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British defense policy against ISIL in Iraq and Syria under David Cameron 2014-2016

Akila Paravathi P

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research to investigate how the UK's decision to engage militarily against ISIL, under Operation Shader, aligns with the principles of neoclassical realism. This research employs a qualitative methodology. The qualitative descriptive approach employed is one of data analysis. This approach is not limited to the presentation of numerical or statistical data. Instead, it focuses on the interpretation and description of the phenomenon under investigation, employing a narrative format. This approach prioritizes the collection of empirical evidence derived from observational studies, interviews, and the analysis of various documents. The results are how UK and US continues to defend itself against ISIL's presence and movements and seeks new strategies to drive them out of the international system.



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Corresponding Author:

Akila Paravathi P,
Universitas Indonesia
Email: akilaparavathip@gmail.com

Introduction

In 2014, United States Marine Corps General Martin E. Dempsey, the then-Commander of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, confirmed that the Iraqi government had requested assistance from the United States in the form of air power.(BBC, 2014). On June 15, 2014, then-President Barack Obama, acting on the advice of General Dempsey, ordered the dispatch of United States troops to Iraq to participate in the American-led military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)(Pike, 2014). The intervention, which commenced on the aforementioned date, has involved the direct involvement of numerous countries. In addition to the United States of America, France and Russia, several other Islamic countries have also participated in the campaign against ISIL. Another country that has expressed interest in participating in the fight against ISIL is the United Kingdom. The UK has a long history of combating terrorism, and the government has stated that ISIL is a terrorist group that has become a threat to the country and other countries with which it has cooperative relations.(UK Action to Combat Daesh, n.d.) The extreme ideology espoused by ISIL is considered to be a threat to national security. The British government itself has classified ISIL as a terrorist group that adheres to jihadist ideology.

ISIL is a brutal Sunni Islamist terrorist group active in Iraq and Syria. The group adheres to a global jihadist ideology, following an extreme interpretation of Islam that is anti-Western and promotes sectarian violence. ISIL aims to establish an Islamic State governed by Shari'a law in the region and impose their rule on people using violence and extortion.(Office, 2016b). In his address to Parliament, UK Prime Minister David Cameron asserted that ISIL represents a direct threat to the UK and the global community. The terrorist organization has

issued a number of threats to the Iraqi government, including calls for terror attacks against the UK (Parliament, 2015). In June 2014, British Foreign Secretary William Hague revealed that approximately 400 British citizens have traveled to Syria to engage in combat, with some of them joining ISIL (Wintour, P., & Watt, 2014). Consequently, the UK government cannot rule out the possibility that extremist jihadists such as ISIL may pose a security threat.

Consequently, the UK government is adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing the threat, encompassing the use of armed forces, counterterrorism strategies, international aid and diplomacy, and collaboration with allies in the face of shared challenges (UK, 2015). The UK is a member of the Global Coalition, an international coalition of 74 countries dedicated to combating and ultimately defeating ISIL. The coalition's member states are dedicated to countering ISIL and its networks in a variety of ways. These include: a.) providing key military support to local forces; b.) crippling ISIL's financial and economic infrastructure; c.) preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters joining; d.) supporting stability efforts in areas liberated from ISIL; and e.) exposing how ISIL spreads its religious teachings and doctrines. In order to further the aims of its mission statement, the United Kingdom became an active participant in the American-led military intervention in Iraq. One of the contributions made by the UK was Operation Shader.

This military operation commenced in late September of 2014, in response to a request from the Iraqi government for assistance in combating ISIL (Warfare, 2017). Prime Minister David Cameron also referenced UN Security Council resolution 2249, which he argued provided a legal basis for military action in Iraq and Syria with the objective of eradicating the threat posed by ISIL. The resolution identified ISIL as a global phenomenon of significant proportions, and thus requiring a global response (Nations, 2004). The resolution provides a legal framework for taking action to defeat ISIL, authorizing the use of all necessary measures to that end (Moynihan, 2015). In a further argument, the Prime Minister asserted that the campaign conducted by ISIL against the UK and its allies can be considered an 'armed attack' in the context of international law. With regard to Article 51 of the UN Charter which contains the right of self-defense, it is argued that self-defense measures may be necessary and proportionate if they meet the criteria and the threat of attack is imminent. In the case of an attack by a non-state armed group, it is further argued that the state in which the armed group is located should be unable to prevent the group from attacking another state.

