism is a transnational. Extremist groups have connections across the Levant, Arabian Peninsula and across the Sahel and South Asia. They are nurtured through ideologies, money movements, leaky corridors and digital channels, enabling terror operations to go beyond the nation state system (UNSC, 2022). Thus, it would be incorrect to use the term “localised” to describe the situation of terrorism in the region, which has to be approached in the context of “extremist ecosystems” on a global spread.

IDPs and techno-modernism, in other words, should be understood as a blend of ideological extremism, political violence, insurgency, and technological adaptation, for that is in fact what happened in the Middle East. It is variously influenced by a set of structural factors, which include civil wars, regional rivalries and state fragility, and is perpetuated by transnational networks and modern communication technologies. The hybrid nature of this terrorism wreaks havoc on state structures, creates humanitarian crises, and significantly disrupts regional stability and global security through the effects on the energy market, migration, maritime trade and international diplomacy.

2.1.2 International Terrorism

Violent acts against persons or property organized by networks of individuals or groups and occurring in multiple states in multiple countries across international borders, with planning, financing or participation. The international nature of the threat of terrorism is demonstrated by the definition of international terrorism found in the U.S. State Department (2023): "Acts that involve or affect citizens of, territories of, or interests of two or more countries. Today, the term globalisation, along with the shift to digital communications, the freedom of travel, or the increased visibility of 'ungoverned spaces' (Hoffman, 2022) have been all ascribed to the rise in sophistication and complexity of international terrorism.

International terrorism manifests itself in many and diverse forms in the Middle East. One big dimension is the flow of foreign fighters where individuals cross borders in order to join extremist organisations. An estimated 80,000 foreign fighters, from over 80 countries, joined the ranks of ISIS during the height of the Syrian civil war, making it one of the biggest transnational movements in recent history (UNODC, 2022). The territorial "caliphate" has since been destroyed, however, numerous of these groups shifted to other battlegrounds such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and the Sahel, sustaining the international presence of ISIS (UN Security Council, 2022).

Cross-border recruitment continues to be a characteristic of international terrorism in the Middle East. Groups like ISIS have multilingual online propaganda apparatuses that reach out to a broader audience around the world. Their digital networks make use of encrypted platforms -- including Telegram and Rocket.Chat, as well as the Dark Web to distribute ideological content, coordinate attacks, raise money and coordinate operational strategies (NATO StratCom, 2022). These virtual structures enable extremist ideologies to reach far more than the Middle East and to affect patterns of attack and radicalisation in Europe, North America, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

ISIS is the most epitome manifestation of international terrorism in Middle Eastern region today. After losing territorial control the organisation changed into a transnational insurgency made up of dispersed cells and affiliates operating in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan (ISKP), Somalia, Mozambique, and the Sahel (UNSC, 2023). This geographic diffusion shows the flexibility of present-day extremist movements and the capacity of such movements to regenerate in different regions at the same time. Empirical studies by IISS (2022) indicate that ISIS's central leadership in the Middle East continues to inspire and coordinate its global branches via the

transfer of finances, ideological guidance and digital communications -- this affirms ISIS's identity as a global network rather than only a regional actor.

Al-Qaeda's organization also provides a good example of international terrorism. Despite losing its historical leaders, the organisation has active affiliates in Yemen (AQAP), Syria, Pakistan (AQIS), Somalia (Al-Shabaab) and the Sahel (JNIM) (International Crisis Group, 2021). These affiliates work together via common training camps, ideological unity, propaganda distribution, and operation instruction. The Middle East serves as both an ideological centre and logistical hub to many of these affiliates which enable cross-border cooperation and resilience despite military pressure.

International terrorism in the Middle East has great global repercussions. The region is a production of extremist ideologies that have reverberations across the continents, fuel radicalisation and inspire lone-actor attacks in Western and Asian countries (UNCTED, 2022). Moreover, the transnational terror networks shape the migration flows worldwide as millions of people flee areas with conflict activity in the Middle East in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc. leading to humanitarian crises and political tensions in Europe, the Gulf, and North Africa (UNHRC, 2022). International terrorism also engages major powers - including the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey and China - in sustained military activity, turning the Middle East into a strategic battle ground with global implications (IISS, 2023).

International terrorism in the Middle East is consequently a phenomenon which cannot be equated to domestic political violence. It is a transnational system which is driven by foreign fighter flows, ideological connections, proxy allegiances, technology and decentralised online worlds. These characteristics allow Middle Eastern terrorist groups to shape the outlook of security around the world, disrupt international relations and destabilise regions outside their geographical origin, as well as challenges the typical state-centric models of security.

2.1.3 Global Security

Global security is a shared environment, common institutions and strategies employed by states and international organisations to help defuse threats that are transnational in nature and have the potential to destabilise the international political system. In its traditional setting of armed forces defence, the notion of global security has expanded to encompass multi-dimensional concerns like cybercrime, pandemics, threats in the sea, energy insecurity and climate change in the 21st century (United Nations, 2022). Strong self-protection of the world today rests on the understanding that no single nation, however powerful, can guarantee its safety against these threats—scarcely more than multiple threats—from its own enemies. Instead, global security depends on cooperation frameworks, common intelligence, collaboration in military operations as well as multilateral diplomacy (Buzan & Hansen, 2021).

At the moment, one of the most serious threats to global security is in the Middle East, namely terror. The instability in the region has ripple effects in other continents because of its geopolitical significance, its role as a global energy supply, as a religious symbol, and because of the strategic maritime routes like Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb and Suez Canal (IISS, 2023). Empirical studies published by the Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023) indicate that the Middle East is home to a large percentage of terrorist incidents throughout the world, making it a key location where counterterrorism operations are primarily carried out across the world. The new norms of hybrid terrorist activities - ranging from drone warfare to cyberattacks and maritime sabotage - also challenge the fundamental notions of security and are calling for contemporary international reactions (NATO StratCom, 2022).

Energy security is also key component of global security affected by terrorism in the Middle-East. The Middle East produces about a third of the world's oil and natural gas, and Gulf countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq, Iran and UAE, are key players in the world's energy markets (IEA, 2023). Concerningly, terrorist attacks on oil industry facilities – specifically the 2019 attack on Abqaiq oil complex and later, Houthis attacks on Saudi Aramco facilities between 2020-22 – resulted in significant fluctuations in oil global prices, demonstrating the potential for small-scale or isolated actions to impact on global economic systems (UN Security Council, 2023). So terrorism in the Middle East has a direct impact on energy security, financial markets and economic development.

Terrorist induced displacement and migration is also a threat to global security. Some of the biggest displacement crises in the world have occurred due to protracted conflict in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and over 15 million people from those countries have displaced to live elsewhere (UNHCR, 2022). As a result of these mass movements, these have put pressure on the countries from which they are moving, including Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, and are beginning to spark more political tensions in Europe that are encouraging the rhetoric of the far right, increased xenophobia, and security concerns (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023). Terrorism, therefore, has global effects – global, but not direct, in the sense that it alters the demographic structures and bewilders the social and political order outside Middle East.

Furthermore, international implications such as the increasing global security on Middle Eastern conflicts are becoming more involved in these conflicts. The United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Israel and European powers have gotten themselves involved in the wars of the region through direct military intervention, counter terrorism operations, proxy alliances or peacekeeping operations (IISS, 2022). These fights further the geopolitical struggle and can be the source of escalating into major international wars. For example, events in the Middle East, such as US-Iran tensions, Israel-Hezbollah conflict, and Russia-Turkey tension in Syria, can escalate to the point where the major powers will be about to enter a war due to terrorism and instability (DoD, 2023).

Furthermore, cyber space is new and emerging threat in international insecurity. In addition to other cyberattacks, Middle Eastern terrorist groups and government-backed militias now have the capability to attack other government networks and critical infrastructure and financial systems globally (UNOCT, 2023). The

attacks have international ramifications as they show flaws in the web of connected digital systems and underscore a lack of regulation on cyber security at the international level.

In a nutshell, security in the world and in the Middle East are interdependent and linked to the dynamics of terrorism in the region. The intra-regional clashes have ramifications for energy markets, migration, military alliances, maritime trade, cyber safety and global diplomatic relations. As terrorism becomes more decentralised and technologically advanced, the global security architecture needs to adapt in order to tackle such emerging challenges. Hence, this study should be of interest to those who want to understand Middle Eastern terrorism not only for regional stability reasons, but also for the sake of global peace, economic uninterruption, and strategic balance between nations of the world.

2.1.4 Hybrid Terrorism

Hybrid terrorism is an amalgamation of the old and the new method of committing terrorism – traditional and modern technology/cyber and unconventional warfare – whereby the terrorist organizations become more functional and unpredictable. In addition to the classical type of terrorism that usually includes bombings, kidnapping and taking hostages, guerrilla warfare etc., there are currently also some methods employed that involve drone warfare, cyberattacks, misinformation campaigns, etc. (…) maritime sabotage as well as transnational digital coordination (Schmid, 2021). They are the mix of old and new techniques, made easier by globalisation and increasingly sophisticated technologies, more readily available inexpensive equipment (such as drones), encrypted communication platforms and digital currency.In the Middle East region there is an increased presence of hybrid terrorism in the form of network-like organizations that can gain from accessing increasingly sophisticated technologies for the enhancement of their operational capacity, such as Al-Qaeda

members, the Islamic State (ISIS), Hezbollah, the Houthis movement and many other examples. NATO's North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (SCCoE) noted that the threat from non-state actors has grown in the region where drones are increasingly being used for reconnaissance, to document propaganda, and to direct attacks. In the case of the Houthis, for instance, they have been producing and using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that were modified from Iranian designs to target aircraft, oil plant and infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the UAE—of critical importance for the kingdom. The use of basic explosives to technologically advanced aerial weapon system that beat air defence systems is a reflection of the technology of warfare from basic bombs to technologically high weapons system.

A key aspect of hybrid terrorism is cyber-enabled terrorism which involves hacking as well as digital espionage, online radicalisation and propaganda-spreading online through encrypted platforms and online. Another group, like ISIS, has developed an extensive online presence with various media outlets like Amaq News Agency and Al-Hayat, who disseminate pro-ISIS propaganda and have multilingual capabilities via messaging platforms such as Telegram and Rocket.Chat and TamTam (CTED, 2022). These sites enable extremist movements to spread their ideology, coordinated terror campaigns, to recruit members from around the world and to recruit for lone wolf attacks. Extremist ideologies can be globalised, and traditional policing and surveillance are difficult as a result of cyber aspects of hybrid terrorism, which are borderless.

