

ASIAN STRATEGIC REVIEW 2016

Terrorism: Emerging Trends

Editors

S D Muni

| Vivek Chadha

idsa

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES

रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Foreword

Terrorism has become, in this century, an issue of growing concern for many States internationally. Although a common problem across regions, terrorism manifests itself in specific ways in different social and national settings. The focus of the 2016 edition of the *Asian Strategic Review* is, consequently, to seek a greater comprehension of the nature and geographic spread of the present and future threats from terrorism, and the possible ways of contending with and combating it, effectively.

The availability of new information, communication, and military technologies has enabled terrorist organisations to evolve into new forms. With a few exceptions, the terrorist threat was largely contained within national boundaries for much of the preceding century, and managed by individual States as a law and order issue. The threat from terrorist organisations – now more hybrid, complex and trans-national– is of a magnitude that it can subvert and destroy existing State structures. These organisations source funding from one country, arms and explosives from another, train in safe havens in areas within the jurisdiction of contiguous States – where authorities have abdicated control due to their incapacity or intent, having themselves turned ‘rogue’ – and select their targets across oceans and continents, sometimes far from their sanctuaries.

Notwithstanding their mutation, they are not altogether dissimilar to the ones that had appeared already in the 1990s in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. The common elements between the 1994 Islamic Emirate under Mullah Mohammad Omar and the 2014 Caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are striking. Both held territory and harboured foreign fighters. Both destroyed the civilizational heritage of their peoples – the Taliban first broke all the Gandhara idols they could find in the Kabul Museum before destroying the Buddha statues in Bamiyan, and the Daesh demolished the Baalshamin Temple of Palmyra. Both Taliban and Daesh have adopted barbaric methods of dispensing ‘justice’, punishing their adversaries, and killed Shias and those accused of apostasy. Both emerged as a consequence of complacency, permissiveness, and abetment on the part of one or more of the regional and great powers.

The convening in Kandahar, on February 23, 1998 of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders, marked the coming of age of trans-national terrorist organisations. As its leader, Al Qaeda enlisted in this Front the Egyptian Jihad Group (Jamaat-ul-Jihad), the Egyptian Armed Islamic Group (Gama'a al-Islamiya), the Pakistan Ulema Society (Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan), the Partisan's Movement in Kashmir (Harkat-ul-Ansar), and the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh. Signatories to the February statement, other than Osama bin Laden, were Ayman al-Zawahiri, leader of Egypt's Jihad group, Rifai Taha, head of Egypt's Gama'a al-Islamiya, Mir Hamza, Secretary General of Pakistan's Ulema Society, and Fazlul Rahman, head of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh.

Three months later, on May 28, 1998 Osama bin Laden announced the creation of a larger organization, the International Islamic Front for Jihad against America and Israel. Several Pakistan-based Islamist organisations joined this Front, including the Markaz Dawa Al Irshad (Centre for Preaching), its armed wing, the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), and the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) – as also its militant wing, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi – became its members. It was presumed that Harkat-ul-Ansar, later renamed as Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, was also part of the Front, besides three organizations from Egypt, two from Uzbekistan, one from Xinjiang, and the Abu Sayyaf group from Southern Philippines. The consenting Taliban leadership, then ruling Afghanistan, allowed Al Qaeda to set up training camps for terrorist strikes worldwide. When one such camp, set up at Jawhar Khel, close to Khost, by the Pakistan Army to train ISI recruits for Kashmir, was hit by Tomahawk missiles, it killed about two dozen residents of the camp. President Bill Clinton wrote in his autobiography, *My Life*, that many of those killed were Pakistani military officers, evidently there to provide training to Kashmiri terrorists. The origins and resurgence of non-State actors like the Taliban, Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and the Daesh demonstrate how they were nurtured by their nexus with State security structures.

Conventional wisdom was that after the fall of the Taliban regime in Kabul on November 12, 2001 and the flight of the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters to Pakistan, terrorism was very nearly vanquished. This sentiment gathered some momentum when Al Qaeda elements lost support from Sunni insurgents in Iraq, military action and drone strikes increased in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Osama bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan. In retrospect, these turned out to be episodic successes. The “forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East,” which the then US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, spoke about in 2004 in the context of the anticipated transformation of Iraq, soon turned sour. The dismantling of Libya, and subjecting Syria to repeated assault have had

their impact across Mashreq and Maghreb, engulfing in its wake both the Sahara and the Sahel, taking Islamist terrorism across into Central and West Africa. Expectations of a democratised Libya were consumed in the 9/11 blaze of 2012 that burnt down the US Consulate in Bengazi, suffocating Ambassador Chris Stevens in his safe-room. The turmoil resulting from the unravelling of Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen has sharpened the divide within and among States in the region by creating internecine ethnic and sectarian wars that have engendered unrelenting violence and unprecedented internal and external refugee flows.

There is a continuum from the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and associated terrorist groups to Daesh. All of them, with their embrace of the cult of suicide bombings, are more dispersed, diverse and numerous than in 2001, when the international campaign against terrorism began in the wake of 9/11. In some ways, Daesh is an evolved manifestation of Al Qaeda. Even if they are militarily contained, their institutional underpinnings undermined, and their leadership decimated, their radicalised foot soldiers might rally under new banners, unless the world finds a way to end the support, sustenance, and safe havens that made their rise possible in the first place.

New Delhi
February 2016

Jayant Prasad
Director General, IDSA

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Introduction

S.D. Muni

Under the US leadership, the international community has been fighting the war on global terrorism for the past decade and a half. Strategies and targets have undergone several changes in this war, but terrorism continues to show no signs of decline. It continues to pose a major security challenge to world order and stability. Concrete and chilling evidence for this was provided by the recent attacks in Paris, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Kunduz, Kabul, Peshawar and Pathankot. The list is indeed long and extensive to be fully recorded here. During the first 15 days of 2016, one website records 17 terrorist attacks in different parts of the world.

War on Terrorism

People in the US claim that they have been free from any major terrorist attack since 9/11. This is no doubt correct. However, there is no sign of a let-up in fear of such attacks in America. Recall the Republican presidential candidate Donald Trumps' plea for throwing all Muslims out of the United States. Such slogans may be laughed out but cannot be ignored as Trump claims to enjoy the support of 34 per cent of primary US voters. The US has recently also tightened immigration and visa rules for the passengers travelling from or through the troubled West Asian region. The only major achievement that the US and its allies may claim in the war on global terrorism is the head of Osama bin Laden, the al Qaeda founder-leader. But his death has in no way dismantled, defeated or eliminated al Qaeda. On the contrary, the US has decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. There are the likes of al-Zawahiri to carry the flag of al Qaeda and his former leader. Thomas Sanderson of Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Washington DC rightly commented that "turning the page on al Qaeda and its formidable team of associated movements is however, premature".

Why has this been so? There are many factors to look into for answering this

question. To begin with, the war against terrorism has been fought largely with the ruthless use of force without proper understanding and assessment of the place and the people on which such force is used. Recall the study by Carlotta Gall, “The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan 2001-2014”. The use of ruthless and excessive force has generated in reaction more recruits and greater commitment on the part of terrorist forces. Force only eliminates bodies and fighters from the scene, not their spirit and self-assumed cause. Very little has been done to factors and forces that carry forward this spirit and sustain it. Hardly any concerted attention has been paid to the ideology and grievances that reinforce the spirit of terrorism. Even the UN Resolutions on blocking funds for terror organisations and creating proper economic and social climate for deterring terror have not been effectively and sincerely implemented by many countries.

The global war on terror has also lacked consistency and consensus of the coalition partners. In the aftermath of 9/11, following the first range of bombing in Afghanistan, attention was soon shifted to Iraq. Later, while the international community was still densely engaged against the al Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan, the US announced in 2011-12, its strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific for ‘rebalancing’. But the deteriorating security conditions in Afghanistan have not allowed smooth implementation of the process of withdrawal and draw down of forces. The subsequent challenges in Libya and Syria have kept the international community bogged down in the Arab world. Most of the allies in Afghanistan were fighting a half-hearted war with the US, and so are they doing now against the newly emerged Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. The agenda of war against the IS lacks comprehensive consensus. It ranges from “degrading” to “eliminating” the IS forces, from the destruction of Raqqa and Mosul to the liberation of Iraq and Syria. The newly formed Saudi-led coalition of forces announced in January 2016, to fight the IS is also not free from strategic deviations and individual priorities of the partners. Pakistan has refused to contribute troops on the ground under this alliance, though it has accepted to join the alliance. Under the pretext of mediating differences between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan has promised only to share intelligence. There are unmistakable indications that the stomach for fight is simply not there among many members of both the alliances led by the US and Saudi Arabia. Russia is also fighting the IS with the support of countries like Iran.

Spectrum of Rising Terrorism

Failure of the global war on terrorism did not mean that terrorism has not been affected at all. Many of the terrorist leaders have been killed and their resources depleted. There have been extensive organisational deconstruction, ideological shifts and regrouping among the terrorist groups.¹ There has also been weakening

of, and erosion in, the strength of many of them. This is evident clearly in the case of al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban in the Af-Pak region. These groups have been inflicted with internal struggles for power and leadership. The Afghan Taliban for instance could not announce the death of its chief Mullah Omer for nearly two years, and when it was done, another struggle for the control of the group came to the fore. Factions of Taliban have left their mother organisation and sought to acquire new identity and affiliation. The Tehrik-e-Taliban of Pakistan (TTP), for instance, has emerged to challenge Pakistani State which otherwise continues to patronise the Afghan Taliban. TTP is now reported to be working in league with the IS. Other terror groups, like Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) of Pakistan, have changed their identities and acquired new names. Banned by Pakistan in 2002, the LeT started operating under the garb of a charitable Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) named Jammāt Ul Dawa which was also proscribed as a terror group by the UN Security Council in 2008. The terror scene in China has also become more worrisome, particularly in Xinjiang.

The rise of the IS as a new and most powerful terror group may be seen as a part of this regrouping and reconstruction within the global spectrum of terrorism.² There have been various factors contributing to the rise of the IS. This rise is a unique and unprecedented development in the evolution of global terrorism. For the first time, a terror group holds territory and is functioning as a state with its administrative and governance structures. While this makes the IS an easily identifiable target, which terror groups generally avoid by getting up mixed with society, the hold of territory also gives them access to resources. The IS control of captured oil wells in Iraq and Syria enables them to sell oil in black market to collect funds for their operations. Hold over territory and people also enables them to raise taxes and collect regular contributions.

IS also stands out from other terror groups in having a large number of foreign recruits. The presence of foreign fighters in various terror groups is not a new phenomenon. But the large size and wider spread of the foreign recruits give IS a distinct character. A UN report in 2015 indicated that IS represents nationalities from more than 100 countries and the foreigners account for more than 50 per cent of its fighting force in various categories, ranging from suicide bombers to cyber technologists. A large number of these recruits are from Western countries. They are recent converts to Islam, but do not understand the ideological foundations and nuances of the cause they are fighting for. They have been driven to this unknown life of adventure and risk out of personal frustrations and cultural alienation within their own respective societies. The foot soldiers of the IS would hardly be able to understand and explain as to why their organisation is fighting mostly against the Islamic states like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Pakistan.

In ideological appeal also, the IS has done much better than other Jihadi

terror groups. It has built on subtle and nuanced spins of Koranic tenets and sharia precepts to package its ideological projections. These packages have been propagated through deft and effective use of information technology (IT), various platforms of social media like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. and multiple, diversified network of religious and civil society organisations. Specific institutional structures and mechanisms have been put in place to carry out and monitor its ideological propaganda and attract recruits, followers and sympathisers. Sophisticated online tools of raising and transferring funds have also been employed through IT.

The IS Caliphate has a much wider outreach and impact. Its political and operational presence though rooted in Iraq and Syria, is not confined only to its seat of power but is also evident in Central, South and Southeast Asia. It claims to have already established provinces (“wilayats”) in Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and even India and promises to bring large parts of Asia, Europe and rest of the world under its sway. The multi-language periodical of the IS, *Dabiq*, states:

The flag of Khalifa will rise over Makkah and al-Madinah ... over Baytul-Maqdis (Jerusalem) and Rome.... The shades of the blessed flag will expand until it covers all eastern and western extents of the earth, filling the world with truth and justice of Islam and putting an end to the falsehood and tyranny of jahiliyyah (ignorance), even if America and its coalition despise such.³

In this strategy of territorial and ideological expansion, the IS has obviously been depending upon the already spreading radicalisation in countries of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Malaysia and Indonesia. It will also cash on religious conflicts like in Myanmar between the Buddhists and Muslims as well as prospects of communal polarisation involving Muslims in India or even Sri Lanka. Some of the European governments like in France and the United Kingdom also fear that sizable population of Muslims in their countries may be radicalised and attracted by the IS propaganda. We have already noted the evidence of such fears even in the US, reflected in the prevailing presidential campaign.

The regional and international rivalries in the Arab world are also fuelling the IS monster. Two of such rivalries deserve careful attention, namely between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the US and Russia. There may be an Islamic sectarian dimension – of Shia/Sunny conflict – in relation to Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, the core of this rivalry is for regional power and influence, not for sectorial supremacy. Saudi Arabia is guarding its primacy as the seat of Islamic religious authority which the Iraq-based IS has challenged. Saudi Arabia is also concerned that gradually softening relations between Iran and the US, and its European allies, may prop up Iran as a major regional player. It is however clear

that in terms of Islamic ideology, both Iran and Saudi Arabia have to confront the spread of the IS. For this, Saudi Arabia has even launched a 14-power coalition to militarily challenge the IS. But such military moves may not yield desired results until Saudi Arabia and Iran join their efforts together in meeting the common threat. It is anybody's guess if such an understanding between the two major Gulf powers would materialise in near future.

The US and its European allies, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, face a dilemma of choosing between the challenge of terror posed by the IS and geostrategic presence in the region. They are all bombing the IS-held oil installations to cripple its sources of funding but have divergent perspectives on the transformation of Syrian regime led by President Assad. Unless this divergence is bridged in the interest of common challenge posed to all, the IS may not be defeated. It may also be kept in mind that the IS challenge is not simply a military challenge; surely not limited to destruction of oil fields and structures by aerial bombing. Nothing seems to have been done, or being done, to challenge its ideological front which is the real driver of the IS success so far. The region is littered with rich oil and gas resources but it is debatable if the Russian-US rivalry is for the control of these resources. Some European commentators do not see this rivalry in term of the hydrocarbon resources alone. They look at the region for its geostrategic value and lucrative potential as an 'arms bazar'. There are huge question marks hanging on the dynamics of this region in view of the declining oil prices, uncertain political contours and intense social turbulence. The ensuing confusion and chaos may be harnessed by the IS to create shields and cushions to blunt and diffuse all the regional and global powers' ire against its vision and aspirations of a 'purist' Islamic hegemony.

The Volume

Various facets of the IS challenge and the unfolding contours of terrorism in Asia, as identified in the above paragraphs, have been analysed and written upon. Most of the perspectives have, however been Western, with the sprinkling of isolated Asian views. The present Volume is a modest attempt to join the discourse on Asian terrorism from Indian perspective. The essays included in this Volume have neither been inspired by any official views of the Government of India, nor do they represent a collective position of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. They should be taken as individual contributions of the authors, representing their objective assessment of the issues concerned. Their purpose is to neither shape opinions nor advocate any specific policy line. It is hoped that these essays will enliven and enrich the debate on the challenge of terrorism in Asia that is increasingly threatening our peace and stability, our values and ideals.

The Volume has been organised in four sections. The first deals with the

ideological, technological, funding, communication and weapons aspects of the IS and other terror groupings. The remaining three sections focus on geographical regions of Asia, namely West and Central Asia; South Asia; and, China and Southeast Asia. In view of the constraints of available expertise, space and time, not every country has been covered; nor every aspect of the changes taking place in Asian terrorism been explored and scrutinised. Yet we feel that the volume will cover an existing gap in the literature and provide a perspective that is relevant to the discourse.

ENDNOTES

1. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organisational, strategic and Ideological Fissures*, Routledge, New York, 2011.
2. William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy and Dooms Day Vision of the Islamic State*, St. Martin Press, 2015. Also Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassen, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, Regan Arts, 2015.
3. As quoted in Jessica Lewis Mcfate, "ISIS Is a State-Breaker' – Here's the Islamic State's Strategy for the Rest of 2015", May 15, 2015, at <http://www.businessinsider.com/isis-is-a-state-breaker—heres-the-islamic-states-strategy-for-the-rest-of-2015-2015-5?IR=T> (Accessed on January 25, 2016).

IDEOLOGY, FINANCE,
TECHNOLOGY AND WMDS

1

The Rise of the Islamic State: A New Chapter in Militant Islam

Yaqoob ul Hassan

“We do not understand the movement [i.e., the Islamic State], and until we do, we are not going to defeat it. We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea.”

—Major General Michael K. Nagata

Since its inception as an entity the Islamic State¹ still remains a mystery. The world community is still perplexed trying to understand the very idea of the Islamic State. Analysts give much stress on socio-political factors and least touch the theological facet, the reason behind the rapid rise of the Islamic State. There is no doubt that the other factors – including the Sunni-Shia schism that has unfolded recently in bloody conflicts in Iraq and Syria – have equally played an important role. The insidious sense of confusion in understanding the Islamic State phenomenon can also be attributed to the conventional wisdom in the West that it is another offshoot of the al-Qaeda. The Islamic State has become a buzz word in academic as well as diplomatic circles. So many writings are coming up on a regular basis. However, less ink has been used to analyse the ideology of the group. The Islamic State justifies its every act through the Quranic verses, Hadiths (teachings and sayings of Prophet) and the fatwas (decrees) of the various religious scholars. Therefore, in this background, an attempt is made in this paper to critically analyse the ideological underpinnings of the Islamic State.

The threat Islamic State poses to the West Asian region can be better understood not only by focusing on the external military threats to the West

Asian states, rather by understanding the crisis of ideational security dilemma created by the Islamic State in its neighbourhood and beyond. It would be this crisis created by the “ideological power, not military power, [that] would be the primary trigger of threat perception and policy”,² and would continue to destabilise the region in the foreseeable future. This article will examine the group’s ideological religious and political beliefs in detail.

Takfiri School of Thought

The theological doctrines most militant groups adhere fall far outside the normative Islamic teachings and do not comply with the mainstream Islamic thought. The emergence of the jihadi school of thought is not a recent phenomenon. It has a long history in the Islamic tradition. It goes back to the writings and teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah during the medieval period. However, the 20th century also witnessed the significant rise in militant scholarship. The common denominator within this school of thought revolves around three concepts: 1) *Jahiliyyah* (ignorance), 2) *Takfir* (excommunication), and 3) *Jihad* (armed struggle). *Jahiliyyah* is used very vaguely in Islamic jurisprudence. It has been derived from the Arabic term, *Jahil*, meaning ignorance. The term is often used as an antithesis to *Ilm* (knowledge). In Islamic history, it refers to the pre-Islamic Arab pagans. The term, *Jahiliyyah*, was used during Prophet’s time to distinguish and separate the community of believers from their *Jahil* counterparts. Sayyid Qutb has made this term a basic argument in his book, *Milestones*³. For Qutb, anything that goes against *Hakimiyyah* (sovereignty) of God is *Jahiliyyah*. According to Qutb, “All sovereignty belongs to God alone.” Islam, he maintained, “cannot accept any compromise with *Jahiliyyah*, either in its concept or in its modes of living derived from this concept”.⁴ *Takfir*, as mentioned earlier, means excommunicating the others. It means declaring incumbent ruler or an individual apostate. The literal meaning of *jihad* is to strive or to exert oneself fully in an endeavour. But in the context of the jihadi school of thought, the term is generally referred to as warfare often seen in military significance.

It would be pertinent to critically examine these three concepts espoused by Ibn Taymiyyah and Sayyid Qutub that over the decades have become the base of the Jihadi school of thought. All the jihadi outfits, particularly the Islamic State, have extensively relied on the above-mentioned ideologues.

Ibn Taymiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah was born in 1263 at Harran (modern-day Syria). It was the time when the whole Muslim world, politically speaking, was in turmoil. The Islamic civilisation was under threat from many quarters. Not only Tartars who were close to Harran but also the crusaders, who were regularly attacking Palestine,

further exacerbated the fear within Islamic world. It was the time when Ibn Taymiyyah took it on himself to mobilise Muslims for jihad. For Taymiyyah, Muslim societies had become demoralised, superstitious and indolent. To revitalise Muslim Ummah, Taymiyyah not only addressed the rulers of the time but also the common masses in his speeches, writings and fatwas. In one of his letters of jihad that was addressed to the public, Taymiyyah classified *Kuffars* (infidels) into a number of categories.

The first group according to Taymiyyah consists of the original *Kuffars* who right from the very beginning did not embrace the new religion, like the Christians, and Armenians. For Taymiyyah, there is no harm in having good relations with them, and it is permissible to hold peace agreements with them.

The second group consists of *Murtaddoon* (apostates) who after accepting Islam returned to their infidel ways, like some Arab tribes, Persians and Romans. According to Taymiyyah, "These Murtaddoons are worse than the original Kuffar. Therefore, fighting them is obligatory if they do not return to Islam and neither peace agreement nor covenant of security can be given to them." It is forbidden to have any sort of relationship with them; they must be fought against and killed.

The third group includes those who belong to Islam but do not perform Islamic duties and practices. They do not perform obligatory prayers, nor do they carry out jihad. They do not believe in *Jiziyah* (religiously required per capita tax levied by a Muslim state on non-Muslim subjects), nor do they cease from killing Muslims and taking their money. This group, according to Taymiyyah, is worse than *Kuffars*, and there is no disagreement among the scholars in fighting against them.

The fourth group includes those who rejected Islam in practice but still claim to belong to it. These are the people who reverted from Islam because they did not follow the Sharia. In Taymiyyah's view, they should be fought until they again return to Islam, and to prevent *Fitna* (sedition or civil strife) so that the religion will be for only Allah.⁵

In one of his famous fatwas on jihad known as *Majmoo al-Fataawa*, Ibn Taymiyyah talks about legislated jihad and the objectives of jihad:

Since the foundation of the legislated combat is al-Jihad, and the objective of al-Jihad is to make all the religion [purely] for Allah, [1] and to make the *Kalimah* of Allah [*Tawheed* (Oneness of Allah)] uppermost [2], then whoever prevents that should be fought by the unanimous agreement of the Muslims. As for those [disbelievers] who are not preventing, or fighting [against the Muslims] such as women, children, monks, the elderly, the blind, the infirm, and others [similar] to them, the majority of Scholars agree they are not to be fought, unless they fight us in their speech [such as propaganda or incitement

against the Muslims] or in their actions [such as assisting those who fight or prevent the Muslims], [whereas] some of the scholars hold the opinion they can all be fought except women and children, because they [become] the property of the Muslims [i.e., *Ganeemah*; war booty].⁶

Taymiyyah by cherry-picking the Quranic verses justifies killing. In his interpretation, he does not differentiate between jihad and warfare. In another fatwa, Taymiyyah maintained that “Allah has permitted the killing of people if it is necessary for the welfare of the creation”.⁷ Taymiyyah’s take on those who do not prescribe and depart from the sharia must be fought against, “even though they may say the two declarations of faith” (i.e., claiming oneness of Allah and believing on the final Prophethood).⁸ In Taymiyyah’s view, jihad can be initiated, “Initiating [jihad] is a communal obligation [*fardhul-Kifayyah*].”⁹ Ergo, he does not make any distinction between offensive jihad and defensive jihad. The normative thought prescribes defensive jihad in rare times.

The obligatory jihad in Taymiyyah’s view does include fight against other sects of Islam. His definition of being Muslim is very conservative; it’s not enough in to believe in one God and in the final Prophethood of Mohammad. He treated the Sufis also in the same vein. According to Taymiyyah:

Likewise, [it is an obligation to fight] those who openly promote innovation which oppose the Book and the Sunnah, and the way of the Salf of the Ummah and its Imams, like those who distort the divinely revealed Names of Allah and His verses of the Qur’aan, or those who deny His *Qadr* [divine decree] and *Qadaar* [preordainment], or those who deny [anything from] that which the Muslims have agreed upon in the time of *Khulafaair-Raashideen* [the rightly guided Khaleefahs], or those who speak in a bad way [*ta’aan*] about the first and foremost of the *Muhaajireen* [Meccan Immigrants] and the *Ansaar* [Medinian Converts] and those who follow them in *al-Ihsaan* [righteousness], or those who fight against the Muslims until they obey them in their opposition to the Islamic Shari’ah and other similar affairs.¹⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah not only portrayed Islam as a political ideology but also laid the foundation of ideological precepts that treat any sort of deviation from the literal teachings of Quran and the Hadith as blasphemy, and it must be eradicated by force. It was the beginning of ‘political’ Islam which adheres to the idea that Islam already entails political implications and aspirations, and politics must be seen as an extension of faith. These ideological precepts later became the underpinnings of the takfiri school of thought.

Sayyid Qutb

Theorising more about the ideological precepts about jihad and establishing a “just” society, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), an Egyptian ideologue whose ideas

inspired the various militant organisations, has meticulously choreographed the ways and means of establishing a caliphate in the Muslim world. Qutb while following the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyyah has gone further into detail in his writings and provided the par excellence extremist theological thought that is often cited as the Weltanschauung of jihad in political Islam. Qutb's transformation from mainstream Islamist to radical militant ideologue was because of specific context and circumstances.¹¹ The etymology of takfir goes back to the period when members of the Muslim Brotherhood were imprisoned by then president of Egypt, Gamal Abdul Nasser. The atrocities of Nasser's regime towards Muslim Brotherhood led to the development of a radical thought. According to Ibrahim Badawi:

The suffering and humiliation endured by the imprisoned Brothers produced an intense rage and an overwhelming need for retribution. It was in theological terms that the prisoners deliberated their humiliation and rage, and justifies their need for revenge. The result of this process was the creation of the radicalised theological doctrine of Takfir, a fundamental precept of militant thought and theology.¹²

The whole process of cogitation within prisoners about their ordeal made them to deliberate on experiences they had in prison. They started questioning: Why was their religion maligned by the people of the same faith? What about apostasy? Would not those people fall in the category of the *Kuffars* by insulting God? What about the rulers who do not govern according to the Sharia?¹³ According to Ibrahim Badawi:

By deliberating their grievances, and the perceived solution to these grievances within the epistemological framework of Islamic theological thought, the imprisoned militants developed the doctrine of Takfir, a theological instrument which could be used to justify revenge against their oppressors.¹⁴

Subsequently, the Muslim Brotherhood members reached a conclusion that those who submit to and obey these laws are also *Kuffars*. Sayyid Qutb codified this idea under the new theme of *Jahiliyyah* ("the state of ignorance of the guidance from God"). According to him, everything outside the circle of Islam is *Jahiliyyah*.¹⁵ The time of *Jahiliyyah* has not ended, rather it is still prevailing and is deeper than ever:

Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws – is *Jahiliyyah*, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of *Jahiliyyah*!¹⁶

Qutb perceived the world in the prism of two concepts, first is what he called *Dar-ul-Harb* and second, *Dar-ul-Islam*. *Dar-ul-Islam* is a society where sharia prevails, and *Dar-ul-Harb* is a land of *Jahiliyyah*. The primary purpose according

to Qutb is not only to free the community from the *Jabili* concepts, traditions and leadership but also not to compromise and show obedience to *Jabili* leaders.¹⁷ After delegitimising the hitherto considered un-Islamic ruler – many Islamic jurists are of the view that it is forbidden in Islam to revolt against the ruler even if he is oppressive – Qutb propounded an Islamic movement that reformed ideas and used “physical power and Jihad for abolishing the organisations and authorities of *Jabili* system”.¹⁸ In Qutbian *Jabiliyyah* theory, according to Ibrahim Badawi, “rulers who claimed to be Muslims but did not implement the Sharia law could be deemed apostates, evil-doers, and transgressors”¹⁹. Therefore, by excommunicating such rulers and system, Qutb validated the concept of takfir, which became a theological weapon for radical Islam.

Normative interpretation of jihad found no place in Sayyid Qutb’s *Milestones*. For him, *Jihad bi al-sayf* (striving through fighting) makes the way for striving through preaching for the application of sharia.²⁰

Islam is not a defensive movement in the narrow sense which today is technically called a defensive war. This narrow meaning is ascribed to it by those who are under the pressure of circumstances and are defeated by the wily attacks of the orientalisists, who distort the concept of Islamic Jihad.²¹

The term jihad is highly misinterpreted in political Islam. Everyone defines it according to one’s ease and much depends on a person’s ideological leanings. It is very often misunderstood as warfare. The literal meaning of jihad denotes “exertion, striving, effort, exhaustion”. At various places in the Quran, it stands for “to swear” or “to take strong oath”. In interpreting the verses of the Quran on jihad, “struggling” is also misunderstood as “fighting”. Out of the 36 Quranic verses on jihad, there are only 10 places where it implies “warfare”. Even in those, one finds a lot of inconsistency. At some places, the verses, often known as “Sword Verses”, contradict each other. In order to address this dichotomy, religious scholars solved the problem by “asserting that the equivocal concepts and injunctions depicted in the Quran were revealed in response to specific occasions within the religious mission of the Prophet Muhammad”.²²

Another issue that needs to be dealt with is: Who has the divine authority to sanction and encourage fighting? In Islamic tradition, no individual or group of people are allowed to take a decision to wage jihad on their behalf, as one Hadith denotes in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “A Muslim ruler is shield; war can only be waged under him.”²³ According to Islamic scholars of repute, no human being is allowed to wage a jihad on the basis of polytheism, disbelief and apostasy but God alone has the right to punish for these crimes.²⁴

Hijacked by fanatic ideologues, the interpretation of the Quranic verses on jihad has found no place for normative construal. The radical scholars back their views by selective use of Quranic verses. The commentators believe that most of

the verses on jihad are *naskh* (abrogated) so that the contradiction within these verses can be addressed.²⁵

Therefore, it is no surprise that an entity like the Islamic State adheres literally to the fatwas and writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and Sayyid Qutb. One can gauge it from their periodic publication, *Dabiq*. In its inaugural issue, the Islamic State laid stress on *hijra* (immigration). Taking recourse to Sayyid Qutb's thought on *Dar-ul-Harb* and *Dar-ul-Islam*, the Islamic State maintains that it is obligatory to make *hijra* to *Dar-ul-Islam*: "*Hijra* has been a pillar inherent to Jihad, particularly in eras void of *Dar-ul-Islam*."²⁶ Quoting Hadiths of Prophet on *hijra* when Prophet and his companions were forced to leave Mecca, "*Hijra* will not cease as long as there is Jihad" and "*Hijra* will not cease as long as the *Kuffar* are fought",²⁷ the Islamic State calls upon all Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State. In the second issue of its propaganda magazine, the Islamic State sought the following:

The first priority is to perform *hijrah* from wherever you are to the Islamic State, from *dārul-kufr* to *dārul-Islām*... Rush to the shade of the Islamic State with your parents, siblings, spouses, and children. There are homes here for you and your families. You can be a major contributor towards the liberation of Makkah, Madīnah, and al-Quds. Would you not like to reach Judgment Day with these grand deeds in your scales?²⁸

The notion of *hijra* is helping the Islamic State in two ways. Firstly, it provides easy recruits to support its fighting industry. Secondly, once Islamic State announced a full-fledged state, the running of state machinery was a daunting task; therefore, it succinctly used the *hijra* card to get the educated workforce especially from the West, who with the technological background is helping it run the captured territories.

The Sunni-Shia Divide

The Sunni-Shia schism is not a recent phenomenon in the Muslim world. It has been simmering since the death of the Prophet. Seeing the rupture only in one prism – political, economic and geo-strategic – is fallacious. The ideological factor plays an equal role in the Sunni-Shia conflict. Although initially it was politically driven, but later it became an ideological-cum-identity issue.

Shia'ism as a new sect emerged when Abu Baker in 632 AD was appointed the first caliph soon after the death of the Prophet. People who opposed it on the ground that Ali ibn Talib, Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, should have been appointed the caliph called themselves *Shi'atu Ali* (the partisans of Ali). However, this division turned bloody in 680 AD, when Hussain and his companions were killed by the Umayyad Caliph at Karbala. Therefore, Karbala not only became a moral issue for the Shias, but they also used this tragic episode to capture the public imagination.²⁹ Shias as compared to Sunnis were apolitical, and through

most of their history they have looked at theology – Imams and Ayatollahs – for political and religious legitimacy and emancipation. However, this changed after the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Sunni world looked at this revolution with suspicion. This suspicion got aggravated with the growing Iranian interference in various Muslim countries, especially after the Arab Spring.³⁰

The recent tide of sectarian wars has divided the Muslim world into two camps, one led by Saudi Arabia and the other by Iran. Guarding their own geo-strategic interests, both use proxy battles by infusing militant organisations' infatuation for purifying the faith or "preparing the way for the return of the messiah".³¹ There is no denying the fact that both Sunnis and Shias lived together peacefully for centuries. Both sects are not monolithic in nature. Sectarian identity was never allowed to overcome national or tribal structure of the society.³² But this trend has now changed abruptly in West Asia. The "confessional identity"³³ has transcended the national identity. After the fall of Saddam Hussain in 2003, the political power shifted in favour of the Shias. The government of Nuri al-Maliki marginalised the Sunni provinces politically and economically. From 2003 onwards, a well-crafted strategy was launched against the Sunnis.³⁴ As Tirana Hassan states:

There is mounting evidence that Iraq's Shite militias are using the fight against the Islamic State as cover for a campaign of sectarian violence targeting Sunni Arab communities. The Baghdad authorities have turned a blind eye to these militias' crimes, while foreign governments have ignored the militias' use of their military aid to pursue their campaign against Sunni Arabs. If the central Iraqi government doesn't rein in Shite militias and hold them and their commanders to account for their crimes-including war crimes-Iraq may enter even more terrible times.³⁵

Sunnis in Iraq were not allowed to be represented in politics, and security services. The process of marginalisation forced the Sunnis to join the ranks of al Qaeda in the beginning and later the Islamic State.³⁶ This was the time when Iraq saw the never ending sectarian strife. Both Sunnis and Shias were forced to pick sides. The Shias joined the Iran-led Shia crescent,³⁷ and Sunnis got political, financial and military support from various Sunni states.³⁸ This polarisation got exacerbated with the outbreak of the civil war in Syria. The whole Muslim world implicitly or explicitly chose sides. The Lebanese Shia outfit Hezbollah, Yemen's Shia Houthis, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Mahdi Army supported Assad's regime and also fought against Sunni fighters in Iraq. Even Shia Afghan refugees mostly Hazzars in Iran were also recruited by Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps to fight in Syria and Iraq.³⁹ On the other hand, Sunnis joined the Islamic State to stem the expansion of the Iran-led Shia crescent. Thousands of foreign fighters mostly from Europe found Islamic State's objective of cleansing and wiping out Shias from the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala very attractive.