In a recent statement, Prime Minister David Cameron asserted that the terrorist activities perpetrated by ISIL in Iraq, Syria, and Libya pose a threat to the British people (BBC, 2015). He further emphasized that the fundamental tenet of the UK's National Security Strategy should be the willingness and capacity to utilize military force when necessary, and that the UK's armed forces are capable of effectively countering ISIL (Parliament, 2015). The neoclassical realist theory is a prominent framework for the analysis of foreign policy, combining elements of classical realism, neo-realism, and defensive realism. This theory, first articulated by Gideon Rose in his 1998 article in the journal *World Politics*, posits that neoclassical realism evolved from the practice of foreign policy, shaped primarily by the international system, particularly the capabilities of states in the domain of power. Rose explains:

"Explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical."

The tenets of neoclassical realism posit that a country's foreign policy can be explained through a multiplicity of factors. These include the distribution of state power, cognitive variables such as the intentions, misunderstandings, and threats of other states, and domestic variables such as state institutions, societal actors, and state elites. These elements collectively impact the decision-making process surrounding a country's foreign policy (E. Lobell, 2009). Randal Schweller asserts that domestic processes function as transmission belts, channeling, mediating, and redirecting policy outputs in response to external forces (Carper, 2014). This suggests that the state becomes an intervening variable influenced by both domestic and international levels. Neoclassical realism, therefore, considers both internal and external variables to model a country's foreign policy analysis.

In the context of an increasingly dynamic global system, threats can emerge from both regional and domestic environments. This can prompt states to engage in international activities for domestic purposes or conversely, to pursue domestic objectives through international means. Neoclassical realism distinguishes itself from other realist-based approaches by allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the role of non-state actors in foreign policy-making. In the context of realism, non-state actors are only considered significant when they assist states

in achieving their goals. In contrast, neoclassical realism views non-state actors as capable of influencing foreign policy decision-makers due to their unique capabilities.

The UK's decision to conduct Operation Shader to combat ISIL can be understood through neoclassical realism as a response to the threat posed by ISIL to the UK and its allies. The request from the Iraqi government, an ally of the UK, for assistance in fighting ISIL, along with the involvement of several British citizens in terrorist groups and British citizens who had become victims of ISIL, prompted the British government to take immediate action to end ISIL. The purposes of this research are multifaceted, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the application of neoclassical realist theory to contemporary foreign policy decisions. Specifically, this research seeks to investigate how the UK's decision to engage militarily against ISIL, under Operation Shader, aligns with the principles of neoclassical realism. This includes examining the external pressures and internal factors influencing this policy decision.

Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology. According to Sugiyono, qualitative research is defined as a research method carried out in natural object situations where researchers are considered an important tool. In qualitative research, the objective is to gain an in-depth understanding of human phenomena or social events by creating a universal and complex picture that is then translated into a series of words and expressed in detailed terms. This approach allows for the generation of a natural understanding. Qualitative research is conducted with the intention of gaining a comprehensive understanding of human and social issues because researchers have observed that individuals gain insight and understanding from their environment and that this understanding can influence their behavior.

As Fadli (2021) notes, this understanding can be gained through a qualitative descriptive approach. The qualitative descriptive approach employed is one of data analysis. This approach is not limited to the presentation of numerical or statistical data. Instead, it focuses on the interpretation and description of the phenomenon under investigation, employing a narrative format. This approach prioritizes the collection of empirical evidence derived from observational studies, interviews, and the analysis of various documents. In this context, the utilization of literature studies is essential in order to gather the necessary data for analysis. In this research, the data generated comes from a literature study conducted by collecting data from various sources, including journals, e-books, and official websites.

Results and Discussions

Terrorism in 2015: A Global and National Perspective

The year 2015 was marked by a notable increase in terrorist activities worldwide, with 11,774 incidents reported across 92 countries. This escalation highlights the pervasive and global nature of the terrorism threat, necessitating comprehensive and coordinated international responses. In the United Kingdom, the threat level remained severe, reflecting the persistent and high-risk environment faced by the nation. During 2015, the UK experienced significant terrorism-related challenges. Approximately 280 terrorism-related arrests were made, indicating robust law enforcement activities and intelligence efforts aimed at disrupting potential attacks. Notably, the tragic attack in Sousse, Tunisia, in June 2015, resulted in the deaths of around 30 British citizens, underscoring the global reach of terrorism and its impact on UK nationals abroad. Additionally, the Paris attacks, which claimed approximately 130 lives, included British victims, further illustrating the transnational threat posed by terrorist groups. (Office, 2016a).

The UK's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

To mitigate the risk of terrorism, both domestically and internationally, the UK government employs a multifaceted strategy known as CONTEST, which encompasses four key phases: Prevent, Protect, Prepare, and Pursue. (Department, 2015). (1) Prevent: This phase focuses on identifying and halting the radicalization process that leads individuals to terrorism. By addressing underlying factors and engaging communities, the goal is to prevent the emergence of new terrorists. (2) Protect: Enhancing the security of critical infrastructure and public spaces is central to this phase. Measures include improving border security, enhancing cybersecurity, and protecting transportation networks to deter terrorist attacks. (3) Prepare: This involves developing robust response strategies to minimize the impact of terrorist incidents and ensure rapid recovery. It includes training emergency services, conducting simulation exercises, and establishing contingency plans. (4) Pursue: The investigation and disruption of terrorist activities are key components of this phase. It involves the identification and tracking of individuals and organizations involved in terrorism, leveraging intelligence, and prosecuting those responsible.