The hybrid terrorism can also include sea and economic sabotage particularly in regions/points of strategic importance. The use of remote-controlled explosive boats and naval mines by the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are some examples of this dimension (International Maritime Organization, 2024). The attacks are at sea on oil tankers, shipping containers and ports and harming the world economy. The contemporary use of such combination tactics has shown the working of the use of non-traditional means used by terrorist organisations in order to incapacitate international shipping lines and international trade networks.

One other characteristic of hybrid terror that has gained recognition lately is cross-border financing via unusual and unconventional methods – not the least among them cryptocurrencies, hawala networks, ransom payments and international smuggling channels. UNOCDC (2023) states that: Extremist groups in the Middle East are increasingly turning to digital financial systems that are harder for states to monitor. Thus, the alternative

funding mechanisms are the new ones alongside the extortion, illegal taxation and sourcing of resources in conflict zones.

The most significant of the implications of the hybrid terrorism is that this kind of terrorism can outpace and overpower the security infrastructure of the States. In normal counter-terrorism procedures ordered organisations with a clear organisational chain were what had been considered. “But hybrid terrorist groups are an undefined collection of virtual anonymity and real-world terror.” This is developing into a new threat landscape where an attack could be launched online to coordinate the attack and then across time zones and continents (IISS, 2023). This makes it hard for the government to predict, intercept and neutralize hybrid threats.

Some say that hybrid terrorism is the terrorism of the future.Others say a hybrid terror is the terror of the future. Kaldor's New Wars thesis backs this notion and proposes that contemporary wars involve an increasing inter-mesh of criminality, political ideology, cyber warfare and transnational financial support (Kaldor, 2022). The Middle East is one of the prime case studies for such an evolution: in the Middle East the theories of insurgency are a lot older than in any other region, but so are the theories of advanced battleship technologies; both state and non-state actors are using creative innovations in warring over the Middle East.

Finally, hybrid terrorism is a multiple terror type, which is complex, adaptive and multidimensional. It should be thought of as a net major shift that is enhancing its capability of disturbing the regional and global security net. A new counter-terrorism strategy, intelligence cooperation, technological counterintelligence and regional security framework is required due to the spread of hybrid terrorism in the Middle East.

2.1.5 Proxy Warfare

Proxy warfare is the name given to a type of warfare in which states use, fund, or control non-state armed groups as means of furthering their political, military or ideological goals while avoiding direct confrontation. It is a defining feature of 21st century conflict, especially in the Middle East, where geopolitical rivalries, sectarian divides, and frail state institutions are a fertile ground for proxies to thrive (Berti, 2022). In proxy war, states supply assistance to armed groups that act on their behalf, including financial support for wars, weapons, military training, intelligence and/or logistical support. This is a strategy that enables states to exert their influence for longer, destabilise their rivals, lower the costs of traditional warfare, and secure plausible deniability for their actions (Mumford, 2021).

The Middle East is the epicentre of the proxy war globally, with its history of rivalries within the region that includes nations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. These states analyse the region through a realist perspective of security: each state tries to acquire strategic advantage and limit the power of adversaries (IISS, 2023). Iran's proxy network is the most developed and largest example. Through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF), Iran supports a wide constellation of militias such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Kata'ib Hezbollah and the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq and a range of Syrian paramilitary groups (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). These militias spread Iran's power from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean in an alliance known to analysts as the "Axis of Resistance."

Iranian proxies thus not only serve the geopolitical interests of Tehran, but also have a very substantial influence on regional trends in terrorism. Hezbollah's role in Syria, its rocket exchanges with Israel and its support of Palestinian factions are good examples of how proxy groups can destabilise borders and contribute to regional conflict (International Crisis Group, 2022). The Houthis, with Iranian drone and missile technology, have launched cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with attacks on airports, oil facilities, desalination plants and civilian infrastructure (UN Security Council, 2023). These activities show that contemporary proxy groups have high military capabilities usually reserved for conventional armed forces.

Proxy warfare is not unique to Iran, while Saudi Arabia and UAE have backed various factions in Yemen, Libya and Syria to counter Iran, Turkey has backed armed groups in northern Syria and Libya, that are

computationally aligned with its ideological and security interest (Berti, 2022). On its part, Israel has fought indirectly by striking Iranian proxies in Syria and Lebanon in an effort to contain Tehran's military entrenchment (IISS, 2022). These double proxy agendas lead to a multi-layered conflict environment where grievances of the local population, ideological agendas and state interests collide.

The spread of proxy warfare has deeply-impact implications on terrorism in the Middle East. First, proxies are commonly driven by an agenda of their own, which may even be ideological or sectarian, while enjoying state support. This autonomy makes the lines between terrorism, insurgency, and conventional warfare blurry and makes it hard for international actors to effectively classify and combat such groups (Mumford, 2021). Second, there often is collaboration between proxy groups and terrorist organisations, absorption, or transformation of former into the latter. For example, some Iraqi militias have ideological overlaps with extremist groups and Houthi forces have used a hybrid approach that some label as that of designated terrorist organisations (UNSC, 2023).

A critical element of proxy warfare is providing advanced technologies. Iran has been providing proxies with more and more sophisticated weaponry, such as ballistic missiles, explosive-laden drones, naval mines, and cyber capabilities (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). This technological diffusion makes the non-state actors more lethal and turns conflicts in the region into a global threat. Maritime attacks on oil tankers and drone strikes on energy infrastructure to precision missile strikes, there is now a variety of tools available to proxies with which they can disrupt international trade and destabilise global energy markets (IMO, 2024).

Proxy warfare also leads to civil wars and humanitarian crises. Studies have shown that foreign-backed militias make conflicts last longer in Syria and Yemen, thanks to the increase of weapons, these militias have hardened negotiating stances and lowered the incentives to politely compromise. The upshot is a cycle of instability that fosters rich ground for jihadist revival, transnational trafficking and mass displacement.

In summary, the phenomenon of proxy warfare in the Middle East is an intricate, multileveled system in which states wage war indirectly by proxy state actors. These proxies play a significant role in the continuity and evolution of terrorism by boosting the military potential of militants, prolonging conflicts, destabilising unstable states and internationalising local conflicts. Understanding proxy warfare is therefore essential to analyse terrorism in the Middle East, and its far-reaching implications on regional and global security.

2.1.6 Maritime Terrorism

Maritime terrorism can be defined as the use of violence, sabotage, or coercion by non-state actors against ships, infrastructure related to the maritime industry, ports, offshore facilities and sea-lanes for political or ideological purposes. Although traditionally having been overshadowed by land-based attacks, maritime terrorism has become a growing global security concern, especially in the Middle East, where strategic waterways are important arteries for international trade and energy transportation (International Maritime Organization, 2024). Maritime terrorism takes advantage of the weakness of open seas, chokepoint shipping lanes and lack of defence capabilities to disrupt the economic stability and create political pressure.

The maritime environment of the Middle East is singularly vulnerable to terrorist exploitation. The region is home to a number of the world's most important chokepoints, namely the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Gul of Aden, and Red Sea. These corridors account for almost 30% of the world's crude oil and large volumes of liquefied natural gas, making them crucial to international energy security (IEA, 2023). The United Nations Security Council (2023) reports that these waterways have seen a significant increase in attacks by non-

state armed groups - notably the Houthi movement in Yemen which has targeted oil tankers, cargo ships and naval vessels with ballistic missiles, explosive-laden drones, naval mines as well as remote-controlled "suicide boats."

The Houthis have become the most active maritime threat actor in the region. Since 2020, empirical evidence suggests that they have launched dozens of attacks on commercially linked vessels belonging to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other countries in support of the Saudi-led coalition (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, 2023). These attacks are strategically planned to disrupt the international shipping industry, increase the cost of insurance, and generate pressure against adversaries in the region. Some of the attacks have even targeted vessels with tenuous or no direct connection to the conflict, proof of the Houthis willingness to internationalize their maritime strategy in order to gain leverage (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Maritime terrorism in the Middle East is not monopolized by the Houthis. Groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates have exhibited an interest in maritime targets, albeit to a lesser degree. ISIS operatives in Iraq and Syria have spoken of attacking oil pipelines and offshore drilling platforms and naval fleets in their efforts to knock out economies in the region (UNSC, 2022). Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), meanwhile, has a long history of maritime operations, including the most famous one,which was the 2000 attack on the USS Cole. Recent intelligence assessment suggests AQAP still has capabilities to launch small boat or mine-based attacks against shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden.

A major enabler of maritime terrorism is the growing sophistication of the weapons technology possessed by non-state actors. The spread of naval mines, anti-ship cruise missiles, and unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) in the hands of Middle Eastern militant groups demonstrates a change in the development of hybrid maritime warfare. These technologies - which are often supplied by external state-sponsors such as Iran - enable non-state groups to fire upon vessels from a significant distance with relative precision and complicate naval defence operations IISS, 2023). The growing precision with which Houthi missile strikes the Saudi Aramco facilities and commercial vessels highlight the extent to which advanced weaponries amplified the extent and effect of maritime terrorism.

The effects of maritime terrorism are worldwide. Disruptions in Strait of Hormuz have led to sharp rises in global oil prices, showing how localized attacks can bring reverberations through world financial systems (IEA, 2023). Similarly, attacks in the Red Sea have resulted in the diversion of ships around Africa, increasing the cost of shipping, delivery time, and causing inflationary pressures in international markets (IMO, 2024). Moreover, these disruptions impact humanitarian access in Yemen, the Horn of Africa and parts of the Arabian Peninsula making food insecurity worse and relief efforts more difficult (UNHCR, 2022).

Maritime terrorism has also embarrassed international military and diplomatic relations. U.S. naval forces, European maritime security missions, and coalitions in the region have had to conduct increasing numbers of patrols in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, in some cases leading to confrontation with militant groups or escalation among state sponsors. Iran's alleged involvement in supplying maritime weapons to the Houthis has intensified tensions in the Middle East, bringing global powers in the region into regional disputes (DoD, 2023). These dynamics show that the problem of maritime terrorism is deeply interlinked with proxy warfare, geopolitical rivalries, and larger trends of insecurity as well in the region.