According to one recent survey, over 42 million Muslims support the Islamic State: “More than 8.5 million people view Islamic State positively, and around 42 million view them somewhat positively.”⁴⁰ Grand Ali al-Sistani, a Shia spiritual leader based in Najaf gave a fatwa for jihad against the Sunnis. A pro-Iranian militia, the Badr Organisation, went rampant against the Arab Sunnis. According to Nicolas Pelham,

With fresh supply of arms and training from Iran, Darraji [Abu Jaafar Darraji, a senior commander of the Badr Organisation] claimed that his Badr militia could outgun the official Iraqi army and set up an alternative system of government. Pointing at Khamenei’s portrait he said, ‘He’s the *waliamr al muslimeen*, the legal ruler in all the Muslim lands.’⁴¹

This Sunni-Shia conundrum has been aptly exploited by the Islamic State. Calling Shias derogatory names such as *Safawi* (a term derived from the Safavid Shia Empire), *Rafida* (meaning rejecters of faith) and *Murtadd* (meaning apostles), the Islamic State seeks to lure foreign fighters by infusing historical sectarian clashes within political Islam. Partisan statements by state premiers only aggravate the situation. For example, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on June 18, 2014 at Khoramabad near the Iraq border, said, “Dear Karbala, dear Najaf, dear Kadhimiyyah, and dear Samarra, we warn the great powers and their lackeys and the terrorists, the great Iranian people will do everything to protect them.”⁴² Former Vice President of Iraq, Tariq al-Hashimi, on June 14, 2014, in the same vein stated, “Sunnis had no other option but to defend themselves and use arms. We reached a point of to be or not to be.”⁴³

Excommunicating the other belief is not confined to the Islamic State or takfiri school of thought. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2012 candidly portrait that highest number of people who believe that Shias are not Muslim are from the West Asia. According to the report, at least 40 per cent of Sunnis do not accept Shias as fellow Muslims.⁴⁴ Therefore, it was not that difficult for the Islamic State to further exploit sectarian divide, or even denounce the other sect. The already available ideological scholarship on takfir⁴⁵ was meticulously used by the Islamic State to accomplish this objective.

Excommunicating the “Other”

The threat Islamic State posed to the region is both territorial and ideational in nature. It poses a threat on cultural, historical and civilisational elements of the modern states. What makes Islamic State different from the other militant organisations is that the other outfits work under the existing state structures. Their objectives are territorial in nature, too. But they do not want to eradicate the existing borders of the state in which they are fighting, rather just want to overthrow the regimes which they consider to be stooges of the West. The other

difference is that the former is vehemently against organisations who are fighting either for separatism or whose objectives are political in nature – Hamas in case of Palestine and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are prime examples. According to the Islamic State, “Nationalism, patriotism, tribalism, and revolutionism were never the driving forces inside the heart of the *muwāhhidmujāhid*. For him to lose his tongue would be more beloved than to voluntarily utter slogans of nationalist *Jāhiliyyah*.”⁴⁶ Islamic State even considers organisations like Hamas as apostates. The Muslim Brotherhood who laid the ideological foundation of contemporary militant Islam is also considered *Tāghūt* (evil). The Islamic State referred to the renowned leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and the former president of Egypt, Dr Mohammad Morsi, as *Tāghūt*. In the seventh issue of *Dabiq*, adh-Dhawāhir takes on Morsi by addressing him as *Tāghūt*,⁴⁷ the same deprecating terms are used against Hamas, al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the region.

The Islamic State divides the other groups who are fighting in Iraq and Syria into four types:

- 1) Islamic factions with an international agenda
- 2) Islamic factions with a nationalist agenda
- 3) Nationalist factions with an Islamic agenda
- 4) Secularist factions with a democratic agenda

According to the Islamic State, the first two groups possess Islamic agenda, but have “mixed it with elements and different degrees of nationalism”. The third group is nationalistic, but uses Islamic language and culture to propagate its agenda. The fourth one stands for apostasy. It has nothing to do with Islam. It states:

Above all this, most of these factions were internally infected by *bid'ah* (some of which was *kufri*) but their *bidā* were never their ‘official’ creeds. The ‘Islamic’ factions were infected with *Surīriyyah*, *Jāmiyyah* [pro-Saudi ‘Salafiyah’], and *Irijā*. The nationalist factions were infected with *Jahmiyyah* [extreme *Irijā*’ and negation of Allah’s attributes], *Ikhwāniyyah* [the ‘Muslim’ Brotherhood methodology], Sufism, and *Qubūriyyah* [grave-worship].⁴⁸

The other Islamist factions according to the Islamic State may claim to be independent in their agenda, but they do get financial and military support from nationalist groups and apostate regimes in the region. Apart from the military strategy, the other important difference between the Islamic State and other jihadi organisations in the region is implementation of the sharia. Islamic State accuses other jihadi organisations for not implementing *Hudud* when they were in power.⁴⁹ It terms those allying with the *Tāghūts* and *Kuffars* as hypocrites. Quoting Ibn Taymiyyah, “The hypocrites who said, ‘We believe in Allah and the Last Day’ [*Al-Baqarah*: 8] but who are not believers are those who are externally believers. They pray with the people. They perform hajj and participate in

offensive battles. The Muslims and the hypocrites marry from each other (sic) and inherit from each other' [*Majmā' al-Fatāwā*].⁵⁰ The Islamic State follows the simple dictum; every other group is apostle except them.

New Trend in Salafism

The Islamic State leaders identify themselves with *Salaf* or *Salaf as Saliheen* (the pious predecessors). Initially Salafism emerged as an intellectual movement in Egypt's al-Azhar University, but later its main aim was to eliminate idolatry, purify the faith infected with innovation and adhere to the concept of *Tawhid* (oneness or unity of God). Salafis consider associating others with God as *Shirk* (polytheism). The practice of *Tassawuf* (religious figures as intercessors with God) is strictly prohibited in Salafism. The crux of Salafi creed is *Tawhid* and its protection. Muslims must strictly follow the Quran and Sunna (teachings and practices of Prophet), and any deviation is idolatry.⁵¹

Over a period of time, a new trend has emerged within the Salafi school of thought regarding the application of religion to new problems and issues Muslims are confronted with. On the basis of contextual application of religion on political issues and conditions, the Salafis are divided into three major factions.

The first faction is of the purists, also known as quietist Salafis,⁵² who believe in *Da'wa* (preaching). This group lays stress on promoting the Salafi creed of *Tawhid*. It maintains a distance from politics. It believes that "until the religion is purified, any political action will likely lead to corruption and injustice because society does not yet understand the tenets of faith".⁵³ This subset within the Salafi thought considers politics and issues related to politics and power as *Biddah* (innovation).⁵⁴ The second one faction belongs to the politicians, who believe that joining politics will enable them to legislate and implement God's rule on earth is akin to the Muslim Brotherhood's thought⁵⁵.

This shift within quietist Salafis from apolitical to political came after the 1991 Gulf war. A debate on whether to allow non-Muslims into Saudi Kingdom among Salafi scholars start deliberating on matters which were political in nature. According to Kamran Bokhari, "prominent scholars began publically calling for reform, which led to Salafists in general engaging in political discourse and, eventually, to the concept of Salafism as an Islamist philosophy".⁵⁶ This trend got further emboldened with the dawn of Arab Spring particularly in Egypt and Tunisia. Al Nour and al-Asala, the two Salafist political parties of Egypt contested elections and latter also supported the military move to topple President Morsi. The transformation of embracing secular military dictator has much to do with political expediency rather than a paradigm shift in Salafist ideological evolution.

The third group is the jihadi Salafists. They are also known as *al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya*, a term the leaders of the Islamic State prefer.⁵⁷ Jihadi Salafism is also

seen as the rejection of purists or quietist Salafis because of their failure to “rectify the ‘un-Islamic’ state of affairs in the Saudi Kingdom and the wider Arab and Muslim world”.⁵⁸ This faction is the recent development within the Salafi movement. Its emergence can be traced to the time of the Afghan War. Jihadi Salafists after returning to the Kingdom did not get the support from the purists for establishing a caliphate. Jihadi Salafists found purists hand-in-glove with the ruling regime in the marginalisation of the jihadis.⁵⁹ Jihadis consider purists as “*al-ulama al-sulta* (the scholars of power)”.⁶⁰ The main issue that created fissures within the Salifi School is the debate on takfir, excommunicating others on the basis of faith, belief and sin. The Islamic State differed with purist scholars and politicians on issues related to *Tawhid* or faith, criteria for determining takfir. Relying on Qutb’s thought of God’s sovereignty alone and his mixing of governance and rule, it declared all rulers, sects and individuals who do not prescribe to their ideology as apostates.

Excommunicating others however limited organisations like al-Qaeda in the past, and that seems to have affected its strategy. Its September 2003 statement regarding an attack in Saudi Arabia makes this clear:

No sound mind will accept this, not to mention the Muslims who know God’s law and the precepts of the Quran and Sunnah. We are not people of error and deviation, that we should turn our weapons against any Muslim. If anyone alleges that we declare the generality of Muslims to be unbelievers and countenance killing them, we take refuge in God from this error. If we held the generality of Muslims to be unbelievers, why did we go to defend our brothers in Bosnia or Chechnya, who know nothing of Islam except the profession of faith (shahadah)? If we are defending with our blood those who know of Islam only the shahadah, judging them to be Muslims and considering it our duty to ransom them with our blood, does it make sense that we would sacrifice our blood for those we consider to be unbelievers? – and then that we would kill a Muslim who lives in a society that follows all the principles of religion? We declare no one who prays towards Mecca to be an unbeliever for any sin, as long as he does not consider it licit.⁶¹

South Asia

The Islamic State officially recognised a wilayah of Khurasan (a region encompassing Afghanistan, Pakistan’s tribal areas and parts of Iran) on January 26, 2014. Shahidullah Shahid, former spokesperson of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has expressed his allegiance to the Islamic State leader, Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, “Oh our brothers of (ISIS), we are proud of you.”⁶² There are already many terrorist organisations operating in the region, few vary in their objectives and tactics but most of them share the common Salafist orientation. The common denominator between these organisations is takfir.

In South Asian context, takfir or “puritarian” Islam as an exclusionary trend was a foreign component, absorbed in the 18th century by South Asian Islam. However, the Ahl-i-Hadis emerged in its fullest only in mid-19th century⁶³. Salafi/Waahabi movement had a tangible influence on South Asian Muslims, as did the influence of Najaf and Qum had on the subcontinent Shias.⁶⁴ It was during the British rule that the sectarian lines were drawn and fatwas against divergent sects were issued. During the same time, Ahmed Raza Khan Barelwi issued a fatwa known as *Fatwa Rizvia* in which he denounced everyone *Kafir* except his own.⁶⁵ The most ardent supporters of takfir in the subcontinent were Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Shah Waliullah and Sayid Ahmad Shahid.

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, popularly known as Mujaddid Alf Thani, is a renowned Islamic figure from the subcontinent, but at the same time, he is the most controversial among the Ulama. Sirhindi, a follower of Sufism, was a staunch supporter of sharia. In his writings, he not only condemned *bida* (innovation) but also denounced the followers of Shia faith. In his famous booklet, *Radd-i-Rawafiz* (“Refutation of the Shias”),⁶⁶ he issued a fatwa against the Shias, declaring them infidels. He wrote:

It is disbelief to curse the *Shaikhayn* [Sayyiduna Abu Bakr and Sayyiduna Umar] – *radi Allahu Ta’alaanhum* ... cursing the *Shaikhayan* means enmity towards them. And enmity towards them, in turn, is disbelief ... Enmity towards them is *Kufr* [disbelief] ... in the light of the fact that a person who denies their Caliphates will become a disbeliever, one should imagine the destiny awaiting those people who vilify and curse them ...⁶⁷

In his writings, Sirhindi approved a legal opinion issued by group of Transoxianianulamas who ruled:

Since the Shia permit cursing Abu Bakr, ‘Umr and Uthman and one of the chaste wives [of Prophet], which in itself constitutes infidelity, it is incumbent upon the Muslim ruler, and upon all people, in compliance with the command of the Omniscient king, to kill them and to oppress them in order to elevate the true religion. It is permissible to destroy their buildings and to seize their property and belongings.⁶⁸

In Sirhindi’s theological thought, sharia had an important place. He divided sharia into two parts, at micro and macro levels. According to Sirhindi:

Shari’ah not only means belief in transcendental realities but also defines what religious life truly is (*haqiqah*), what are its constituents and what they really mean. Shari’ah is not just a code of rules and regulations that govern external action. It also explains what faith, *Tawhid*, trust, gratitude, patience worship, *dhiker*, jihad, *taqwa* and *ihsan* are, and shows how to realise these realities.⁶⁹

However, the condemnation of Shias in his writings has to be seen in the historical context. The denunciation of Shias and other sects lessened towards the later

part of Sirhinid's writings. But his theological thought, particularly the *Radd-e-Rawaafiz*, is still considered the vanguard of takfiri school of thought in the subcontinent.

Shah Waliullah's theological thought played an important role in the radicalisation of Sunni Muslims in the subcontinent. He is known as the founder of Waahabi movement in India. Shah Waliullah was influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah.⁷⁰ Waliullah attributed the downfall of the Muslims to the failure of literal adherence of Quran and sharia. His rejection of combined unity and stress on only religious identity for Muslims created permanent cracks in Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent. Waliullah believed in Arabised Islam: both in culture and norms. In his famous fatwa, Shah Waliullah declared India as a *Dar-ul-Harb*. For him jihad was the only way against the infidels. While commenting on the impact of Waliullah on South Asia, Ayesha Jalal elucidated that:

The writings of the redoubtable Delhi-based scholar Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), known for his enunciation of the most systematic theory of jihad in South Asia, must be read in this historical context ... Hailed as being at once a Muslim modernist and the architect of Sunni orthodoxy, Waliullah left an intellectual legacy that casts a long shadow over all subsequent explications of jihad in theory and attempts to translate into practice.⁷¹

Shah Waliullah's writings had a huge impact on the writings and the ideologies of radical school in the subcontinent. According to him the fate of Muslims can't be changed until "Muslims won victories on the battlefield-otherwise they would be swamped by the infidels in every way. He urged soldiers to abandon their unislamic habits and develop the spirit of crusade, and the character of soldiers fighting for Islam".⁷²

Shah Waliullah's writings were further interpreted and also executed by the Sayid Ahmad Shahid, also known as Sayid Ahmad Barelvi. More a soldier than a scholar, Sayid Ahmad Barelvi was greatly influenced by the Shah Waliullah. After his visit to Hijaz, a western part of Saudi Arabia, where he got influenced by the Wahabi ideology, Sayid Ahmad Barelvi declared war against the Sikhs. He declared:

The Sikh nation has long held sway in Lahore and other places. Their oppressions have exceeded all bounds. Thousands of Mohmmadans have they unjustly killed, and on thousands have they heaped disgrace. No longer do they allow the Call to Prayer from the mosques, and the killing of cows they have entirely prohibited ... Praise to be God, some thousands of believers became ready at his call to tread the path of God's service; and on the 21st of December, 1862, the Jihad against the infidel Sikhs begins.⁷³

He started a campaign to recruit volunteers for the jihad against Sikhs. Initially, he got support from the Pashtuns and was able to secure a small area, which

“became the hub of fanaticism and a miniature Wahabi-styled Saudi Arabia”⁷⁴. It was the first time sharia was implemented. Though it lived a short life, the memory of a caliphate created by Barelvi remained in the minds of his followers, and he is greatly revered as India’s first jihadist. Centuries later Taliban and other outfits followed his ideas in the region, and became the corner stone of jihadists in the region. His legacy of jihad and puritanical rule became an ideal state for the radical Islamists.

Now a new brand of Jihadism is on display in the region in the shape of Islamic State. Highly sectarian in its outlook, Islamic State will garner support from various sectarian outfits in the region. The region, particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan, will see more sectarian conflicts, and again become a turf ground for the sectarian proxies. Other external factors will interfere to support their own proxies. In order to stem the Islamic State, Iran would likely support Shia and anti-Islamic State outfits. That will take us back to the 1980s of sectarian proxies between Iran and Saudi Arabia. India, which until recently was not affected by the developments in the Muslim world – be it war in Afghanistan or Iraq – but now the repercussions of sectarian wars in the Muslim world is going to affect it too. On June 27, 2014, 30, 000 Indian Shia Muslims have expressed willingness to join anti-Sunni forces in Iraq and Syria.⁷⁵ At the same time, many Sunni Indians were reported to have joined the Islamic State.⁷⁶ The non-institutional presence of the Islamic State is enough to draw the whole region into a conflagration by invoking the already existing Sunni-Shia schism ideology, takfiri and puritanical zeal among the radical elements, particularly in areas controlled by like-minded outfits.

Conclusion

The rise and success of the Islamic State in providing an ideal state has energised the jihadists. The ideology of rigid interpretation of the holy texts is very popular today than it ever was. It is in this interpretation that the Islamists are losing to the jihadists. Defeating the Islamic State needs a prolonged strategy. Defeating it militarily can only be a short-term goal, as the legacy it leaves is going to haunt the region for a long time. Therefore, it needs to be tackled meticulously. The Ideology of the Islamic State can only be defeated by an alternative ideology. Thus, there is a need for bridging the gap between modernity and political-social manifestation of Islam. Arab spring saw Islamists coming into power through a ballot box, resulting in the polarisation within these societies. It was seen as the triumph of Islamists over modernity as well as a security threat to the states. The emergence of mainstream Islamists convinced the secular elites and the monarchs in the region that the Islamists had a nefarious divisive agenda. Therefore, defeating the Islamists was considered an important mission by the security

establishments of the West Asian states. This in turn resulted in any Islamist organisation who hitherto was working in the same structure being forced to retreat from “its ambition of promoting its progressive views about how Islam can be a frame of reference for a modernising society, and became concerned with defending its ideology and differentiating it, to any listener, from the militant Islamism”.⁷⁷ Today, the Islamic world is in the midst of a clash of ideas between Islamists, who have mainstreamed and perceive religion more in terms of identity, and Jihadists, who with the success of the Islamic State in the Mediterranean region have become more shariatised. In the meanwhile, the Islamic State’s ideology has infiltrated into the minds of the common people, and the Muslim world in particular is undergoing a rather bloody transformation.

NOTES

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2

Triggers to Tabs: ISIS and the Information Age

Munish Sharma

Introduction

Technology plays a pivotal role in enabling various societal functions varying from communications to the delivery of essential services. Technology, if put to the right use can do wonders, and the present-day services such as email communication, mobile telephony and banking work for the benefit and growth of the society. Unfortunately, the same technology can facilitate the terror activities of non-state actors as well; free-of-cost email services, social networking platforms, mobile telephone services are extensively leveraged by terrorists. In certain instances, technology works for the detriment of society.

The Mumbai terrorist attacks of 2008 were an eye opener for the law enforcement agencies across the world. The terrorists possessed technologically advanced apparatus, Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled hand-held devices, satellite phones, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone services,¹ to communicate with their planners back in Pakistan. They used the online mapping tool, Google Earth to retrieve satellite imagery of the intended targets as well. The overall planning and execution of the attacks marked a significant shift in traditional modus operandi of terrorist operations. The modern-day terrorists are not just well versed with the use of technically savvy products for planning and execution, they happen to be graduates or post-graduates in electronics, communications and computer science. These recruits can develop websites, run media campaigns, handle social media platforms, and write software programmes which can perform exceptionally difficult tasks such as encryption.

It is quite fascinating that terrorist organisations have kept themselves abreast with the technological changes, and they swiftly adapt modern technology to their advantage. While governments in developing nations are still toiling to harness cyberspace for e-government or other necessary services, terrorist organisations already have dedicated cyber operations teams, overlooking their propaganda, social media, outreach and recruitment. The terrorist organisation, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a splendid case study to understand how critical technology has become for them. ISIS has tremendous presence on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Tumblr and Instagram), leveraging them substantially for fundraising and recruitment of fighters to its ranks. This research paper explores the changing landscape of technology in the 21st century with respect to the growing menace of terrorism. It attempts to examine the operational aspects of terrorist organisations influenced by technology and establish rationale behind such organisations being adept at using it, too.

Organisational Objectives in the Information Age

In the information era, merits of technology have opened ample opportunities for individuals and organisations of varied interests to communicate seamlessly across the world. Communication is the oxygen for any organisation, both within and with the outer world. The advancement of communication technology has not only reduced the cost of communication to fractions within a decade but also enhanced ease of access and availability. With the advent of social media, new generation terrorist organisations need not depend upon conventional media to reach out to their sympathisers or audience. A YouTube channel or Facebook page can generate the same impact at a negligible cost, within seconds.

The Internet as a technology has evolved over the years, but its applications for the end users have undergone quantum change. Earlier, the engagement of a user on the Internet was a passive process, more towards seeking information; fundamentally users operated in silos. Today, the Internet is not just a network of computers, it is a socially active network of users where they can interact, exchange information, create content, express thoughts and share activities in real time.

The Internet as a platform or communication medium has low threshold of entry; continuous improvement in usability has further lowered the barriers. Web browsers or social media applications are readily available on smartphones, tablets or computers, at very low installation costs and access charges. The above factors have made Internet an enticing option for terror groups to use as a medium as well as a target. Moreover, the reach of the Internet, beyond geographical and political borders, allows information to be circulated widely. It is relatively easy

to target the information and exploit weaknesses in online accounts or email systems over the Internet.

Information and communicating technologies have influenced various organisational objectives of a terrorist organisation, be the way it communicates with its sympathisers, its recruitment strategy or the way it delivers the message of violence, hatred or terror.

ISIS: Technocrat Terrorists

ISIS has a fundamentally different operating environment as compared to other terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda. While Al-Qaeda is geographically dispersed and comprised of a network of independent cells, ISIS draws its legitimacy from the vast territory it occupies and claims authority over – the Caliphate. To efficiently administer territory and the essential functions of a state, ISIS requires a well-commanded top-down or hierarchical structure. The bureaucracy of ISIS is comprised of civil and military wings, and the controlled territory is further divided into provinces.² In order to stay relevant within the context of Caliphate, ISIS needs a strong hold and administrative authority over the occupied territory.³ For territorial gains and administration, it needs human resources who can join its cadres as fighters and civil servants. Its extremist ideology and propaganda should appeal to all the age groups, especially youth. It needs high visibility to mobilise people from all parts of the world to the parts of Syria and Iraq under its control. ISIS needs to run massive online campaigns for recruitment, fundraising, propaganda dissemination and to facilitate people with information who are willing to join its Caliphate. In the short history of ISIS, it has, caught the attention of the global audience; been at the epicentre of debates and discussion on terrorism; altered the perception of terrorism altogether; established itself as a brand and demonstrated that how information technology could be exploited to accomplish all of these.

Propaganda

Dissemination of propaganda is an organisational imperative to maintain visibility and legitimacy for terrorist organisations. The Internet emerged as an alternate platform to the traditional media such as television, radio or print. In traditional media, the producer has substantial control over language and content, and reserves the discretionary powers to edit or omit. Using social media platforms, propagandists can publish the desired content in the form of text, videos, audio, presentations, poems, lectures, acts of violence, etc. Content sharing has become easy through peer-to-peer file sharing applications and websites. The propaganda covers a wide spectrum of objectives and audiences. It targets the existing supporter base, the potential ones, victims or sections of society they belong to, governments of nation states or the international community at large. Propaganda

Figure 1: Given the strategic focus of ISIS on global audience, its content is produced or translated in many languages. (Image source: <http://jihadology.net/category/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center/>)

AL-CHURABA THE CHOSEN FEW
AL-CHURABA
THE CHOSEN FEW
AL-CHURABA
THE CHOSEN FEW

A MESSAGE TO THE MUJAHIDIN AND THE MUSLIM UMMAH IN THE MONTH OF RAMADAN
A MESSAGE TO THE
MUJAHIDIN
AND THE MUSLIM
UMMAH
IN THE MONTH OF RAMADAN
FROM AMIRU'L-MU'MININ ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI

Translations included: English, Arabic, German, Albanian, Hindi, Turkish, Russian, French, Indonesian, Tamil

Translations included: English, Russian, French, German, Albanian, Turkish, Indonesian, Bengali

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LANGUAGES
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over the Internet attains the objective of effective communication to pass on the direct message, raise support, gain popularity or attention, heighten the sense of fear or terror and create panic among the population or subset of the population.

ISIS: Internet and Propaganda

The Internet, as a free publishing platform has given ISIS complete and direct control on its content. ISIS uploads execution visuals of hostages on YouTube, the unedited content of brutal execution instils fear, influencing the psychology of the audience. Internet has become the mainstream medium for ISIS to impact the psychology of the wider populace. ISIS intends to exploit Internet to: a) increase the reach of ISIS and its ideology to the global masses, which gives it tremendous advantage in recruiting people in its cadres; b) use it as a medium to instil “terror” among the populace, without carrying out terror strikes in their home territory; and c) conduct offensive cyber operations, which may not lead to any direct loss or serious damage, rather disruption of services or defacements and small scale hacks into email or social media accounts.⁴

ISIS has dedicated arms which oversee and execute its propaganda, called the Al-Itisam Establishment for Media Production and a newly established, Al Hayat Media Centre.⁵ These divisions are responsible for rolling out multimedia in CD or DVD formats and web-based interface to target audience in 23 different languages⁶ including English, French and German (see Figure 1). This has been extremely productive for ISIS, as 3,700 of the total 5,000+ foreign fighters from the European Union come from just four countries, namely France, UK, Germany and Belgium; according to the Mackenzie Institute estimates.⁷ The group leverages its dexterity in digital media and diverse linguistic skills to get the maximum reach of its propaganda and allure potential recruits hovering in the cyberspace.

Radicalisation, Recruitment and Training

In addition to a propaganda dissemination channel, terrorist groups leverage the Internet to establish direct contact with youths in various parts of the world, where the physical reach of the organisations is limited or non-existent. The processes such as indoctrination, recruitment, and training previously relied completely on physical interactions between recruits and recruiters, a time consuming process in addition to travelling costs and physical distance as barriers. Traditionally, the operatives of terrorist organisations used to get in touch with the potential recruits at meetings and social gatherings. The Internet enables interactions which are swift, user friendly, anonymous and cost effective.

Eventually, the recruitment strategy has shifted towards social networks like Facebook and Twitter to attract members across the borders.⁸ Some groups have websites designed specifically overlooking youth as their perspective audience,

using cartoons and games to disseminate propaganda,⁹ as more than half of the Internet users are between 15-34 years of age.¹⁰ Terrorist groups maintain websites and actively monitor visitors who have browsed their websites. This information is used to identify, profile and select the visitors in anticipation of potential candidates for recruitment through direct communication over the Internet or face-to-face interaction.¹¹

The Internet serves as a repository of massive content required to radicalise or indoctrinate individuals. It gives ample opportunities to the individuals to communicate with each other, share published material, online interaction which culminates into physical meetings and extended connections with like-minded people, hence augmenting the process of radicalisation.¹²

The Internet is a platform to inculcate relationships, and propaganda plays a pivotal role in enticing individuals or influencing them with the ideology of the terrorist organisation. It becomes the recruitment ground, where different skill sets are available, who get motivated by the propaganda and are willing to contribute towards the organisational goals. Through direct emails, chat rooms, texting applications, etc., terrorist organisations get access to the global pool of human resources for potential recruits. Terrorist groups adopt creative means to design their content specifically to attract youngsters, which is broadcasted on the platforms they frequent. These Internet platforms also provide detailed instructions, often in easily accessible multimedia format and multiple languages, on topics such as how to join terrorist organisations; how to construct explosives, firearms or other weapons or hazardous materials; and how to plan and execute terrorist attacks.

ISIS: Online Recruitment, Mobilisation and Communication

According to Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University Centre for Cyber and Homeland Security, ISIS stands apart from other terror outfits on the aspect of social media in recruitment, broadly because:

- a) Their videos are much more “packaged”, professionally directed, more entertaining and meticulously designed to appeal to western kids with shorter attention spans.
- b) There is “a diversity of messages” targeting different audiences, in forms of video games, religious message or appeal to humanitarian instincts invoking the idea of fair society based on divine law.
- c) Incredible speed of social media, where information is pushed towards the followers rather than someone seeking out a website or a chat room to get information.¹³

An information exchange platform, ask.fm (with 180 million users, and many

are teenagers) is extensively used to further simplify interaction with the potential recruits, where queries are answered by members of ISIS who have migrated to the ISIS-controlled regions in Syria and Iraq.¹⁴ Perhaps, the same platforms are used to exchange contact numbers or usernames of smartphone messaging apps such as Kik and WhatsApp. Being tech-savvy, recruiters are adept at using messaging to communicate and advise people on their travel plans, how to cross into Syria and extend any possible help. The information is also readily available in the form of brochures.

Figure 2: The Twitter profile page of British ISIS operative, Junaid Hussein, sharing contact information for surespot, kik and telegram
(source: <http://www.memrijttm.org/>)



ISIS operatives have adopted encryption to secure their online communication, and that makes it an uphill task for law enforcement agencies to track the conversations. Once potential recruits get in touch with the operatives, their communication is moved to encrypted mobile messaging applications available on smartphones such as surespot, kik and telegram (see Figure 2).¹⁵

ISIS has been incredibly successful at using the Internet to recruit fighters and call Muslims to join the Caliphate, mobilising substantial number of people across the world.¹⁶ Social media platforms have made it much easier for radicalised Westerners to get in touch with a recruiter, who assists them with vetting and travel process. The barriers of entry to the Caliphate are much lower, the procedures are simplified, and information assistance for travel planning and crossing the Syrian border is readily available.

Fundraising

Financing of terrorist organisations is critical to their sustainability. They need seamless flow of finance to cover the expenses incurred towards the salaries of recruits, arms procurement, logistics and other organisational requirements.

Terrorist financing has attracted a lot of academic research and attention of global counter-terrorism agencies and financial institutions. There are numerous ways a terrorist organisation raises funds: direct solicitation of donations, charitable organisations, illicit trade, extortion, online frauds, taxes or control over resources such as mines, oil fields, factories and forests. Additionally, online payment tools are exploited through fraudulent means of identity thefts, credit card information theft and cybercrimes. Cybercrime has now surpassed international drug trafficking as a terrorist financing enterprise.¹⁷ Illicit trade is one of the prominent sources of money, and it includes a spectrum of activities varying from trade of counterfeit products to drug trafficking. Moreover, legitimate businesses and front companies are set up and the profits are diverted.¹⁸

In the aftermath of the attack on World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, rigorous vigilance and regulatory controls have been levied on international banking systems or global financial system to crack down on terror financing. Therefore, money laundering and hawala networks emerged as preferred channels for money transfers. With the advancement of technology, the ways and means of transferring money from various sources to the recipient have undergone a sea change. Moving on from traditional banking and money laundering techniques, the recent rise of crypto or digital currencies such as e-gold, Bitcoin, Peercoin, and Dogecoin have brought in a drastic change. Some websites affiliated to terrorist groups have already begun accepting Bitcoin¹⁹ donations; however, the known instances are very limited.²⁰

ISIS: Exploiting Virtual Currency

The group has diverse sources of raising finance. In addition to income from control of oil fields and refineries, ransom or donations, ISIS runs fundraising programmes through communication networks.²¹ Criminals and terrorists always find innovative means to exploit the existing systems and technologies to work for their advantage. Bitcoin, being an encrypted and untraceable digital currency exchange medium is an obvious choice for nefarious activities. The supporters and donors of ISIS around the world have allegedly used such digital currencies to transfer money to the wallets or accounts held by ISIS militants and operatives, reducing the risk of detection.²²

In a blog post entitled, “Bitcoin and the Charity of Violent Physical Struggle”²³, ISIS had proposed using bitcoins to raise funds. The blog post denounced the stringent banking regulations which prevent easy flow of money to terrorist organisation. It noted that decentralised Bitcoin system is not owned by individuals or groups and it is hack proof. It called upon the wealthy Muslims to donate to the cause of ISIS, and proposed the use of Darkwallet²⁴, a Bitcoin wallet designed to provide online anonymity. Riding on innovation, the activities

of ISIS in information sphere are not just restricted to meet organisational goals; offensive cyber capabilities make it a disruptive non-state actor as well.

ISIS: Cyber Attacks

In January 2015, Cyber Caliphate – a group claiming its allegiance to ISIS²⁵ – came into limelight when it managed to hack into the Twitter handle of the US Central Command, USCENTCOM. In February, the same group sneaked into the Twitter handle of *Newsweek* and the website of *International Business Times*. A couple of months later, in April, the group orchestrated a three-hour blackout of the French channel, *TV5Monde*, taking off 11 TV stations off air, and hijacked its website and Facebook page.²⁶ Since early 2015, the group with Twitter hashtag, “#CyberCalipHATE”, has been making into the news for a series of website hacks and using them to post extremist propaganda.²⁷ The hacking enterprise was allegedly run by some of the profound hackers, hailing from Western countries. Junaid Hussain, a British computer hacker was instrumental in hacking operations targeting the US, UK and other European countries. He was a key member of Cyber Caliphate and gained notoriety following the US Central Command’s Twitter incident.²⁸ He was killed in a drone strike in August 2015.