To support these strategic phases, the UK government has implemented several operational measures and legal frameworks. One notable tool is the Royal Prerogative, which allows the government to cancel or refuse to issue passports on grounds of public interest. This power, exercised 23 times between December 2014 and January 2015, is used to prevent individuals from traveling abroad to join terrorist groups or engage in terrorism-related activities. (Government of United Kingdom., 2016).

International Cooperation and Future Directions

The UK's counter-terrorism efforts also emphasize international cooperation. Terrorism is a global issue that requires collaboration with other nations to address root causes, share intelligence, and conduct joint operations. By maintaining a proactive stance and leveraging international partnerships, the UK aims to enhance global security and protect its interests worldwide. The Royal Prerogative, a power reserved for the British Crown, can be exercised in the case of British nationals holding passports. This allows for the cancellation or refusal to issue passports on grounds of public interest. The exercise of this power may be utilized to target individuals engaged in or intending to engage in acts of terrorism. The use of the Royal Prerogative power by the UK government was documented in the period between December and January 2015, during which time the power was invoked on 23 occasions. In order to utilise this power, the UK government has to take a variety of steps, including implementing counter-terrorism and security measures and disrupting terrorist financing.

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015 (CTSA) was enacted to equip police, security, and intelligence agencies with the necessary powers to address the increased terrorist threats from Syria and Iraq effectively. The Act introduces measures to disrupt the movement of foreign terrorist fighters from conflict zones and enhance the UK's operational capabilities both within and from these areas. Given the importance of managing the potential return of foreign terrorists, this focus is crucial. The CTSA, effective from February 2015, supports the UK's counterterrorism efforts by reinforcing prevention and protection strategies. To prevent terrorism, the government needs to strengthen programs that protect vulnerable groups from terrorist threats. The UK has partnered with online industry players to remove terrorist content and support counter-narrative campaigns. The main goals of the prevention strategy in 2015 include identifying extremist ideologies and mitigating related threats. The strategy also aims to prevent individuals from joining terrorist organizations and encourages collaboration with key sectors to prevent and detect radicalization early.

The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015 (CTSA) is a legislative measure designed to bolster the UK's ability to combat terrorism, particularly the threats originating from conflict zones like Syria and Iraq. The Act grants additional powers to police and intelligence agencies, enabling them to prevent foreign terrorist fighters from traveling and to enhance operations related to conflict zones. This is especially important for managing the risks associated with the return of these fighters to the UK. Enacted in February 2015, the CTSA strengthens the UK's counterterrorism framework by emphasizing prevention (stopping radicalization and recruitment) and protection (securing the country against attacks). The government aims to protect vulnerable individuals from being drawn into terrorism. This involves working with various sectors, including online platforms, to remove extremist content and promote counter-narratives. By collaborating with specific sectors, the government seeks to identify and address radicalization early. This proactive approach is essential for preventing the spread of extremist ideologies and recruiting new terrorists.

To address the critical threat posed by individuals traveling to and returning from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq, the UK government prioritized several key counter-terrorism measures in 2015. Enhancing the screening and monitoring processes for travelers was central to these efforts. Approximately 850 individuals of national security concern have traveled to these conflict zones since the conflict began. Of these, almost half have returned to the UK, with around 15% having died. Notably, the number of individuals traveling to conflict zones from the UK decreased in 2015 compared to previous years. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) played a crucial role in managing over 1,000 detainees identified as extremists or vulnerable to extremism. NOMS employed various strategies, including disciplinary actions, in-prison transfers, standard and specialized programs, to manage these detainees. To date, 143 interventions and specialist assessments have been completed, with approximately 60 ongoing at any given time. These efforts are tailored based on the risk level each individual poses.

The implementation of the Prevent strategy saw significant advancements in 2015, driven by new legal obligations. Training on radicalization increased markedly among frontline workers. For example, over 150,000 NHS employees received training on radicalization by 2015. Overall, more than 400,000 frontline staff members were trained, more than doubling the previous year's total. This increase was achieved by expanding training programs and introducing electronic learning modules. The UK government also focused on several protection measures to enhance national security against terrorist threats. (Department, 2015). The preparedness phase encompasses several critical objectives aimed at enhancing the UK's ability to respond to and recover from various potential terrorist and civil emergencies. These objectives include: (1) Building Response and Recovery

Capabilities: Continuously developing and improving the nation's ability to respond to and recover from a wide range of emergencies, including terrorist attacks and natural disasters. (2) Enhancing National Preparedness: Focusing on the highest impact risks identified in the National Risk Assessment to ensure the nation is prepared for the most significant threats. (3) Strengthening Emergency Services Collaboration: Increasing the capacity of emergency services to work together seamlessly during a terrorist attack, ensuring coordinated and efficient responses. (4) Improving Communication and Information Sharing: Enhancing the mechanisms for communication and information sharing during terrorist incidents to ensure timely and accurate dissemination of critical information.