In summary, maritime terrorism in the Middle East is part of an emerging hybrid threat that includes the old school of insurgency motivation and new school of weapons, geography, and international economic leverage. Its impacts are far-reaching, affecting global trade, energy markets, naval strategy and humanitarian operations. As terrorist groups grow in their maritime capabilities the waterways of the Middle East will continue to be at the centre of conflict in the region and around the world.

2.1.7 Cyber-Radicalisation

Maritime terrorism is an act or threat of violence against ships, maritime infrastructure, offshore installations, ports or cargo routes or navigational systems for the purpose of achieving political, ideological or economic goals. The International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2024) defines maritime terrorism as intentional acts committed in the maritime domain with the aim of causing mass fear, disrupting trade, coercing governments, or damaging critical resources that have a marine-based presence. Unlike traditional land-based terrorism, maritime terrorism takes advantage of the vulnerabilities of open oceans and congested waterways and extensive coast where the limits of surveillance and longer security response times exist.

The Middle East is referenced as one of the most explosive hot spots for maritime terrorism because of its strategic maritime corridors such as Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and Gulf of Aden as well as Red Sea. These waterways are trade arteries for the global economy, over which nearly 12% of international commerce flows; 20% of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) and about 30% of the world's crude oil flows (International Energy Agency, 2023). Consequently, any disruption to these routes has immediate ramifications for the global markets, energy prices, food security and international supply chains.

Maritime terrorism in the Middle East has become a major issue in the period between 2020 and 2025, as there is an upswing from the activities of the Houthi movement in Yemen and proxies associated with Iran. The Houthis have carried out many attacks against oil tankers, container ships, and the port infrastructure using various hybrid weapons such as remotely-controlled explosive boats, naval mines, sea-borne IEDs and anti-ship ballistic missiles (UN Security Council, 2023). These attacks have targeted Saudi Arabia, UAE, United Kingdom, Liberia, and Panama-flagged vessels to display the nature of maritime terrorism in the region, which is essentially international.

The attacks on vessels near the port of Jeddah, the coastal Al-Mukha, and the Gulf of Oman in 2021-2024 provide a good example of how maritime terrorism impacts maritime shipping integration around the world (IMO, 2024). One of the most noticeable ones was the strike on the Liberian-flagged tanker Mercer Street in 2021, attributed to an Iranian-made drone strike, that killed two crew members (a British and a Romanian citizen) prompting international condemnation and military presence in the region (IISS, 2022). These incidents highlight the role that maritime terrorism plays in raising geopolitical tensions and bringing significant actors into maritime security operations.

Maritime terrorism is increasingly becoming associated with proxy warfare. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have been reported to have supplied high-level naval mines and drone boats and missile technologies to the Houthis, giving them an increased ability to threaten Red Sea trade routes (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). This proliferation of maritime weapons by the state to non-state actors increases the scope of terrorist threats by turning irregular groups into dangerous maritime adversaries.

Beyond direct attacks on ships, maritime terrorism is also being directed against critical infrastructure such as desalination plants, offshore oil rigs, coastal refineries, port terminals and undersea communications cables. The 2020-2022 drone and missile strikes on Saudi Aramco installations in Ras Tanura, Yanbu and Jeddah - while land-based - had direct implications for the maritime industry as they for a short period put the loading of tankers and the exports of oil on hold (UN Panel of Experts on Yemen, 2023). This highlights the interconnection between maritime security and energy infrastructure in general.

2.2 Thematic Review

2.2.1 Evolution of ISIS Tactics and Operations in the Middle East

During 1942-1943, the tactics and operations of ISIS changed.Tactics and operations of ISIS altered in 1942-43.

Terrorism evolved in the 21st century to a degree. Despite the presence and growth of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), there has been a tremendous evolution of terror. After losing territory to its self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria, ISIS has become more decentralised and flexible. The group chose what was the tactic of insurgency, guerrilla warfare, targeted assassinations, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), cyber-radicalisation and cyber recruitment rather than taking up much land. Thanks to the “strategic shift” continued military pressure from local and international counter-terrorism coalitions, experts say, has not led to the demise of ISIS. ISIS used digital communications, encrypted messaging systems and social media propaganda to plan activities and recruit from various regions from 2020 to 2025.ISIS adopted the use of encrypted communication technology and messaging platforms between 2020 and 2025, along with social media propaganda to gather in other areas, and to plan and coordinate activities as a whole. That is the manifestation of their abilities as an organisation to respond to the evolving security environment and continuance of their ideological objectives.

2.3.2 Proxy networks, regional rivalries and terrorism in the Middle East will be discussed next.

Proximity and regional power swirls and proxy wars are a big influence in the Middle East security climate. There has been turmoil in the area because of a competition among various regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar, scholars say. The State has a long track record of sponsoring and supporting armed groups, including financial, military, intelligence, and even ideological support, to serve its strategic objectives.

These proxy relationships have endowed them with a favorable situation for sustaining and operating them. Two instances of rivalry in the area have further complicated counterterrorism efforts and kept it unsafe: the Syrian and Iraqi wars. State interests and non-state actors have turned conflicts into bigger, geopolitical ones, which has created an opportunity for extremism, such as ISIS, to exploit the lack of governance and for sectarian and security conflicts.

2.3 THEORETICAL REVIEW

A very good theoretical base is required to comprehend the phenomenon of terrorism and its international implications. The state of terrorism in the Middle East, in the years from 2020-2025, will not be a random occurrence but rather shaped by embedded factors, geopolitical competitive dynamics, technological shifts and historical resentments, sectarian fissures, and modern warfare trends. There are some conceptual angles from which the staying power, development and international effects of terrorism in the region can be explained. These theories are important in understanding the reasons the group of extremists still exist despite their military losses, the continuation of using proxies by states and the impacts of insecurity in the region being felt worldwide.

2.3.1 Realism Theory of International Relations

Realist Theory is one of the frameworks of international relations in its foundation and provides critical insight into why terrorism continues to exist in the Middle East. Realism is based on the assumption that the international system is anarchic - meaning that there is no overarching global authority that is able to enforce rules and prevent conflict (Morgenthau, 2019). In such an atmosphere, States must use their own hash to ensure survival, defend their national interests, and their sovereignty.

Within this anarchic system, states often use direct and indirect tools of power such as using non-state armed groups as proxies in regional dynamics. Realists hold the view that the conflicts in Middle East are essentially influenced by power struggles among the major regional players such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, and the world powers like the United States and Russia (Walt, 2020). These rivalries produce a competitive security atmosphere in which terrorism is both an instrument and product of geopolitical rivalry.

Iran's employment of proxy militias, including the Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), and the Houthis, is one of the best examples of the theory of realism being applied in reality (U.S. Department of Defense, 2023). These groups have served as Iran's strategic instrument for countering competing influence and reaching out for regional influence [and] deterring outside intervention. Saudi Arabia and UAE are also backing some factions in Yemen and Syria to check the power of Iran. Turkey supplies armed groups in northern Syria to secure the borders and further political sphere. Israel launches targeted strikes of Iranian-backed militias in Syria to keep up the deterrence in the region.

Realist theory explains:

Why states sponsor violent non-state actors to project power in an indirect manner;

Why terrorism gets intertwined with regional rivalries that make the goal of eradicating it difficult;

Why great powers intervene militarily in the middle east and often escalate the tensions; and

Why terrorism is enduring, despite international coalitions: Unfundamental power competitions are not over.

Thus, realism highlights the fact that terrorism in the Middle East has not been nothing more than ideological violence - that it has been deeply rooted in the power politics of states to dominate and strategize in the region.

2.3.2 Relative Deprivation Theory

Theory of relative deprivation was developed by Ted Robert Gurr (1970) which states that violence and terrorism often occur when people or groups feel they are not getting what they deserve in society. The theory proposes that anger, the sense of inequality, marginalisation and injustice can drive people to become aggressive and extreme.

The theory is very applicable to the Middle East between 2020 and 2025 as many parts of the region were politically unstable, unemployed, poor, corrupt, displaced and socially excluded. Many young people in a number of countries, including Syria, Iraq and Yemen, were feeling excluded from economic opportunities, political participation and social security and protection, due to longstanding conflict and weak governance in these nations (UNDP, 2022). These frustrations were used by terrorist groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the Houthis as a means to show that they were a source of justice, identity and protector of the oppressed groups.

The development of online radicalisation in the study period can also be attributed to the relative deprivation theory. Extremist organisations exploited social media and digital propaganda to propagate narratives of victimhood, oppression and discrimination to recruit members both within and beyond the Middle East (UNOCT, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated unemployment and hardship in the region, adding to peoples' frustrations and recruitment opportunities for extremists.

Theory is significant to this study in the sense that it is a way of understanding how social inequality, political exclusion, and perceived injustice are the elements that underpin the cause and development of the terrorism that remains in the Middle East. It demonstrates that ideology or religion alone is not a cause of terrorism, but there are also entrenched socioeconomic and political feelings that contribute to the problem.

2.3.3 Failed State Theory

Failed State Theory is a theory that says terrorism flourishes when governmental institutions have failed or have little capacity to maintain order, ensure security, provide basic services, or control the national territory (Rotberg, 2020). Failed states provide safe havens, ground for recruitment, weapons markets and ungoverned spaces for extremist groups to thrive.

The Middle East contains some of the most fragile states in the world making Failed State Theory extremely relevant. Prolonged conflicts and political disintegration in Syria, Yemen and Iraq creates governance vacuums for extremist organisations:

1.Syria (post-2011 civil war)

Divided into zones under government control, Kurdish groups, remnants of ISIS and Turkish-backed militias and Iranian-linked forces.

UNDP (2022) says that the destruction of state institutions allowed the embedding of ISIS and HTS into the local communities.

2.Yemen (2015-present)

Considered to be one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.

The UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (2023) has documented that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Houthis are flourishing because of the breakdown of central authority, famine, massive displacement, etc.