The US Department of State, in a report released in July 2015, determined that the hacker group, Cyber Caliphate, does not have any ties with ISIS, despite its backing of the ISIS terror activities.²⁹ The cyberattacks on media and defence establishments had drawn global attention. Irrespective of any linkage between the two entities, ISIS seized what it craves for. From the present instances of cyberattacks, it could be drawn that as of now ISIS might not be a prominent threat in the cyberspace, but its growing ability to disrupt or hack into accounts is an indicator of its burgeoning expertise in this domain. At the same time, they appear to be wary of their communication in cyberspace, which is subject to interception and surveillance.

Technology and the Future of ISIS

Apparently, ISIS is very conscientious about security of communication. In a published advisory, “Several Cyber Security to Protect Your Account in the Social Networking”³⁰, an ISIS affiliate group sensitizes operatives and followers about the safe usage of Twitter; installation from genuine sources, password strengthening, password management, enabling security features, and foiling phishing attacks. The advisory instructs to disable “location services” of the smartphone camera to secure information related to geographical location of the camera image. It explains the weak encryption of Global System for Mobile communications (GSM)³¹ networks, and recommends the use of encrypted phones such as CryptoPhone (<http://www.cryptophone.de/>) for secure voice

communication over GSM networks. The advisory document illustrates almost every security measure, such as creating private wireless network in case of a GSM network blackout, antivirus installation, using Tor browser to hide identity and share information confidentially, hard drive or flash drive encryption (using VeraCrypt, TrueCrypt, Hardskat), email alternatives (such as Hushmail and ProtonMail), cyber security in voice communication (using Linphone, Silent Circle or RedPhone), and security of information or data stored on Cloud (using MEGA or SpiderOak).

ISIS has also operationalised a round-the-clock “Jihadi Help Desk” to disburse information about secure communications.³² These two specific instances denote that ISIS understands the threat of surveillance and interception from law enforcement agencies; therefore, it advises its operatives to adopt freely available best in-suite applications to hide their identity and secure communications. The planning, coordination and execution of Paris attacks in November 2015 went undetected by intelligence agencies of both France and Belgium; a high probability of ISIS operatives communicating over the Darknet³³ or using open source encryption tools. It has been venturing out to exploit innovative solutions to secure the flow of funds from international donors, and simultaneously been innovative with development of applications for mobile platforms.

A Twitter app, “Fajr al-Bashaer” (“The Dawn of Glad Tidings”), developed by ISIS provides the registered users regular updates on the activities of ISIS in Iraq and Syria.³⁴ The app allows mass sharing of images and links by deceiving spam-detection algorithms of Twitter.³⁵ ISIS has developed a smartphone app, compatible with Android devices, basically a news feeder application which includes videos and text content about life in the Islamic State. The fascinating part is that the link to the app was being distributed through Telegram – a Russian app ISIS deems to be safe for communication.³⁶

The Internet hosts plethora of information, about address, transportation facility, location on maps, access routes and relevant information about strategic facilities, including airports, urban transportation systems or railway networks. In the information age, terrorists use technology as a strategic tool to gather intelligence, communicate, co-ordinate and later upon claim responsibility or gain wider attention. Technology is a mission enabler and terrorist operations are not an exception. But, the way ISIS has harnessed technology; it has overshadowed its peers and astonished the strategic community and policymakers. There are certain aspects on which ISIS has fared far above as compared to Al-Qaeda.

Comparative Analysis: ISIS and Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda was raised in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the subsequent occupation, as guerrilla militants, and later emerged as

a global terrorist network, staging high visibility attacks against the US and its allies. ISIS traces its history to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 to oust Saddam Hussain. As a Sunni extremist group, it fought the US forces and attacked Shiites, under the name “Al-Qaeda in Iraq”, pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda of Osama Bin Laden. It was defeated when Sunni tribes partnered with the US forces to confront the jihadists, but it reincarnated as a network of captives and operatives at the US prisons in Iraq.

The group capitalised on the Syrian Civil War, a revolt against the Assad regime since 2011: seized territory in northeast Syria, established its base, and rebranded itself as ISIS. Just across the border, after the US withdrew its forces, ISIS leveraged a weak state government and boiling sectarian strife arising out of pro-Shiite agenda of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki.

Since the origin and organisational goals of both ISIS and Al-Qaeda are distinctive from each other, their tactics, strategy and modus operandi are fundamentally different. Al-Qaeda was run in a centralised manner, where Osama Bin Laden and his close aides were central to the decision-making. ISIS differs fundamentally from Al-Qaeda in terms of leadership style, ISIS follows the collective leadership model. Al-Qaeda staged spectacular attacks to attract eyeballs, gaining notoriety by bombing the US embassies in Tanzania and Kenya and attacking the World Trade Centre in New York. ISIS, however, has resorted to social media, using images and videos to intimidate the Western populace; it has also launched terror attacks on the French soil and elsewhere, although not as massive as Al-Qaeda’s.

Al-Qaeda chose television as the medium to connect with the world, while ISIS is completely focused on new media avenues. Al-Qaeda survives on donations and contributions from personal wealth, while ISIS has a functional financial system in place to generate money for its day-to-day operations. Al-Qaeda also let Western journalists interview Bin Laden, well within its safe heavens,³⁷ as TV was the sole medium to connect with the audience.

In terms of portrayal, through publications and video or audio messaging, Al-Qaeda is primarily a militant group, a tightly knit organisation comprised of fighters and commanders who want to subdue the state. Al-Qaeda had been a well-established terrorist network, but it is devoid of territorial controls and incapable of direct military confrontation. ISIS is based on a different narrative, it is involved in state-building exercise; it governs has a vision of a utopian state. Although some of its activities could be termed as acts of terrorism, but some of them align with the directives of a state.

Al-Qaeda’s English language magazine, *Inspire* was started in 2010, and it has focused on providing instructions on how to carry out armed attacks. Its presence on the Internet is restricted to very simple form of propaganda, which

includes websites for jihadist content and discussion forums.³⁸ ISIS began producing its English language magazine, *Dabiq* in July 2014, as a platform to promote ideology and showcase its success back in its home territory as well as across the globe.³⁹ The 12th issue of *Dabiq* has a cover story on the Paris attacks of November 13, boasting the success and religious justification of its act of terrorism. Despite operational or ideological differences, ISIS and Al-Qaeda share common narratives of Islam: jihad as an obligation for the Muslims, as portrayed in their publications, *Dabiq* and *Inspire*.⁴⁰ Both espouse extremist narratives and oppose Western ideology.⁴¹

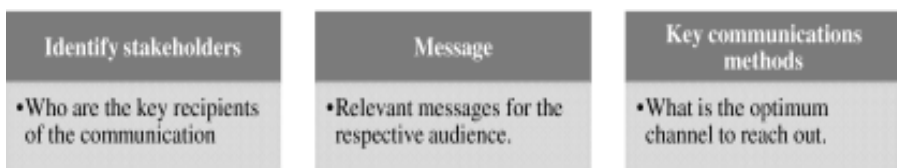
A stark difference is that the Al-Qaeda has never recruited online, perhaps because its recruitment is very selective and works on referrals, or it has never had any technological foresight to do so. Unlike ISIS, Al-Qaeda, in its heyday, did not have a young-Twitter-generation virtual army to make its online content go viral. Therefore, both Al-Qaeda and ISIS have completely different outlooks towards technology. The former, more of a terrorist organisation, uses it to supplement its functioning, communicate with members or at the most spread its propaganda. For the latter, a de facto state, technology is key to its existence, its own governance. Technology enables its communication with the outer world, spreading the message of hatred and terror, recruitment of fighters, and most important, expansion of its population towards the establishment of the Caliphate.

The content in the form of texts, Twitter messages, periodicals or videos disseminating from ISIS and its affiliate groups or supporters might originate from diverse sources, but the underlying messaging is coherent. Its communication with its supporters, residents and the populace across the globe is pertinent to its existence, which implies that a communications strategy is in place.

ISIS Communications: Arbitrary or Strategic?

A communication strategy has to align with the overall organizational goals and plans. It helps organisations in identifying key messages they want to convey to the targeted audience, and in effect contribute towards the fulfilment of organisational objectives. Communication strategy is a multi-stage process, which begins with identification of audience or stakeholders, message, key communication methods and execution (see Figure 3).⁴²

Figure 3: Communication Strategy Design Process



Fundamentally, the communication strategy of ISIS exists in two forms, one is institutionalised and channelled through its media arms and other is informal, which rests on the numerous sympathisers or supporters spread across the globe. It targets six kinds of audiences, namely Residents of Islamic State or the fighters, Muslims abroad, Non-Muslims abroad, Adversaries, Supporters, Informed and Competent Individuals and the Youth.

At a macro level, ISIS is fighting wars in two spheres, one in physical and other psychological.⁴³ The physical war employs military strength, which ISIS is fighting in its territorial vicinity to expand its base. The psychological war employs the use of images, photographs, videos, pamphlets, hoardings, message on vehicles and online magazines, to bring the strife in Iraq and Syria on the international discussion tables.⁴⁴ The psychological war warrants the use of communication strategy.

The success of ISIS rests upon altering the “public opinion”, which is the centre of gravity of its entire propaganda machinery and communication strategy. An enemy is quintessential to wage a war. ISIS has constructed the image of the adversary as an existential threat, which is necessary to engage and motivate the fighters at the battlefield.⁴⁵ The group exploits this strife to radicalise youth, recruit them as fighters and consolidate radical Islam as a fighting force against the adversaries as its mission. The portrayal of enemy as a threat to the religious beliefs of the group is the foundation on which military and communication strategy of ISIS rests.

The narrative of the Caliphate is a utopian alternative to the democratic and secular social construct of the West, directly engaging the individuals who are aloof, devoid of a purpose in life and who perceive their lives to be worthless because of a lack of sense of identity.⁴⁶ The French authorities found the ISIS volunteers from France to be disaffected, aimless and having a lack of sense of identity or belonging.⁴⁷ The messaging exploits their weak emotional intelligence, the ideological void⁴⁸, and active engagement gives them a feeling of belongingness, which they generally do not find in their own societal settings. Therefore, a quest for a purpose in life or a sense of belonging to a cause or seeking friendship, are the main reasons people look up to the idea of Islamic State, which surprisingly remain to be the least addresses issues in the international efforts against the terrorism of ISIS.⁴⁹

A pragmatic communication strategy has short-, medium- and long-term outlook, where different media is used to achieve the desired outcomes (see Table 1). Text messages, micro blogs and image sharing has short-term impact, and they are primarily accessed through smartphones, therefore, ISIS keeps them short and stunning to catch the attention and lets the users share them instantly. ISIS uses periodicals to provide regular updates with selective content to shape the

“public-opinion”, and this falls in its medium-term outlook. Its e-book publications, meticulously placed religious narratives in periodicals, video productions and active engagement on social media fall under its long-term communication strategy.

Table 1: Different aspects of Communication Strategy

		Communication Strategy		
Short Term		Medium Term	Long Term	
Medium	Text messages	Newsletters	Publications	
	Twitter	News Releases	Videos	
	Facebook	Handouts/Pamphlets	Blogs	
	Instagram (Image sharing)	Websites/Forums		
Outcome	Instant sharing	Regular updates	Engagement on Social Media	
	Stunning/Eye catching	Direct, Simple	Quality Publications	
	Smartphones	Content Selection	Quality Video Productions	

Source: Elaine Edwards, Kansas State University.

Dabiq in the Communications Strategy

The communication strategy of ISIS resonates in its impeccably packaged magazine, *Dabiq*, which does an extensive coverage on latest updates from the Islamic State at domestic and military fronts, lauding its acts of terror, such as on Paris, articles on execution videos, write ups on historical context of Islam (e.g., Islam is the religion of the sword not pacifism⁵⁰), scholarly articles with elaborations in footnotes, success stories of military operations, philanthropic activities (caring for orphans and distributing meat to needy during Ramadan), photo stories on demolition of sculptures or temples (Blowing up the “Husayniyyatul-Qubbah” temple in Mosul, demolishing the “Grave of the Girl” in Mosul, demolishing the shrine and tomb of Ahmad Ar-Rifa’i in the district of Al-Mahlabiyyah, Shirk temple of Baalshamin⁵¹), stories on captives and feature interviews with the fighters.

The very first issue of *Dabiq* describes the strife between believers and non-believers, the magazine states:

The world has divided into two camps; the camp of Islam and faith, and the camp of *kufir* (disbelief) and hypocrisy – the camp of the Muslims and the mujahidin everywhere, and the camp of the Jews, the crusaders, their allies, and with them the rest of the nations and religions of *kufir*, all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilised by the Jews.⁵²

In essence, the magazine conveys that ISIS as state is under constant territorial expansion, the lives of the residents under the Sharia law are enriched, the Muslims abroad must migrate to the Islamic State and offer their services for both

administrative or philanthropic activities and armed fight, and most important, it judiciously represents the adversary as humiliated and defeated.

Social Media in Communications Strategy

In the last one decade, social media has brought in the entire process of an individual's radicalisation to the recruitment as fighter and subsequent martyrdom, which used to happen under shadows earlier, on the Internet and practically accessible to everyone. Fighters in the ISIS ranks and their potential recruits communicate over the Internet: they share videos of military operations, their lifestyle in the Islamic State, etc., which is all very critical to the communication strategy of ISIS.

ISIS leverages the massive tech-savvy supporter base to execute its communication strategy. A Brookings Institution investigation found that ISIS had released 845 audio-visual campaigns between January 2014 and September 16, 2015⁵³. ISIS supporters hold around 90,000 Twitter accounts⁵⁴, which can make a video snippet or a message go viral in a jiffy. The messaging themes are inspired by movies, such as *The Matrix*, *American Sniper*, and *V for Vendetta*, and video games like Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto, which are quite popular among youngsters. Their video, "*This is our Call of Duty, and we respond in Jannah*" is based upon the famous shooter video game, "Call of Duty".⁵⁵ ISIS has a vast and discrete network of supporters and sympathisers, who disseminate the online propaganda of ISIS, and motivated through ennoblement of titles such as "knights of the uploading".⁵⁶

The social media-based communication strategy campaign serves two purposes: first is to recruit or emigrate as many as people, and second is very meticulously placed to meet its military objectives. The video or graphic content of execution instils fear, which psychologically "softens up" the future opponents or subdues the adversaries in the geographical vicinity from fighting against the ISIS.⁵⁷ In accordance with the Koranic teachings, Islamic state allows people from other faiths to live under its administration, if they do not resist, accept subjugation and pay the special taxes, known as *Jizya* or the Non-Muslim Tax.⁵⁸

Video-grapy in Communications Strategy

ISIS has a network of agencies which fetch content for the audience, primarily Al Furqan, Al Ittissam, and Al Hayat for global audience and another 26 agencies for explicit content for each region across Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, West Africa and Afghanistan.⁵⁹ ISIS forbids journalists from entering the territory under its control, therefore short videos and images are the most effective ways of communicating and disseminating information.⁶⁰

The content of videos released by the media arms of ISIS is clearly aligned with the objective of expansion of the Caliphate. The narratives of video messages

are targeted to challenge the existing systems, norms and borders. The video entitled, "The End of Sykes-Picot" delegitimises the agreement between the UK and France in 1916, which divided up the Arab territories of the former Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence of the signatories.⁶¹ It features a young Chilean-Norwegian as a reporter crossing over from Sham to Iraq, challenging the physical borders inflicted upon the region. The fighter cautions that ISIS forces will break the borders and barriers to Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon and challenges the US to send its soldiers to fight the ISIS forces in Iraq and Syria.

Fighters from Western countries are handpicked as protagonists to establish connection with the audience back in the countries these fighters belong to. An exemplary recruitment video, "There is No Life Without Jihad", features a self-identified British national as protagonist who calls upon the Muslims to be part of Jihad and "feel the honour" or "feel the happiness", claiming that "Brothers" from all over the world, namely Bangladesh, Iraq, Cambodia, Australia and UK are part of the ISIS movement.

The institutional architecture resonates in its communication strategy as well. Decentralisation is the fundamental institutional principle of ISIS. Its leadership is decentralised, and so is its governance structure. The communication strategy also shows signs of decentralisation. Despite known as tech-savvy, the group does not have a website. Moreover, it does not depend on a single medium, it blends in videos produced from its own production arms (al-Furqan, al-Hayat), thousands of Twitter accounts, and well-edited literature in the form of e-books and periodicals available online for swift distribution. The messages might originate from diverse sources or traverse through disparate media, but the overall strategy ISIS apparently aims to reinforce the messages on multiple platforms to captivate diversified audience for a unified mission of strengthening its own version of jihad.

The Global Coalition of 65 partners to counter the growing threat of ISIS vows to impede the flow of foreign fighters; curb its financing and funding; and address the address humanitarian crises in the region.⁶² Whether the use of force by coalition degrades or eventually defeats the ISIS remains a matter of debate and analysis, but ISIS is a unique adversary.

Armed Response: Is Force Futile?

ISIS is generally considered to be a terrorist organisation, and hence the strategy of the coalition circumvents around counter-terrorism. Fundamentally, ISIS performs the functions of a state; it administers territory in Iraq and Syria, has its own military capability and personnel, sources of income, and uses terrorism as a tactic to meet its organisational objectives. Although, ISIS evolved as a guerrilla movement or a terrorist organisation, today it is rather a de facto state.

Table 2: Summarises the Overall Communication Strategy of ISIS

Targeted Audience	Message Objectives				Message Medium
	Success Stories	Recruitment	Life in IS	Terror	
Residents of IS/Fighters	Motivation, Pride, Showcasing		Informed, Satisfaction with Law and Order	Suppress Oppression	Political/Theological
	Information, Attraction, Pride, Inspiration		Emigration as fighters and social/administrative services		Religious underpinning and identity. Purpose in life, Justify Jihad, call for Jihad
	Fear, Intimidation, Attention			Terrorise, Soften Opponents from other faiths	Religious underpinning and identity. Purpose in life, Justify Jihad, call for Jihad
	Humiliation, Intimidation			Terrorise	Counter-narrative to western ideology
Non-Muslims abroad					Terror videos
	Adversaries of IS				Terror videos, periodicals, social media
Supporters/Radicals	Motivation, Showcasing, radicalise	Recruit fighters, administrators, service providers	Motivation for emigration, Narrative of Utopian Islamic State		Videos, messages in Dabiq, Social Media, Fighter's Interviews
	Information, attention, Discussion				Periodicals, ebooks, videos
Informed and Competent Individuals/Groups					Games, videos, Fighter's Interviews
	Motivation, Administration, Objective in Life	Recruit fighters, execute social media campaign, develop smartphone applications	Sense of belongingness, motivation for recruitment/emigration, narrative of Utopian Islamic State		Shape Public Opinion, Build narrative, Justify terror attacks, initiate debates and discussions
Youth					

Impact of Messages

Therefore, the counter-terrorism strategy that worked against Al-Qaeda may be ineffective against ISIS.

For instance, in the aftermath of Al-Qaeda-led terror strikes in September 2001, the US invested trillions of dollars to build a robust counter-terrorism infrastructure of intelligence, law enforcement and financial regulations to contain and destroy the Al-Qaeda network.⁶³ Tracking flow of money over hawala and other financial networks has cut-off Al-Qaeda's sources of funds. In contrast, ISIS has devised a self-sustaining model to secure the financial supply chain. Although, it raises finance through charity and donations which flow through international monetary system, it is not dependent on these sources for its survival. The financial intelligence works round the clock to detect any diversion of money towards ISIS, but ISIS has its own sources of raising finance. It ventures out into innovative solutions, in form of bitcoins and the Darknet. The economy of ISIS is dependent upon black market trade⁶⁴, which makes it immune to the restrictions implemented through international financial systems to cripple its economy.

The military response to contain the spreading tentacles of ISIS, under the aegis of a US-led coalition is focused on airstrikes and arming the paramilitary of Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. In the short term, it might contain the ISIS, but it is insufficient to address the wider governance problems prevalent in the region where ISIS is flourishing.⁶⁵

The US State Department had founded its Centre for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) in 2011 to counter online jihadist propaganda. It has Digital Outreach Teams in Arabic, Urdu, Somali, Punjabi and English for communications activities targeted against terrorism. In July 2015, the governments of the US and UAE established the Mideast Digital Communications Centre to counter the propaganda of ISIS on social media.⁶⁶ As a counter to the plethora of digital content released by ISIS, the US Department of State has published around 300 videos on YouTube since mid-2014. It is executed through six Twitter accounts, putting hashtags used by ISIS in their communications.⁶⁷ The Department of State has further adopted online de-radicalisation strategies⁶⁸, one of them is "Think Again, Turn Away" social media campaign in English and Arabic languages to showcase the atrocities of ISIS on its citizens and women.⁶⁹ The strategy is executed by professionals working with governments, but ISIS executes its strategy through innumerable volunteers, and governments have not been able to match those numbers. The propaganda machinery of ISIS is unstoppable, which has developed a very firm narrative of jihad and religious obligation for Muslims to participate in it. To develop counter-narratives, the messengers have to possess religious authority in the community for whom the message is targeted, and generally Islamic scholars, imams and community-based religious leaders hold such authority.⁷⁰ The inabilities of the

coalition to reach out to those sections of society which are vulnerable to radicalisation, dearth of religious authority are major impediments in countering the spread of ISIS in physical, virtual and psychological spaces.

The present response falls short in controlling the expansion of Islamic State, curbing its financial resources and most important, controlling the movement of people to ISIS-controlled parts of Syria and Iraq. According to the United Nations estimates, there was 70 per cent increase in Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the cadre of ISIS between mid-2014 and March 2015⁷¹. The first release of Soufan Group's report, "Foreign Fighters in Syria", estimated 12,000 foreign fighters from around 81 countries.⁷² The latest estimates, in December 2015, suggest that the numbers have surged to 27,000-31,000 from 86 countries.⁷³ Eventually, the number of foreign fighters hailing from Western Europe has more than doubled since the last report of June 2014.⁷⁴

As a counter to the communications strategy of the ISIS, there is no clear evidence of a strategy in place. The Twitter accounts of ISIS operatives are brought down, but it just takes a few seconds to open a new account. Any strategic initiative to counter the growing radicalisation has to engage with the populace vulnerable to radicalisation and thereupon recruitment. Understanding that ISIS feeds its recruits and emigrants from its colossal online campaign, a counter to it has received miniscule attention.

Conclusion

Traditionally, terrorist organisations emerged out of political issues which garnered enough ground support and finance to conduct operations against the established political authority. Gradually, political aims have apparently been replaced by new motivations, which tend to alter the society at a fundamental level. ISIS is one such phenomenon, which envisions the idea of an Islamic State and Caliphate, aspiring to instil Islamic values as means of statehood or restore them. ISIS has very distinct characteristics, as it is an administration authority as well as a terrorist organisation. It claims and maintains authority over a vast territory, administers the resources and law and order, adopts an extremist interpretation of Islam and promotes religious violence.

At present, the approach of ISIS reflects a strategy focused on publicity, which serves the dual purpose to gain attention of the world and spread the terror through visuals (video and images) of its outrageous activities and atrocities. The hacking attempts on social media accounts or website defacements are more of a nuisance, which do not amount to any serious damage. The operational strategy of ISIS is limited to the use of social media as an effective platform to propagate its message of hate, terror and extremism, primarily driven by its fascination with publicity. It has gained dexterity to harness social media to terrorize populace through videos

of imprisoned journalists, soldiers and aid workers being beheaded, shot or incinerated or drowned in cages.

There are numerous reports on the alleged use of digital currencies by terrorist groups and its growing acceptance, but the instances are limited. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)⁷⁵ in its report, “Emerging Terrorist Financing Risks”, notes that law enforcement agencies have identified Internet discussions among extremists regarding the use of virtual currencies to purchase arms and educate their peers on use of virtual currencies. The National Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment of the US Department of Treasury reported that bitcoin could possibly be used to fund terrorism, but the actual risk posed remains uncertain.⁷⁶ The case of Silk Road, a commercial online market for illicit merchandise such as drugs and small arms, drew the attention of law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies where digital currencies were used for transactions. Although these procedures are complex to understand and execute, but given the rise in number of recruits with technical education, these are effective mechanisms for funds transfer, giving the much needed anonymity as compared to conventional banking transactions, which operate under stringent regulatory norms and frameworks. ISIS is quite likely to embrace digital currencies, and tracking flow of money would be strenuous for international financial system and law enforcement agencies.

As ISIS operatives shift their communication in public space over encrypted channels, law enforcement agencies seek access to encrypted communications from mobile software and application developers. Given the state of privacy and civil liberties debate, it would be a tightrope walk for the governments to strike a balance between its national security imperatives, the business interests of mobile market and voices of civil liberty advocacy groups.

The threat from ISIS has become acute because it is well versed in the use of modern technology; it understands the nuances of technology. The group has learnt the art of crafting video messages and targeting the vulnerable audience through online propaganda. The audience includes people residing in Western countries, speaking different languages, having computer skills – some of them experts who can write software programs or hack.

ISIS has redefined the approach of terrorist organisations towards technology. It understands the power of social media, which reflects its exorbitant presence on almost every social media and networking platform. It employs online tools to connect with sympathisers, radicalise vulnerable individuals and recruit them to spread its Caliphate. Its propaganda is well documented, directed and packaged, winning the minds of youth, who form half of the global Internet population. According to the 2014 report of Soufan Group, “Foreign Fighters in Syria”, the age of fighters range between 18 and 29.⁷⁷ ISIS has mobilised youngsters from

every corner of the world and every walk of life. The cyber operations are not just restricted to propaganda or recruitment; it seeks to exploit digital currencies for fundraising and aspires to develop offensive cyber capabilities.

The content originating from the media arms, residents of the Islamic State, and its fighters in form of messages on social media and micro-blogging websites, periodicals, e-books or videos, might be discrete if viewed in isolation, but if put together, it has coherent underlying message. The message is to construct the narrative of a utopian state – the Caliphate – increase the population of Islamic State through migration, dissuade the weaker adversaries in the geographical proximity and humiliate the bigger forces fighting against the ISIS. Every aspect of communication is pertinent to its existence, implying a communications strategy is in place.

ISIS could be deemed a de facto state. Therefore, the counter-terrorism strategy that worked against Al-Qaeda might be rendered ineffective against ISIS. An armed counter-terrorism strategy, inability to strangulate the financial supply chain, and lack of religious authority are major impediments in countering the spread of ISIS in physical, virtual and psychological spaces.

NOTES

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2. Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants", *The Atlantic*, March 2015, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/> (Accessed September 15, 2015).
3. The top brass of ISIS includes two deputies of Baghdadi, former generals in the Iraqi army from Saddam Hussain's army, namely Abu Ali al-Anbari, who controls the operations in Syria, and Abu Muslim al-Turkmani in Iraq. The civilian bureaucracy is further divided into administration zones and supervised by 12 administrators. See Audrey Kurth Cronin, "ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/isis-not-terrorist-group> (Accessed November 20, 2015).
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3

Armed with a Tweet: The Islamic State's Virtual Propaganda Wars, Its Appeal and Looming Threat to India

Shruti Pandalai

Introduction

If 9/11 woke the world up to the horror of al-Qaeda, the spectacle of the Paris attacks in November 2015 has brought the threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; also called Islamic State [IS] or Daesh) the new poster child of global jihad to every country's doorstep. Central to the ISIS cause is the Shia-Sunni rift, which the group has exploited, fanning animosity between the two sects and exploiting their insecurities. The sectarian wars so far were not of immediate concern to India. But now that's no longer the case. With global terror strikes by ISIS rising by the day, and its oft-repeated call targeting Indian Muslims to join the cause, the Indian Government too is on guard. No longer is the ISIS' ability to attract recruits from beyond the Middle East questioned.

The ISIS' ideological moorings are often questioned – yet there are clear political and theological underpinnings in its messages apart from the vengeance towards the West's interference in the politics of the Middle East, which it seeks to propagate. First, there is clear enunciation of the rejection of the concept of nation states in the Middle East, and an aim to replace them with the “founding of a state in Iraq – a proto-caliphate – that would ultimately expand across the region, proclaim itself the full-fledged caliphate, and go on to conquer the rest of the world”.¹ Second, the ISIS identifies with a movement in Islamic political thought known as Jihadi-Salafism, a distinct movement of Sunni Islam. It is primarily concerned with purifying the faith as a theological project, with a vision

and interpretation of Islam which is premodern, extremist and anti-Shia.² While the theological project encompasses a global propaganda network of scholars, websites, media outlets, and social media forums, ISIS has captured global imagination through its virtual propaganda of “military victories” via social media branding.

ISIS, rightly summed up by an analyst, has “achieved its resurgence through two single-minded means: control of territory and, by design, unspeakable cruelty. Its emblems are the black flag and the severed head”.³ Here lies the biggest success of the ISIS, it has captured the imagination of a whole generation of youth, angry and disillusioned and wanting to avenge their grievances by making brutality appealing. Gone are the old days of tapes surfacing with the late al Qaeda Chief Osama Bin Laden and his hour-long sermons. In the age of instant terror – ISIS sells ideology instantly via social media. A propaganda tool so powerful and untamed that counter narratives just can't seem to keep up.

They have introduced a new concept in the lexicon of terror – lone wolves, who fight for the caliphate armed with a tweet. Adept in its use of social-media platforms, the ISIS runs a sophisticated propaganda campaign to broadcast its gruesome “successes” and recruits beyond the Middle East. From high-quality videos edited in fancy Hollywood-styled sequences posted on YouTube, to its use of trending hashtags coupled with gruesome slaughter videos shared via Twitter, ISIS has exploited the medium and introduced a new theatre for warfare. A battle for ideas which it, at least in perception, seems to be winning.

The spate of arrests in India over the last two years, starting with the detention of a Bengaluru executive in 2014, who ran the Twitter handle, @shamiwitness, to recruit supporters in India, has put authorities on alert. In fact the Home Ministry has put out an advisory post the Paris attacks on a possible such attack in India.⁴ There has been a dramatic shift in the stance of the Indian Government over the last year, with consultations to draft plans in order to deal with the growing threat of the Islamic State. The idea is to strengthen internal surveillance and counter-measures. While Indian agencies are aware of the looming challenge, we need to buff up capacities to match the scale of the challenge. It requires not just active policing but a well thought out effort to build convincing counter-narratives.

In an age where social media are the “command and control networks” of jihad, this paper will aim to understand: how ISIS has exploited the medium for propaganda, ideology and outreach, the tools and methods for manufacturing and selling this new age jihad, the extent of ideology penetration and target audience and whether the peer-to-peer radicalisation ability is facilitated by the medium and why governments around the world have failed to put together effective counter-narratives. It will also assess the threat to India and stress on the need for counter-narratives to supplement intelligence efforts, with an overview

of the lessons for India. This paper will draw primarily on interviews from experts on the subject and authorities actively involved in countering the ISIS threat to India. Since research on the ISIS has been heavily invested in by Western governments, especially the US Government records and analyses have been sourced. Reports on the threat to India have been sourced from government sources, experts and the news media.

ISIS and Its Social Media Strategy

The Message and Its Appeal

It is baffling to societies with liberal and secular democracies, especially in the West, why ISIS seems to be attracting recruits across the globe. It has been reasoned by experts that “the rise of ISIS is only the most extreme example of the way in which liberal determinism – the notion that history moves with intent toward a more reasonable, secular future – has failed to explain the realities of the Middle East”.⁵ Simply put, it has been argued that:

ISIS draws on, and draws strength from, ideas that have broad resonance” among many populations where Islam is the centre of life. (...) They may not agree with ISIS’s interpretation of the caliphate, but the notion of a caliphate – the historical political entity governed by Islamic law and tradition – is a powerful one.⁶

The caliphate which declined in 1924, is a reminder of “an organic legal and political order that succeeded for centuries before its slow but decisive dismantling” (by the West), and is interpreted as the driver of enduring political violence in the Middle East, where an appropriate post-caliphate political model has never really been able to successfully evolve.⁷ Add to this the powerful narrative of the corruption of the golden age of Islam by the West and the need to purify the faith – now toxic in a globalised yet unequal world. This discourse then appeals to a globalised generation, where technology takes a leap every day and disruptive ideas seem to grab headlines. You thus have your cause to fight – both for identity and the nobility that comes with waging a crusade.

Since this article is part of a special series of essays on the rise of the ISIS and its consequences, it will not delve further into the ideological appeal, but rather focus on how this idea is marketed and justified to the global audience. ISIS has mastered propaganda by playing on the emotions of shock and fear and packages brutality via social media. The message it is selling is clear – it calls upon all Muslims to join its cause and enjoy the ISIS patronage or else suffer the consequences of defiance.

While it may be oversimplifying to state that terrorist strikes like the Paris attacks are directly linked to ISIS propaganda, there is room to speculate some causal linkages. Russia and France both received maximum threats in the time

frame of the last two years. An analysis of ISIS social media broadcasts has revealed that 14 days before the attacks in Paris, ISIS released a video encouraging young people in France to join the terrorist group.⁸ Something similar happened on June 26, when a terrorist inspired by ISIS committed a terrorist attack in Lyon, exactly a month after ISIS had released a video asking French youth to stand up for the cause.⁹ Again, one month before the January 7, 2015, attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo, ISIS released a video where a group of young French citizens asked their peers to enlist in the ranks of terrorist group.¹⁰ Given these inferences, the impact and influence of Islamic State's social media propaganda in the radicalisation and recruitment of youth requires more understanding to find a way to counter it.