The Ministry of Home Affairs works closely with the police, security and intelligence agencies, the Armed Forces, and other government departments to regularly test and refine counterterrorism response capabilities. One such initiative was Exercise Strong Tower, conducted in London during the summer of 2015. This exercise involved the Metropolitan Police, British Transport Police, and other agencies in responding to a simulated terrorist firearms attack. Insights gained from Exercise Strong Tower are being used to inform and improve future response strategies, ensuring the continued enhancement of the UK's counterterrorism preparedness. (*UK Action to Combat Daesh*, n.d.). The United Kingdom's military has established comprehensive plans to support civilian authorities in the event of a significant terrorist attack within the nation. Up to 10,000 military personnel are on standby, ready to provide assistance as needed.

This initiative is a crucial component of the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Program (JESIP), which aims to ensure that emergency response personnel from various agencies can collaborate effectively. The primary objective of JESIP is to maximize the efficiency of emergency responses, thereby increasing the chances of saving lives. In 2015, the UK continued efforts to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of multi-agency responses to major incidents through joint training and exercises, building on the initial program from 2012 to 2014. Additionally, a new national system was implemented to identify, analyze, and address lessons learned from real-life incidents and exercises. This system aims to continually improve the UK's emergency response capabilities by incorporating insights gained from past experiences.

Operation SHADER

Operation SHADER represents the UK's military involvement in the US-led Global Coalition against ISIS. Initiated on September 26, 2014, in response to a formal request from the Iraqi Government, the operation was later extended to Syria in October 2014. The Royal Air Force (RAF) began conducting surveillance missions over Syria, and on December 2, 2015, the UK government approved RAF airstrikes against ISIS targets in Syria. Since this approval, the RAF has been operating at an intensity not seen in the past 25 years. By June 2016, the RAF had conducted over 2,200 sorties and approximately 900 airstrikes, resulting in the deaths of nearly 1,000 ISIS fighters. Operation SHADER also involves the Royal Navy, British Army, and special forces, demonstrating the UK's comprehensive approach to combating ISIS as part of the global coalition. (Warfare, 2017).

Operation Shader is one of the United Kingdom's primary operations targeting the Islamic State (IS) organization, representing a significant counterterrorism initiative alongside the U.S. government's efforts. MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), based in Cyprus, have been crucial in providing approximately one-third of the aerial surveillance in Syria. Tornado jets, which have been involved since the mission's inception, and Typhoon aircraft, which joined the operation in late 2015 following the UK Parliament's authorization to expand the air campaign against ISIS in Syria, have played pivotal roles in the success of Operation Shader. (Warfare, 2017).

The Royal Air Force (RAF), the British Army, and the Royal Navy are all contributing to Operation Shader, with the RAF providing the majority of forces. In 2014, the RAF deployed a total of 1,950 personnel, and this number has grown each year, reaching approximately 2,230 personnel by 2017. The British Army had 500 personnel involved in 2014, which increased to around 1,920 by 2017. The Royal Navy's involvement also grew from about 60 personnel in 2014 to 80 in 2017. Over nearly four years, the RAF's operations have been extensive. The UK has been the second-largest contributor to the coalition's air operations in Iraq and Syria, conducting airstrikes against ISIS. Additionally, the UK has provided Coalition partners with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support. During a hearing before the Defence Select Committee in May 2018, Air Vice Marshal Stringer, the former Commander of the UK Air Component in the Middle East, disclosed that the UK's Sentinel radar contributes approximately 25% to 30% of the coalition's overall intelligence (Parliament, 2015).

Conclusions

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is responsible for destabilizing the global political landscape, especially in Syria and Iraq, where they have been involved in the deaths of hundreds of people. The UK's stance towards the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is evidenced by joining the United States in its efforts to combat terrorism, and becoming the second largest anti-terrorism coalition. The military strategy is evidenced by the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and United Kingdom Army, all of which are prepared to prevent the spread of ISIL and attack their presence in Iraq, Syria and other regions of the world. One such strategy is Operation Shader which deploys MQ 9 Reaper drones based in Cyprus with the Air Force, Army and Navy taking part. This strategy was undertaken to address ISIL's presence in the world and protect their national security interests. The UK continues to defend itself against ISIL's presence and movements and seeks new strategies to drive them out of the international system.

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