1. Iraq (post-ISIS era)
2.
3.
4.

Although ISIS was territorially defeated in 2017, there were still weaknesses in governance and corruption in Baghdad that contributed to ISIS's insurgent revival in rural areas (IISS, 2023).

The reason for this according to Failed State Theory is:

1. Why extremist groups embed in ungoverned territories, which are then used as a training and operation base;
2.
3.
4.
5. Why terrorism continues even after military interventions since governance problems continue to persist;
6.
7.
8.
9. Why civil wars are opportunities for extremist expansion; and
10.
11.
12.
13. Why political solution to the problem of counterterrorism is very important for its long term success.
14.
15.
16.

The state fragility of the Middle East in the years 2020-2025 is directly related to the survival and adaptation of terrorist organisations.

2.3.4 New Wars Theory

New Wars Theory articulated at Mary Kaldor suggests that modern conflicts differ from classical wars in their structure, their objectives, and participants. Instead of the organised armies fighting over spaces, modern conflicts involve a combination of non-state actors, identity groups, foreign proxies, inter-national criminal networks, cyber actors and ideological movements (Kaldor, 2018; 2022). These wars are fuelled by political fragmentation, economic collapse, sectarian identity, globalisation and technological innovation.

In the particular case of wars in the Middle East during 2020-2025, New Wars Theory appears to be especially relevant in terms of terrorism, because the conflicts in the region take on more and more of the hybrid signs:

Identity-based violence

Sectarian strife (Sunni vs. Shia) fuels what happens in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

Groups mobilise their supporters around religious and ideological stories.

Non-state dominance

Hezbollah, the Houthis, ISIS, HTS, and PMF militias behave like quasi states, which have their own political wings, media units, taxation system, and foreign policies.

External sponsorship

Iran, Turkey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the U.S. are supporting armed groups; this is turning local conflicts into regional confrontations (UN Security Council, 2023).

Hybrid and cyber warfare

Drones, ballistic missiles, cyberattacks and online propaganda are key components of new conflict strategies (NATO StratCom, 2022).

Transnational financing and criminality

Terrorist groups 'fund operations by means of smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, oil theft, drug trafficking and donations in cryptocurrencies' (UNODC, 2023).

Examples include:

How the Houthis use Iranian drones to target Saudi and Emirati oil infrastructure;

ISIS organizing global attacks through encrypted digital networks;

Hezbollah combining political power and military power and regional operations; and

Syrian conflict parties in use of cyberattacks and digital misinformation.

New Wars Theory explains:

Why terrorism in the current world is technologically advanced and multidimensional;

How extremist groups behave as both military and as digital, blurring the lines of classical conflict;

Why external powers play a huge role in Middle Eastern conflicts; and

Why Hatred in the Middle East Impacts Global Security, from from Energy Markets to Cyber Stability and Migration

In essence, the New Wars Theory enables the complexity of modern terrorism to be understood better than the traditional theories, which makes it irreplaceable when analysing the trends in the period 2020-2025.

Empirical Review

1. Institute for Economics & Peace (2023) conducted a study called Global Terrorism Index 2023 Report, which evaluated the trends of terrorism in the Middle East from 2020-2023 through databases of incidents, number of deaths, and qualitative scenarios. The research found that while fatalities caused by terrorism have dropped slightly in Iraq and Syria, groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda affiliated groups and the Houthis have adopted more sophisticated terrorist tactics such as drone attacks, maritime sabotage, and targeted assassinations. The report said Iran-backed militias and jihadist networks increasingly ransacked rural areas where the state has weak presence. According to the study, it was concluded that terrorism in the Middle East has become more technologically advanced and decentralised, creating towards new challenges for the regional and global security.

2. United Nations Security Council (2022) produced the report Fourteenth Report on ISIS and Al-Qaida, analysing intelligence information from member states with the help of field reports, satellite monitoring, and data provided by counterterrorism organisations. The results demonstrated that ISIS managed to maintain between 6,000 and 10,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria even after losing control over territory. The group operated out of remote areas in the desert, depending upon sleeper cells, taxation of an illegal nature, extorted people, and cross-border mobility. The report also noted the growth of ISIS activities in Afghanistan, Yemen and Africa, assuming propaganda units in the Middle East. The study concluded that ISIS has evolved into a global insurgency that has retained ideological power which remains a serious security threat to the world community.

3. International Crisis Group (2021) released a policy study Countering Jihadist Resurgence in Yemen through interviews with local officials, field research and conflict mapping tools. The research concluded that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) took advantage of political fragmentation in Yemen to recreate structures and gain more ground in Abyan and Shabwa. It also witnessed cooperation between militant groups in Yemen, and jihadist-linked groups in Syria. The report concluded that unresolved civil wars in the region are giving jihadist groups safe havens in which they can regroup and sustain transnational networks.

4. Berti (2022) carried out an academic research on Proxy Warfare and Security Dynamics in the Middle East based on qualitative analysis and military incident data. The study reviewed the manner in which Iran, through IRGC-Quds Force, supports Hezbollah, Iraqi militias (such as Kata'ib Hezbollah), Syrian militias, and the Houthi movement. Findings showed that these proxies were supplied with drones, ballistic missiles, cyber training and funding, greatly enhancing their military abilities. The study concluded that proxy warfare has become one of the primary drivers of terrorism-related instability in the Middle East and a significant cause of major security tensions between the U.S., Israel and Gulf states worldwide.

5. International Maritime Organization 2024; "Threats to Maritime Security in the Red Sea" study using vessel tracking systems, naval incident logs and surveys by the shipping industry. The findings showed the number of maritime attacks increased by 45% between 2020 and 2024, most of it blamed on the Houthi movement in Yemen. The target of the group consisted of oil tankers, container ships, and port infrastructure and consisted of drone boats, mines, and guided missiles. The report concluded that maritime terrorism in the Middle East threatens global supply chains, energy security and international trade routes that are connected with Asia, Africa and Europe.

6. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2022) published the study Non-State Actors and Drone Warfare which uses study of battlefield footage, intelligence reports and digital forensics. The study showed how non-state actors in the Middle East - including ISIS and the Houthis - incorporated drones into their surveillance and propaganda production and to directly attack. The Houthis flew over 100 drone assaults using drones against Saudi and Emirati targets and IS used drones for reconnaissance and psychological warfare. The study concluded that terrorism using drones has become a major part of the Middle Eastern conflicts and a growing threat to the world.

7. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (2023) carried out a study called Trends in Online Extremism using analysis of digital platforms, metadata tracking as well as social media monitoring tools. The research showed that Middle Eastern extremist groups have greatly increased their digital footprint after 2020, shifting to encrypted platforms, notably Telegram, Rocket.Chat and the Dark Web. ISIS propaganda production has surged almost 50% during the pandemic's lockdowns, and recruitment has shifted to the multilingual online. The report concluded that cyber-radicalisation has now become one of the primary vectors of modern terrorism and is a direct threat to global security.

8. International Institution for Strategic Studies, No 1 (IISS) for the Middle East region was a regional security assessment paper authored by military intelligence, satellite imagery, and policy analysis. Findings indicated that terrorism and proxy wars in the Middle East triggered volatility in world oil markets, disrupted vital sea routes, heightened flows of refugees to Europe and intensified geopolitical conflict between the U.S., Russia and China. The study concluded that the terrorism of the Middle East has far-reaching implications that stretch

towards the entire world including the way it affects world diplomacy, military strategies, and economic stability.

2.4 SUMMARY OF REVIEWED LITERATURE AND IDENTIFIED GAP

The reviewed literature proves that terrorism in the Middle East from 2020 to 2025 has undergone a significant transformation in terms of scale, structure, and the way of operation. Studies such as the Global Terrorism Index (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023) and the United Nations Security Council Reports (2022, 2023) repeatedly point to the fact that terrorism has in fact become far more decentralised, technologically advanced, and interconnected. Scholars agree that groups such as ISIS adapted to the post-caliphate realities through restructuring of cells based on networks taking advantage of the vacuums in governance of countries of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Empirical studies reviewed also confirm that non-state actors have increased in scope of operations via cross-border mobility, digital radicalisation and affiliations with regional militias. This is in agreement with the arguments of Jones (2021) & CTED (2022) who contend that the modern terrorism flourishes both in the physical zone of conflict and online ecosystems.

Furthermore, one can find widespread similarities in the literature regarding the ever-increasing role of proxy warfare in terrorism trends in the Middle East. Authors such as Berti (2022) and the U.S. Department of Defense (2023) present the evidence supporting the globalisation of regional terrorism by Iran's support of Hezbollah, Iraqi militias and the Houthis, by boosting the military capacity of non-state actors. Similarly, the

International Crisis Group (2021, 2022) shows how the lack of settlement of civil wars - particularly in Yemen and Syria - provides safe havens for the regeneration and expansion of terrorist networks. This suggests that terrorism in the Middle East can neither be properly understood separately from interstate rivalries, geopolitical competition, and moreover, state-sponsored militancy.

The empirical review also finds that the type of threats to the region from terrorism has shifted from land-based insurgency to maritime and drone-enabled threats. Reports from the International Maritime Organization (2024) and UN Panel of Experts on Yemen (2023) show a rising number of attacks against commercial vessels, oil tankers and port structures especially by the Houthi movement. Concurrently, the nature of drone use by groups such as ISIS and the Houthis is clearly demonstrated by the empirical evidence that they have been able to use drones to strike far away targets of high value with impunity and hide from traditional counterterrorism defences by NATO StratCom (2022). These studies together bring home the fact that the use of modern terrorism in the Middle East is no longer restricted in its geographic confines and this terrorism spreads via air, sea and cyberspace.

Reviewed literature also shows the consequences of terror in the Middle East countries around the world. Factional conflict and violence in the Middle East have influenced the global price of oil, disrupted the oil-flows via the seas and contributed to the influx of refugees, inflation, and the tension between major powers like the United States, Russia, China and the European countries, as mentioned by the scholars and institutions including the IISS (2023), the UNHCR (2022), the IEA (2023). From these studies one gets the confirmation that middle eastern terrorism is one of the basic reason of insecurity in the world and it has impact on international diplomacy, border security policies and energy markets.