Manufacturing Propaganda

In a study focused just on Twitter, by the Brookings Institute, it was found that the Islamic State puts out 18 media releases a day and has 90,000 twitter handles dedicated to it, which have helped it recruit over 20,000 foreign fighters – including 3,000 teenagers and over 200 women.¹¹ These numbers may have shot up since the study was released in March 2015. Most of these followers are largely lured by powerful messages projected through social media, highlighting the great “military victories” of ISIS and the idea of a global caliphate. The fall of Mosul – with ISIS erasing the border between Iraq and Syria and controlling large swathes of territory, well publicised by its propaganda wing on social media channels – made the idea of this caliphate tangible and no longer esoteric.

In the West particularly, ISIS has tried to package its messages on social media around the spirit of adventure than jihad. These videos use gaming language, graphics and effects. They depict Western jihadis in the field in everyday situations from jogging or discussing sport and simultaneously posing with the decapitated heads of victims – civilians and soldiers alike. These videos, a commentator says, capture both “the nobility and urgency of joining the fight, juxtaposed with pulse-pounding images of adventure in battle”.¹² Simply put, ISIS then becomes the realisation of the fantasies of these virtual games, so popular with youth across the globe – the everyday underdog fighting for a cause.

An interesting article on the brand-building of ISIS compares its social media marketing strategy with corporate marketing techniques and makes a very argumentative case. It argues that the diabolical marketing strategy of the ISIS – like many “brands” in the market place – seeks to disrupt; the ISIS ‘product’ (i.e., declaration of an Islamic caliphate in Iraq) was sneered by most of the world ‘establishment’, saying: “ISIS is just another terror group, and there is nothing to fear.” But, the ‘establishment’ was never the target audience; ISIS leaders are using social media marketing to recruit young potential extremists – ISIS is a revolutionary ideology and devout fighting force that is looking to massively

disrupt the old social order (the ‘establishment’).¹³ This also puts into perspective why ISIS has been promoting the profiles of its teenage recruits, encouraging them to publicise the outfit’s brand through their Facebook accounts and other social media – the ‘young force’ being used in order to ‘disrupt’ the old order.¹⁴

This ideological pull beyond the Middle East – is further explained by some of the numbers that the Brookings’ ISIS study came up with:¹⁵ 1) Almost one in five ISIS supporters selected English as their primary language when using Twitter while three-quarters selected Arabic. 2) ISIS-supporting accounts are among the most active and on an average had about 1,000 followers each, considerably higher than an ordinary Twitter user. Much of ISIS’s social media success can be attributed to a relatively small group of hyperactive users, numbering between 500 and 2,000 accounts, which tweet in concentrated bursts of high volume. 3) And finally perhaps the most important finding – suspension of accounts by Twitter didn’t result in a drop in the frequency of messages, in fact new users cropped up in no time. This highlights the need for not just monitoring and surveillance of social media platforms by security agencies, but also the creation of comprehensive content to build effective counter narratives – both by civil societies and governments across the globe.

The Tools

While Twitter remains its most powerful weapon, the Islamic State’s online diaspora spans several major sites according to an investigation by *The Washington Post* (see Table 1).¹⁶

Table 1: The ISIS Arsenal

Twitter:	The microblogging site has likely been the most successful platform for the group.
Facebook:	The social network allows the selective sharing of graphic content if the user posting the content is condemning it, but not if the content is being celebrated or glorified. This makes it difficult for militants to post there.
YouTube:	The video-sharing website allows the group to upload professionally produced propaganda videos of executions, captured territory, and promotional pieces about life in the Islamic State.
Kik and other messaging apps:	The recruiters prefer such apps to speak with would-be members. They often ask newcomers they find on other services to move their conversations to Kik.
Ask.fm:	A Q-and-A site, where militants and other Islamic State members answer questions about their motivations and religion.

Source: Scott Higham and Ellen Nakashima, “Why the Islamic State Leaves Tech Companies Torn between Free Speech and Security”, *The Washington Post*, July 16, 2015.

New Media Phenomenon: Helping ISIS Get a Global Audience

Giving the global audience to this social media strategy is the 24x7 media and multimedia convergence. In my work on social media and national security,¹⁷ I have articulated in great detail the new media phenomenon, i.e. the convergence of various forms of media – television, social, and online networks which, when combined together, become a potent weapon. ISIS has understood this. It generates the content of shock and brutality, playing on the emotions of disenchantment and fear, which then get amplified by both organised groups on social media and consequently reporting by the traditional media. The US Department of Homeland Security in its analysis sums up:

ISIL [ISIS] leverages social media to propagate its message and benefits from thousands of organised supporters globally online, primarily on Twitter, who seek to legitimise its actions while burnishing an image of strength and power... The influence is underscored by the large number of reports stemming from social media postings.¹⁸

The interviews done by the Western media of recruits who have defected from the ISIS reveal the emphasis put on generating content for social media propaganda and 24x7 news cycles. They hold chilling insights for governments and counter-terror propaganda campaigns around the world.¹⁹ The following is an excerpt:

What they described resembles a medieval reality show. Camera crews fan out across the caliphate every day, their ubiquitous presence distorting the events they purportedly document. Battle scenes and public beheadings are so scripted and staged that fighters and executioners often perform multiple takes and read their lines from cue cards. Cameras, computers and other video equipment arrive in regular shipments from Turkey. They are delivered to a media division dominated by foreigners – including at least one American, according to those interviewed – whose production skills often stem from previous jobs they held at news channels or technology companies.

Senior media operatives are treated as ‘emirs’ of equal rank to their military counterparts. They are directly involved in decisions on strategy and territory. They preside over hundreds of videographers, producers and editors who form a privileged, professional class with status, salaries and living arrangements that are the envy of ordinary fighters. ‘It is a whole army of media personnel,’ said Abu Abdullah al-Maghribi, a second defector who served in the Islamic State’s security ranks but had extensive involvement with its propaganda teams. ‘The media people are more important than the soldiers,’ he said. ‘Their monthly income is higher. They have better cars. They have the power to encourage those inside to fight and the power to bring more recruits to the Islamic State.’²⁰

The investigation further reveals that the messages ISIS tries to convey in its propaganda have dual undertones to influence “a divided audience”:

The beheadings, immolations and other spectacles are employed both to menace Western adversaries and to appeal to disenfranchised Muslim males weighing a leap into the Islamist fray. (...) A separate collection depicts the Islamic State as a liveable destination, a benevolent state committed to public works. Videos show the construction of public markets, smiling religious police on neighbourhood patrols and residents leisurely fishing on the banks of the Euphrates.²¹

So while territory gives it the military power, a lot of energy is also devoted to creating an idealised version of “how that virtual empire is perceived”.²²

Lack of a Comprehensive Counter-Propaganda Campaign to ISIS

It would be natural to assume that the powerful anti-ISIS coalition of Western countries led by the US with large financial resources and communication specialists at their disposal would be able to counter ISIS propaganda effectively. However, this has not been the case.

US Centre for strategic counterterrorism quote: there is a fantasy in Washington which is: (t)hat if you somehow put magic social media or public diplomacy pixie dust on a problem, it will go away. It’s not that ISIS is so great. It is that the response against ISIS is both limited, and weak.”²³ He reiterated that dismantling Twitter feed is a temporary solution, the challenge remains the wide range of audiences to target with counter propaganda. There is also the intelligence angle, where agencies monitoring social media don’t want to completely dismantle accounts, so that they can get valuable insights to aid military operations. He further elaborates:

You’ve got very hard-core members, so it’s going to be very hard to pull them back or to convince them that ISIS is not the group to follow. But then you’ve got fence sitters that are looking to figure out what they want to do with their lives and how they define themselves. I think our messaging has to try to address all of that. The challenge has been we haven’t done it very well, we haven’t figured out how to amplify the credible voices that are out there, particularly in Muslim communities.²⁴

It has been trial and error even for the US State Department, otherwise known as the best in the business handling public diplomacy campaigns. In a break from its traditional approach, it put out a video online using ISIS’s language to defeat its very message.²⁵ The video became a viral phenomenon – viewed more than 844,000 times on YouTube – and did reportedly rattle ISIS. Titled, “Welcome to ISIS Land”, its script opened with the line, “Run, do not walk, to ISIS Land”, and promised new arrivals would learn “useful new skills” such as

“crucifying and executing Muslims”. The script was juxtaposed with images of the terrorist group’s atrocities: kneeling prisoners shot point-blank, brutal beheadings, etc. However, the minute-long recording also became a flashpoint in a much broader debate over how far the United States should go in engaging with a barbaric adversary online.²⁶

The lines are even more difficult and blurry for tech companies who host these social-media platforms. (W)hile Facebook has instituted a no-tolerance-for-terrorism policy, the sheer volume of terrorist propaganda that needs to be sifted through and analysed poses the real challenge. The dilemma then stems from how these companies can strike a balance between enabling people to discuss and access information about ISIS, without being a distribution channel for its propaganda.²⁷

This paper has so far tried to paint the larger canvas of the multi-layered threat ISIS presents to global anti-terrorism efforts and the scale of the challenges ranging from ideological pull to technical complications amplified by the exploitation of such a powerful medium. This effort has been made to put into perspective the magnitude of the threat that India faces from ISIS, and the ground work the government and the agencies have to put in to combat it. The next section will elaborate on the specific ISIS threat to India.

The Threat to India

While it has been repeatedly argued that hardly any Indian Muslims have joined the ISIS, the writing is pretty clear on the wall. Youth in India are exposed to ISIS propaganda on social media every day and are ripe for the picking. Those caught peddling the ISIS cause in India include the neighbourhood techies equipped with a foreign education, desperate for a new identity and a new destiny. These developments have long-term implications, which now after the Paris attacks, the government is taking very seriously.

Slew of Arrests of ISIS Social Media Recruiters

The arrest of the Bengaluru executive in November 2014, accused of allegedly running a pro-ISIS Twitter handle, threw open the Pandora’s Box on the use of social media by extremist groups for radicalisation of youth and recruitment. The 24-year-old Bengaluru-based engineer, Mehdi Masroor Biswas, “confessed” that he was handling the pro-jihad tweeter handle, “@ShamiWitness”, and became “a source of incitement and information” for new ISIS recruits.²⁸

It was then that the repercussions of the news of four Mumbai youths, who had gone to Iraq-Syria in May 2014 to join ISIS were beginning to be felt. While one of them returned, his confession to the National Investigative Agency (NIA) was shocking. The youth claimed he had come back home succumbing to parental

pressure and if given a chance would rejoin the ISIS and fight for the cause. “This despite the fact that ISIS leadership made him clean toilets, indulge in construction work and provide water to those on the battlefield, instead of being pushed into the war zone.”²⁹

Then in January 2015, a US-educated Indian techie, was apprehended in Hyderabad by security agencies after it was found that he was joining his partner in the UK and then travelling to Syria, ostensibly to join ISIS.³⁰ Local police said that in one of the three Facebook accounts opened by the techie, all peddling the ISIS cause, over 180 messages were posted by ‘followers’ from India, as the engineering post-graduate had taken on the task of recruiting local youth from Hyderabad.³¹

Most recently, an Indian woman allegedly involved in recruiting people for the Islamic State was deported by the UAE, and subsequently arrested in Hyderabad. The 37-year-old, Afsha Jabeen, alias ‘Nicky Joseph’, had been portraying herself as a British national while luring youth for ISIS through social media.³² This was followed by news of the arrest of Muhammed Abdul Ahad, a US-educated computer professional from Bengaluru, who was intercepted by Turkish authorities on the Syrian border and deported to India.³³ Most interestingly, he had barred his wife from contacting authorities about his disappearance or from locating him. There have also been reports of agencies monitoring over 150 youths from south India, who the agencies seem to be monitoring.³⁴ Those apprehended included a brother and sister who received over ₹ 50,000 from a mysterious benefactor to prepare their travel documents, an MBA holder and his wife, a Google employee, brother of a SIMI activist killed by the police, and several engineering students.³⁵ Financial motivation combined with the ideological pull seems to be attracting these sympathisers.

However, Indian intelligence agencies have reportedly said that “the ISIS did not consider South Asian Muslims, including Indians and Pakistanis, good enough to fight in the conflict zone of Iraq and Syria, and they were treated inferior to Arab fighters, often being tricked into suicide attacks”.³⁶ It has been reported that officials claimed Arab fighters with better battle experience are mostly positioned behind South Asians, and hence their casualties are proportionally less.³⁷ Officers have continued to rule out any widespread sympathies for the ISIS in India. But they admit that there is always a possibility of lone-wolf attacks, given the fact that they have found at least a few active modules.³⁸

ISIS Propaganda Fuelling Competition between Terror Groups on Social Media

In addition, Indian security agencies are also worried that the brazen use of social media by the ISIS to establish itself as the global face of ‘jihad’ has made other

transnational terror groups like al Qaeda more competitive and resorting to more sensationalist and ruthless styles of propaganda.³⁹ Over the last two years, we have seen many propaganda messages on social media directed towards ‘the Indian Muslim’ by both these groups.

Bandwagoning by Terror Groups in India

Perhaps the biggest threat that the success of ISIS poses to India is, the bandwagon effect that it seems to have inspired in local terror outfits. Irrespective of whether they agree with the ISIS ideology, groups like the Indian Mujahideen⁴⁰ and other extremist outfits have been seen as eager to latch on to brand ISIS, in a bid to garner attention. Media reports quoted intelligence agencies saying that “Instead of forming its sleeper cells, the Internet and social media has become another platform for the terror outfit to scout for vulnerable youth belonging to the minority community. All agencies are keeping a close tab on the suspect areas where the IM was most active”.⁴¹ The outfit had also uploaded a video of the ISIS Chief, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, with Hindi, Urdu and Tamil subtitles.⁴²

Inspiring ‘Overt War of Ideas’ and Recruitment by Indian Insurgent Groups

One of the spin-offs of the blatant use of social media propaganda by the ISIS is that insurgent groups in India are catching on to the potential of social media to attract recruits. Intelligence officials shared with media a set of photographs and a video that went viral in Kashmir, showing “eleven Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) militants posing in army-style combat fatigues”.⁴³ This photograph emerged just a few days after similar photographs were uploaded by militants in the North East, of armed cadres posing in the forests with assault rifles.⁴⁴ This group NSCN-K was responsible for an ambush on the Indian Army that had killed 18 soldiers in Manipur. The message was clearly signalling that the “war of ideas against the establishment” is no longer covert, but aims to ‘inspire’ recruits overtly.

India’s Attempts to Push Back ISIS Radicalisation

Indian Government agencies have been working on plans to counter social-media radicalisation in India. While experiments like “Social Media Labs” by the Mumbai police, scouring social-media content to isolate influencers and prevent mishaps have been emulated across India, emphasis has been made to institute a de-radicalisation programme. The programme according to a government official quoted by the media, has tried to address the issue at three levels: At the first, macro level, through preventive arrests, at the second level, counter-narratives to discourage youths and give incentives to renounce violence and at the third, to work at the micro level with individuals.⁴⁵ However, this is no easy task. A government secretary was quoted saying, “It is hard to gauge the success of these programmes. But with this programme, disengagement from extremist groups

has been managed but re-radicalisation is proving to be difficult. Many jihadis go back to the vortex of terror.”⁴⁶

Attempts have already been made to reach out to the Imams of various Muslim communities in India, to use their Friday sermons to address the youth on why rejecting the ISIS-ideology should be their call of duty. In fact over 1,050 Indian Islamic scholars and clerics have issued fatwa against the ISIS, describing its acts and actions as against the basic tenets of Islam.⁴⁷ In cities like Bengaluru, the Imam of the Jamia Masjid, has started an initiative to counter propaganda of the kind unleashed by Islamic State by organising outreach programmes in colleges and using social media platforms, such as WhatsApp. A WhatsApp group of around 150 maulanas has been created to devise a communication strategy to prevent radicalisation of youths.⁴⁸ All these are great building blocks to a comprehensive effort to counter the ISIS ideology in India. The impetus has to remain in sustaining these efforts over time and to look beyond instant solutions.

Conclusion

It has been argued that “if ISIS and what will surely be a growing number of imitators are to be defeated, then statehood – and, more importantly, states that are inclusive and accountable to their own people – are essential”.⁴⁹ This holds true for both the global and local fight against ISIS. The world has seen decades of terrorism and insurgency to understand that escalation of violence is linked to failed politics, governance, and economic development. Reports from Iraq and Syria have shown that the civil causes of violence are so deep that no defeat of extremist movements alone can hope to bring any lasting form of security and stability.

For India, indifference is no longer an option. The ISIS has brought the fight to our doorstep. In the previous sections, this paper has tried to elucidate that the appeal of ISIS works at multiple levels for its many followers across the globe. So targeting social media propaganda with monitoring and surveillance alone will not help, unless one is looking at it purely to assist intelligence gathering efforts. The approach of the Indian Government so far, as discussed above, has been moving in the right direction, but it needs to be sustained. While Indian agencies are aware of the looming challenge, they need to buff up capacities to match the scale of the challenge. Counter-narratives need to address the roots of the feelings of disillusionment, alienation and economic and social insecurity felt by the youth. This requires a comprehensive assessment of why particular sections of the population are being targeted from specific areas, and will not be successful if the approach is ad hoc. The fact that the Prime Minister is leading the effort with security agencies to discuss security threats, especially those rising from the influence of the ISIS, the role of social media in violent crimes and left-wing

extremism, signals the emphasis being laid on India's efforts to preserve its national security.⁵⁰

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4

Islamic State and the Threat of Chemical Weapons

Reshmi Kazi

*The United Nations (UN) Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic presented a fact-finding report to the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, in September 2013. The “Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013” suggests that “chemical weapons were used on a relatively large scale, resulting in numerous casualties, particularly among civilians and including many children”.¹ Investigations revealed that in the ongoing conflict between the Assad regime and rebels in Syria, surface-to-surface rockets containing sarin were fired indiscriminately against innocent civilians at suburbs of Damascus on August 21, 2015 killing hundreds of people. While it yet remains to be established whether the regime or the rebels used chemical weapons, compelling evidence corroborates *their use*. These incidents raise new questions about the evolving threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including chemical weapons, and sub-national militant groups like the Islamic State. It also focuses on the evolving nature of warfare involving the use of chemical weapons. Further, it draws attention on the ability of the international community to combat the threat of chemical terrorism.*

The recent chemical weapons attacks in Syria and Iraq are not unprecedented. Since the twin nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 by the US, chemical weapons are the only WMD that have been used for both strategic and tactical purposes alike. The March 1988 Halabja chemical attack killed between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injured more than 7,000 to 10,000 civilians. Iraq

is believed to have dropped bombs containing the blister agent mustard gas on the Kurdish population during the end of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Chemical agents are reported to have been used by terrorist-based cult organisations like the Aum Shinrikyo. In recent times, growing evidence indicates that the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL; also called the Islamic State) is likely to have obtained mustard agent from Syria or Iraq.² They are also suspected to have used mustard agent against Kurdish forces in Iraq in August 2015.³ In the past several months, several sources have claimed that ISIL could pose a potential WMD threat. Mainstream media reports have raised the alarm about ISIL seizing chemical weapons and materials for their nefarious activities. That the alarm was not just a figment of imagination or merely hypothetical was clear when the British Home Secretary, Theresa May, warned that ISIL “will acquire chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons to attack us”.⁴ With more and more territory coming under the control of the ISIL terrorists, its potential as a WMD threat is becoming less hypothetical and more real. In this context, this paper attempts to analyse the evolving threat of chemical terrorism and its consequent proliferation concerns. It also seeks to explore whether the Islamic State is seeking to acquire any WMD, and the likelihood of ISIL resorting to the use of chemical weapons. The paper concludes by making some suggestions for strengthening the defences against any chemical weapons threat.

The Chemical Weapons Threat

Historical documentations have confirmed that chemical weapons constitute the most commonly used and proliferated form of WMD. According to the Chemical Weapons Convention,

Chemical weapons means toxic chemicals and their precursors, prohibited under the Convention, toxic munitions and devices, specifically designed to cause death or other harm and any equipment specifically designed for use directly in connection with the employment of munitions and devices as specified above.⁵

The toxic chemical properties of these weapons cause varying levels of physical harm ranging from burns, blisters, respiratory problems to death. Some chemical agents like mustard gas are gruesome, which hideously disfigures skin, sears lungs and mucus membranes and blinds. Since mustard gas has no antidote, it raises the fatality rate exponentially. Besides physical incapacities, the psychological effects of chemical weapons can inflict devastating impact causing mass panic and chaos. Chemical weapons agents can be classified into three major categories, as follows:

- Nerve agents like sarin, tabun, soman and cyclosarin.

- Blistering agents like mustard gas, also called sulphur mustard, lewite and nitrogen mustard.
- Choking agents like chlorine, phosgene and diphosgene.

Chemical weapons are sometimes described as poor man's nuclear weapons. Chemical weapons have the potential to cause mass casualties by using small amounts of poison gas. Unlike nuclear explosives, which are difficult and expensive to procure, chemical weapons can be manufactured from cheap and readily available raw materials. Interestingly, many of the components of toxic chemicals have dual-use applications and are essential for peaceful purposes. For example, the ingredients and manufacturing process for making parathion, a pesticide, can be readily used to develop deadly nerve gases like sarin, soman and tabun. Similarly, pesticide, petrochemical or detergent plants can be adapted as potential facilities to manufacture the virulent mustard gas. Water treatment plants that use chlorine for purification purposes is a potential source that can be used for developing poisonous chemical substances. The dual-use element and relatively easy availability makes toxic chemical substances considerably appealing to non-state actors.

History of Chemical Weapons Use

The use of chemical weapons has roots in ancient human civilisations. Historically, the Sumerians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Romans, Greeks and Asians have recorded the use of chemical poisoning for maiming and injuring their enemies. Despite efforts to ban chemical weapons at the Hague Convention of 1899 that prohibited the use of "poisonous arms" and "asphyxiating gases", states have not stopped using chemical weapons in conflicts large and small to the present day. In modern times, chemical weapons were employed on a large scale during World War I when clouds of chlorine and phosgene gases filled in pressurised canisters were dispersed into the air by Germany that killed hundreds of French troops in Ypres, Belgium. This incident shocked the long-held understanding that civilised armies must refrain from using deadly weapons and boosted the indiscriminate use of lethal weapons in later years. The 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting the battlefield use of chemical weapons has been unable to prevent the development of toxic chemicals, both as strategic and tactical tools of terror. Egypt used phosgene and mustard agents during the 1963-67 Yemen Civil War. In March 1988, during the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein ordered raining of mustard gas on the pro-Iranian Kurdish commanders in Halabja in 1988, killing up to 5,000 men, women, and children in what is known as the world's most deadly use of chemical weapons against civilians. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union both maintained thousands of tonnes of chemical weapons stockpiles, enough to have catastrophic effects on human and animal life.

Other than states, deadly chemical warfare agents are known to be used by terrorist groups. The Japanese cult, Aum Shinrikyo's interest in chemical terrorism can be traced back to 1990. Between 1993 and 1995, Aum launched 10 known chemical weapons attacks, with intentions ranging from assassination to mass murder. In the Tokyo subway sarin attack of March 1995, the Aum cult members released sarin gas on several lines of the Tokyo subway, killing 12 and injuring 5,500 others to varying degrees.⁶ The grotesque chemical weapons attacks by Aum Shinrikyo had drawn international attention on the dangers posed by chemical weapons and their potential tactical use by terrorists. Between October 2006 and June 2007, Al Qaeda targeted the Sunni population in the Iraqi cities of Ramadi, Baghdad and Falluja with chlorine gas, leaving 115 killed and 854 injured (including 85 children).⁷ Between April 2012 to June 2013, 23 poison attacks on girls' schools in Afghanistan, allegedly by the Taliban militants, were recorded.⁸ Some of these incidents involved cases of water poisoning leaving 1,924 children and many more severely injured.⁹ In recent times, there has been an increase in the use of chemical weapons in the conflicts zones of the Middle East. For example, since March 2013, deadly chemical weapons have been continually used in the conflict zones in Syria. Poisonous chemical gases like chlorine, nerve gas and mustard gas are reported to have been used in several barrel bomb attacks in Hama, Aleppo and Idlib suburbs of Syria. The chemical attacks have killed thousands of innocent civilians including women and children, with the official death toll having reached 1,400 people already, and rising further with hundreds more critically wounded in the surrounding districts.

ISIL and Chemical Weapons

Of late, compelling evidence is mounting that the ISIL militants are likely to have used mustard agent against Kurdish forces in Iraq in August 2015.¹⁰ Reports indicate that ISIL's use of chemical weapons is no longer unprecedented. In October 2014, Iraqi officials investigated claims that ISIL used chlorine as a weapon in Dhuluiya, Iraq. In March 2015, Kurdish authorities claimed that ISIL had used chemical weapons against Peshmerga fighters outside the Iraqi city of Mosul. These reports raise questions about the intentions, motivations and capabilities of the Islamist militants. Are the ISIL militants seeking to acquire WMD like chemical weapons for accomplishing their objective of establishing the Islamic State? Are they seeking the return of the Caliphate with the aid of the worst possible means of terror? How can the acquisition of virulent chemical weapons help them to achieve their objectives? Do they have the requisite competence to acquire and weaponise chemical substances for terror activities? In order to address these questions, it is important to undertake a reality check to consider the threat of chemical terrorism from the ISIL militants. The issues

must be adequately preceded with some basic questions and their logical answers to assess if there is any emerging correlation between the ISIL terrorists and chemical weapons that heeds serious attention.

Is ISIL looking for chemical weapons?

ISIL militants are suspected to have used mustard agent against Kurdish forces in Iraq, which is the first indication that the militant group has obtained banned chemicals.¹¹ According to the US intelligence assessment, the Islamic State could have obtained mustard agent from Syria, probably left behind in some hidden cache when the Assad government agreed to give up its chemical weapons arsenal and facilitated the destruction of large quantities of chemical weapons in 2013. The US intelligence sources view that the militants were unlikely to have seized the chemical agent from the Syrian regime before the regime was forced to hand over its stockpile under the threat of the US airstrikes in 2013.¹² Alternatively, ISIL militants could have also acquired weapons left over in Iraq from their old WMD programme. However, it is believed that the possibility of ISIL militants obtaining chemical agents from Iraq is low. This is because the US military would have probably discovered it during the military campaigns it waged in Iraq over the past decade. Though logically the possibility appears feasible yet unanswered ambiguities remain a worrisome issue. There is further speculation that chemical weapons stockpiles of former President Gaddafi in Libya had fallen into rebel hands during the Libyan crisis and are actually circulating among select jihadi groups, including ISIL, and could make their way into crisis spots all over the world.¹³ The present Libyan regime considers the discovered chemical weapons as part of Gaddafi's "undeclared stockpiles" that were not completely destroyed, nor was there any material accountancy of the same.¹⁴ It can be further speculated that even if all the chemical weapons were destroyed, the absence of any data on the original hoards leaves critical gaps about the entire stockpiles. This also creates challenges in calculating whether and how much of chemical weapons have fallen into wrong hands.

While conclusive evidence still remains elusive about ISIL using chemical weapons in Syria, certain significant inputs provide critical pointers towards this dastardly act by the Islamic militants. Fragments from mortars fired by Islamic State militants at Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq earlier this month tested positive in a US military field test for the chemical agent sulphur mustard.¹⁵ Kurdish fighters in both Iraq and Syria have blamed ISIL for its alleged use of chemical weapons. The Peshmerga General Command stated:

The terrorist Daesh [ISIL] launched 45 120mm mortar shells tipped with chemical heads on Peshmerga positions, which led to the injury of a number of Peshmerga forces with burns on different parts of their bodies.¹⁶

The US intelligence agency believes that ISIL had at least a small supply of mustard agent much before it attacked the Kurdish forces. While more authoritative reports await confirmation of ISIL using WMD existential evidence continues to point towards this possibility.

It is clear that the ISIL terrorists are trying to develop rudimentary forms of chemical weapons for unconventional terror tactics. The ISIL has already challenged the leadership of Al Qaeda, the only known group, other than Aum Shinrikyo, with declared intention to acquire nuclear weapons. Perhaps, ISIL would consider it a challenge to acquire some sort of WMD to establish their status as the only leader of the “jihadi terrorism movement”. It is too early to conclude that the ISIL militants will be successful in acquiring WMD. However, it is important to make a threat assessment of the intentions, willingness, financial capability, available technical expertise and past record of brutal groups like ISIL to evaluate whether they constitute a WMD threat.

Can the ISIL militants gain access to poisonous chemical substances and technology?

ISIL has over the past year extended its influence across the Middle East. Since June 2014, it has taken control of large territories from Raqqa, Syria, to Mosul, Iraq. They have also formally declared a caliphate in Yemen in early 2015. ISIS supporters are also operating in central, south and east Yemen, specifically Tarim in Hadramawt, where they have raided several military sites. The capture of large territories serves two-fold purposes. First, amassing of more and more territories facilitates their objective of establishing the Islamic State. Large swathes of land under a single authority and ISIL-established government mechanisms confer upon them the legitimacy that the Islamist terrorists are seeking. Second, with large territories under their fold, the Islamic militants can utilise them as suitable safe havens for laboratories and other facilities to manufacture deadly chemicals weapons.

With the IS making steady advances into Syrian territory after declaring its intention to establish an Islamic Caliphate, the alarming prospect of WMD, including chemical weapons, falling into its hands could become a reality.¹⁷ Syria is believed to be in possession of huge stockpiles of chemical weapons. In 2014, the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, let international inspectors supervise the removal and destruction of all chemical weapons. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the international body responsible for implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), announced in October 2014 that almost all of Syria’s declared chemical agents and precursor chemicals had been safely and irreversibly destroyed.¹⁸ However concerns still persist over the status of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles. It is believed that the Assad regime did not give up all of the chemical weapons.¹⁹ The supervision

of the destruction of Syria's chemical stockpiles by the international inspectors was controlled to a large extent by the Assad regime.²⁰ This leaves room for enough suspicion that Assad might still retain stocks of chemical weapons and could use them in an attempt to prevent his removal. It is suspected that the weapons-research facilities run by the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre in Damascus are being used to develop and deploy a new type of chemical bomb filled with chlorine.²¹ Intelligence officials also suspect the regime may have squirrelled away at least a small reserve of the chemical precursors needed to make nerve agents, sarin and VX.²² It is feared that the Islamic State militants might seek to get these chemical weapons under their possession. Given the prevailing domestic turmoil in Syria, it is apprehended that country's critical military bases, supply lines and research facilities are becoming increasingly vulnerable to terrorist groups like ISIL. This is because the ISIL militants will simply follow the *Willie Sutton principle* while seeking materials for making chemical weapons and will target those vulnerable facilities where toxic chemical substances and materials are housed, poorly safeguarded and easily accessible. The conflict situation in Syria and neighbouring Iraq provides ideal sources for ISIL to seek and acquire chemical weapons.

Does ISIS have the technical competence and expertise to manufacture chemical weapons?

The US intelligence analysts have assessed that the Islamic State militants in all likelihood has an active chemical weapons research cell dedicated to building chemical weapons. Noted British monitoring groups, the Conflict Armament Research and Sahan Research in their internal report to the Kurdish government in Iraq have assessed that mortar shells fired in Syria appeared to have been manufactured in an "ISIS workshop by casting iron into mold method. The mortar contains a warhead filled with a chemical agent, most probably chlorine".²³ The US intelligence sources ascertain that the ISIL militants are continuously working towards developing more sophisticated chemical weapons. For this purpose, the terrorist group is recruiting "highly trained professionals".²⁴ These facts indicate that the Islamic militants are undertaking "serious efforts" to grow their chemical weapons stockpiles. According to the Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, "Da'esh [ISIS] is likely to have amongst its tens of thousands of recruits the technical expertise necessary to further refine precursor materials and build chemical weapons."²⁵ ISIL's attempt to acquire WMD, including nuclear weapons, has been emphasised upon by India. India has expressed concern that ISIL could likely acquire a nuclear bomb from Pakistan. Interestingly, India's concerns echo claims made by the ISIL terrorists that they are 'infinitely' closer to getting hold of a nuclear weapon, emphasising that they could buy it via corrupt Pakistani officials.²⁶ Acknowledging the potential threat from ISIL, Home

Minister Rajnath Singh “admitted that online recruitment by Islamic State (IS) had become a major security challenge for India”.²⁷ In an issue of their official English-language propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*, the ISIL militants have drawn a hypothetical operation wherein “the Islamic State [with] billions of dollars in the bank, [will] call on their wilayah in Pakistan to purchase a nuclear device through weapons dealers with links to corrupt officials in the region”.²⁸ The article suggests that such a weapon could be smuggled into the US homeland either over land from Mexico or Canada, or by boat.

Following the June 2015 chemical attacks by the ISIL forces, Kurdish militia had captured industrial-grade gas masks from the attacked sites confirming that they are prepared and equipped for chemical warfare on this front.²⁹ The Kurdish fighters had also gathered “makeshift chemical projectiles” fired by ISIL in Syria as evidence that the Islamic militants are improving on their capabilities in unleashing chemical terrorism. With steady flow of engineers and scientists as recruits, dual-use advantages of chemical substances and widely available knowledge to produce poisonous chemical weapons, the potential for chemical terrorism to enter a new era of catastrophe remains significant. For example, many of the ingredients of chemical gases are essential in peaceful applications. The precursors and processes used for making parathion, a pesticide, can be readily adapted to manufacture toxic nerve gases like sarin, soman and tabun. Similarly, the knowledge to make the mustard agent is widely available and process involved can be carried out by trained recruits. There are readily available components of chemical weapons and there is vast commerce, in industrial chemicals, which can provide potential pathways to terrorists seeking to obtain virulent chemicals. Unlike their nuclear equivalent, only limited scientific and engineering knowledge is needed to turn them into virulent weapons.