The following information gaps were identified in the literature:

Despite the voluminous literature on terrorism in the Middle East, there are still a number of important gaps:

There has been limited breadth of integrated analysis of the effects of the terrorism + proxies warfare + global security impacts. 2020-2025.

The majority of the research focuses on a single aspect of terrorism, on a single aspect of proxy warfare, or on the global security trends separately. There are scarcely any studies that tie these three dimensions together in an analytical framework. Your study fills this important void by exploring the synergic impact of both the terrorism and the proxy conflict on the issues of global security.

If attention is not paid to the time period of 2020-2025, the following outcomes are likely:

Many of the already written works focus on a large portion or all of ISIS' highest activity of the period 2014-2019, or the earlier activities of the War on Terror. There is a lack of scholarly attention to the most recent age of terrorism which is characterized by:

COVID-19 impacts

Drone proliferation

Maritime terrorism

Cyber radicalisation

Post Caliphate Network Evolution

Lack of research on the link between Middle Eastern terrorism and a worldwide economic and energy insecurity.

Although there have been reports that refer to disruptions in oil, there are very few academic works which go deep into analysing the direct impact of terrorist attacks in the Middle East on global supply chains, maritime trade and international energy markets. The study fills this void.

Focusing primarily on the political, religious and strategic aspects of drone and cyber terrorism, with relatively little empirical reference.

The existing literature on terrorism largely continues the emphasis on the conventional terrorism wing. Modern threats such as:

Drone warfare

Cyber propaganda

There is little that is known about cryptocurrency financing.

The present research is an attempt to provide much updated empirical information on these new times.

The maritime sector also lacks integration and data sharing with general terrorism studies.

Despite the increased Houthi strikes on oil tankers and cargo ships, maritime terrorism is a marginal issue in academia. Your study brings the aspect of maritime terrorism as a primary aspect in the Middle Eastern insecurity issue in a study which is unique.

Lack of a joint view on comprehensive analysis of the Middle Eastern terrorist threat and the migration to it, the humanitarian situation and the politics of the world.

There is a likely distinction made in the scholarship literature between them. Your study is an important link between them, making it clear that the Middle Eastern conflict of terrorism affects many other global regions in humanitarian, political and economic factor.

Gap in Literature

The above reviewed literature demonstrates that, overall, there is a clear noteable scholarly interest in the Middle East terrorism, but there is also gaps to be filled in terms of a comprehensive, integrated and updated analysis of the relationship between terrorism, proxy warfare, the use of hybrid tactics, and global security between 2020 and 2025.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the theoretical foundations, understanding and explanation of the phenomenon studied. It gives the researcher a way of comprehending data and also relationships in between variables. There are a few theories of the study of terrorism which have been developed to explain the causes and continuance of extremist violence. This current study, however, is derived from the Relative Depilation theory which has been able to explain how perceived political, economic and social inequalities could engender radicalism and terrorist activities. The theory is especially important to grasp in the context of an understanding of ISIS in the Middle East where issues of marginalisation, exclusion, insecurity and perceived injustice have been associated with facilitating recruitment to extremist organisations. Based on the RDTH, the terrorism phenomenon can then be of study and the implications for world security in ISIS experience in the Middle East (2020-2025) can be analyzed.

Relative Deprivation Theory

This study's primary theoretical approach is the Relative Deprivation Theory since it offers a strong socio-psychological explanation of the grievances, mobilisation process and ongoing demands of violent non-state actors in the Middle East in the period 2020-25. The mediation between the perception of injustice and inequality, of blocked aspirations by individuals and/or collective identity, through the prism of the comparison made with a given reference group, and the resulting nature of the frustration is called relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is a significant factor in understanding ISIS recruitment, and its role in fostering explanations of redressing the violence is a significant factor in explaining local recruitment in today's Middle-East where war, sanctions, economic fall and uneven reconstruction have resulted in comparative grievances.

Origin of the Theory

Ted Robert Gurr was the first to systematise Relative Deprivation theory in his influential book Why Men Rebel (1970). Gurr thought that collective unrest was more likely to break out where people saw a discrepancy between what they feel they deserve and what they receive; and it is the perceived discrepancy, rather than absolute poverty per se, that leads to collective unrest. Earlier sociological and psychological scholarship (e.g., Davies, 1962) also emphasised the role of expectations/frustration in precipitating aggression. Gurr's contribution was to bridge the psychological level to a macro-political level, and to show how the subjective sense of relative deprivation, whether economic, political, cultural or status-based, is a powerful force for rebellion and revolutionary behaviour. His framework has since been widely applied in the attempt to explain insurgencies, sectarian conflict and the mobilisation of youth into armed groups.

Assumptions made by the Theory

1. Perception larger than objective condition. It is the subjective feeling of being worse off compared with a salient reference group (another region, social class, religious community or even past expectations) that leads to grievance, and not simply the fact that you are poor or facing inequalities.

2.All comparison of reference groups is important. Individuals and collectives compare themselves with meaningful others (neighbouring ethnic groups, political elites, diasporas or recent historical standards). Where the only gap salami is interpreted as unfair, collective anger grows.

3.Magnitude of discrepancy increases mobilisation potential. The greater the size and visibility of the deprivation in relation to expectations, the more likely people will protest politically and the risk of violent mobilisation will also be greater, especially where there are weak institutional channels for redress.

4.Collective (group) deprivation eases organised action. When by some means deprivation is shared over a group of people that can be identified -- ethnic, sectarian, regional or class-based -- that's where it becomes easier to form group identities, to routinise grievances and to make recruitment into collective action possible.

5.Frustration -attribution-action. Perceived deprivation generates frustration that has to be attributed to causes (corrupt elites, foreign intervention, sectarian exclusion). That attribution process determines the nature of grievances, whether peaceful protest or radicalisation and/or violent insurgency.

Application to This Study

Relative Deprivation Theory is especially relevant for the analysis of terrorism and the security implications for the Middle East (2020-2025) on a global level. The arena after 2019 had many and overlapping decks of perceived and real deprivations: destroyed local economies after long years of conflict (Syria, Yemen, parts of Iraq), sanctions and economic squeeze (Iran, for example), patchy reconstruction assistance, and political exclusion of certain sectarian or ethnic communities. These conditions produced strong comparative narratives -- Sunni marginalisation in parts of Iraq and Syria, for example, Houthi claims to economic and political exclusion in Yemen or Palestinian grievances under occupation -- which were able to be packaged by extremist organisations in terms of systemic injustice which needed violent redress.

Practically, the theory is the explanation of a number of empirical patterns in the 2020-2025 period:

Recruitment dynamics. Extremist groups employed the rhetoric of relative deprivation (economic desperation, lack of services, humiliation by occupying forces or rival elites) in order to attract youth and marginalized communities, promising status, income and purpose as alternatives to perceived social exclusion.

Local-transnational linkages. Perceptions of relative deprivation were frequently entangled with more general geopolitical interpretations (e.g. claims of foreign interference, regional inequality, or western bias). Such framings allowed the groups to link local grievances to global jihadist narratives to be more effective at attracting foreign recruits and support.

Proxy amplification. State actors took advantage of relative deprivation by backing up proxies who claimed to be correctors of injustice (either real or constructed). The availability of financial, military and ideological support enhanced the capacity of the groups and gave credibility to their narratives of grievances.

Persistence in the Face of Territorial Losings Despite territorial losses (as in the breakup of the caliphate by ISIS, for example), relative deprivation was left unresolved which left fertile ground for insurgent networks and clandestine cells to re-emerge and act transnationally.

Using Relative Deprivation as the key theoretical framework guides this research to investigate not only tactical/military variables (attacks, weaponry use, use of drones) but also the socio-economic/political substrata that perpetuate terrorism. It suggests that comprehensive policy responses should include a mix of security measures alongside the political inclusion or economic reconstruction and grievance-redressing mechanisms if the root causes of violent mobilisation are to be mitigated.

3.3 Research Design

This research takes the ex post facto research design. The term "ex post facto," meaning "after the fact," is the approach adopted for analyzing the past events, behaviours and patterns without manipulating variables. This design is suitable for this research since issues such as terrorism, proxy warfare, geopolitical conflicts and global security implications cannot ethically or practically be controlled or altered by the researcher.

By relying on real developments and documented trends from 2020 to 2025 this design enables the design study to explore how terrorism in the Middle East evolved, how extremist groups operated and how these underpinned global stability -- all without intervening in the events under examination.

Ex post facto design is absolutely essential because the researcher simply cannot induce terrorism, insurgency or international conflict for experiment purposes. Instead, this study is based on the analysis of events as they happened, the interpretation of how non-state armed groups, proxy militias and extremist organisations influenced insecurity in the Middle East and how they manifested themselves in global security consequences.

Therefore, the ex post facto method helps the researcher to spot trends, connections and implications that are embedded in reports, datasets, historical accounts. These insights form the basis for understanding the broader linkages between Middle Eastern terrorism and international security outcomes.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

This study utilises the documentary approach of data collection which is also referred to as the secondary data approach. Given the volatile nature of the Middle East conflict zones, and the sensitive nature of terrorism and global security, primary fieldwork would not only be dangerous and unethical but also practically impossible. Hence, the evidence used in the study is taken from various existing authoritative and credible resources.

Data for this study was collected from:

Academic journals for terrorism, Middle Eastern politics, security studies and international relations 2020-2025.

Reports from global and regional organisations, such as the United Nation Security Council, the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the International Maritime Organisation, UNHCR and the Arab League.

Security assessments and policy papers from think tanks (international crisis group, rand corporation, Chatham house, ISS, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization strategic communications centre).

Global terrorism and conflict databases such as GTD, ACLED, SIPRI and UN casualty tracking system.

Investigative Journalism and News Archives of attacks, proxy activities, drone operations, maritime interferences and global reactions between 2020 and 2025.

These sources allow the study to create a multi-layered, in-depth view of terrorism on the Middle East and its worldwide repercussions.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The study applies the qualitative content analysis method of interpretation of the collected data. Content analysis is appropriate as the study is based mainly on secondary materials such as reports, journal articles, policy documents, terrorism databases and news analyses.

This method is to read through documents in a systematic way to find recurrent themes and patterns concerning:

Trends in ISIS Terrorism 2020 to 2025

The impact of the proxy networks in operational tactics

Role of extremist groups in destabilising regional and global security

Patterns of Drone Wars, Cyber-radicalisation and Attacks at Sea

Global impacts including flow of refugees, disruption of energy, economic instability

Comparing different sources ensures that conclusions that are drawn are credible and reduces bias. Where necessary, timelines, maps, tables and summaries of the incidents will be used to visualise the changes in terrorist activity and its global implications.

Finally, content analysis is important to identify whether the empirical analysis evidence research confirms or rejects the stated hypotheses regarding the Relative Deprivation Theory.

3.6 Logical Framework

S/N	Research Objectives	Variables	Indicators	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis Method
1	To examine the implications of Middle Eastern terrorism on global security (2020–2025)	**Independent Variable:** Terrorist activities (ISIS,) **Dependent Variable:** Global Security	Number of attacks, maritime disruptions, oil price volatility, refugee flows, cyber incidents	UN reports, GTD, IMO, IEA, IISS, academic papers	Documentary Review	Qualitative Content Analysis
2	To analyse the influence of proxy networks on terrorism and insecurity in	**Independent Variable:** Proxy involvement (IRGC, foreign militias,	Drone/missile activity, cross-border attacks, financing flows, strategic alliances	UN Panel on Yemen, DoD, Crisis Group, policy think tanks	Documentary Review	Thematic Analysis & Interpretation

	the Middle East	external sponsors) **Dependent Variable:** Escalation of insecurity and terrorist capacity				

This logical framework ensures that each research objective is clearly linked to its variables, indicators, data sources, and analytical methods.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Evolution of Terrorist Tactics in the Middle East (2020–2025)

From 2020-2025, the structure, methodology, technology and tactics of terrorism in the Middle East greatly changed. During this period, the use of other approaches rose, like territorially decentralised, technologically sophisticated and adaptive, violent extremism by terrorist groups. The lack of ISIS territorial control in Iraq and Syria; the diffusion of digital technologies; regional geopolitical competition; and present global security context were key drivers in this change. Past concerns were occupied territories and influence – now the concerns of terrorist organisations had shifted to area of operational resilience, operational mobility, disruption and psychological effects.

ISIS's defeat in its caliphate of 2019 is a pivotal moment in the history of terrorists in the Middle East. ISIS may grant back a lot of land in Iraq and Syria but it is not gone. Instead, it was fragmented into a small mobile insurgent army which could attack unpoliced rural areas and semi-governed states. It was a transformation that followed a strategic shift of the jihadists from state building to adaptive insurgency and transnational disruption. ISIS started to try hit and run, ambush, use of improvised explosive device (IED), Assassinated local populations and economized sabotage of local infrastructure. The techniques enabled the group to stay insecure and to stay out of the state forces in the presence of army forces.

The increase in the cyber operational systems and digital technologies were a significant aspect of the development of ISIS in this period. The revolution went from a centralized propaganda to a de-centralised digital communication via encrypted messaging apps and other secure communication channels. These technologies enabled ISIS to continue with its ideological recruitment and propagation efforts, organize its actions and issues related to finances without losing control of its physical areas. The growing dependence on cryptocurrency financing and a shift online in radicalisation also pinpointed how the terrorist organisations adopted modernity and technology. Consequently, the geographical boundaries of terrorism were disregarded and it was more networked globally.

Deterritorialisation within terrorist organisations was a major tactical development that was observed in the period. ISIS spread started to grow slowly and separate regional branches and separate franchises such as ISIS-Khorasan and ISIS-West Africa Province continued its ideological loyalty but was autonomous in each region. This enabled the organisation to protect itself from military attacks and from the elimination of the leaders. The new insurgency models, based on networks, were thus a reflection of the changing nature instead of the persistent nature of the modern terror, far from being rigid and hierarchical.

In the same way, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates changed to more subtle and locally rooted operational tactics between 2020 and 2025. Al-Qaeda never intended to make any quick comebacks; instead, they were going to percolate slowly and remain in existence for the long-term.The initial strategy of Al-Qaeda was to gradually get in and to stay around for the long haul, unlike ISIS that got their big head of the game and had many strongholds and committed many great acts of violence. Its affiliates in Syria and Yemen became more and more entrenched in the local socio-political landscape, forming alliances with tribes, exploiting gaps in the system and becoming part of the local community. This approach enabled the organisation to focus initially from the international to local sphere, thus gaining legitimacy in this new area.

Al Qaeda achieved strategic flexibility as well: strategic flexibility: very selective violence is the slogan, very institutional infiltration. It came to gradually focus its efforts on targeted killings and strategic intimidation and infiltration of local administrative systems instead of indiscriminate attacks which could result in arms embargoes and other stringent penalties in the international arena. Al-Qaeda affiliated groups in some hotspot areas tried to merge their governance and insurgent activities, thus making it difficult to distinguish militant activities from local governance. The development hindered the counterterrorism response by coupling it with poor social and political frameworks.

During this period, there were other changes in the armed group: the evolution of Hamas into a more technologically advanced and micellarised armed group. It was the time when Hamas would start using

“conventional military action, information war, psychological operation and guerrilla warfare.” The group added an upswing in its range of surveillance drones and targeted strikes, as well as improving the precision and synchronisation of the group's rockets. As well, Hamas have developed their capability for subterranean warfare and made their tunnels more mobile and easier to conceal that they can use in the event of a conflict for attacks and movement. The developments were indicative of a wider evolution in the nature of warfare, which had become multi-domain with land, drone and subterranean systems.

Otherwise there was increasing emphasis on urban warfare as a particular part of Hamas' strategy at that time. This group operated informally and illegally in the cities at high population density; they hindered the effectiveness of the state military forces and indeed increased the political and humanitarian price of anti-terrorism operations. Also, Hamas mobilized social media and online communication technologies to create world narratives, manipulate global opinion, and build support networks in other parts of the globe. This presented an illustration of how much the modern-day terrorist organizations were increasingly melding military and information warfare and strategic communication.

Hezbollah too changed from being a militant group to a well-trained hybrid military organisation. It was a worthwhile addition to its operational experience, command, intelligence and conventional combat coordination, having played a part in the Syrian conflict. Hezbollah further expanded its arsenal, its use of cyber weapons, its monitoring and intelligence capabilities, and regional cooperation mechanisms, from 2020 to 2025. It was also a strategic clove-hungre strategic point for larger transnational militant groups, which facilitated exchanges of training and logistics and transfers of technologies among the groups spread across the region.

The development of Hezbollah was an example of the rise of militarisation and professionalisation of nonstate armed groups in the Middle East. Hezbollah, however, was not just an insurgent group, increasingly had attributes of quasi state military structures. This was a new one that intensified the links between the Axis of Terrorism, Insurgency, Proxy Wars and conventional warfare.

Overall, during the 2020-25 timeframe there appeared to be some broad patterns in terrorist methods at the regional level. One of the greater ones was the rise in the availability of sophistication in technology that is being used for terrorists. The ability of extremist groups has been significantly enhanced by the use of drones, encrypted communications, financial systems etc., and cyber radicalisation “platforms” and “propaganda” on the internet. In addition, the terrorist groups became more context-specific, more adaptive to political and social context, were more decentralised.

Another significant trend was the increasing element of "hybridisation" in war. There was increasing blurring of the lines between terrorism and insurgency, between cyber warfare and proxy and conventional warfare. Terrorist groups were no longer only violent actors; more and more, they were beginning to operate through political influence, the manipulation of information, in cyberspace, and working through proxy relationships. Their aim also evolved from occupying space, to disrupting it, resisting it and surviving.

Thus, the findings showed that during the period (2020-2025), a structural and tactical metamorphosis of the terrorist organisations in the Middle East had taken place. The operational modifications were not just due to changes, but were indicative of an evolution of the character of modern terrorism. These developments - such as the growing decentralisation, technological sophistication, hybrid warfare strategies and transnational networking of extremists, but also their rising narratives of a ‘post-9/11’ era of resilience, adaptation and infrangibility - were testament to the fact that terrorism in the last ten years has become more resilient, adaptive and more resistant to conventional security concepts. The facts given lead to the complete acceptance of Hypothesis One: A significant shift in terrorist organizations' operational strategies and patterns occurred in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025.

4.2 Proxy Networks and Regional Power Rivalries (2020-2025)

The factors of proxy networks, regional competition and terrorism became one of the growing security concerns in the Middle East by 2020-2025. Terrorism during this period began to be firmly associated with other, more extensive, battles between nation-states and “outlaw groups”. Spread-stateful competition for influence and security, and for the weakening of competitors, by non-state armed actors characterized the security landscape of the Middle East.Security in the Middle East was characterized by indirect competition between states for influence and security— and to weaken rivals— using non-state armed actors. As a result, terrorism and transnational insecurity merged with the neo-cold war of proxy-wars and geopolitical and ideological competition.

One of the most crucial factors in this proxy system was Iran. The Iranian regional security strategy that was in place during the period studied primarily aimed at asserting its influence beyond its own borders to deter threats from getting to Iran, its doctrine of forward defence. Rather than warring, Iran came to rely more and more on the power of proxy organisations as asymmetric power projection. Iran came into close contact with many groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, pro-Iranian armed groups in Syria and Shiite militias in Iraq through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) especially its Quds Force.

These proxy relationships were sustained by various mechanisms of support, including financial, military, arms sales, ideological and strategic coordination. Some of these groups were equipped with high-tech weaponry,

drone technologies, and missiles and intelligence information provided by Iran to create a higher level of sophistication. Drones arms controlled to proxy forces were a sign of the class of regional asymmetric warfare and terrorism. Once used by light insurgents, hacking, cyber-attacking technology and tools have since become more readily available for non-state actors to aid them in targeting strategic infrastructure, commercial routes, and military facilities, both within and beyond the borders of states.

The localisation of local conflicts was another effect brought by Iran's system of proxy troops. Local and internal disputes progressed through various dynamics to become part and parcel of greater international and regional conflicts between multiple actors. No, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon had not while multiple proxy groups, but were instruments of intrastate rivalry as well. This continued instability, deepened sectarian tensions and complex diplomatic issues in the process of resolving conflict. Terorrism was therefore no longer an autonomous ideology but more and more became linked to state rivalries and geopolitical influence.