What is more challenging is that the rapid advancement in the fields of neuroscience and in particular neuropharmacology increases the threat from chemical substances manifold. The potential benefits for treating neurological impairment, disease and psychiatric illness are immense; but so too are potentially harmful applications – specifically the development of a new range of lethal, as well as incapacitating, chemical warfare agents.³⁰ Nanotechnology has enormous potential in providing medical care, but it could be transformed to creating more powerful chemical weapons. The knowledge of nanotechnology developed by the chemical pharmaceutical industry to make more effective products could be used to make nanotechnology-based weapons which are easier to create, more deadly, and more insidious than conventional chemical agents.³¹ Besides, the personnel including scientists, pharmacists and chemical engineers trained in producing toxic chemicals for non-weapons purposes are a potential source that run the risk of being suitably exploited by terrorists for nefarious purposes.

Developing chemical weapons is no longer a formidable challenge for ISIL. With suitable recruits, available knowledge and accessible chemical substances, it is not a complex task to weaponise toxic chemicals. A confidential assessment by the American intelligence analysts concludes that nearly 30,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Iraq and Syria from more than 100 countries since 2011.³² In 2014, it was estimated that about 15,000 combatants from 80 countries, went to Iraq and Syria mostly to join the Islamic State.³³ This indicates that despite concerted efforts to stem the flow, the ISIS has been successful in disseminating its influence worldwide and gain recruits for its activities.

Do the Islamic State militants have the necessary delivery vehicles to carry chemical bombs to the target area?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is in the affirmative. A chemical weapon attack can be launched in two ways – delivery and dissemination. The most significant aspect of chemical weapons is the efficiency of dissemination of toxic chemical agents. The most effective method of disseminating lethal chemical weapons is by launching it through munitions which include rocket bombs, submunitions, projectiles, warheads, and spray tanks. Chemical weapons can also be transported through trucks, missiles, landmines, aerosol canisters, mortars, air dropped gravity bombs or artillery shells. Dissemination is commonly carried out by means of explosives that expel the chemical agent laterally. In this method, the techniques of filling and storage of munitions are of critical importance to inflict maximum damage. The principal method of disseminating chemical agents has been through the use of explosives.³⁴ During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq disseminated toxic mustard gas and tabun with artillery shells, aerial bombs, missiles, rockets, grenades, and bursting smoke munitions. North Korea is believed to have developed chemical warheads for its Scud-B and Scud-C ballistic missiles. However, there are certain complex engineering challenges posed by warheads filled with chemical agent and mounted and delivered with ballistic missiles. For this reason missiles fitted with spray tanks would serve as particularly effective delivery vehicles.³⁵ The evidence collected from the series of recent chemical attacks in Syria has traces of mustard agent and chlorine gas left behind on fragmented pieces of mortars, artillery shells, projectiles tank sprays, gas cylinders and munitions used for delivery of nerve agents.³⁶ The emerging potential threat of chemical terrorism from the ISIL militants is real. With preliminary impact achieved, ISIL now well understands the effectiveness of chemical weapons as an ultimate weapon of terror. It is only logical to presume that it will attempt to heighten its terror activities to the next level. Trainee terrorists studying at an ISIL-controlled university in Iraq are feared to be planning mass casualty chemical attacks, and miniature drones could be used to do the deed.³⁷ Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are the ideal platform that combatants may utilise to disperse

chemical agents.³⁸ Moreover, with the upsurge of suicide bombers, who seek martyrdom, crude chemical weapons can be easily transported for detonation in a densely populated area. Porous borders can increase the risks of terrorists smuggling chemical and other WMD materials by terrorists.

Why would ISIL resort to chemical weapons as means to spread terror?

Alongside acquiring territory to establish legitimacy, the ISIS has been active in striking terror within the Middle East. The brutality that the terror group has displayed is gruesome. From beheadings, mass shootings to burning people alive, ISIL has surpassed all levels of brutality. One reason for this ghastly brutality is to seek the world's attention and convey just how far it is willing to go to achieve its goal of establishing the Caliphate. Given the increasing degree of lethality of ISIS terrorists, it can be presumed that they will not hesitate to further mount their inclination for cataclysmic terror activities. The conventional view suggesting a minimal likelihood of terrorists using WMD has significantly evolved, particularly with the 9/11 attacks. These attacks revised the conventional form of thinking and led to serious thought being given to the possibility of WMD being used outside the context of general inter-state warfare by terrorist groups. Richard Betts has argued that Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) weapons, which were considered the "frontier of warfare" and principal weapons of powerful states, have now increasingly evolved to be "weapons of the weak – states or groups that militarily are at best second class".³⁹ These WMD, which were earlier symbolic of strength, are now believed to be instruments of vulnerability and weakness making them "the only hope for so-called rogue states or terrorists who want to contest American power".⁴⁰ Terrorist violence is a costly form of signalling. It is difficult for them to impose their will by the direct use of force. However, sometimes terrorists are successful in persuading their targets to do as they wish by convincing the latter about their ability to impose costs and their determination to do so. Given the conflict of interest between terrorists and their targets, ordinary communication or 'cheap talk' is insufficient to change minds or influence behaviour.⁴¹ If Al Qaeda had informed that it would kill four million Americans unless they withdrew from Saudi Arabia, the threat might have caused concern but the impact would not have been the same as with the attacks that followed in September 2001. Since it is hard for weak actors to make credible threats, terrorists are forced to display publicly just how far they are willing to go. Use of chemical weapons and other WMD fits well into this strategy of terror groups like ISIL. This presumption is not totally unfounded, as warnings have been sounded from several quarters about ISIL's intention of obtaining and possibly resorting to the use of WMD. Experts have already warned, "The risk of a terrorist attack using nuclear or chemical weapons has just gone up."⁴²

Chemical weapons are a desirable option for ISIL militants both for strategic

and tactical purposes. Strategically, any successful act of terror by means of WMD, including chemical weapons, would be an enormous technological achievement. It would enable terrorists to convey to the world their technical competence, capabilities and effectiveness in carrying out the objectives successfully. This would invariably facilitate them to seek the attention of the international community towards them for facilitating “suitable deals”. “From a motivational standpoint, the acquisition of a working nuclear weapon would represent the ultimate capability for fanatic politico-religious terrorist groups.”⁴³ In tactical terms, subnational groups, both independent and state-sponsored, could manufacture or procure toxic chemical warfare agents to intimidate the civilian population.

As the entire populace of any nation cannot be safeguarded against massive WMD attacks, the impact of any attack involving toxic materials could be acute. Even though the consequences of the Aum Shinrikyo attack in Tokyo was limited, the international community remains increasingly concerned about the use of toxic chemicals and has been unable to come to terms with the complexity of the problem. Given the vulnerabilities involved, chemical weapons remain an attractive option for ISIL. Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, former commanding officer of the United Kingdom CBRN Regiment, wrote in *The Telegraph* that ISIL has “no boundaries in terms of its war of terror, and using chemical weapons is one of the ultimate ways of spreading fear and panic among its enemies”.⁴⁴

Islamic State militants’ penchant for chemical weapons can be analysed from the rising statistics of terrorism fatalities. International terrorism is on the rise, with an almost fivefold increase in fatalities since September 11, 2001 attacks. According to the 2015 Global Peace Index report, deaths caused by terrorism increased by 61 per cent in 2013, which resulted in almost 18,000 people being killed in terrorist attacks. Of those deaths, 82 percent occurred in just five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria.⁴⁵ The groups identified for unleashing most of these activities are: the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; Boko Haram in Nigeria; the Taliban in Afghanistan; and Al Qaeda in various parts of the world. Unfortunately, most of these terrorist groups operate in Asia. According to the report, Syria remains the world’s least peaceful country, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁶ According to the Global Terrorism Index 2014 report, the number of fatalities has steadily grown over the last 14 years, from 3,361 in 2000 to 11,133 in 2012 and 17,958 in 2013, a 61 percent increase.⁴⁷ Alongside a rise in fatalities, terrorism has also become more widespread. The number of countries experiencing more than 50 deaths rose to 24 in 2013; the previous high had been 19 in 2008.⁴⁸ In 2013, more than 80 per cent of the lives lost to terrorism occurred in only five countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria.⁴⁹ These growing fatalities bring into question the counterterrorism strategies of the Western powers. It also emphasises upon the critical requirement

of developing and implementing a sound strategy for combatting the threat posed by the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups like ISIL.

Conclusion

It can be established with fair degree of certainty that ISIL has the intention and resolve to kill large numbers of innocent civilians. What further exacerbates this threat is ISIL increasing its control over large urban territories, amassing huge amounts of cash, and building up a global network of recruits through social media. Reports also claim that ISIL already has sleeper cells in Lebanon. Further, it has forged alliances with other terrorist groups. The ISIL terrorists are apparently gaining steady access to the basic requirements for developing their own chemical bombs. The vast global network also provides them access to radicalised recruits who might possess technical knowledge to build crude chemical devices. ISIL has access to vast resources that fund its terror activities. Unfortunately, there are a number of like-minded terror groups and organisations that provide ISIL essential funding and a global network of recruits.⁵⁰ Besides occupying territories of land in Iraq, Yemen and Syria, ISIL also controls large oil fields within these territories. This is yet another source of monetary assets that can help ISIL bribe corrupt officials in Russia or Pakistan in order to gain access to sensitive nuclear or radioactive materials.

The primary objective of ISIL is to facilitate the return of the Caliphate. Between the territory ISIL controls in Syria and its growing gains in Iraq, the militants have managed to secure a significant swath of territory, stretching from the outskirts of Aleppo in the west to towns in Iraq's east.⁵¹ The Indian intelligence agencies have sounded an alarm following reports of the growing presence of the ISIL in Afghanistan's Farah and Nangarhar provinces.⁵² India apprehends that if ISIL spreads across Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, it could "pose a long-term threat to South Asia".⁵³ It is clear that central to ISIL's notion of developing build its colossal army, it aspires to besiege and control territory spanning from Morocco and Spain out to Sri Lanka and the border of China within the next five years.⁵⁴ To prevent the spread of ISIL's influence and territory, the international community must take necessary military and political steps with immediate effect. Besides, the law enforcement and intelligence agencies must be reinvigorated with new strategies and methods to prevent ISIL from spreading its tentacles. Efforts must be made towards greater intelligence-sharing between the India and Pakistan to destroy any safe havens set up by the Islamic State militants in the region.

There is no ready defence against the threat of chemical or any other form of WMD terrorism. However, the emerging risks of chemical terrorism will escalate if the prevailing trends remain unchecked. The terrorists failed to seize nuclear weapons and materials in the aftermath of the political turmoil following the

breakdown of the Soviet Union. They might see the prevailing political instability in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region as another opportunity to realise their goal of securing chemical weapons or materials. The critical need of the hour is an institutionalised system of high-level guidance based on effective intelligence and oversight to deal with the threat of emerging chemical terrorism in Asia and other parts of the world.

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5

Financing of Terrorism in Asia: Emerging Trends

Vivek Chadha

Terrorism has witnessed striking evolutionary trends in the last few years. The most challenging and radical amongst these has been the rise of the Islamic State (IS). This has also been accompanied by a number of other ideologically driven terror groups, which have in most cases displayed levels of intolerance and disdain for life that has come to characterise their modus operandi. These evolutionary trends have been highlighted in region and country-specific articles of this volume. This paper concentrates more specifically on the financing of terrorism. It is this essential facet, which is often rightly described as the lifeblood of terrorism, given the sustenance that it draws from a ready and sustained flow of finances.

Terrorism for all its commonalities in terms of the use of violence, exploitation of mass media and funding systems, does have distinct characteristics, which makes each example unique. An assessment of the emerging trends of terrorism in Asia must therefore be accompanied by a cross-section of case studies, which can help provide a broad-based analysis of these trends. The chapter takes up three case studies in order to establish common trends, as well as differences that are prevalent in the regions of Asia. The first case study of this selection includes the funding pattern of the IS, which has emerged as the most affluent terrorist group in the world. Its rapid rise and influence on strategic affairs makes it all the more relevant and interesting. The second deals with the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The LeT, which began with its focus firmly on Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in India, has evolved as one of the best organised and fanatical terror outfits that has made its presence felt well beyond its initial target area. It has also established a well-oiled and resilient funding system that has successfully withstood pressure

from countries like the US. The third case study analyses the financing of Indian Mujahideen (IM). Though much smaller than the previous two and with limited funding resources at its disposal, the IM has morphed into a weapon of proxy war for Pakistan. Given its predominant funding from its master and benefactor, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the group has become an example of how Pakistan has successfully exploited radical and disillusioned youth in the country to forge an instrument of hate.

The chapter suggests that terrorist groups tend to exploit every possible opening available to them for sourcing, transfer and utilisation of funds. It is also evident that they remain flexible in their approach towards sourcing and transfer of funds. As and when a source or channel dries up, alternate means are employed to sustain the financial needs of the network. The ability of a group to sustain itself also improves as a result of the diversity of sources employed, which provide an inherent redundancy within the financial structure. The combination of modern means of communicating with potential donors, globalised transfer systems and age-old value transfer mechanisms has made the financial network of some of these groups extremely resilient and resistant to external impact. The only limitation that some of them like the IS face is the potential gap between demand and supply, which can be impacted by external action against highly cash rich sources like extraction and smuggling of oil.

There are a number of terrorist groups in Asia, however, the selection of case studies has been based on three factors. *First*, an attempt has been made to analyse terrorist organisations, which carry out their funding in very distinct ways. The methods employed by the groups are unique and establish a trend, which helps draw relevant conclusions for the larger challenge of the financing of terrorism as relevant to Asia. In essence, these trends reflect upon the importance of local sourcing of funds, external support patterns, exploitation of technology and new media as tools of terror funding. *Second*, besides the factor of internal funding, which has been witnessed in the past as well, the IS presents a rare case study of a group which physically controls a geographical area and not only exploits it for funding but also administers it through the same resources. *Third*, while all three groups are distinct, with their signature operational patterns, however, each of these has either directly or indirectly impacted India and its citizens. This has been witnessed in the form of terror strikes in case of LeT and IM, and recruitment in case of all three – the larger challenge of radicalisation and a potent threat to Indian national security. This makes the case studies relevant to evolving security concerns, as they directly impinge upon present and future threat perceptions. In a larger context, with the exception of the IM, the other two terrorist groups assessed, are equally relevant for countries in Asia and for the world at large. The case studies aim to provide a broad-based assessment of the sources, means of

transfer and utilisation of terror funding. In doing so, the chapter provides a comparative perspective of the financing of terrorism and its key differentiating characteristics.

CASE STUDIES

Islamic State

The meteoric rise of the IS is a phenomenon which few could have forecast. It successfully secured areas in a blitzkrieg that has few parallels amongst terrorist groups the world over. The capacity of forces at the disposal of the group clearly indicated a well-established and affluent system of funding operations. This is especially the case, since the IS fought against state forces in both Iraq and Syria. The IS also repudiated the conventional understanding that terrorist groups are amorphous, decentralised and virtually invisible organisations, which come to the fore only when they eventually strike at their targets. The Al Qaeda reinforced this belief and emerged as a highly evolved model, which had the capacity to function despite the combined force of some of the most powerful and resourceful countries in the world. It did not believe in capturing and holding territory to further their ideological objectives. nor did they establish physical control to support their funding efforts.

In contrast, the IS at the peak of its power had succeeded in occupying almost 40 per cent of Iraqi territory in 2014.¹ The area under control in Syria is an even more shocking 50 per cent of the country.² This marked a reversion to traditional methods employed by insurgents, wherein, they controlled areas and virtually ran a parallel government in liberated zones. The IS decision to hold territory and fight against national armies despite their superior capability was based on the local support base derived from the Sunni population and erstwhile military commanders of Saddam's army.³ The sustenance and success was equally reliant on the substantial financial muscle created and sustained by the IS.

The IS strategy is aimed at controlling large geographical areas both in Iraq and Syria, thereby, giving the group the advantage of exploiting existing resources there. The most rewarding for IS was the capture of oil wells, which was seen as the prime asset in these areas. There are different assessments regarding funding generated from the sale of oil. Amongst these, the *Newsweek* suggested that the areas under the occupation of IS can produce 80,000 barrels of oil per day. The control over oil resources in Syria is even larger, with a potential of 385,000 barrels, which is 60 per cent of the capacity of the country.⁴ As per last year's estimates, when the IS had greater military control over its areas and the price of oil was in the range of \$ 80 per barrel, discounted sale of oil gave the IS an estimated \$ 1.5 to 3.6 million per day.⁵ A more conservative estimate by the

International Energy Agency, places the total output per day at 20,000 barrels, given the challenges of continued extraction over time.⁶ The UN Security Council report on the IS suggests that its earning per barrel is in the range of \$ 18 to \$ 35, which translates to an income of \$ 846,000 to \$ 1,645,000 per day.⁷ However, with a drop in the price of oil, challenges of extracting oil from existing wells, bombing of some of the wells by the US and recapture of areas, the revenues generated by the IS could have appreciably dropped.⁸ Despite some of Iraq's neighbours being a part of the coalition fighting the IS, deals with the group at discounted rates continued to be struck, which became a mutually beneficial situation, providing the IS with the much needed market to maintain its considerable ground forces.⁹

Another advantage that the IS gained through the control of territory was the large-scale seizures of assets, especially banks. Looting of the Iraqi Central Bank at Tikrit gave the group an estimated \$ 1.5 billion. This has been accompanied by the sale of looted valuables that the IS could sell in the international market. The most lucrative amongst these are the ancient artefacts from various sites, a third of which are controlled by the IS. The looting of ninth century B.C. grand palace of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud could have potentially led to a large source of income.¹⁰ This has since been supplemented by similar attempts at selling artefacts in the black market for antiquities.¹¹

Crime as a source of income has also extended to a more traditional source of funding by undertaking large-scale kidnappings for ransom. The trend is not peculiar to the IS, with a United Nations (UN) estimate indicating payment of \$ 120 million from 2004 to 2012 to different terrorist groups.¹² In contrast, the IS is estimated to have earned \$45 million in 2014 alone.¹³

The group has also been taxing the people in areas under its control. Not only have the common people and businesses been taxed in occupied areas, the IS has also raised additional revenues by taxing minority communities through the levy of *jizya*, or minority tax.¹⁴

Much like other radical groups, IS has also been funded by donations and charities, primarily from within the Gulf region, though a percentage has also come from Western countries.¹⁵ These collections are moved as cash across the border to support IS activities. There is also increasing evidence of employment of modern methods of communication like websites and social media (e.g., Twitter) by the group to raise funds.¹⁶ Amongst the case studies that have emerged, some suggest the exploitation of platforms like Twitter for seeking donations. Once the response was received, the potential supporters were asked to purchase international prepaid cards. The number of the card was sent through Skype. This number was thereafter sold at a lower price to raise funds for the group.¹⁷ Case studies also suggest that the IS supporters have employed the concept of

crowd funding, which is increasingly being seen as an effective method of collecting funds for corporate projects as well as start-ups. This entailed widespread use of social media as a medium for collections. A case study reveals the following:

On May 31, 2014, an individual was arrested and charged with two counts of receipt and possession of an unregistered firearm silencer. On September 16, 2014, a federal grand jury in Rochester, New York, returned a seven-count indictment charging him with three counts of attempting to provide material support and resources to ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and Levant], among other charges.

According to the criminal complaint, the individual used Twitter to post and re-post tweets expressing support to various terrorist groups and violent extremism, and seeking donations to assist foreign fighters in Syria. The complaint alleged that he stated that money is the largest resource for extremists and people should fight with their money as well as with their bodies and words. He urged people to donate money, often times a third of their salary, as it is considered a type of jihad. These tweets would sometimes list specific weapons and the amount needed to purchase them. One example included asking for specific cash donations of US\$ 5,000 from each family.¹⁸

The IS has also received support and funding from private and government sources in the region. It is appreciated that this has primarily come from Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However, external pressure from the international community has led to action being initiated by the Saudi Government. “Grossing as much as \$ 40 million or more over the past two years, ISIS [IS] has accepted funding from government or private sources in the oil-rich nations of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait – and a large network of private donors, including Persian Gulf royalty, businessmen and wealthy families.”¹⁹ The weak enforcement regime, especially in Kuwait and Qatar has been acknowledged by the US Government, despite these countries being its allies. Cohen feels that “a number of fundraisers operating in more permissive jurisdictions – particularly in Kuwait and Qatar – are soliciting donations to fund extremist insurgents, not to meet legitimate humanitarian needs”.²⁰ Funds have also been collected from countries beyond Asia. Reports have emerged from the UK, where Muslims have been pressurised to donate for bogus charities, which are supporting the IS.²¹

There is also increasing evidence that the IS has exploited the drug trafficking business. Russian Federal Drug Control Service suggests that the IS share of drug money could be upto\$1 billion. These are transported through the Balkan route and also grown in Iraq.²²

The different sources of funding are complemented by adoption of equally wide-ranging fund transfer methods. Amongst these, the most commonly exploited options are couriers, wire transfers, hawala and exchange houses.²³ The IS has also employed legal banking channels, Money Transfer Service Schemes

(MTSS) and smuggling of valuables like gold.²⁴ The IS gained control of a number of bank branches in its occupied territories. While the government attempted to block international financial transactions, yet the IS has attempted to retain access to international banking through correspondent banking channels. These are exploited to move money through routine transfers and payment for trade, in order to circumvent existing restrictions. The IS also employs banking and other financial networks available in vicinity of the areas under their control to further enlarge their financial footprint and maintain the flow of funds.²⁵

Along with modern means of fund transfer, supporters of the IS have also been employing value transfer services like hawala, which fill a void left by banking restrictions. These are also more difficult to regulate and monitor, especially on an international financial platform. Cash transfers also provide very basic, yet effective means for transferring funds. According to a recent case study:

A passenger from EU [European Union] member state arrived in Istanbul's Sabiha Gokcen Airport with four large pieces of luggage and two sports bags. Upon suspicion by the competent authorities at the airport, he was interviewed and found to be in possession of €3,500. The passenger stated that he was visiting and would go back to his homeland in a week's time. Upon search of his luggage, many pairs of tracking boots, jeans, IS-labelled t-shirts and sweatshirts and torches were found. He was denied entry and was added to the Turkish no-entry list.²⁶

It is difficult to estimate the utilisation of funds collected by the IS. However, it is reasonably evident that these are being employed to run the elaborate war-waging establishment created by the IS. They are also supporting the areas captured to support the civic amenities. In many cases, monetary compensations are being provided to fighters and their families, depending on their expertise and special skills.

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)

The LeT is amongst the most well-organised terrorist groups, with a wide support base, operating from Pakistan. The group was established in 1991, not surprisingly coinciding with the early years of the disturbance in the J&K. The group was formed by Hafiz Saeed, and was active in the J&K, by 1993, leading the foreign component of fighters, with Pakistan having neutralised the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), through its proxy the Hizbul Mujahideen(HM). The LeT provided the resilient element amongst the terrorists, further introducing the tactics of *fidayeen* attacks subsequently. The strength of the LeT flowed from the support it received from the ISI, which not only mentored the group, but also trained and oversaw its operations.

The LeT emerged as a terrorist arm in 1990, from the *Jamaat-ud-Dawa* (JuD),

which was formed in 1985.²⁷ It operates under the garb of a charitable establishment. However, this functions more as a smokescreen, with the advantage of enlarging its base amongst the poor and illiterate, who in turn become potential candidates for its global jihad. This image also helps create a suitable environment for seeking donations from common citizens within Pakistan, thereby providing the LeT its biggest source of funding. The duplicity of the organisation has been emphasised by classified US Government reports leaked in the past. It suggests that “some of JUD’s budget, using funds raised both from witting donors and by fraud, is dedicated to social services or humanitarian relief projects, while some is used to finance LT operations”.²⁸ The methods employed for generating funds by the group include seeking hides of animals sacrificed by the people during the holy festival of *Eid-al-Adha*. Stephen Tankel quotes an example wherein, a bag, for the hide, was sent to a volunteer in Pakistan with the message, “If you support the dominance of Islam then help us.”²⁹ This is reinforced by yet another study, which suggests the potential scale that can be achieved, especially given the well-organised methods followed by the group. In 2008, more than a million goats and sheep, as well as an equal number of cows were slaughtered. Of these the JuD collected enough to help them raise \$ 1.2 million.³⁰ The same was reported yet again in 2013, despite a ban on the terror group. During the year, it aimed to collect 1000,000 hides, with each selling for approximately \$ 50.³¹

A simpler, open and more effective method followed by the group is placement of donation boxes at shops in markets in Pakistan. This has been employed consistently to support the activities of the LeT, and continues to fund its activities.³²

The LeT also collects its funds from the expatriate Pakistani and Kashmiri community. A large percentage of the same is generated in the UK.³³ Similarly, the LeT-JuD combine also exploits the humanitarian work of the group to seek money from Saudi Arabia, which is partly utilised for building madrassas and mosques, while its inflated billing caters for a percentage to be pumped into terrorism.³⁴ Fake charities have sprung up in countries like the UK, to coerce the Muslim population to donate money, a percentage of which comes to the LeT.³⁵ According to a report which quotes an Intelligence Bureau dossier, the LeT received 60 per cent of its funds for the Mumbai 26/11 attacks from donors outside Pakistan, while the balance was collected from within.³⁶

Besides donations, LeT and its affiliates have also received funding directly from the state in Pakistan. The Punjab government gave a grant of \$ 82 million in 2010 to the JuD for charity, which was clearly in contravention to international perception of the JuD and its affiliates. The US Department of State had blocked the properties of LeT, JuD and the Falah-e-Insaniyat, as part of the counter terrorism initiative.³⁷ This was repeated yet again in 2013, when the Punjab

government allocated Rs 61 million to a terrorist camp Markaz-e-Taiba, near Muridke. This is an arm of the JuD, which has been banned for its terror related activities.³⁸

The JuD has also been involved in running businesses in Pakistan in order to raise money for funding their activities. This includes hospitals, fish farms and selling carpets. Agriculturists are asked to give 10 per cent of their earnings, a practice called *ushr*.³⁹ The LeT is also involved in drug trade, which helps it raise substantial funding to fund its terror activities. An estimate places this figure at 5000 tons at a cost of \$ 2.5 billion.⁴⁰

The LeT has a large cadre strength, and it uses the funds collected to train and pay for the cadres, as also run the organisation that supports the enterprise. A report suggests that the LeT spends \$ 330 for every recruit for the *Daura-e-Aam* (basic) course and \$ 1,700 for the three-month advanced course. This raises the operating costs to beyond \$ 5 million per year. A large part of this is directly borne by the ISI.⁴¹

In conjunction with the ISI, the LeT has also been involved in moving counterfeit currency, thereby using the accruals to raise money for its terrorist activities.⁴² This has been pumped through criminal networks and smuggled by couriers, limiting the possibility of direct involvement of the terrorists themselves. The LeT has employed cash, legal and hawala channels to move funds for terror activities.⁴³ The investigation of 26/11 attacks provides an overview of the means employed for transferring funds. This includes handing over cash of approximately \$ 40,000 to operatives like David Headley, a conspirator in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Money was also transferred through banking channels, exploiting branches in the J&K. Finally, small amounts were transferred in cash to ensure that movement of funds does not raise suspicion.⁴⁴

Indian Mujahideen (IM)

The IM is considered an offshoot created by former cadres of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). It became active in 2007, ostensibly as a reaction to the perceived wrongs against Muslims in India.⁴⁵ A series of major terrorist strikes in 2008 were attributed to the group, after which, it came into the mainstream of terrorism in the country.

IM, much like a number of other groups operating in India, has received active support from Pakistan in the form of safe sanctuaries, training, funding and logistical support to undertake strikes.⁴⁶ This has been accompanied by active involvement of groups like the LeT and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI).⁴⁷

A large percentage of funding of the IM came from extortion, which was organised by their representatives in India and further coordinated by others in countries like the UAE. As an illustration, "Several operatives like Noor@Anwar

and Abdul Wahid@Khan continued to stay in the UAE in order to collect and supply funds to the field operatives. The absconding accused Amir Reza Khan continued to collect money for the IM through extortion from businessmen and received amount of about nearly 10 crores in 2010, when he participated in the extortion from Kolkata in India.⁴⁸ Extortion has been an easy and ready source of income for the group.⁴⁹

Another criminal activity the group has used for raising funds includes bank robberies: "According to Madhya Pradesh Anti-Terror Squad (ATS), the robbery of 13 kg gold (worth ₹ 2.5 crore) was planned and executed by the same men. They had robbed five banks in Dewas, Itarsi and two other places in the state, and are also suspected to be behind the 2008 Ahmedabad blasts."⁵⁰ It is also open to the idea of kidnapping rich individuals, in order to raise large amounts of money for supporting its activities.⁵¹

The IM has also received funding from the ISI, which has been utilised for not only terrorist activities, but also sustenance of individual cadres and their families.⁵² The extent of funding from the ISI is indicated by the sums that have been referred to in the charge sheet filed in the court by the NIA. By mid-2013, the ISI had already given Rs 25 crore for supporting the cadres.⁵³

The IM cadres have also resorted to collection of funds as part of *zakat*, which is meant to support the poor, and in the name of Islam. However, a part of this has been utilised for undertaking terrorist activities and supporting the group in India.⁵⁴

Former SIMI members and IM cadres have also been involved in counterfeit currency rackets. The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad arrested Asrar Ahmed Abdul Hamid Tailor, a computer trainer in the case.⁵⁵

The methods of transfer used by the IM include hawala and money transfer services. Instead of directly getting involved in money transfer, IM utilises the services of supporters and overground workers and has in turn used them as a convenient conduit for channelling funds. It has also explored the potential of creating similar networks in Nepal.⁵⁶

The IM cadres have also reinforced the well-established reality that terrorist strikes do not need large financial support and can be executed with as less as 500.⁵⁷

ASSESSMENT OF CASE STUDIES

The aforementioned three case studies represent diverse regional locations, country-specific areas of relevance, different conditions and unique environments in which the financing of the groups takes place. While the IS is the most potent terror group amongst the three, its impact has been limited to radicalisation of youth and their recruitment, in some cases from the Indian perspective. However,

its potential to have a direct bearing on India's security could increase over a period of time. In contrast, the LeT, has been and remains the most serious external terror threat to India. It has been instrumental in carrying out a number of terror strikes, with the 26/11 attack as the most well planned and potent. The IM has faced a number of arrests in the recent past, which has adversely impacted its capability. However, the influence of Pakistan on its funding and employment, could become a catalyst in its eventual evolution.

The case studies suggest a diverse system of raising finances by the groups involved. This includes external funding from countries that hope to extract strategic mileage from the support extended, or donations by religious bodies or individuals who support the cause. Funding is also internal from different sources. This includes looting, kidnapping, counterfeit currency, local taxation to name a few. In every case, though with a varying degree of expertise, the groups have successfully been able to exploit modern tools of communication and movement of funds to circumvent legal roadblocks. This has also been accompanied by old and traditional methods like cash couriers and hawala (See Figure 1). Despite these broad similarities, there are variations which distinguish the funding characteristics of each group. It is these factors which make each of these groups unique with regard to their funding characteristics.

Differentiating Factors

Amongst the three groups analysed, the IS alone has relied on the ability to capture and hold ground. This has the closest resemblance to a military campaign. As a result, the group gets unfettered access to the resources offered by the area under occupation, in terms of oil wells, bank deposits, extortion of the population and business and trade routes across borders. This has led to a sudden spurt of finances in the IS coffers, making it arguably the richest terrorist group in the world.⁵⁸ However, this strength could well become its weakness, as its ability to administer the area could come under strain as and when these resources start diminishing, as is already evident post the US bombing of oil wells and tighter restrictions on smuggling through oil tankers into neighbouring countries. The ability of the IS to secure funding for terrorist activities is a unique case study in the existing environment, despite the world being far more resistant to the idea of terrorism, as compared to the decades of the Cold War when the erstwhile USSR and USA were supporting rival groups to seize control over regions.

Amongst the most important distinguishing factors between the groups is the manner in which they have been created and employed. From this perspective, the LeT is different from the IS and IM, since it has been created specifically as a tool of proxy war against India. As a result, it receives a large percentage of its funding from the ISI, an internal source, which is essentially an example of state

sponsorship. Moreover, though the IM also receives its funds from the ISI, it does so from an external source. This enhances the resilience of both groups, at least from the perspective of funding, reinforcing their ability to sustain their organisations and conduct acts of terrorism. In contrast, the IS may well be the richest terrorist organisation, however, its vulnerability remains a limitation which can be exploited by states, as seen with the bombing of oil wells by the US and its allies.

Drug money has played an important part in funding terrorism, especially in Asia. The three case studies suggest that it is primarily the IS and LeT, which have employed this source, though more through its indirect exploitation as a result of trafficking. This is based on IS and ISI's involvement in funnelling revenues earned from its proceeds for terrorism.⁵⁹ It also creates a linkage between terror finance channels and criminal syndicates, which are exploited to facilitate trafficking, as witnessed in Nepal and Bangladesh.⁶⁰ This helps diversify the sources of funding and forces state agencies to look beyond the traditional threats emanating from terrorism. It also enhances the resilience of terror funding as crime increases the number of stake holders in the funding chain, thereby sustaining funding through innovative means adopted by crime syndicates.

The degree to which an external power invests in the activities of any terror group has an impact on its efficacy. A prime example of the same is Pakistan's involvement in producing and trafficking counterfeit currency, which allows both the LeT and IM to exploit its potential to raise funding. The involvement of state apparatus in terror funding makes its sourcing and channels more robust and ensures a degree of reliability in funding efforts. On the other hand, the IS controls the area under its occupation which makes counterfeit currency as a source of funding irrelevant for them.

The utilisation of funds also throws up two areas of differentiation between the terror groups. The IS, given the independent area under its control, spends a percentage of its funds on governance-related activities. In contrast, the JuD is involved in charity efforts, as part of the smokescreen created to obfuscate the terror activities of LeT. A comparison between the two suggests that the LeT, free from the encumbrances of funding and supporting local administration, is more likely to sustain its activities, unlike the IS.