Saudi Arabia played a key role also in the evolving regional security dynamics. Saudi Arabia saw that Iranian influence pervaded the Middle East, so they tried to take ‘counterbalancing measures' to dip into the Iranian spread. This contributed to its ever increasing involvement in coalition warfare, indirect military engagements, and giving support to other fighting groups in a number of conflict areas, particularly in Yemen. Saudi Arabia had a largely regional dimension to its involvement (that is, security and stability in the region), but it was also partly what limited the formation of armed groups and prevented an escalation of proxy rivalry in the region.

One of the examples of how regional rivalry can drive a wedge into local conflict situations and present a platform for extremists to expand their footprint is the Saudi-led intervention in the Yemen conflict. The fighting has had a major impact both on state institutions and humanitarian relief efforts, and done nothing to help end the ungoverned areas where militants and terrorist groups can operate. In many instances, the line between militancy, insurgency, and terrorism began to fade away even further. This failure to bring an end to insecurity, ideological radicalisation and arms proliferation all contributed to the insecurity of the region for a long time.

In the study period, however, Turkey was also an actor that emerged in the regional proxy sphere. The involvement of the Turkish army in Syria and in other wars in the region was planned to show a national policy aimed at pragmatic geopolitical expansion needed to secure the Turkish borders, fight the influence of the Kurdish militants, and expand Turkey's presence in the region's affairs. To achieve these purposes, Turkey has formed alliances with various armed groups and non-state organizations in northern Syria and neighbouring hot spots.

Turkey's proxy relationship had more than just ideological aspects. Notwithstanding these ties, these dynamics have contributed to intensifying conflict hotspots and resulted in the growth of armed actors in already conflict situations. Armed groups with various interests became more than active in the region, intensifying the armed conflicts and enriching the opportunity for extremist groups. Terrorist groups were able to take advantage of these split up areas to recruit, move, and continue their military activities.

The other pivotal factor in the engagement of Turkey is the increased use of high-tech military technology, particularly drones. This was achieved by the use of drone warfare systems by the Turkish Armed Forces in the conflicts in the region and proved its role in asymmetric warfare.The military success of Turkey's drone warfare systems was a testament to the role of technology in today's asymmetric warfare. The development had an impact on other state and non-state actors in the Middle East, and was part of the spread of drone technologies into the broader context of terrorist and insurgent activities.

Also, Qatar was in an extremely out-of-the-ordinary and even somewhat controversial position in the regional security apparatus. During the course of the study period Qatar contributed to the process as a diplomatic liaison and as a governmental party that was financially and politically engaged in nonstate levels. Qatar has orchestrated ceasefires and mediations on a number of regional crisis, provided humanitarian aid and led on political negotiations for ceasefires and conflict management. Its connection to some of the militants' groups, however, raised doubts about its indirect funding and political backing of the operational capability of some of the groups.

The Qatar involvement was a miniature of the balancing act of the regional states that desired to play a role, both on the diplomatic front and as supporters of armed groups. The mediations were sometimes successful in the immediate term, but relations between the state and the local militants further complicated the situation in the region on a long-term basis. It demonstrated the linkages between terrorism and the Middle East beyond political, financial and strategic axes, which were far more interconnected than one would have imagined, except on a piecemeal basis.

The relations of the proxy networks brought some general security implications to regional and global security, apart from the states themselves. Internationalization of local conflicts was the only impact that was considerable. Civil wars and domestic conflicts were reimagined as multi-party and geopolitical conflicts between states, international coalitions, domestic and private militias and transnational extremist forces. Peace building and handling conflicts were even more complex and difficult, with local conflicts intertwined with strategic ones.

The other major impact was the rapid spread of weapons and military technologies all over the area. Contribtion from proxy groups not only enabled NCA to be more effective and lethal but also tested and enhanced their

cyber systems, advanced explosives and surveillance capabilities through transferring these assets.Proxy groups' contribution to NCA's effectiveness and lethality included the transfer of drones, missiles, surveillance equipment, and advanced explosives intensity and test equipment, which helped to increase their efficacy and lethality.The ability to deploy drones, missiles, surveillance equipment, cyber technology and high-grade war munitions between proxy groups further boosted the operational effectiveness and lethality of non-state armed groups. Technology diffusion further helped development of new tactics by terrorist groups to adapt themselves to counter-challenge in a more faster way.

State sovereignty in certain Middle Eastern states was still being undermined by the conflicting rivalry of these different states, in the form of proxy wars. Armed groups increasingly took influence in semi-governed or ungoverned areas, leading to the erosion of control by weak governments over parts of their territories. Some of the countries traditionally associated with insurgent armed groups significantly lacked government presence and political control of the government, such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. It was thus possible to experience both terrorism and insurgency, smuggling networks, and organised violence together in the same environment.

Conflict was also promoted by proxy-warfare activities, relating to smuggling, illegal trade and resource exploitation, ransom and foreign funding. The motivating forces behind such economic systems were a desire to perpetuate the economic chaos: undoubtedly, many armed actors were earning good money from breaking out the wars, given the prevalence of economic gain derived from vengeance. As a result, there could be a high degree of linkage with other networks of criminals and economic activity at the borders, as well as other illegal and border-crossing activities in which terrorists engaged.

More to the point, proxy wars become more sectarian and ideational in the region. Competing political stories, religious identity and geopolitical interests ensured there were radicalisation processes and extremist recruitment. These divisions can be exploited by terrorist movements in order to make themselves seem to be defending a certain ethnic, sectarian, or doctrinal group. Thus, the violence of the proxy war and the ideologisation of violence further propagated violent narratives and processes of violence.

According to the results of this analysis, it can be concluded that one of the structural factors in terrorism and transnational insecurity in the Middle East during 2020-2025, which has been identified, is the proxy networks and the power competition in the region. The regional powers played a role in sustaining and propagating extreme violence in the region, providing financial support, military support, and support in ideology, technology, and information. The concept of terror that has been limited to independent terror should be avoided during this period because it was based on geopolitical competition and a form of state confrontation in the background. Therefore it would be expected that Proxy networks and regional conflicts were significant in the growth of terrorism and transnational insecurity in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025.

4.3 Global security consequences of terror in the middle east (2020-2025)

The period from 2020 to 2025 brought about many implications for global security but not quite confined to the geographic scope of the region itself with terror in the Middle East. Terrorism during this time became a multi-dimensional transnational threat and has a significant impact on political stability, economic systems, migration, technological security, international diplomacy and global governance institutions. The global nature of today's international system also ensured that the Middle East instability had increasingly global repercussions. Thus, terrorism in the Middle East turned into a regional security threat and a global one of significant importance that will impact on international peace and stability in the future.

The forced migration and displacement of refugees was arguably one of the most obvious results of the fighters of terror around the world during this time.This is certainly one of the most noticeable effects of the fighters of terror in the period of review regarding the forced migration and displacement of refugees. Terrorism, insurgency and proxy warfare resulted in cyclical violence, destruction of infrastructure, humanitarian crises and fragility of governance systems in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Terrorist attacks against civilians, schools, hospitals, transportation and economic infrastructure caused frequent and escalating insecurity, and drove millions of people away from their homes. Large populations became internally displaced while others migrated across borders into neighbouring countries and Europe.

The need to assist the migrants as a humanitarian and political matter gave rise to serious difficulties around the world. The sheer volume of refugees swell pushed neighbouring countries and populations under severe economic, social and public resources strains to the limit, such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. In Europe, an influx of migrants sparked intense debates on the security of the borders, the reception policy, Nationalism, identity politics and more. The migration crisis also exacerbated fears about infiltration of extremist elements among migrants and heightened security concerns among countries of arrival. Right wing populism, anti-immigration sentiment and polarization not only led to the rise of right wing populism in several western states, but also, to the source of the fears drawn from the idea of migration and terrorism.

The other major consequence of terrorism in the Middle East was the increasing transnationalisation of terrorist networks. Terrorist groups shifted their influence beyond the Middle East, developing networks, communication and outbound programmes from 2020-2025. Organizations like ISIS set up affiliates, backing units, and

recruitment networks all over Africa, Europe and Asia. The events proved that terror was no longer a local cause but an international issue, and interconnected with other forms of terror.

The foreign fighter phenomenon was one of the key aspects of this transnationalisation. People from other parts of the world went to the Middle East to get trained ideologically, experience combat, and mobilisation with terrorism. Some of these returned home with combat experience, operational expertise and radical ideology to their own country. This heightened raised concerns regarding domestic terrorism and lone-wolf attacks in various geographical locations around the world.

Also helping spread tactical knowledge around the world was the decentralisation of terrorist structures. Use of digital communication networks and online encrypted platforms, for the purpose of distributing information concerning bomb making methods, small-cell coordination, lone-wolf attack strategies or cybers tactics became common practice amongst terrorist organisations. In doing so, it meant that people didn't have to come into extreme contact with key terrorist groups in order to be radicalized or become active operatives. The rise of 'leadership-less' resistance models to attack provided an opportunity for self-radicalised persons to attack without needing to be led by an existing leader, while maintaining ideological ties to larger extremist groups.

Another significant international security question throughout the study period was the digitalisation of terrorism. One fact to consider is the growing recruitment and propaganda capabilities of terrorist groups, as well as financial coordination and the preparation of anti-state operations within the cyber sphere.One fact to consider is the increasing recruitment and propaganda capabilities of terrorist groups, financial coordination and planning against the state in the cyber domain. Extremist groups were using social media, encrypted messaging apps, and other electronic communication tools as key business tools.

In 2020, there is definite evidence of an increase in online-radicalisation and the exploitation of algorithmic systems in social media to reach vulnerable audiences globally and spread extremist content via these platforms. The narratives were carefully designed in such a way to encourage a sense of helplessness, oppression and injustice among those who are being oppressed, and to promote certain religious and political ideologies with the terrorist groups. These online environments that fostered the growth of "echo-chambers" that amplify extremist ideas and diminish the inhibitions for radicalization and recruitment.

With the advancement of cyber-terrorism, it also brought a world concern with regard to security. Terrorist groups thought of using cyber-attacks against critical facilities, communications, financial institutions and electronic networks. Cyber skills employed by an extremist group were excellent and outstanding in comparison to those of an over-the-spot group, but the range and ubiquity of cyber capacities employed during an extremist group's operations showed they were operating in a multi-domain security threat environment. International efforts to help trace money laundering or disrupt money supply networks via cryptocurrencies and anonymous digital financing systems have been compounded, especially by cryptocurrencies.

Additionally, world economic and energy security implications had grown strong due to the worry regarding Middle East terrorism. Found in the strategic position in the international energy market and trade relation. The effects of such actions on oil production, distribution systems, shipping lanes and sea transportation routes, were thus a ripple effect beyond the areas of conflict.

More strategic maritime routes in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Hormuz as well as others were targeted more and more by armed groups and militant organisations during the period under review. They play a significant role for oil transport and in international commerce. The destabilizing attacks on commercial vessels, energy infrastructure facilities along with pipelines and shipping infrastructure compounded the uncertainty in the international energy supply chain, and resulted in a fluctuation of energy markets.

The price ups and downs of these challenged oil prices impacted manufacturing costs, inflation, transportation costs and overall economic stability in numerous countries. There was also heightened levels of terrorism driven instability which raised shipping risks to raising rates for insurance services in international trade. The disruption was a reminder of what can happen to the world economy when conflicts break out locally in the Middle East.

Illicit transnational economic structures were also growing due to the rampant terrorism. Terrorist groups increasingly turned to smuggling networks, sales on the black market for oil, weapons smuggling, blackmail, kidnapping and antiques for a source of funding. These activities reinforced the relationship between terrorism, organised crime and the shadow economy in the world. As a result, terrorism was embedded in larger international networks of crime that posed challenges for enforcement and counterterrorism.

The Middle East context played also a key role in the security governance structure as well as in the international counterterrorism policies. As the threats from extremists escalated, states and international organisations started creating intelligence sharing arrangements, surveillance technologies, laws against terrorism and programs concerning the security of borders. Government changed its approach from reactive to proactive – proactive security measures to detect and neutralise potential threats before an attack.

Also, the world's global security networks were being militarised. Several States adopted an "enhance and upgrade" approach to military expenditures, defence cooperation with other countries, and overseas military actions in the Middle East and other parts of the world against terrorism.A number of States chose to lift military spending, augment defence relations with other States and expanded military operations overseas, in the Middle-East and other parts of the world, in order to fight terrorism. Joint efforts of military establishments and the intelligence agencies in combating transnational terrorism and cyber security issues were expanded. The technological and operational shift of terrorism also signified a shift in the concept of security which increasingly adopted a militarised and strategic approach by governments.

These developments also brought forth civil liberties, human rights and democratic governance issues at the same time. With a rise in surveillance programmes, digital monitoring, restricted access to borders and emergency security laws came the committee's concerns regarding privacy concerns, state-sponsored rights and freedoms, and the compromises between security and civil liberties. Various countries have enacted legislation regarding counter terrorism that has tested either the balance between the security and democratic needs of the nation or have placed undue barriers to the balance of those two.

Terrorism continued to reveal differences in the international system on counterterrorism cooperation and international interests. States sometimes worked together against threats from extremists, but at other times they were divided by strategic differences with other world powers, which hampered effective action in response to regional conflicts. The international cooperation in the fight against terrorism showed its weakness in dealing with it in a comprehensive manner in the face of competing geopolitical interests in the field countries of Syria, Iraq and others.

The results of this analysis, therefore, indicate that terrorism in the Middle East in the period 2020-2025 had wide and multi-faceted global security impacts. Nothing escaped these impacts, whether in terms of humanitarian, economic, technological, political or institutional components in the international system. Terrorism was emerging as a threat-multiplier that could lead to a cascading string of crises not only in the Mid-East, but worldwide as well.

The evidence is quite clear indicating that terrorism contributed to forced migration, the transnational expansion of extremist groups, cyber insecurity, economic disruption, energy instability, geopolitical tension and restructuring of global security governance. The evolving nature of terrorism also pointed to the growing interconnection between the conflicts taking place in the region and the international security regimes in place. The results thus confirm Hypothesis Three: In the period 2020-2025, there was an extreme state of global security that emerged in the Middle East associated with terrorism.

This was followed by a discussion and summary of findings (4.4).

This study revealed the existence of significant change in the structure, tactics and operational strategy of the terrorism in the Middle East between 2020 and 2025. How terrorist groups, such as ISIS, deployed new tactics of drone warfare, cyber radicalisation and hybrid warfare tactics using decentralised and technologically advanced methods was increasingly being observed. Current form of terrorism in the region proved to be a change from territorial based insurgency to more networked and flexible one that could become a source of long term insecurity in the region.

Another finding of the research was that transnational insecurity and terrorism in the Middle East was also heightened by the presence of proxy networks and regional rivalries. Occasionally financial support, arms, ideological and strategic cooperation with Nsas, were provided indirectly to the escalation of the conflict by regional actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. These substitute links prolonged wars and curtailed state interposition, fostered the arms proliferation and set the stage for extremist actions.

The other important conclusion of the study was the terror in the Middle East had consequences globally for the security. The research revealed that terrorism played a role in refugee contraffection, forced migration, cybersecurity issues, economic dysfunction, energy market volatility and expansion of transnational networks of extremist groups. Terrorist groups had increasingly emerged as proficient users of digital platforms for recruitment, communications and coordination, and were previously operating outside the Middle East.

The findings also resonated with the sentiments of Relative Deprivation Theory that feelings of political exclusion, poverty, joblessness, insecurity and social outcast may contribute to feelings of frustration and radicalisation and violent extremism. Based on all the above considerations, the research team concludes that during the study period, besides their extremist ideology, there were several other structural factors that motivated the activities of terrorists in the Middle East, such as: State weakness, geopolitical competition, socio-economic grievances and technological change.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation

5.1 Summary of Findings

The research into terrorism in the Middle East in 2020-2025 revealed that terrorism was more dynamic, decentralised and technologically advanced. Terrorist groups like ISIS resorted to newer operational tactics like asymmetric warfare, the use of micro-cells, drones, cyber-radicalisation, encrypted communication and hybrid modes of warfare. Furthermore, the study found proxy networks and regional rivalry among states like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar have significantly exacerbated the threat of terrorism and transnational insecurity by providing financial backing, arms and other military supplies, ideological support, and indirect involvement in regional conflicts.

The study also concluded that the Middle Eastern terrorism had broad security implications over the global outlook of security during the time period studied. These encompassed refugee and forced migration issues, global extension of transnational terrorist networks, cyber terrorism, energy markets instability, disruption of international trade routes, growing militarisation and surveillance worldwide. The findings accordingly showed

that terrorism in the Middle East has ceased to be a regional phenomenon and is now becoming a problem faced by the entire world on various political, economic, technological and humanitarian tracks.

5.2 Conclusion

This paper concludes that terrorism has gone through a paradigm shift in the Middle East, where it was a phenomenon at a territorial level but became a complex, adaptive and transnational security system. The interaction between the changing terrorist strategy, the state-backed proxy-related strategies, and the effects of the multi-polarized systems have posed a multi-dimensional threat context that debunks the conventional counterterrorism strategies.

The findings highlights the reality that the new instrumentation of terrorist acts, which have come to light over the last few years, are the direct effect of the extreme ideology and, in particular, the geopolitical competition, technological advancement and structural dysfunctionality of the political and administrative systems of state. Resilience and scale have been significant factors in making terrorist actors resilient, as has hybridisation of warfare, as well as decentralisation of terrorist network and the use of digital technologies.

Moreover, the research highlights that Middle Eastern terrorism has far-reaching impacts on the world that are long-term. Regions' instability continues to generate repercussions in the policy agendas and priorities in international security, ranging from migration problems to cyber threats and economic disruptions.

Last but not least, the failure to address the root causes of the Middle East terrorism including political marginalisation, economic marginalisation, extremism of ideas and geopolitical tensions. These dynamics are bound to persist and become even more visible in foreseeable future, if a well organized and coherent response is lacking.

5.3 Recommendations

To build up regional cooperation and to reshape proxy networks is the first.

The research senses that the closer the relationship among foreign governments and international organizations in the Middle East is – in the sense of promotion of diplomatic dialogue, intelligence exchange and cooperation in countering terrorism – the more likely it is to succeed in preventing the use of proxy groups and calm down the region. It's an essential condition, given the findings that state-sponsored proxy groups manage to greatly boost the strength of terrorism and international insecurity when it comes to arms supply, financial support and ideology support.

2. Strengthening mechanisms for Digital Counter-terrorism and Global Security

Cyber-surveillance, digital counter-radicalisation and bolstering maritime and border security measures need to be prioritised by the government and international security institutions. The mere fact that modern terrorist groups are increasingly using cyber-radicalisation, drone warfare, encrypted communication, and transnational digital networks, which continue to pose a danger to global security, economic stability and international peace, supports this recommendation.

References

Atran, S. (2021). The psychology of terrorism and political extremism. Current Opinion in Psychology, 35(4), 1–6.

Byman, D. (2022). Road warriors: Foreign fighters in the Middle East and beyond. Oxford University Press.

Cronin, A. K. (2020). Power to the people: How open technological innovation is arming tomorrow's terrorists. Oxford University Press.

Gurr, T. R. (2021). Why men rebel (Updated ed.). Routledge.

International Crisis Group. (2021). Ten challenges for the UN in 2021–2022. Brussels: International Crisis Group.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). (2023). Armed conflict survey 2023. London: Routledge.

Moghaddam, F. M. (2020). The psychology of radicalization and terrorism. American Psychological Association.

Schmid, A. P. (2021). Handbook of terrorism prevention and preparedness. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). Preventing violent extremism through inclusive development and the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). (2023). Global counter-terrorism strategy review. New York: United Nations.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2022). Handbook on children recruited and exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups. Vienna: United Nations.

United Nations Security Council. (2023). Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts. New York: United Nations.

Williams, P. D. (2023). Understanding peacekeeping (4th ed.). Polity Press.

Wilner, A. S. (2022). Deterring rational fanatics. University of Pennsylvania Press.

World Bank. (2022). Middle East and North Africa economic update. Washington DC: World Bank.

Yarger, H. R. (2021). Strategic theory for the 21st century: The little book on big strategy. Strategic Studies Institute.