It is evident from the sources of funding of the three groups that there is a combination of internal and external funding as relevant to each of these. However, what differentiates the groups is the scale and percentage of each, which is not revealed in the accompanying figure. The IS generates a large majority of its funding internally through oil revenues, local taxation, looting of financial institutions and museums and kidnapping. While it does receive donations from abroad as also a degree of sponsorship, purely in percentage terms, it is a small proportion of the total earnings. The LeT receives most of its funding through

donations and charity. This, as the case study suggests, flows both from within the country and the sympathisers abroad, thus balancing out its reliance on internal and external sources. Similarly, the business interests of the LeT/JuD are spread across Pakistan and beyond, which help the group source its funding. In contrast, the IM relies on its funding primarily on external sources, in Pakistan, given the limited influence it wields in India. This constrains its ability to raise donations locally.

As a result of a combination of internal and external funding, the three groups have been able to diversify their funding to varying degrees. In case of the IS, its reliance on local sources could become a challenge, as and when its control over the occupied territories weakens. This will adversely affect its ability to retain the kind of influence and control that is visible at present. The IM is also primarily dependent on Pakistan for its sustenance. Its continuing effectiveness therefore remains captive to the flow of funds from its principle sponsor. In contrast, the LeT has been successful in generating funds, despite a ban on the group and the JuD. This clearly illustrates its resilience, deep roots both in Pakistani society and prominent fund raisers abroad and finally its ability to reinvent itself in the face of adversity. The group is therefore likely to sustain its operations and remain a potent threat for India and the world at large. This comparison provides an indicator for other terrorist groups in Asia as well. Groups which are successful in diversifying their funding are more likely to sustain their activities, as compared to others which fail in this critical endeavour.

LeT is the only group, which despite not controlling a geographical area like the IS, runs legitimate business interests in Pakistan. This is conducted as part of its endeavour to raise funding and support its activities. Unlike the LeT, the IM does not have state sanction and the IS is the government in its areas of control.

Common Factors

The most prominent common factor to the three case studies is their success in exploiting Islam or its specific sects, in order to extract donations. While the degree of success and influence of the three groups varies, as has been discussed in the chapters dealing with this aspect; however, they have been able to successfully exploit prevailing sentiments and to an extent shape them. In the case of the IS, this has been most successful, spearheaded by the use of modern communication tools. Using Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Youtube, Skype, etc. the group has been able to turn globalisation on its head. Each of these have become useful instruments of conflict, serving to not only influence hearts and minds, but also loosen the purse strings of potential donors. The LeT has been more traditional in its approach, employing some of these tools, though not with similar success. For them, the call for saving Islam at gatherings in Pakistan and

placement of collection boxes at shops has been a more successful method of collecting funds. The IM's success has been the least, though, it has made forays into this field by exploiting the system of *zakat*, to misuse donations for promoting terrorism.

The channels for fuelling funds used by the groups are similar. However, the IS has a much larger global footprint that brings its collections and donations from a number of countries. The LeT is the next, with sympathisers in Europe contributing to its cause, besides the domestic support base. In both these cases, a variety of means for transfer of funds, including cash, legal channels, MTSS and hawala, are utilised. The reach and impact of the IM is limited in comparison, with funds primarily moving from Pakistan in addition to local sources. This is done through the same channels, with the possible exception of banking.

The utilisation of funds, despite the differentiating factor related to the IS, does involve similarities. While the majority of funding is utilised for supporting the organisational structure of the groups, a smaller percentage is employed for terrorist attacks. This is borne out by the sheer scale of funding needed for payment of cadres, procurement of weapons, training and logistics associated with supporting actual acts. The proportion of this percentage varies based on the size of an organisation and the sophistication of equipment employed. For this reason, the IS, given its conventional weapon systems employed and cadre strength employs the maximum for this purpose, followed by the LeT and thereafter the IM.

Conclusion

An assessment of the aforementioned case studies clearly suggests that terrorist groups are not bound by specific funding options. They have and will continue to exploit any opening that is provided to them to seek funds from every possible source. The utilisation of external and internal sources for funding, exploitation of an age old systems like hawala, as well as modern means like money transfer systems and banks, further supported by social media and online chats, reinforces the view that terrorists have been successful in remaining a step ahead of intelligence and enforcement agencies, when it comes to funding patterns.

The case studies suggest a flexible and responsive system that has been evolved by terrorist groups in their quest for ensuring continuous supply of finances. This has been facilitated by porous and poorly manned borders, as seen in the case of IS, complete state complicity in case of LeT and external support witnessed in the context of IM.

The trends also highlight the need for greater international cooperation and pressure on countries and institutions, which are an integral part of the financial system, yet prefer to exploit existing loopholes to further their limited strategic

or domestic interests. The case of Kuwait and Qatar, both allies of the US and Pakistan, in its self-destructive quest to seek parity with India, are examples of this tunnel vision.

This limitation is also a reflection of the inability of the international community to force substantive action against errant countries, despite concerted efforts, especially after 9/11. Security Council resolutions 1373 and 1624 were attempts at criminalising the financing of terrorism, freezing of funds, deny financial support to terrorist groups and share information with member countries.⁶¹ In addition, resolutions 1267, 1989, 2161, 2170, 2178 have attempted to curb the financing of terrorism, including funding as a result of trade with groups like the IS, Al Qaeda and Al Nusra Front.⁶² The UN Security Council unanimously accepted action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in order to curb the financing of IS.⁶³ Though there has been a degree of impact of these curbs on countries neighbouring Iraq and Syria, yet, it is inadequate to curb the flow of finance to groups like the IS. This has led to differing approaches by individual countries, which undertake action against the financing of terrorism, according to their perceived strategic interests. Similarly, since the focus of attention of major world powers remains on the IS, groups like the LeT and IM continue to collect funds with impunity, as a result of the state sponsorship by Pakistan.

Despite these limitations, some of these successive UN resolutions have certainly increased pressure on countries which were either directly involved in funding activities to further their strategic or religious interests or willing to turn a blind eye to individual led financing of groups not necessarily directly affecting their national security. This has further resulted in enactment of counter-terrorism laws and incorporation of statutes which criminalise the financing of terrorism. It has also led to greater cooperation amongst member countries and given an impetus to functioning of organisations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which provide the guidelines to fight the financing of terrorism.

The case studies suggest that a group which has reasonable control over an area is ideally suited to extract financial resources from it. This is all the more relevant when the area has a concentration of natural resources like oil fields, which provide the potential for sustaining a group like the IS. This is facilitated by weak and at times complicit neighbours. State sponsorship also remains a critical factor in sustaining terrorism, as is evident in case of both LeT and the IM. The stress on making legal channels more complicit with international regulations has also led to relatively weakly enforced systems like money transfer services and value transfer systems like hawala remaining relevant.

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Figure 1: Financing of Terrorism: A Tabular Assessment

Group	Sources											Method of Moving Money					Utilisation				
	External		Internal									Cash Gold	Legal Bank	MTSS	Hawala	Civic Adm	Welfare	Terror Setup	Terror Acts	Training	
IS	Yes	Yes	Business	State Sponsor	KFR	Looting	Tax	Donation	Charity	Drugs	Fake Notes	Cash Gold	Legal Bank	MTSS	Hawala	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	
LeT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
IM	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	?	?	Yes	Yes	?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Source: Derived from data in chapter. KFR - Kidnapping for Ransom. MTSS - Money Transfer Service Scheme

WEST AND CENTRAL ASIA

6

Islamic State and the Changing West Asian Geopolitics

Prasanta Kumar Pradhan

The emergence of the Islamic State (IS; also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS] and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant [ISIL]) has been an unprecedented event in the geopolitics of the West Asian region. The IS declared the establishment of a 'Caliphate' in June 2014 and Abu Baqr Al Baghdadi as Caliph. Since then it has captured a large swath of territories in Iraq and Syria including the border areas and controlling the entry points. By doing so it has challenged the governments of Iraq and Syria, and thereby engaged in a long-term military conflict with them. It has also challenged the existing regional political order by trying to redraw boundaries in the volatile region, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Turkey, Jordan, and Iran. The growth and capability of the IS can be measured from the fact that as of now it has already launched terror attacks in countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey. There is a growing concern among the countries of the region regarding the activities of the IS as they feel that it has emerged as a threat to their security as well as the existing political order in the region. Countries of the region have taken initiatives to fight against the IS, but there is an absence of a collaborative action on the ground strong enough to defeat the IS. The existing unease, competition and rivalry among the countries of the region have been a hindrance in building up a united front against the IS. Major regional powers have their own political, security and strategic priorities in the region, and hence, the fight against the IS receives insufficient attention. US and Russia are two major extra-regional players whose policies and decisions

have bearings on the IS as well as the regional geopolitics and security. In this context, this paper intends to analyse the impact of the rise of the IS on the geopolitical situation in West Asia.

The State of the Caliphate

Ever since the establishment of the Caliphate, the IS has been trying not only to consolidate its gains but also spread its activities and influence beyond its borders. Carving out a space for itself in north-western Iraq and north-eastern Syria, the IS occupies a large swath of territory with around eight million inhabitants.¹ It has discarded the Iraq-Syria border drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement claiming that the Agreement is illegitimate as there is no such border existing between the two countries.² At the same time, maintaining control over the gained territory has not been easy, as it has to fight the militaries of Iraq and Syria, as well as the coalition forces. Though there is no exact information regarding the estimates of the number of fighters involved with the IS, initial estimates by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) put it around 20,000 to 31,500.³ In November 2014, the Chief of Staff to the Iraqi Kurdish leader, Masoud Barzani, claimed that the total armed men under the Caliphate would be around 200,000.⁴ Recently, Brett McGurk, Special Presidential Envoy of the US to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, stated that about 30,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries around the world have joined the IS in Iraq and Syria.⁵ The IS has confiscated and looted the arms and weapons from the captured territories of Iraq and Syria. The defected military leaders have also managed to bring some weapons along with them. It is procuring arms from the black market as well.⁶

Initially, it was believed that oil from the captured oil fields constituted the largest source of the IS's income. It was estimated that the IS produced around 48 thousand barrels a day from wells in Iraq and Syria, and earned an estimated US\$ 1 to US\$ 3 million a day by selling the oil in the black market to the middlemen at a cheap price.⁷ Besides the sale of oil, looting banks in the captured territories, money received from kidnapping and ransom, selling artefacts, etc. have also emerged as other lucrative sources of financing the Caliphate. According to some estimates, IS looted US\$ 429 million after it raided Mosul's central bank in June 2014.⁸ The IS has sold antiquities estimated to be around US\$ 300 million,⁹ and in 2014 alone it received around US\$ 20 million as ransom money from kidnappings.¹⁰ Also, fake donations in the name of charities and other humanitarian activities from some of the Gulf countries reach the IS. The US treasury estimated that the IS received around US\$ 20 million¹¹ from such donations in 2014. In order to legitimise its rule, it also collects taxes and provides basic services to the people. The IS has portrayed itself as a legitimate ideological and political entity. More importantly, it presents itself as the most powerful

Sunni entity in the Iraqi-Syrian political and ideological landscape which is otherwise dominated by the Shiite regimes or militias.¹² In Iraq, there are no other strong Sunni groups to challenge the strength of the IS. This leaves the IS as the most dominant organisation present in the region. If the IS manages to stay for a longer period in an advantageous position vis-à-vis its Sunni rivals, it would become easier for it to transform itself into a socially embedded, political, economic and military presence in the region.¹³

Saudi Arabia, Iran and the IS

The contentious Saudi-Iran relations stand in the way of establishing a joint coalition against the IS. Presently, there is no single united front in the region to fight the IS. Though the regional countries are contributing militarily in the fight against the IS, a united front involving all the countries is missing. The regional countries very well realise the dangers posed by the IS and also understand that the spread of the IS should be checked immediately.¹⁴ But the regional political scenario and the relations among themselves and their own varying regional security priorities are the major hindrances. For instance, Iran has been supporting the regimes of Iraq and Syria to fight against the IS. The GCC countries, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt have chosen to join the US-led coalition to defeat the IS. A joint political understanding and military cooperation among the regional powers would put up a formidable challenge to the IS which is a common enemy for all of them, but it is yet to take shape.

With the emergence of the IS, the role of Iran has become increasingly significant in the region. The centrality of Iran can be measured from the fact that Iran enjoys significant influence on both Iraq and Syria. Assad is a strategic ally of Iran. Throughout the difficult period of protests and civil war in Syria, Iran has stood by the Assad regime. Iran has provided political support, funding and material support to the Assad regime.¹⁵ Without the Iranian support, it would have been even more difficult for the Assad regime to sustain in the face of internal political opposition, terrorist groups and external pressure. Similarly, the government of Haider Al Abadi in Iraq maintains strong ties with Iran. Ever since the removal of Saddam Husain, Iran-Iraq ties have witnessed a sea change with growing Iranian influence in Iraq.¹⁶ Bilateral ties in all important fields – political, economic, defence – have been strengthened significantly during last 10 years. Iran, for all practical purposes, would like to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq and Syria. Also, it is in the interests of Iran that the regimes of Baghdad and Damascus do not fall into the hands of IS or any other insurgent elements. Iran has also made significant economic investments in Iraq as well. Iran is providing substantial military and financial support to both Iraq and Syria in their fight against the IS.¹⁷ Because of Iran's troubled

relationship with the US, it did not join the global coalition against the IS led by the US.¹⁸ That Iran has chosen to strike at the IS without joining hands with the US reflects a deft Iranian strategy in Iraq and the region. Moreover, Iran, by going it alone, has asserted its strategic independence and regional leadership and dominance.¹⁹

The rise of the IS and its declaration of the Caliphate came both as a surprise and a challenge for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The growing cadre strength of the IS, its control over large parts of Iraq and Syria, running of a parallel economy within Iraq, activities in Syria and continuous killing of the people have all been causes of concern for the House of Saud. Saudi Arabia has already faced IS terror attacks on several occasions. The rise of IS also poses an ideological challenge for Saudi Arabia.²⁰ Islam has been the most dominant factor in Saudi foreign policy. Saudi Arabia claims itself to be the leader of the Muslim world. The location of the two holy places in its territory has helped Saudi Arabia maintain its dominance and influence in the Islamic world. The IS follows the Salafist ideology, which has been supported and promoted by Saudi Arabia. Thus, the announcement of the 'Caliphate' by the IS challenges Saudi ideological dominance in the region.²¹ Further, some Saudi youths being inspired by the IS's ideology and joining the organisation undermines the internal security of the Kingdom and also challenges the legitimacy of the House of Saud.

Saudi Arabia has lost a significant degree of influence in Iraq since the appointment of Nouri Al Maliki as the Iraqi Prime Minister. The coming to power of Maliki also meant Iran's growing influence in Iraq. Saudi Arabia believes that the Maliki government failed to effectively control the menace of terrorism and it accused Maliki of adopting sectarian policies,²² thus squarely placing the blame on him for the situation in Iraq. Maliki, in turn, accused Saudi Arabia of supporting the IS.²³ As a result, political and diplomatic relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia suffered. In Syria, Saudi Arabia faces the dual challenge of dealing with Bashar Al Assad and the IS. It has been at the forefront of opposition to the Assad regime and has severely criticised the atrocities perpetrated by the regime. It has also expressed its discontent over the lack of unified action against Assad by the US and international community. In Syria, Saudi Arabia has limited influence and that flows from its support for and financing of the Salafists in their fight against the Assad regime. But it has no lever over the IS. Riyadh believes that the removal of Assad from power in Syria would bring the necessary unity and strength to fight against the IS in Syria.²⁴ Saudi Arabia has reiterated its call for removal of Assad as the only possible condition to bringing stability in Syria.

The IS is trying to incite sectarian violence in the region by selectively attacking Shia mosques. It has launched attacks on Saudi Arabia and alleges that the Saudi regime is corrupt and illegitimate.²⁵ It calls for the overthrow of the Al Saud

regime and has proclaimed the goal of capturing the two holy places of Islam – Mecca and Medina. To incite sectarian violence in the Kingdom, the IS has targeted Shias in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia.²⁶ It has also undertaken attack of similar nature on Shiite mosques in Kuwait as well.²⁷ The relationship between Shias and Sunnis in Saudi Arabia has witnessed severe strain in the past. It was further animated during the Arab Spring when people in the Eastern Province, primarily Shias, protested against the regime. IS intends to further ignite the sectarian tension in the Kingdom by launching attacks on the Shiite mosques and to provoke the Shias against the regime.²⁸

The contentious relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a crucial factor hindering the establishment of a united military front against the IS. In December 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the formation of an Islamic military alliance of 34 Islamic countries, all of them members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to fight against the IS.²⁹ This is the latest Saudi initiative to build an alliance against the IS by inviting Islamic countries from West Asia, Africa and South Asia.³⁰ Saudi Arabia has included South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives in the coalition. The political and military success of the coalition is yet to be seen; however, there are two major challenges the coalition faces. Firstly, the formation of the coalition with a deliberate omission of Iran limits its capabilities to achieve its intended objective of defeating the IS. The formation of the coalition does not iron out the existing Saudi differences with Iran which is a major factor in building the region-wide coalition. Secondly, the members of the coalition are Arab/Islamic countries that are mostly friendly in their approach towards Riyadh. Still, political differences among them also exist which may emerge as a challenge in the way of achieving consensus among them.

The execution of Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr, a Shia cleric of Saudi Arabia, by the Saudi authorities along with 46 others has led to an outbreak of a political and diplomatic crisis in the whole region. Iran was quick to condemn Nimr's execution,³¹ and Saudi Arabia called it an Iranian interference in Saudi internal issue. Protesting against Saudi Arabia, a group of protesters forcefully entered into the Saudi embassy in Tehran and its consulate in Mashhad. In response, Saudi Arabia severed all ties with Tehran, recalled its envoy and asked the Iranian envoy to leave the Kingdom.³² Saudi Arabia received support from its neighbours such as UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait who also followed Saudi Arabia in recalling their envoys from Tehran. Saudi Arabia has also used its political clout over the regional organisations such as the GCC, Arab League and OIC who have also condemned the attack on Saudi embassy in Iran. Other countries such as Yemen and Sudan have also condemned the incident. Iraq has stood by Iran in criticising the Saudi regime for the execution of Nimr. This incident further widens the

Saudi-Iran rivalry and, thus, further narrowing the chances of any joint military force involving both Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Islamic State and the Kurdish Issue

With the emergence of the IS, the Kurdish issue has once again come back to the regional political scenario. The spread of the IS in Syria and Iraq has alarmed the regimes and Kurds alike. The Kurds have been fighting for independence and to carve out a territory for themselves in the border areas of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In the past, Turkey and Iraq have launched military strikes against the Kurds as both the countries are reluctant to cede their territory to them. The Iraqi Kurds have managed to achieve autonomy and have secured the Kurdish Autonomous region in the Kurdish-dominated north-eastern part of the country. They have also established their autonomous government in the region taking advantage of the political upheaval.³³ The spread of the IS into the Kurdish autonomous region led to a clash between the Kurds and the IS over control of territory. The Kurdish military known as the 'Peshmerga' have fought against the IS to protect the Kurdish territory. Though the relations between the Kurds and the Iraqi Government have long been tense, they have now started cooperating against the IS – their common enemy.³⁴ The US has also reportedly been supplying weapons to the Iraqi regime as well as the Kurds to fight the IS.³⁵

But the Turkish Government faces a different dilemma over the Kurdish issue. The Kurds in Turkey continue to face the wrath of the Turkish military as the government is not ready for granting any sort of independence or autonomy to them in its territory. Thus, the Kurds have started an armed struggle in the southern border area of the country led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Turkish Government has often launched military strikes against the Kurdish hideouts in Turkey and neighbouring Iraq. For Turkey, the Kurds represent a stronger security threat than the IS. Therefore, it wants to take advantage of the opportunity to strike Kurds as well.³⁶ Unlike Iraq, it discards any possibility of collaborating with the Kurds against the IS. After months of indecision, the Turkish Government finally decided to take part in the US-led coalition in military operation against the IS in July 2015.³⁷ It allowed the coalition forces to use its Incirlik airbase located at the south of the country which is close to its border with Syria for operations against the IS. It has been alleged that Turkey was initially reluctant to join the war against the IS, as it believed that the Kurds rather than the IS are the major security threat for its national security. Turkey, therefore, wants the US to target the Kurds simultaneously while launching attacks against the IS. The US supports the Syrian Kurds in their fight against the IS³⁸ – an approach it has adopted in Iraq where the Iraqi regime, Kurds and other tribal forces loyal to the regime have been brought together to fight the IS.

Kurds in Syria have achieved significant gains taking the advantage of the ongoing civil war. The Syrian Kurds have fought against the regime as well as the IS to hold on to their territory. The People's Protection Units, locally known as the *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* (YPG), is the military branch of the Syrian Kurdistan operating under their government led by the *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (Democratic Union Party; PYD). The continuing political and military success of the Kurds in northern Syria has been claimed as the 'Rojava (literally meaning, western Kurdistan) Revolution'³⁹ by the Kurds. The YPG has captured and hold on to the Kurdish-dominated areas in northern Syria after the regime's forces withdrew in 2012. Severe clashes have been witnessed between the YPG and the IS in their struggle for occupying territories in northern Syria. The Syrian Kurds have declared autonomy and intend to remain with a democratic Syria in future.⁴⁰ The US support for the Kurds infuriates Turkey. The Turkish apprehension lies in the fact that declaration of autonomy by the Syrian Kurds may stoke similar demands from the Turkish Kurds. As the YPG is closely linked with the PKK, the success of the YPG and the cooperation between YPG and the US has alarmed Turkey and affects the US-Turkey relationship, too.⁴¹ But for the US, the Syrian Kurds have been a reliable force against the IS. Thus the continuing chaos in Syria has been beneficial for the Syrian Kurds, and longer the conflict continues more time it gets to entrench and consolidate its gains.⁴²

Arab League and Its Proposal for a Joint Arab Military Force

With the aggravation of conflicts in the region in the aftermath of the popular protests, the Arab League has been activated. The organisation has been perceived as an ineffective body without any real powers. In order to maintain its effectiveness, legitimacy and acceptability among the people, it has been trying to rejuvenate itself in the wake of significant changes taking place throughout the region. As the protests slowly began to spread and intensify, one of the critical moves of the body came in 2011 when it condemned the responses of the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, and supported the rebels fighting against the Gaddafi regime. The organisation also supported the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in imposing a no-fly zone over Libya. Further, the Arab league sided with the opposition forces against the Assad regime in Syria. It also suspended the membership of Syria and has supported Assad's removal from power. In November 2011, the League officially recognised the National Coalition of Opposition Forces of Syria. It imposed sanctions on Syria, which include ban on banking and trade as well as travel ban on officials.⁴³ But no such action has been taken by the Arab League towards the conflict and instability in other Arab countries such as Yemen, Bahrain and Egypt. This shows the selective interference by the organisation and establishes the fact that the body still operates under the

influence of the wealthy and powerful Arab nations, with deep divisions among some member countries.

The emergence and spread of the IS activities has alarmed the Arab League. It has condemned the establishment of the Caliphate in Iraq and Syria by the IS. Arab League called upon its members to tackle the IS 'militarily and politically'.⁴⁴ Though the Arab League has adopted a tough political stand condemning the IS, the member countries have not been successful in forging any military coalition against the IS. It has strongly condemned the destruction of the cultural heritage by the IS stating it as 'odious crime'.⁴⁵ Besides Iraq and Syria, the worsening situation in Libya, due to continually increasing IS influence there, is also another major concern for the Arab League. Taking opportunity of the absence of a strong central authority in Libya, the IS has also captured a large swath of territory in the north of the country. The internationally recognised government of Libya has not been able to check the activities of the IS and sought the help of the Arab League to defeat the IS. Though the Arab League called for an 'Arab strategy' to fight Islamic State in Libya, no specific military and political strategy has yet been chalked out by the organisation.⁴⁶

Amidst growing tensions in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere there is a call by the countries of the region to form a joint Arab military force to face the security challenges. Such a proposal has been in the air since long but has not yet materialised. With the threat of the IS spilling over from Iraq and Syria and, the challenges emanating from Yemen, the necessity of such a force has been increasingly felt by the Arab League. Iraq is not in favour of establishment of such a joint military force as it believes that it may create further insecurity in the region.⁴⁷ Countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia are in the forefront supporting the idea of establishment of such a force. This issue was discussed in detail in the 26th Arab League Summit held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, in March 2015 and majority of the member states seemed to be in favour of establishing such a joint force. In May 2015, Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sameh Shokri, stated that "a vision to establish a joint Arab force' would be 'ready within the next four months",⁴⁸ but it has been delayed further. The success of the formation of such a military force will have repercussions for the regional politics as well. It may help keep the Arab states united in the face of a common security challenge emerging in the region. Also, the relationship of the Arab countries with Iran will be affected. There are certain practical difficulties which slow down the formation of the joint Arab force. Despite the expression of unity and solidarity, because of the security challenges in the region, the political differences among the member states of the Arab League still exist. For instance, Oman has differences over the regional politics with its neighbours such as Saudi Arabia. Qatar has also differences of opinion on several issues with Saudi Arabia and UAE. Egypt has differences

with Qatar over the Muslim Brotherhood. Bashar Al Assad is not liked by many of his Arab neighbours. Similarly, the current government in Baghdad is seen by its Arab neighbours to be under the heavy influence of Iran thus not to be relied upon completely.

US, Russia and the Evolving Geopolitics

The US has been at the forefront of leading the military strike against the IS with the formation of the 'Global Coalition to Counter ISIL'. The IS has killed US citizens and poses threat to the American interests and allies in the West Asian region. The US has expressed determination to protect the territory and sovereignty of Iraq from the control of the IS. Though the US has restrained itself from launching huge military aggression like the one it initiated against the Saddam Husain regime in 2003, it has sent 3,000 military advisers to Iraq who are monitoring and planning the aerial attacks on the IS targets. In September 2014, President Obama declared to 'degrade and destroy'⁴⁹ the IS. But the US realises that it will take a long time to completely destroy the IS as it has entrenched itself politically and militarily over the years. The US has ruled out deploying ground forces in Iraq. The former Chief of the US Army General, Raymond Odierno, believes that it may take 10 to 20 years to destroy the IS.⁵⁰ The coalition's offensives have till now produced limited results. Besides, the US is providing military support to the local opposition forces in Syria, Kurdish forces in Iraq and other tribal groups loyal to the Iraqi Government who are fighting against the IS. The US also intends to choke the financial flows to the IS. As oil exportation has been a major source of financing for the group, the US has been trying to check the cross-border supply of oil from Iraq. The US has also urged the UN member states to refrain from cutting any oil deals with the IS. Several oil facilities and mobile refineries have been targeted by the US military strikes in Iraq which has hit the revenue flow of the IS. In January 2015, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, claimed that the military strikes by the coalition forces destroyed about 200 oil and gas facilities which were used by the IS.⁵¹

While Iraq is an ally of the US, the Assad regime has been a challenge for the US policy. Traditionally, the regimes of Bashar Al Assad and before him his father Hafez Al Assad have been anti-US in their policy. Their close relationship with Iran and Hezbollah also made the US wary about the Syrian regime.⁵² Syria has been branded by the US a 'rogue state' which supports and sponsors terrorist groups and poses threat to the American national interests.⁵³ Thus, for the US, both the Assad regime and the IS represent threats to its national interests. Therefore, while launching military strikes against the IS positions, the US also holds the view that the Assad regime must be removed for the future of peace and stability of Syria.⁵⁴ The US has also the backing of the Gulf Arab states who

strongly demand removal of Assad from power and squarely put the blame of prevailing instability in Syria on the regime.

The Russian approach runs contrary to that of the US while dealing with the IS challenge in Iraq and Syria. From the beginning of the conflict in Syria, Russia has thrown its weight behind the Assad regime. Russia's support for Assad has been one of the determining factors in the political and security dynamics of Syria and also of the region. By supporting Assad, Russia has put up a challenge for the US and its Gulf Arab allies in the region. In the UNSC, Russia has vetoed the attempts by the US and some other European countries to condemn the activities of Assad and pass a resolution which could have allowed use of military force against the Assad regime. Rather, Russia has reiterated its continuous support for the regime in future.⁵⁵ Russia focuses more on protecting the regime while at the same time targeting the IS. It believes that strengthening the capability of the Assad regime by supplying weapons and training is an effective way of dealing with the IS. Russia is reportedly supplying weapons to the Assad regime in its fight against the IS and other armed opposition groups.⁵⁶ On September 30, 2015, Russia conducted its first airstrikes against the IS in Syria and claimed that the strikes were intended to provide "air support to the Syrian government forces in their fight against the Islamic State."⁵⁷

In September 2015, to establish a coordinated framework, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Russia formed an intelligence committee in Baghdad to coordinate the actions against the IS. The committee would be involved in sharing and analysing information as well as monitoring the movements of terrorists.⁵⁸ The involvement of Russia – the only extra-regional power in the group – comes because of the growing Russian concern for its nationals joining the IS. Russia has reportedly stated that around 2,400 Russian nationals have joined the terrorist group.⁵⁹ Apart from joining the war against the IS, Russian involvement also strengthens its strategic position in the Gulf, particularly in Iraq, vis-à-vis the US. Russia has already established a strong foothold in Syria. Its foray into the Gulf by engaging Iraq to deal with the IS gives further impetus to its policy in the region.

The US-Russia duel over the Syria situation has further escalated the intensity of regional politics. Though both US and Russia are targeting the IS, both have failed to cooperate and launch a unified attack on the IS. Both Putin and Obama strongly disagree over the course of action in Syria. Obama calls for removal of Assad as a necessary condition for the establishment of peace in Syria. Obama has expressed his desire to work with Putin and Iran to defeat the IS in Syria, but at the same time, he calls for a managed transition removing the Assad regime. Russia, on the other hand, believes that the regime of Assad and his military is the only viable force to fight against the IS. Complete divergence in the perceptions of the US and Russia over dealing with the IS has given a new twist to the situation

in West Asia. Russia has built up military forces in Syria which has caused the US concern. Though both US and Russia agree to work for a diplomatic solution to the crisis, their contrary approaches will have severe long-term impact on the politics and security of the region. Obama and Putin met on the side-lines of the G20 meet in November 15, 2015 in Turkey. Both the leaders agreed on a 'Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition'⁶⁰ in Syria, but the tactical differences between them over dealing with IS and Assad regime seem to continue.

Conclusion

The rise of the IS has deeply impacted the geopolitics of the West Asian region and posed a security threat. It has also added another dimension to the Saudi-Iran rivalry. The relationship between the two regional powers has worsened further. The old Kurdish issue once again has come to the limelight with the territorial expansion of the IS. The Kurdish forces are involved in fighting against the IS forces in order to prevent them from entering their territory. Kurds in Iraq have received the support of the US and the Iraqi Government as well in their fight against the IS. In the face of the emerging threats, Arab countries are mulling over formation of a joint Arab force, overlooking the political differences among them. The IS has prompted yet another US-led international military coalition in the region, which would perpetuate American military presence in the region. But the striking feature has been the involvement of Russian military in Syria against the IS; and thereby, providing military support to the Assad regime as well. The differences between US and Russia have been played out in the Syrian political scenario. Both countries have adopted contrasting postures, which does not help bring peace and stability to the region. The West Asian geopolitics is, thus, becoming more intricate with the emergence of the IS and the subsequent involvement of regional and extra-regional players.

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Iran and the Islamic State: Implications for India

M Mahtab Alam Rizvi

Introduction

The current dynamics in the West Asia region, in general and Iraq and Syria in particular, are focussed on the spread of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; also called the Islamic State of Syria and Levant [ISIL], Daeshor Islamic State [IS]), which has deteriorated the internal situation and raised doubts of uncertainty and insecurity in the region. The existing crisis has also changed the strategic dynamics of the region. The West Asian region has now become the epicentre of extremism with the existing governments unable to control its emergence due to their internal differences. The region has witnessed a bloody revolt by Sunnis against the Shia-dominated governments of Iraq and Syria. The IS, which has become as a fierce extremist group, has aims to alter the present geographical border of the region. The Western, especially the US, diplomacy in the region has been widely condemned by a whole slew of actors that saw the developments on the ground from their strategic interests as the IS conquered territory and massacred thousands of innocent people not only in the region but also in Europe and other Asian countries. For example, the recent attacks in Paris (France) on November 13, 2015, where the militant group killed more than 100 innocent people. The threat from Daesh has taken on new potency and spread into Europe since the jihadists committed coordinated gun and bomb attacks in Paris. The IS claimed responsibility for the wave of attacks in Paris, and said that France would remain at the “top of the list” of its targets. France is part of the US-led coalition that has been striking Daesh in Syria and Iraq for the past year.¹ Daesh also claimed responsibility for downing a Russian plane over Sinai province

that was carrying over 220 Russian crusaders in October 2015. The claim of responsibility was carried by the Aamaq website, which acts as a semi-official news agency of Daesh.² For Russia, defending Assad and confronting Daesh has become more important since the militants blew up the Russian plane.

On December 22, 2015, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted a resolution “to confront the Islamic State”. The resolution was supported by all member states. UNSC Resolution 2255 (2015) calls upon “Member States to move vigorously and decisively to cut the flows of funds and other financial assets and economic resources to individuals and entities on the List, and international standards designed to prevent the abuse of non-profit organizations, formal as well as informal/alternative remittance systems and the physical trans-border movement of currency”.³ The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, Philip Hammond, said that “the threat posed by Islamic State or Daesh must be confronted, underscoring that all countries claiming to fight the terrorist group must do what they said rather than directing the bulk of their attacks against non-extremist opposition groups”.⁴

Though Russian airstrikes in Syria again created conflict with the US. In December 2015, during the discussion, in the Security Council on UNSC Resolution 2254 (2015) for *Endorsing Road Map for Peace Process in Syria and Setting Timetable for Talks*, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said that “[the] resolution approved the November 14, 2015 agreement which referred to ways to re-implement the Geneva Communiqué. All three instruments constituted a platform for resolving the crisis in Syria”.⁵ He also pointed out that the Vienna plan was the only way that brought together all important players to find a workable and reasonable solution through talks with the Government and the “whole span” of the opposition. He added, “Only Syrian-led, comprehensive dialogue can put an end to the untold suffering of the Syrian people.”⁶ He stressed that it was a response to the endeavoured nuisance of an external solution on Syria. He requested all concerned countries not to involve in rhetoric and, instead, to be guided by the need to combat terrorism and find a political settlement of the conflict.

However, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, said that the resolution adopted by UNSC set up a clear road map that now there was urgent need of stop violence and the killing in Syria. He stressed, “A broadly supported process was needed to give the Syrian people a real choice between war and peace, and put Syria on the road to the political transition envisioned in the Geneva Communiqué.”⁷ He also pointed out that all concerned countries must accept the fact that there is clear division among international communities that the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, had lost the faith, capability and integrity to

stop the violence in his country and was unable to unite the Syrian people. The statements given by Russian and US leaders during the discussion in the UNSC clearly indicate that major international powers are still divided over Syria; and they are not able to set a clear agenda to fight against the terrorist groups.

On November 24, 2015, Russian Sukhoi-24 was downed by Turkey. This accident again created a gap between Russia and the West, including Turkey. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, warned Turkey that the misfortune with Su-24 shot down in Syria would have negative impact on Moscow-Ankara relations. Putin said, "Either way, our pilots and our plane were not posing a threat to the Republic of Turkey,"⁸ adding, "We have always regarded Turkey not only as a close neighbour, but also as a friendly state."⁹ He went on to say that "instead of contacting us immediately Turkey addressed their NATO partners – as if it was us who downed their plane, not vice versa. Do they want to put NATO at the service of Islamic State?"¹⁰ On other hand, the US President, Barrack Obama, defended Turkey and said that Ankara had the right to defend itself but also urged the two countries to "step back"¹¹ from the brink of conflict and seek out common interests – particularly the fight against the IS.

Brief Background of ISIS

ISIS is headed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Its main objective is to create a Sunni caliphate in the heart of the West Asian region. In February 2004, US ground troops arrested head of ISIL, al-Baghdadi, and put him in prison. However, in late 2004, he was released from jail. Immediately, after the release, he established himself in a very strong position among the extremist groups. Before the starting of the Syrian crisis in 2010, he became the head of the IS. IS which is comparatively new-fangled among the terror groups, however, has risen swiftly not only in the region but also all over the world. Initially, even intelligence agencies had little knowledge about the group. The group has also taken advantage of Sunni Iraqi dissatisfaction against Nouri al-Maliki's government. Sunni and Kurdish leaders have blamed Maliki's government and said that Sunnis in Iraq, including the Kurds, didn't get chance in the political process of the country and that they were even restrained from getting key positions in the country. IS has also enjoyed support from other Sunni fighters, including supporters of Saddam Hussein. Iraqi Sunnis feel that the IS would offer them better opportunities. It is also believed that the military accomplishment of the IS is a result of popular Sunni support in provinces of Nineveh and Anbar. "The failure of the Iraq Army became evidence in Mosul when a mere 800 men Islamic State force drove away an Iraqi contingent of 30,000."¹² While the regime in Baghdad is trying to get out from the crisis and control the spread of the terror group,

Kurds in Iraq look to have benefitted from the IS's acts by taking control of the oil facilities in Kirkuk.

Iraq's Internal Dynamics and Demands for Reforms

When crisis started in Iraq, Sunni and Kurdish leaders blamed Maliki's government for the present situation in the country and said that the new government under the leadership of new Prime Minister, Haider Jawad Kadhim Al-Abadi, must resolve the problems of the Iraqi Sunnis and Kurdish and give them adequate shares in the decision-making process of the country. They also said that new government should also provide them some key positions and sufficient share in military and other government jobs. Recently, Iraqi Parliament speaker, Saleem al-Jubouri, stressed that there is urgency of reconciliation especially for building police and military forces to fight against terrorist groups. He also underlined that in the fight against the IS, many Iraqi Sunnis have hesitated to join the battle against the group, which especially combats Shias. Al Jubouri also underlined that the advancement of the IS in the Sunni northwest "is a result of the policy of exclusion... during the past few years, Sunnis in those areas felt voiceless and ignored by Shia dominated Government".¹³

There is need for more unified command structures in Iraq's localities. The Iraqi forces in Mosul and Ramadi were defeated mainly due to lack of centralised command over pro-government forces. There is urgent need of a broad reconciliation among all political leaders – Shias, Sunnis and Kurds – to fight against the IS. Saleem al-Jubouri also called for closer cooperation with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, a Shia, who has sought to ease Sunni-Shia tensions since he took office in September 2014. Any Sunni groups that encounter ISIS must be guaranteed better security than in the past. He also supported US stands and added, "We must arm the tribes. We cannot eliminate Daesh except with the local population, through coordination with the federal government."¹⁴ According to Sunnis in Iraq, the areas captured by the IS are an impact of the administrative failure and financial corruption in the country. President of Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Masoud Barzani, underlined that "there is the need for reconciliation and dialogue in Iraq. He said the fight against ISIS and the restoration of internal security and stability depends on a common effort and peaceful co-existence".¹⁵

Although after the removal of Maliki from the prime minister's post and appointment of Al-Abadi as Iraq's new prime minister has given hope to Sunnis and Kurds that the new government may consider their demands and make certain changes in government's policies. In response to public demands and protests, Haider Al Abadi removed 11 cabinet ministers from the old guard on August 16, 2015, as a first concrete step towards the reform process, control of corruption and streamlining the government. This move came after weeks of long protests

by Iraqi people, especially Sunnis and Kurds, and a call from the country's top Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al Sistani.

In contrast, the outgoing US Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno, cautioned that reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq is becoming harder and that partitioning the country "might be the only solution". However, his remarks have been strongly condemned by Iraqi Prime Minister and Iranian leaders. On August 13, 2015, Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi also criticised the Odierno's statement as reckless and said, "Such comments indicated his ignorance about the Iraqi reality."¹⁶ His statements came after a controversial US Congress bill, released in April 2015, proposed the partition of Iraq into three separate states. According to Iranian media, "The bill stipulates that 25 to 60 percent of the 715-million-dollar aid allegedly allocated to Iraq in its war against the Islamic State will be directly supplied to the Sunni and Kurdish forces."¹⁷

Iranian leaders and officials, too, strongly criticised Odierno's remarks. Iranian leaders appealed to the Iraqi leaders "to take strong step against the Odierno's statements regarding the division of Iraq".¹⁸ Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said,

Iraq's political system has been clearly defined based on the constitution of the country, and the comments by the high-ranking US military official are provocative, against the path towards peace and security in Iraq and the region, and are even in violation of the policies of politicians in his country.¹⁹

Iran and Daesh

Iran wields considerable influence in Iraq and Syria, more than any other regional and extra-regional country. Considered Iran's effect over social, political and cultural background of Iraq, it seems to be the only regional playerable to manipulate Iraqi politics on the basis of its Shia affinities. The rise of the IS has left Iran with a strategic dilemma. Iran needs cooperation from regional and foreign stakeholders, including Russia. In June 2015, Iranian Interior Minister, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, said that Iran, Syria and Iraq are in talks to discuss ways to intensify campaign against terrorism. He also said, "Iranian officials have always called for collective efforts of all countries to help resolve the ongoing crises in Iraq and Syria, and stressed Tehran's continued assistance to these states."²⁰ In February 2015, Iranian First Vice-President, Eshaq Jahangiri, said,

We fight against terrorism in Iraq and Syria today but believe that this fight will have its fruits for the future of humanity since today the problem of terrorism is not merely related to one country and is an issue related to all humans and all countries should help Iraq and Syria to leave behind their crises.²¹

Australian officials including Deputy Foreign Secretary, Ric Wells, welcomed Iran's

role in supporting the Iraqi Government in the ongoing fight against the IS. Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, said in a meeting with Italian Foreign Minister, Paolo Gentiloni,

Terrorism and insecurity is an epidemic disease which doesn't belong to a special region, and efforts should be made to encounter extremism and violence to prevent its spread and we shouldn't allow any innocent person, regardless of his/her nationality and religion, to become a victim of the terrorist groups.²²

Analysts believe that Iran could directly get involved in the war against the IS, especially when the terror group advances towards the all-important Shia holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, recently stressed that Iran would give all assistance to the Iraqi Government and send its forces to safeguard the religious cities of Iraq. The lengthy operation in Anbar province has encouraged Iran and its most loyal militias in Iraq to revive and unite Shia militias. The formal creation of the Popular Mobilisation Forces – al-Hashd al-Shaabi (PMF) – in June 2014 was the first step in the formation of a pan-militia organisation. This was a straight reply to the widespread achievements of the IS in June 2014 and reflected extensive concerns at the highest levels of Iraq's Shiite community on the incapability of the army and other national security forces to control the Daesh threat. Notwithstanding the formation of the PMF, the militias are still inclined to work more or less independently, with little effective coordination with the Iraqi Army. However, in September 2015, during his address to the UN General Assembly, Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, said that the PMF is part of the official state.²³ However, it must be noted that Abadi has never been comfortable with the al-Shaabi – an umbrella organisation of various non-state armed groups. Though in 2015, he agreed to legitimise the al-Shaabi.

Overall, Iran is trying hard to increase its influence in Iraq by trying to unite the disparate Shia militias into a single cohesive force. However, “the existence of a clear and clever Iraq strategy does not essentially indicate complete unity of purpose or motivation in Tehran. Without doubt, competing forces and interests have different visions of the desired outcome. Iran's long-term success in Iraq depends on the level to which these forces can act jointly to alleviate costs and maximise gains.”²⁴

Iran-Iraq Cooperation to Counter Daesh

Iran maintains cordially relations with Iraq particularly after the collapse of Saddam's rule and the establishment of Shia rule in the country. Iran is constantly worried about peace and stability including the security situation in Iraq and the spread of extremism groups such as IS near its border. On July 27, 2015, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, visited Iraq and shared his

views with the Iraqi counterpart, Ibrahim al-Jafari, about the spread of the IS in Iraq. Zarif underlined that Iran is ready to help Iraq for the security and territorial integrity of Iraq and stopping extremism from advancing further. However, some Iranian leaders have different views regarding the role of the Iraqi Government in the past, especially about Al Maliki's government. They have pointed out that the country (Iraq) is in crucial need of unity and political partnership of all sects and tribes including Sunnis and Kurds, in accordance with Iraq's Constitution.

During a meeting with the Kurdish delegation, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, opined that Iran is ready to give its support to the axis of resistance and campaign against extremism. Deputy Head of Iraq's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Barham Salih, praised Iran for its strong support in critical juncture of Iraq particularly in the fight against terror group, IS. Iran has played a very important role to counter IS in the region in general and in Iraq in particular.²⁵ It is noteworthy to mention here that Iran's sway on Iraq has been strong and notable since the ouster of Saddam in 2003. Iraqi Shias, who witnessed social suffocation and identity crisis under Saddam's regime between 1979 and 2003, found relief in the rise of Shia politics under burgeoning Iranian influence.

Iran-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the IS

Iranian leaders including President Hassan Rouhani have asked global players to join together to counter and dismantle extremism from the region. Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary, Ali Shamkhani, too, has appealed to the regional players for joint efforts to counter IS and destroy its un-Islamic ambition in the region. After a trilateral meeting between Iran, Afghanistan and Russia at the deputy heads' level in Tehran in August 2015, he said, "Regional cooperation and adopting joint initiatives by the concerned countries are the only way to successfully challenge terrorism and restore regional security and peace."²⁶ Zarif too said that all regional countries should unite and take strong steps to fight against the terror group. His statement came after his visit to regional countries, Kuwait, Qatar and Iraq, in late-July 2015. Zarif also underlined that "any threat to regional countries, including Saudi Arabia, will be considered a threat to Iran".²⁷

Persian Gulf countries united against the IS particularly after the recent suicide attacks in the regional countries including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where hundreds of people were killed. The Ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States underlined that the killing of innocent people and spread of the IS can jeopardise the peace, security and stability of the region. "The GCC Ministers also agreed that activities of terrorist groups are not linked with Islam and its values."²⁸

However, the enigma is: Why did the Arab League in general, and GCC in

particular, united against the IS? There are several reasons: first, the resolution was passed to fight against the extremist groups a day after the telephonic conversations between officials of Arab League and the US Secretary of State, John Kerry. After the Arab League Resolution to fight against the IS, Kerry went to Saudi Arabia on September 11, 2014 in an effort to ensure the help of the Arab countries for an anti-IS campaign, though the Secretary of Defence, Chuck Hagel, visited Turkey to convince Ankara for its support to fight against the IS. Key Arab allies of the US, including Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, also agreed to 'do their share' to fight against the group through a joint military effort. Arab States also agreed to extend their support for the Iraqi Government under the leadership of Iraq's Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, as his government has been trying to unify its citizens without any discrimination on the basis of religion or sect in the fight against the IS.

Second, after the collapse of Saddam Hussein, Sunni-dominated countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, have cut their political and diplomatic relations with the Iraqi Government. "Therefore, after a decade, Arab countries may feel this is a good opportunity to influence newly-formed government in Iraq through induction of Sunni groups in the political system of the country. Abadi also started to induct Sunnis and Kurds into the new cabinet."²⁹ Abadi appointed Khaled al-Obaidi, a prominent Sunni politician from Mosul, as his Defence Minister. Iraqi President, Fuad Masum, paid a goodwill visit to Saudi Arabia in November 2014. In response, Saudi Arabia agreed to reopen its embassy in Baghdad, which had been closed in 1990 during the Gulf War. Abadi has also visited Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey to discuss regional strategies to fight against ISIS. In December 2014, Abadi created a new revenue-sharing agreement with the Kurds, under which Baghdad agreed to pay the Kurdish Regional Government one half of all income from Kurdish-controlled oil fields.³⁰

Third, Arab countries including Saudi Arabia think that the IS is dangerous for the regional peace and security in the region, and would likely defy the authorities of monarchy in the region in the near future. The major claim of the IS is to form a caliphate. "According to classical Muslim political theorists, there can only be one caliphate for the whole Muslim world or ummah. Fourth, it is also believed that the chief of Islamic State, Al-Baghdadi, is beyond the control of Arab countries including Saudi Arabia."³¹

Despite unanimity among all regional countries, some GCC states, particularly the major player in the region, Saudi Arabia, are strongly concerned about Iran's support to Shia groups in Bahrain, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. That is the reason Iran and the GCC countries especially Saudi Arabia have different opinions on many regional issues, particularly on finding a solution to the present situation in the countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain. On Syria, both players, Iran and Saudi Arabia have opposite stands to resolve the crisis: Saudi

Arabia is against Bashar Al Assad's regime and not ready to legitimise the Syrian Government. However, Iran says that Bashar Al Assad is the legitimate president of the country and Tehran will continue to support to the Syrian regime.

On August 11, 2015, Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel Al Jubeir, said in Moscow, "Our position has not changed ... there is no place for Al Assad in the future of Syria."³² He also said, "Assad is part of the problem, not part of the solution. On the other hand, Iran's stands is very clear about the Assad regime. Iran has reiterated that Tehran will continue to support Assad."³³

Why Iran Believes US Actions against ISIS are Gibe?

The puzzle is why Iran is not interested to join the coalition group to fight against the IS. There are some reasons. First, Iran does not believe in a US-led coalition to counter the extremism group in the region. Iran feels that the US is unsure and some countries of the coalition forces are still providing military, financial and logistical support to the extremist groups in Iraq and Syria. Recently in December 2014, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said that "the anti-Islamic State coalition is just an excuse for the US to exercise its plots in the West Asian region".³⁴ Khamenei also strongly condemned the West, particularly the US, for creating extremism, and underlined that the major motive of the IS is to divide and create disparities among Muslim world. Khamenei also pointed out that the US is using the IS as an umbrella to offer the Zionist state safety and security through provoking extremism groups and creating conflict among Muslim countries. In July 2014, Khamenei called "on Muslims across the world to set aside their differences and utilise all their resources to support the Palestinian people. He also asked Muslim countries for the formation of a united, powerful and capable Ummah".³⁵ Iran and its supporter, Hezbollah, also accuse the West particularly the US of supporting the IS in the beginning believing that it could use the extremist group against Iran and other regional countries such as Syria and Iraq. The US has been constantly trying to overthrow Assad's regime with the help of terrorist groups.

Second, Iran accuses the US and its coalition members for not taking prior consent from Syrian and Iraqi governments for airstrikes against the IS on their soil. Iranian officials also blame "Tehran considers any external military action in Syria, which had not been demanded by the Damascus Government, as unacceptable and interference in their sovereignty".³⁶ Iran also feels that the US and other Western powers, including regional countries, cannot defend their actions in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state.

Third, Iran could not join the alliance against the IS because of internal under currents in the country. Under any circumstances, hardliners in Iran will not be ready to accept any reconciliation with the US. They did not even digest the nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1 and are still cynical about a final result.

India's Apprehensions

The prevailing situation in the West Asia region especially after the rise of IS have compelled India to rethink its engagement with the region. India is also worried about the advancement of terrorist groups in the West Asian region. India has agreed to support the regional countries to counter the terrorist groups including the IS. On August 14, 2015, Indian leaders and the visiting Iranian Foreign Minister discussed the spread of the IS and the threat caused by the extremist group.³⁷ The visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister was a follow up to the discussions between the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and Iranian President, Rouhani, at Ufa where both sides agreed to enhance the bilateral relationship between two countries. Iranian Foreign Minister and Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, also discussed various issues of mutual interest including regional and multilateral issues, such as the threat posed by ISIS, and the situation in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen.

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), too, discussed “the spread of terrorism in the region and issued a joint statement during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to the UAE on August 17, 2015”.³⁸ Both countries agreed to join together in their fight against the Islamic State. Both countries also strongly criticised those countries that give religious and sectarian colour to the violence.

India is also worried because some Indian youths are inspired by the IS and willing to join it. The Indian Government is also concerned about the spread of ISIS and feels that the extremist group may carryout attacks in the country utilising a solo extremist, also known as ‘lone wolf’, to create chaos. The government has however taken certain steps to avoid such attacks. In November 2015, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijju, said, “We are facing strong challenges and threats due to spread of ISIS in the West and South Asian regions.”³⁹ Certainly, joint efforts between India and the West Asian region in general and with Iran in particular are the need of the times to fight against the spread of the IS all over the world. India could cooperate by sharing intelligence with Afghanistan and Iran to counter IS and other extremist groups. India's and Iran's experience in counterterrorism could play a crucial role in combating ISIS in the West and South Asian regions.

Conclusion

As discussed above after the nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1 spread of terrorist group in the region such as Islamic State, Qatar's top diplomat called for a “serious dialogue” with Iran. Iran has expressed its willingness to cooperate with the GCC states in order to fight against the IS. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, said that “the proposal to hold a joint meeting between Iran and the GCC countries on the regional conflicts and rise of Islamic State is a

welcome initiative and all regional countries should take it seriously”.⁴⁰ In December 23, 2015, Abdollahian also said, “The common threats facing the regional countries, including terrorism, the destructive measures of Daesh and extremism, require increasing consultations as well as security and defence cooperation among the regional countries.”⁴¹

Qatar’s Foreign Minister Khalid Al Attiyah too pointed out that following the nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1, GCC countries in general and Qatar in particular, would have good opportunities to work together on regional issues including the spread of the IS. He underlined, “We should have a serious dialogue with our neighbour, the Iranians, and ... lay down our concerns from both sides, and solve them together. We have to live together ... We in the GCC are working towards a good neighbourhood. We want Iran to take this approach as well, and only then we can have a fruitful dialogue.”⁴²

However, Iranian officials blame the West especially the US for the rise of terrorism in the region and say that the US-led coalition against the IS was unable to prevent the terrorist group’s advancement and that the coalition’s Arab members, along with Turkey, are not serious in their fight against Daesh. Analysts and experts believe that regional cooperation is required in the fight against the IS in the region, and that Arab countries should make some sort of plan with the moderate government of Iran under the leadership of President Hassan Rouhani and other regional countries including foreign players. In December 28, 2015, Rouhani appealed to all Muslim countries including regional and extra-regional players that there is urgent need for collective efforts to counter Daesh. He said, “Collective cooperation among all Muslim nations in the fight against violence and extremism is an inevitable necessity.”⁴³ Rouhani also added that Iran is now a forerunner in the campaign against terrorism.

Without doubt, it could be argued that Iran has a lot of experience to handle such a situation in Iraq. Iranian troops are well aware about the Iraqi terrain. The Iranian Quds Force had already trained Iraqi fighters and Shia militia especially when US occupied Iraq. Iran also has significant information about the faultlines of Iraq’s politics. Iran has also played a very an important role in organising Shia fighters in Iraq to fight against the IS, such as Sadr’s Mahdi Army that has weakened in recent years. The Shia Militia of Mahdi Army loyal to Moqtada Al Sadr marched with weapons in the Sadr city area of north Baghdad and has been an playing important role to counter the IS. In March 2015, the Tikrit operations were organised under the command of General Qassem Suleimani, commander of the elite Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) of Iran to free Tikrit from ISIS’s control. It is believed that Shia militias also participated in this operation.⁴⁴ The rise of ISIS and worsening regional security has been taken rather seriously by Iranian leaders including the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In his latest remarks in November 2015, Khamenei said that “the

way to deal with ‘terrorist’ undercurrents is to engage the people in correct Islamic manners with a view to enhancing moderate and rational Islamic currents”.⁴⁵ The major difficulty for Iran however is that in recent years it has gradually reduced the ability to influence the Sunni states especially due to the crises in Yemen, Syria and other regional countries.

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8

Present Danger: Terrorism and the Israeli Experience

S. Samuel C. Rajiv

Israel's image as a strong nation state is founded on its decisive counter-terrorism (CT) policy, among other significant military achievements. Israeli analysts often note that they have suffered more from terrorism than any other democratic country in the world, in proportion to population. The chapter begins with an overview of the nature of the terrorist threat faced by Israel and the Israeli responses to deal with it. It goes on to delineate the current nature of the threat including new challenges being posed from entities affiliated to the Islamic State (IS; also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS] and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant [ISIL]). The chapter closes with a brief examination of the nature of the CT cooperation between India and Israel and possible lessons for India as a result of the Israeli experience.

Israel and the Nature of the Threat

Since its founding in 1948, Israel and its citizens have faced a plethora of terrorist threats. These included those launched by Palestinian armed groups and their radical supporters targeting Israeli air passengers, the brazen attacks targeting Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972, attacks by Hezbollah targeting Israeli interests overseas in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (e.g., the July 1994 attack on a Jewish Centre in Buenos Aires killing 85 people), armed uprisings in the West Bank (First and the Second Intifada [armed uprising] from 1987-1991 and 2000-2005, respectively), rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of Israel's dis-engagement in 2005, as well as instances

of Jewish terrorism (assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jew in 1995) and settler violence.

The Israeli Government states that as of November 2015, 1,292 people lost their lives as a result of Palestinian terror attacks since 2000, and that over 8,500 people have been injured.¹ Since the beginning of the Second Intifada (2000), there were over 140 suicide bombing attacks, which killed 542 people. More than 360 of these deaths were recorded from 2002-03, at the height of the Intifada. Suicide bombing attacks have since declined, with the last such incident having been recorded in January 2007 in the southern city of Eilat, which led to the death of three people.² It is pertinent to note that prior to 2000, 14 such suicide bombing attacks were perpetrated beginning from 1993, which led to the loss of over 120 people.³

The Israel Security Agency (ISA; also called the Shin Bet) currently lists as many as 16 terror outfits operating against Israel's interests. These include the Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hamas, Al Qaeda, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), among others. ISA charges that organisations like the Hezbollah are "front-line operational arm of Iran against Israel".⁴ Hamas (which stands for Islamic Resistance Movement) was established in 1987 (pertinently co-terminus with the First Intifada) as an arm of the Islamic Brotherhood (which itself traces its roots to Egypt).

The military wing of Hamas – Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades – according to the ISA is a 'terrorist organisation' funded by the extensive '*dawa*' architecture (network of charitable institutions) established by Hamas.⁵ PIJ members were predominantly involved in carrying out suicide bombing attacks during the Second Intifada, while Hamas was also responsible for suicide attacks prior to 2000.

Israel Responds to Terror

Israel has followed a set of muscular responses in order to deal with the terrorist threat primarily made up of terror strikes, suicide bombings, kidnappings, and rocket attacks. These policies related to securing its borders through physical barriers and 'intelligent' fences, enhancement of surveillance capabilities as seen from the innovative use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in urban settings, targeted killings of key terrorist leadership, periodic military interventions to offset enemy military capabilities, among others. The pertinent aspects of these policies as they relate to terrorist violence emanating from the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (primarily relating to incidents in the aftermath of the First Intifada) are delineated as follows:

Armed Uprisings (Intifada)

As regards the Palestinian armed uprisings, when the First Intifada broke out in 1987, Israeli analysts note that Israel had to develop a unique response as it was

neither a guerrilla war nor a terror campaign but a “rather unusual mixture of non-violent civil dis-obedience with sub-conventional use of force”.⁶ It is pertinent to note that armed violence emanating from the territories was initially viewed as not being a ‘strategic threat’ but as a law and order situation which had to be managed not by the Israel Defence Force (IDF) but by the police forces.

In the initial stages, therefore, the government was restrained in the use of force to quell the violence. Greater force began to be applied and the IDF was deployed as the nature and scale of protests increased. Analysts note that the IDF gradually developed a ‘small war’ strategy, elements of which included use of gliders, UAVs and helicopters for real-time intelligence gathering, use of commando units for special assignments, among others.⁷ These tactics were used to a greater degree during the time of the Second Intifada.

From the beginning of the Second Intifada, violence emanating from the West Bank began to be seen as an ‘existential’ danger. This is on account of the fact that the vast majority of the Israeli population is concentrated across the narrow strip of land sandwiched between the West Bank and the Mediterranean Sea, within the confines of which Israel’s single international airport is also based. Any disturbance to Israel’s way of life and its economy as a result of terrorist violence therefore was seen as disruptive to Israel’s functioning as a ‘normal’ country. Geographical determinism, therefore, imposed a unique vulnerability on Israel, with the entire population immediately sensitised to the effects of terror incidents.

Targeted Killings

A key feature of Israeli CT policy has been the targeted killing of terrorist leaders. Some of the key terrorist leaders killed by Israel include the Hamas ‘bomb maker’, Yahya Ayyash (January 1996); Hamas’s octogenarian founder, Sheik Ahmed Yassin (March 2004), Hamas’s co-founder, Abdul Aziz Rantissi (April 2004); PRC Commander, Zuhair al-Qaissi (March 2012); Hamas military chief, Ahmed al-Jabari (November 2012), among others.

Israel’s CT policy of ‘targeted killings’ is a subject of much debate. Israel swears by such a policy and has carried out repeated strikes against top militant leaders, as noted above. Analysts note that offensive action against terrorists and their infrastructure, which while not solving terror problems, cause ‘short- and medium-term damage’ to the terror organisation and their leaders, which constrict their ability to mount subsequent attacks.⁸

The counter argument has however been that such offensive actions lead to further radicalisation and ‘revenge’ attacks leading to the death of more Israelis. For instance, after Ayyash (who introduced suicide bombings as a terror weapon against Israel) was killed in January 1996 – with reports indicating via a booby-trapped cell phone given by a compromised relative and activated by an Israeli

helicopter/drone flying overhead, during the next two months, 60 Israelis were killed in suicide bombings in four separate incidents. Israeli officials however asserted that terrorists like Ayyash were prevented from being involved in carrying out even more deadly terror attacks, which would have resulted in greater loss of Israeli lives. Some analysts concur with this view and note that “motivation for terrorism was and remains strategic – and it is not seriously based on revenge”.⁹

Israel has also faced international scrutiny for attempts to eliminate terrorists outside Palestinian territories. Israel’s botched attempt to assassinate the head of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal, in September 1997 in the streets of Amman, Jordan, via a poisonous injection led to strained relations between the two countries. It is pertinent to note that Jordan is the only Arab country after Egypt with which Israel has a peace treaty. Two of the agents involved in the operation were arrested at the spot while the remaining three allegedly involved took refuge in the Israeli Embassy in Amman.

Reports noted that Jordanian authorities only agreed to the safe passage of these five agents on the condition that Israel supplied the antidote that would eventually save Meshaal’s life and further required the release of Hamas’s founder, Sheikh Yassin.¹⁰ As pointed out earlier, Yassin, who was a quadriplegic since childhood and wheel-chair bound, was himself killed in a strike by an Israeli helicopter gunship in March 2004, which also led to the death of nine other by-standers.

The more recent incident of Israeli agents allegedly assassinating an enemy outside Palestinian territories related to the killing of Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, co-founder of the Hamas military wing (Al Qassam Brigades) at a hotel in Dubai in January 2010. Reports noted that more than 30 Israeli agents took part in the operation, which led to significant diplomatic heartburn as most of these agents travelled on assumed identities of dual-citizens belonging to countries like Britain and Australia.¹¹

Security Barriers

Then Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, undertook the decision to reinforce and expand the security barrier between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the face of renewed suicide attacks during the Second Intifada. The Israeli Government contends that the barrier has been an effective impediment to terror strikes, especially suicide bombing attacks. While security barriers existed prior to the Second Intifada as well, barricading parts of the Gaza strip and the West Bank from Israeli territories, the expanded project generated controversy for the route on which it was being built and its contribution to the image of Israel as a ‘walled state’.

The expanded barrier has been billed as the largest construction project ever undertaken in Israel, extending to over 700 km. A key Palestinian criticism has been that the barrier route deviates from the 1967 ceasefire lines and additionally

adds about 7 per cent of Palestinian territory to Israel. Further, it has been criticised for dividing Palestinian villages and families as well for creating hardships for Palestinians working in Israel.¹²

Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, while inaugurating a new security barrier construction project at the border with Jordan near the southern port city of Eilat in September 2015 insisted that “Israel is a very small country with neither geographic nor demographic depth and we must control our borders”.¹³ Israel has already spent more than \$2 billion on security barriers with Egypt and Syria, while \$2.5 billion has been spent on the border with the West Bank.¹⁴ Arguments favouring the security barrier meanwhile note that the efficacy of such defensive measures has resulted in a change of Palestinian terror tactics, with an increased focus on rocket attacks in order to overcome the limitations imposed by the security barrier.

Rocket Attacks from the Gaza Strip and Israel’s Response

In the aftermath of Israel’s dis-engagement from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, the volume of the rocket attacks from the enclave increased significantly. Hamas had won legislative elections in January 2006 and subsequently in June 2007, took control of the territory after engaging in a bloody fight with the Fatah. These rocket barrages on Israeli population centres caused major dents in Israel’s sense of security. The IDF contends that over 11,000 rockets (till July 2014) have been fired from the Gaza Strip since Israel’s dis-engagement. During 2007-08, over 1,200 Israelis were injured in the rocket attacks and 25 were killed.¹⁵

Israel has deployed high-tech equipment like the Iron Dome Anti-Missile Defence (AMD) system to counter the crude Palestinian rockets. The AMD system has been operational since August 2011 and is designed to be effective to counter rockets at the range of 4-70 km. Analysts note that the system has been quite successful in countering Palestinian rocket attacks.¹⁶ For instance, during ‘Operation Protective Edge’ – the Israeli military intervention in the Gaza Strip from July-August 2014– while nearly 4,600 rockets were fired into Israel, 800 projectiles deemed as a threat to Israeli population centres were intercepted by the system, with almost 92 per cent success rate. Israel, however, notes that over 3,800 of the rockets fired did land into Israel during this conflict, killing seven civilians and wounding 126.¹⁷

The IDF further draws attention to the increasing sophistication of Palestinian rockets as well as their enhanced range which brings a larger proportion of the Israeli population within their reach. Despite the success of the Iron Dome AMD system, Israel contends that “more than half a million Israelis have less than 60 seconds to find shelter after a rocket is launched from Gaza into Israel”.¹⁸ The IDF lists Hamas’s rocket inventory to include the M-302 with a range of 160 km, the M-75 with a range of 75 km, the Grad rocket with a range below 50 km

and the Qassam projectiles with a range below 20 km. In order to deal with the increased range of the Palestinian rockets, Israel is set to deploy the Iron Dome's 'larger cousin' ('David's Sling', co-developed with the United States) with a capability to neutralise enemy rockets at a range up to 300 km. The system which would potentially cover the entire country is said to become operational in 2016.

Apart from using defensive measures like the Iron Dome system, Israel undertook offensive military interventions in the Gaza Strip in order to nullify enemy military capabilities. Pertinent among these include 'Operation Cast Lead' (December 27, 2008-January 18, 2009), 'Operation Pillar of Defence' (November 12-14, 2012) and 'Operation Protective Edge' (July 8-August 26, 2014). Despite the respite from harm provided by such repeated military interventions for a limited period of time, enemy military infrastructure has continued to get replenished leading to further escalations.

Assessment of the Israeli CT Policy

In the aftermath of its dis-engagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, Israel's periodic military interventions into Palestinian territories in order to stop rocket attacks resulted in enormous loss of Palestinian lives (nearly 3,700 Palestinian deaths in these three conflicts cumulatively as against about 100 Israeli soldiers and civilians). While this generated international condemnation for the use of heavy-handed tactics, the Israeli Foreign Ministry contends that since 2000, more than 1,200 Israelis have lost their lives as a result of the terror campaign by the Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups.

Israel as well as its antagonists have also been criticised by the United Nations' agencies and other international observers for undertaking actions "in contravention of customary international humanitarian law".¹⁹ Israel, however, contends that it took unprecedented steps to minimise civilian casualties, while its enemies wilfully put the lives of civilians at risk. It further charged Hamas with turning the Gaza Strip into a "fortress for terror activity, knowingly putting its civilians and infrastructure in danger".²⁰ Further, Israel notes that as a result of the rocket barrages as during 'Operation Protective Edge', more than 10,000 Israelis had to be evacuated from their homes. The economic impact of the July-August 2014 military operation has been pegged at over £ 3.5 billion (nearly \$1 billion).²¹

Despite Israel swearing by such policies, the criticism encountered by security barriers and targeted killings has been pointed out earlier. It has also been mentioned that Israel is guilty of following "good tactics but bad strategy" while dealing with the terror threat. This is on account of the fact that the Israeli use of military force to drive out the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) from Lebanon in 1982 subsequently created the Hezbollah, which has functioned as

a more virulent terrorist outfit. Israel's Gaza dis-engagement is also seen to have become a 'strategic failure' as it has led to the ascendance of the Hamas.²²

Issues of 'proportionality' have haunted Israeli policymakers given the wide disparity in fatalities suffered by Palestinians in comparison to Israelis in periodic military interventions. Israeli analysts however note that Israel as a democracy has to take every step possible to ensure the security of its citizens, and that 'proportionality' is an 'indeterminate question' dependent on the 'behaviour of the rival' and 'battle conditions' among other factors.²³ Ganor further suggests that since terrorism is a form of psychological warfare, the success of a CT policy could possibly be measured "by the strength of the public's resilience to terrorism", which according to the author remains high in the Israeli case.²⁴

Israel and Terror: New Challenges

ISIS

Israel also had to deal with the implications of the ideological impact of ISIS on its domestic population. Six Israelis including four schoolteachers belonging to the Bedouin Muslim community near Israel's border with the West Bank were arrested on July 6, 2015 on charges of supporting the ideology of ISIS and teaching their wards about the 'exploits' of the terror organisation.²⁵ Israel has carried out periodic arrests during 2015 of Israeli Arabs on charges of expressing support to ISIS or recruiting on their behalf with the aim of trying to join their ranks in neighbouring Syria.²⁶ Salafist terror groups in Gaza which had pledged allegiance to ISIS have claimed responsibility for rocket attacks into Israel in the recent past.

Israel, therefore, is wary of the effect of the ISIS ideology on its Arab citizens, worried about the possibility of increased rocket attacks by ISIS-affiliated Salafi groups, and cautious about the continued instability and disturbances on its borders with Egypt and Syria, as well as the possibility of disturbances along its border with Jordan. As noted earlier, Prime Minister Netanyahu inaugurated the building of the new security fence along its border with Jordan in September 2015 as a deterrent against possible terror attacks as well as to stop illegal immigrants. Some Israeli analysts have suggested that the border with Jordan was especially vulnerable to infiltration by ISIS given the prevalent poverty and unemployment among the Bedouins who live on the Jordanian side of the border.²⁷

It is pertinent to note that Israel allowed 800 Egyptian troops into the Sinai in January 2011 for first time since the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt in order to better bolster its security presence. Despite such enhanced presence however, the intensity of terror attacks does not seem to have abated. Over 600 Egyptian security personnel for instance have lost their lives as a result of the worsening insurgency in the Sinai since 2013.

An ISIS-affiliated group Wilayat Sinai ('Province of Sinai') mounted a daring attack on Egyptian border checkpoints near the Sinai border with Israel on July 1, 2015 which left nearly 23 Egyptian soldiers dead and more than 30 injured.²⁸ The Egyptian military on its part stated that more than 100 jihadis were killed in this attack. Prior to November 2014 when the group changed its name to be affiliated with ISIS, it was called Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis ('Champions of Jerusalem').

While the group's primary target continues to be Egypt, analysts noted that it had launched attacks against Israel dating back to 2011 (when it was earlier affiliated to the then dominant jihadi group the Al Qaeda). Israel further charges that Hamas has been providing weapons and logistical support to the Wilayat Sinai.²⁹ Analysts also point out Israel's dilemmas in responding to such attacks, given that such terror groups operate from areas within the borders of Egypt over which Cairo seems to have limited control. The Wilayat Sinai has also claimed responsibility for the downing of the Russian Metrojet flight on October 31, 2015, dramatically escalating regional security angst.

Regional one-upmanship meanwhile continues to add to the complexity of geo-political dynamics. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, for instance, in July 2015 charged that Israel and ISIS were "two sides of the same coin" and that Israel was the "winner" as a result of the destruction being caused by ISIS in the Arab world.³⁰ The Iranian Minister charged that the actions of ISIS targeting Arab states weakened the "resistance front" against Israel, which according to him was the "main sponsor of terrorism" in the region. Similar sentiments were expressed by Iran's Defence Minister, Brig. Gen. Hussein Dehqan, in October 2014. Minister Dehqan was cited as stating that Israel was treating "injured ISIL fighters" in its hospitals and charged that Israeli equipment was found in "ISIL hideouts in Iraqi cities".³¹

Israel on its part proudly notes that it was one of the first countries to offer humanitarian aid to Syria and that it has established a field hospital near its border with Syria to treat "thousands of Syrians", who now had the opportunity to view Israelis as "healing angels" when they have been taught by state apparatuses that they were the "devils".³² Prime Minister Netanyahu has further asserted that "ISIS-dominated Syria is bad and a Iran-dominated Syria is bad", and that the Israel would support polices that "weaken both" ISIS and Iran.³³

Israeli military officers, therefore, have been critical of the US-led military operations against ISIS, as in their view, these were strengthening the "Shiite axis" led by Iran, which is Israel's main regional enemy.³⁴ Iran on its part has been resolute in its opposition to Saudi military intervention in Yemen which began in March 2015 against Shiite Houthi rebels, and has compared it to Israel's periodic military interventions in the Gaza Strip. Riyadh and Tel Aviv meanwhile have found themselves on the same side of the divide in opposing the terms of the Iran

nuclear deal, which both of them believe will make Iran better equipped to pursue its hegemonic ambitions in the region, in the aftermath of the removal of sanctions.

'Third Intifada'?

The renewed violence perpetrated by Palestinians in Jerusalem among other places has given rise to speculation whether the 'Third Intifada' is in progress. In October 2015 for instance, 11 Israelis were killed and over 80 injured as a result of stabbings, shootings, and vehicle attacks, as compared to over 90 Palestinian deaths during the month as a result of Israeli responses. Over 600 such attacks were recorded by Shin Bet during the month, as compared with 223 in September.³⁵

Analysts however point to some differences as regards the previous uprisings. These include large-scale suicide attacks (especially so during the Second Intifada) among other forms of violence which generated a comprehensive Israeli security response including large-scale arrests, military mobilisation by the IDF and sealing off of the West Bank. The latest attacks concentrated in and around Jerusalem analysts note does however point to the increasing radicalisation of youth in Jerusalem. Coupled with the continued ascendance of the Hamas in Gaza and lack of a political solution in sight, they note that it "may only be a matter of time before the possibility of that third intifada becomes a reality".³⁶

It remains to be seen how Israel would respond to an enhanced campaign of violence by the Palestinians. It is pertinent to note that the aftermath of the First Intifada led to the deeply divisive Oslo Accords while at the end of the Second Intifada, Israel dis-engaged from the Gaza Strip which led to the political ascendance of Hamas and major military escalations.³⁷

Israeli CT Experience and India: Possible Takeaways

India and Israel have built a strong strategic partnership based on mutual interests and complementarities. The defining aspect of the relationship has been the burgeoning strategic engagement. India has bought niche Israeli defence equipment like Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS), UAVs, AMD systems for naval warships, among others. Robust institutional engagement is another critical feature of India-Israel strategic partnership. The 11th round of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Defence Cooperation was held in June 2014 in Tel Aviv. Port visits by Indian naval warships are an integral part of the defence diplomacy.

It is however pertinent to note that despite the robust strategic linkages as noted above, India-Israel CT cooperation seems 'low-key' or rather can be characterised as being on the 'back-burner'. This is because the last meeting of the India-Israel JWG on CT (established in 2002) was held in February 2013. This was only the eighth meeting in 13 years. This is despite the fact that CT

cooperation was flagged as one of the priority areas by the then Defence Minister, Sharad Pawar, as early as in February 1992, in the immediate aftermath of the establishment of diplomatic relations. It is pertinent to note that one of the first high level visits to Israel in the aftermath of both sides establishing diplomatic ties was by the then head of the National Security Guard (NSG), Ashok Tandon, in 1995.³⁸

Various explanations have been put forward for the slow pace of CT cooperation by the two countries. Some analysts have noted that despite Israel showing an interest for enhanced CT cooperation in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, the “nature of domestic political sensitivity within India” to such cooperation constrained possibility of growth.³⁹ Former Foreign Ministry official, Rajendra Abhyankar, points out that there are differences between the two countries, “both on the philosophy behind counter-terrorism and respective threat perceptions”.⁴⁰ He notes that India faces Islamic threats from Pakistan while Israel’s “concentric circle of threats” include Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. Abhyankar however does note the exchange of “practical experiences” between the two countries on border security, suicide terrorism, aviation security, terror financing, information security and cyber warfare.⁴¹

Despite the aforementioned explanations and constraints, with the coming to power of the Modi government in 2014, it does seem that CT cooperation has been put on the ‘front-burner’, as it were. Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, attended the premier Israeli homeland security exhibition in Tel Aviv in November 2014. This was the first visit by an Indian Home Minister since L.K. Advani’s June 2000 visit. India and Israel have in place the necessary institutional mechanisms to carry forward CT/Homeland Security (HLS) cooperation. This includes the February 2014 HLS agreement concluded towards the end of the previous government’s tenure.

Israel on its part seems to be consciously focussing on expanding internal security/HLS cooperation. The Israeli Embassy has a specific official to deal with these aspects, the Deputy Defence Attache for HLS Defence Cooperation. The issue is also on the agenda of meetings the Israeli Ambassador, Daniel Carmon, has with regional leaders. Carmon during his meeting with the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in December 2014 for instance discussed the possibility of internal security cooperation with the state. It is pertinent to note that he had also met with the police chiefs of the two Telugu-speaking states during his visit.⁴² On the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the Mumbai attacks, Carmon reiterated that Israel “stands by the Indian people, government and security forces, in their tireless efforts to fight and eliminate terror”.⁴³

Given the above state of play, what could be the possible lessons that India could glean from the Israeli experience. While the broad criticisms of Israeli CT

policy have been delineated earlier, positive aspects flagged by analysts include operational flexibility of Israeli security forces, training, use of advanced surveillance capabilities, 'home front' preparedness with the active involvement of a large number of civilian population (and a separate Home Front Command of the IDF operating to cater to this requirement), among others. Other analysts have also pointed out that the Israeli experience with 'preparedness' and 'coping' offers valuable lessons for other countries to emulate.⁴⁴

Israeli experience in dealing with terror attacks analysts note can also offer lessons across the issue areas of crisis management, establishing national standards in responding to terror attacks, the importance of coordination between different agencies and communications, among other pertinent aspects.⁴⁵ These issue areas are no doubt an important arena of relevance for India.

India can significantly benefit from the Israeli experience by emulating the operational effectiveness of its security responses, contingent of course on a political decision to execute any relevant policy. While being mindful of the complex Israeli situation, the criticisms generated by the Israeli responses are a reminder that the military response has to be embedded within a larger political strategy of finding possible solutions to the intractable issues.

It is also incumbent to draw attention to the divergent nature of the sources of the terrorist threat being faced by either country. Israeli citizens and interests in India, for instance, have been the target of terrorist attacks. Pertinent examples include Israeli tourists in Kashmir in 1991, the targeting of the Chabad House during the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the bomb attack on Israeli Embassy vehicle targeting the wife of the Israeli Defence Attache in February 2012. Groups as varied as the Pakistani-based terror outfits and Iran-based operatives (as in the case of the attack on the Israeli Embassy vehicle) have been responsible for these attacks.

As against the above, however, Indian citizens or interests have not been the target of terrorist groups operating against Israel, as yet. The 16 terror outfits listed by the Israeli internal security agency Shin Bet for instance do not pose a threat to India, except perhaps Al Qaeda, which has intermittently threatened to carry out attacks against Indian interests. Al Qaeda furthermore has not carried out any major attack against Indian or Israeli targets, though reports in the latter half of 2014 indicated that Al Qaeda was planning to target Israeli tourists visiting India.⁴⁶ Pakistani-based terror outfits meanwhile, with a singular anti-India focus, have not attacked Israeli citizens or interests outside India. The strong Indian responses to Israeli military activities in the Gaza Strip meanwhile are a reminder that India has 'concerns' about such overwhelming use of force.⁴⁷

The India-Israel strategic partnership though has resulted in a significant improvement of India's capabilities. India would continue to seek niche Israeli

expertise as part of its efforts to strengthen its capabilities. The Minister of State for Home, Kiren Rijiju, informed the Rajya Sabha in August 2014 that securing technologies and equipment for security agencies was very much part of the India-Israel HLS agreement.⁴⁸ India therefore benefits from the use of Israeli-made assault weapons, sniper rifles, and surveillance platforms like UAVs, as well as Israeli-imparted training to improve its aviation security mechanisms, among other significant aspects of bilateral collaboration to improve its policy responses to incidents of terrorism.

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9

The Syrian Uprising and the Rise of ISIS

Tsupokyemla and Neha Kohli

Introduction

The once not so ‘dangerous’ group considered ‘jay vee’¹ by Obama administration till 2014 seems to have brought the world to its knees. Since 2013, when it emerged out of the Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the world has been confronted with the menace of the Islamic State in Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS; also called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant [ISIL], or *Daesh*, derived from the Arabic, *al Dawaa al Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham*). Its tentacles are spreading far and wide, instilling fear by uploading morbid videos on social media, committing atrocious acts of terror, and using beheading as a form of a marketing and recruitment strategy. The claim to establish a Sunni Islamic caliphate which initially sounded quixotic has almost come to fruition by establishing a proto-caliphate in Raqqa² raising alarm in the neighbouring countries – Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey – and beyond. Their fanaticism coupled with suave military finesse and efficient organisation makes for a lethal combination. What would amount to law of the jungle in the modern human conception gets their acts justified by citing sharia laws. They are reviving the institution of slavery and rape, consider rape as *ibadah* (worship) and are using children as “caliphate cubs”. To score propaganda victories, they are involved in rampant destruction of archaeological sites and relics within their territories. This destruction is another strategy to disconnect people from their historical and cultural roots, break the bonds between people and history.

Globalisation has upped the ante for this radical-extremist organisation. The

use of “new media” has enhanced the ways, and impact, of radicalisation. Uploading grotesque and gory videos of mass executions using social media serves as a good propaganda tool. The demonic character of ISIS relegates AlQaeda Central to a mere playmate.³ Led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, an ex-prisoner, ISIS has unleashed reign of terror and is capitalising on the “cracks created by various players in the region”.⁴ Besides, Iraq, ISIS has carved a position of dominance in Syria, and rather than consolidating its gains, it continued to press on with its expansionary offensives.

Emergence of ISIS

Entities such as ISIS thrive in a state of weak governance or one which is on the brink of collapse. The rise of ISIS was brought about by the “democratic deficit” of Iraq and Syria. ISIS grew out of the former AQI and spread quickly in Iraq and Syria, largely because it appealed to segments of the population who were mistreated by the government for a long time, and appeared to bring a sense of order in a rapidly deteriorating political situation. In June 2014, the group, which now calls itself the Islamic State (IS), declared the establishment of a new “caliphate” and named Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi as its leader or caliph. It is an extremist Salafi group that adheres to a fundamentalist, conservative version of Sunni Wahhabi Islam and has imposed that in the territories that it controls. ISIS established, in effect, a proto state in the region where it enforces the Islamic sharia law. The organisation made good use of the social media to propagate its ideology and also recruit members; especially significant has been the presence of numerous westerners from European countries such as France, Britain and the Scandinavian countries, as also from the US, and from Arab countries such as Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. ISIS focuses on “...three parallel tracks: (1) inciting regional conflict with attacks in Iraq and Syria; (2) building relationships with jihadist groups that can carry out military operations across the Middle East and North Africa; and (3) inspiring, and sometimes helping, ISIS sympathisers to conduct attacks in the West.”⁵

Tracing the roots of the fragmentation of Iraq back to the US-led invasion of 2003 and the dismantling of the Ba’ath party infrastructure, the sovereignty of the Iraqi State was eroded, with authority and power becoming increasingly decentralised.⁶ Iraq comprised a diverse ethnic and religious population: around 60 per cent Arab Shias lived in the south of the country (bordering Saudi Arabia and Iran), approximately 17 per cent Sunni Arabs lived in the centre-north of the country, while the Kurds and Turkmen (17 per cent) live in the north of the country. Simmering sectarian tensions bubbled to the fore once the Ba’ath rule ended. Under the rule of Nouri al Maliki, sectarian divisions were politically co-opted and manipulated favouring the Shias despite the Anbar Awakening where

Sunni tribal leaders cooperated to oust Al Qaeda.⁷ The de-Ba'athification law of L. Paul Bremer left a lot of disenfranchised Sunni Iraqi army officers disgruntled resolving to work in cahoots with ISIS. According to some reports, the "Ba'athification" of ISIS may have been the brainchild of a former colonel in Saddam Hussein's army who spent time with Baghdadi at Camp Bucca.⁸

Likewise, the ISIS exploited the situation in Syria and managed to channel the resentment of Sunni street. The depravity of the Syrian regime upon the opposition forces and the various external forces dilly-dallying manoeuvres provided fertile ground for ISIS to surge in Syria. As Jessica Stern reasons, "If the sectarian clashes in Iraq provided an opening for ISIL to regroup, the violence in Syria gave Baghdadi a pretext to expand."⁹ At the time of writing, in Iraq, ISIS controls territory in the north and centre of the country, including near or in the towns of Sinjar, Mosul, and Falluja and Ramadi close to Baghdad. In Syria, it controls a vast swath of territory, from Palmyra to Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in the country's west, a tract that the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates to be 95,000 sq. km, or more than half of the country's landmass.¹⁰ With its seizure of the Arak and al-Hail gas fields near Palmyra, it also controls much of the country's electricity supply – those two fields power much of the Syrian regime's strongholds in the west. It was able to sustain itself by generating "...almost \$2 million a day in oil revenues and extortions..."¹¹

Why Syria?

What then made Syria so susceptible to jihadists? Ever since its establishment as an independent state in 1945, Syria is a country tussling to carve a niche in the regional as well as in the international arena. It has been the cradle of Arab nationalism and was ostensibly a vocal supporter of pan-Arab nationalism with the Ba'thist ideology as the driving force along with Iraq. Positioning itself as the harbinger of Arab nationalism, however, has put Syria many times in "a paradoxical" situation. In the 1980s, Syria became the only Arab state to support a non-Arab Iran during the Iran-Iraq crisis, which was unlike the position taken by its Sunni Muslim neighbours. In the 1990s, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, there was negotiation to sign a peace agreement with Israel. However, the "shrewd" then President, Hafiz al-Assad, decided to ally with Iran than with Israel for he perceived that it would give him more bargaining power vis-à-vis Israel and the US.

Syria was nonetheless caught in a dilemma. At the home front, Assad was not considered legitimate enough. He belonged to an Alawite sect amongst a sea of Sunni Muslims, who consider them as heretics. Despite not being a monarchy, the Assad family has been ruling Syria since 1970. Perceptive calculations by Hafez al-Assad ensured that almost all the high-profile positions were from the

Alawite sect and a coterie of Sunni loyalists to bolster his standing among those groups and helped the regime to stay in power. Perhaps due to the “minority complex” coupled with the history of multiple coups, and the threat of Muslim Brotherhood, the system was closed and Syria was under emergency law for almost 50 years. There was no rule of law and little scope for public sphere in the country; public protests banned, the press and the media state-controlled, which Ibrahim Saleh terms as “media cocooning”.

The Arab Spring phenomenon got the sense of the Syrian citizens. In an inconspicuous town of Deraa, the young boys of Syria expressed their distress towards the regime inflaming the biggest uprising ever, engulfing the whole of the region and abroad. Initially, when the uprising started in Tunisia, the current President, Bashar al-Assad, was very confident that Syria will remain immune from all these conflicts. He instead exuded a holier-than-thou attitude towards the inflicted countries of Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt. So, when a slight sign of dissent was discovered, the *Mukhabarat*¹² state bounced into action. The torture and assault of young children had a visceral effect upon the citizens, which went viral through different sources of social media and resulted in massive demonstrations. What started as a peaceful uprising for dignity, inclusion and democracy, notoriously turned into an ethno-sectarian conflict.

The schism in the Syrian society is predominantly economic, although compounded by a rigid and non-participatory political structure. Bashar Assad’s policy of opening the market, termed “social market economy”,¹³ led to a zigzag approach. The adhoc liberalisation was not effective; as part of the neo-liberalisation drive, the regime dismantled all state farms and handed them over to private hands. This process of neo-liberalisation benefitted the privileged elite business primarily in Damascus and Aleppo. By contrast, rural communities had state support withdrawn and subsidies lifted, leading to significant rural discontent and rural-to-urban migration. The slum villages on the outskirts of urban areas absorbed much of the rural migration, ended up housing nearly a third of Syria’s population, and were centres of anti-regime activity in 2011. Samir Seifan asserts:

Syria used to have a social pyramid characterised by a wide base, a big middle stratum and a low peak; under economic reform, the middle strata are shrinking while a rich stratum is emerging at the top, resulting in a social pyramid with a broad base, a narrowing middle stratum and a higher peak.¹⁴

According to Safadi, Munro and Ziadeh, “Syria’s economy suffers from deep-rooted structural weaknesses and a business environment plagued by bureaucratic red tape, governance weaknesses and a lack of corporate transparency.”¹⁵ David Lesch in 2005 had put the straw in the wind that “it would be a recipe for social unrest if unemployment which was rising between 20 percent and 25 percent were to continue unabated”.¹⁶ Joshua Landis also prophetically wrote in the initial

phase of the protest, "...There is too much unemployment and too little freedom... the wall of fear is broken. Apathy of the youth has turned to anger. The country is ready to explode."¹⁷

The nature of the state's response towards the agitators in the Syrian uprising directly led to the rise of ISIS. Discontent among the masses was ripe, there was high rate of unemployment in the rural sector, social safety net had been diminished, there was a wide social gap between the rich and the poor, the false promises of Bashar Assad¹⁸ infuriated the masses, the "public sphere" was missing, and Syria suffered from a "legitimation crisis," as defined by Habermas. By the time few populist measures were doled out to the citizens, the people were already ready for a mortal combat.¹⁹ Assad's first flaw was that he blamed the Islamists and jihadists playing a hand in the uprising and portrayed it as a foreign-inspired conspiracy. Skirmishes along the Israel-Syrian border were reported, which appeared to be done on purpose to divert the uprising.²⁰ Rather than rectifying the system's flaws and resorting to open dialogue, his repressive force compelled people to resort to violence and aggravated the situation leading to involvement of external players. On the other hand, the fragmented and dysfunctional nature of the Syrian opposition made ISIS grow. The wide varieties of political groups, exiled opposition figures and grassroots coalitions have been unable to agree on how to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian National Council (SNC), recognised by 114 countries as the sole legitimate representative of the Syrian people, could not present a credible alternative to the Assad government. It has become a sort of a rag-tag leaderless organisation that had no definite vision and plan.²¹ The presence of strong leaders capable of shaping the political path of revolution was also missing.

Regional Twist: Syria is Key for Many Players

Till 2011, ISIS was an affiliate of the Al Qaeda known for suicide bombing and terror acts in Iraq. But from 2012, ISIS began to make inroads into Syria, sending fighters across the border from its strongholds in northern and western Iraq, seeing an opportunity in the chaos and infighting in Syria, even between those who should in theory have been allies. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who were to become the staunchest foes of Assad, did not initially react aggressively. The Arab League also was reticent and it was only with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) push that the League demanded Assad's resignation and formally requested that the UN Security Council implement a resolution to that effect. The UN Security Council, on its part, only expressed "concerns" without any practical deterrent measures on the ground. The hesitancy with which the regional community acted toward the regime of Bashar al-Assad, despite reports of oppression by government forces against largely peaceful protestors, was majorly

due to much unrest in the neighbouring countries. Post-Saddam Iraq was teetering on the brink of collapse, Libya was embroiled in a mosaic of turf wars post the removal of Gaddafi, and there was civil unrest in Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The “democratising effect” of the Arab Spring prevented the regional states to respond in a measured and calculated manner. However, the internal conflict eventually metastasised into a regional conflagration.

The regionalisation of the Syrian conflict meshed with the involvement of ISIS has morphed the conflict in an unfathomable fashion. The prognosis of the “war on ISIS” is grim. Regionalisation has become a necessity for both the regime and the opposition, survival for the former and military victory for the latter. The “moderate” rebel forces inability to coalesce into a well-organised and effective force, as mentioned above, hampered the Western forces to organise their support systematically. This paved the way for the rise of more radical groups who were becoming disillusioned with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and getting attracted to more radical jihadi and conservative Salafi groups.²² At the same time, the involvement of Iran and its proxy in supporting the Assad government became more pronounced. The involvement of Iran led to some of the Gulf states – prominently Saudi Arabia and Qatar – to foment violence in Syria and harden the sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict, as well as fuelling the sectarian stand-off across the region.²³ The Saudis and other citizens of the Gulf States were increasingly accused of channelling money to radical groups in the war. While officials denied it, there were suspicions that the governments of the Gulf were tacitly supporting Jabhat al-Nusra and other radical groups.

Indeed, regional actors also have powerful incentives to intervene. As Patrick Seale very prudently commented, “If you want control in the region, you have to take control of Syria.” Syria is located at the heart of the geo-sectarian fault line running through the region and rests at the intersection of every major strategic axis in the Arab East.²⁴ It is a key member of the strategic alliance linking Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, with support from Iraq’s Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. Despite Syria’s military exit from Lebanon in 2005, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, the overgrowing presence of Hezbollah as a proxy player helped Syria continue to exert significant influence. Ostensibly, it has played a central role in the ‘resistance front’ against Israel. Its relationship with Jordan’s Hashemite monarchy has subsequently been strained by Jordan’s support for Syria’s opposition and by the influx of Syrian refugees. On its part, Jordan represents a staging ground for Saudi efforts to effect regime-change in Damascus. Syria is also ensnared in an intricate regional web of competition and confrontation: between Turkey and Saudi Arabia for influence in the Levant; between Iran and the GCC states; and between Turkey and Kurdish groups seeking greater autonomy from both Arab and Turkish governments.

However, the alliance of cooperation and confrontation that existed amongst the parties before the uprising has taken a sharp twist.

Turkey, once a close ally of Assad, has become one of the most vocal countries to oust Assad.²⁵ The Kurdish issue is the sticking point for Turkey which Assad manipulated for regime survival.²⁶ The Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) offshoot in Syria, was allowed to operate freely, recruit new fighters for its campaign against Turkey, and undertake a pseudo-governmental role in Kurdish regions of Syria. In return, the PYD used its influence on Syrian Kurds to prevent their participation in the uprising.²⁷ Assad's policy of going soft with the PYD made Turkey take a decisive decision to side with the popular uprising who during the first few months of the Civil War was still sitting on the fence. It started to follow an "open door policy" wherein borders were left porous to allow fighters to enter Syria through Turkey. One consequence of this position was a surge of 2 million refugees into Turkey and the security problems that stemmed from arms and fighters massing around the border area. The killing of 32 people in Suruc by an ISIS suicide bomber became the last straw that prompted Turkey to fight ISIS.²⁸

The recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Turkey is also another reversal in each other's foreign policy. Not so long ago, divergent stance was taken by both countries on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with the coming of General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, where Saudi Arabia was a passionate supporter; and the Israel-Hamas Gaza War which Turkey considered as "genocide" whereas Saudi Arabia supported Egypt's cease-fire initiative. However, Saudi's long-standing opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood has now become more complicated, largely as a result of the country's increased involvement in Yemen. In the fight against the Houthi rebels in that country, the Brotherhood represents an organised Sunni force, a possible Saudi ally on the ground. Some observers believe that the unlikely cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Turkey has been spurred in part by the perception that Iran and the US are moving closer together.²⁹ With the exit of the US troops from Iraq, Iran has certainly emerged as the first line of defence against ISIS which has brought discomfort to the traditional Sunni Arab allies – Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States. Iran is seen to have become Iraq's new patron. This rationale can be substantiated by the refusal of Iraqi Government's apathetic agreement to the US equipment offer.³⁰

Iran has long-standing ties with Syria, unlike the rest of the Arab world. Bashar al-Assad's statement, "The power of Iran is the power of Syria, and a victory for Syria is a victory for Iran,"³¹ is reflective of the countries' cordial relations. Iran's alliance with the Alawite Assad family enables it to extend its influence to the Mediterranean giving a regional leverage and clout. For this reason, when civil war broke out in Syria, Tehran committed itself to funnelling money,

equipment and military assistance to the government. Iran admitted that the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) was present in Syria to provide advice and economic assistance³², and it was reported that Iran was shipping weapons and personnel to Syria via Iraq.³³ “Much of Iran’s funding in Syria has gone toward arming predominantly Shia proxies – notably the so-called National Defense Force, an IRGC-QF-built super-militia – which fight Sunnis on behalf of Assad,” according to Michael Weiss and Nancy Youssef in *The Daily Beast*.³⁴

Iran is quietly coming to terms with the prospect of coordinating with the West, or at the very least not condemning western intervention, in order to secure its regional environment³⁵– highlighted most by negotiations pertaining to its nuclear programme with the P5+1 (namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States; plus Germany) and the July 2015 deal with the US. While it is unlikely that the ISIS episode will result in a dramatic improvement in US–Iranian relations, it may result, in the long term, in an improvement in the context in which Iran–US interactions take place. At the very least, even though Tehran is not coordinating with the Washington-led international coalition, the rise of ISIS has become an important factor in the relations between the United States and Iran.³⁶ This can be seen with the breakthrough in the Iran Nuclear deal earlier in 2015. Internationally, the once “pariah” state Iran has taken a significantly new direction in its foreign policy by going all out at building bridges to neighbouring Sunni states traditionally regarded as rivals, in one board.³⁷ Signing the nuclear deal has allowed Iran to now flex her diplomatic muscle and it has now started to show with the flurry of diplomatic visits by the Iranian Foreign Minister flouting for a plan for a smooth transition of power in Syria. The Iranians, an intelligence official in the region says, “have been more flexible and more effective than anyone else”.³⁸

International Response: Geopolitical?

International response to the Syrian uprising before ISIS came in the scene was non-committing and hesitant. Italy (read as less political clout) was the first European country to condemn the violent oppression of Assad regime and recalled its Ambassador. It took almost six months for the international community to react and condemn the regime. Russia and China, however, did not join the bandwagon and used their veto power four times against proposed UN action against President Bashar al-Assad and his government.

Syria is a long-term strategic ally of Russia. Strategically so because the Syrian port city of Tartous is Moscow’s last naval base in the Mediterranean and recently upgraded by Russian technicians, indicating Moscow’s long term intention of maintaining access to the port. Syria’s geo-strategic centrality in the region gives

Moscow some diplomatic leverage. China, with her growing appetite for energy, has been enlarging her footprint in the West Asian region. Unrest in the region would adversely affect the trade and economy. Moreover, trade between China and Syria had seen significant growth; by 2010 China had become Syria's third-largest importer.³⁹

Sino-Russian opposition to join the US-led coalition forces in Syria was also because of the case of Libya in 2011, whereupon both countries felt duped. The two countries abstained the UNSC Resolution 1973 to establish a no-fly zone over Libya intended as a protective measure to safeguard civilian lives was used to their advantage by the United States, France, Britain and other interested parties to bring down Libyan dictator Gaddafi. The Kremlin also sees the West's attempts to remove Assad more a way of weakening Iran than of helping the Syrian people rid themselves of a tyrant. In contrast to Libya, there appeared to be no concrete plan and direction among the other international players, who were against the Assad regime. Though there was condemnation, no stringent measures and significant assistance came from the international community that would turn the tide to the opposition's advantage, leading the president of SNC to say that the West is giving "cardboard support". Russia has, however, undertaken a bombing campaign against ISIS strongholds in the country as well as providing humanitarian aid.⁴⁰

For varying reasons, Western policies have been hesitant, cautious, and limited in their involvement. Western governments were providing humanitarian assistance while resisting pleas to arm opposition forces, or establish safe zones or no fly zones. They ruled out direct military intervention other than to secure Syrian chemical and biological weapons, and when it became clear that the regime deployed them, provided only 'non-lethal' support.⁴¹ Even this purported "red line" has been tested, however, by the reluctance of the Obama Administration to act when in late-April British, French, Israeli and US intelligence agencies all confirmed that small quantities of the nerve gas Sarin had been used against civilians in Khan al-Assal, near Aleppo.⁴²

Apparently, "confusion" seems to be the word that befits the International actors' response to ISIS and Syrian Crisis. The American President, Barack Obama's four-point plan to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS is yet to be fulfilled.⁴³ In fact, implementation of the plan itself has become a problem. Division 30, also known as the New Syrian Forces, created by the United States and trained by Pentagon⁴⁴ in June 2014, reportedly pledged allegiance to ISIS at Albu Kamal on the Syria-Iraq border.⁴⁵ Division 30 was effectively a propaganda tool to portray there are secular rebels in Syria to fight the Assad regime. But as has been observed, "There is simply no real separation between 'moderate' rebel groups and hardline Salafists allied with al-Qaeda." The bankruptcy of the US effort to train the forces

to defeat ISIS is revealing. French journalist, Nicolas Henin, who was a hostage of the extremists has stated that there is nothing like an Iraqi army. “Basically, we are supporting an army that is not reliable and we are giving them weapons that they will eventually hand over to ISIL,” Henin told *Al Jazeera*. The US, despite four years of vetting the rebel groups, is yet to find a credible dependable ally. The dilemma amongst the powers is that there is no viable alternative after Assad exits. The fight against Assad and fight against ISIS are intricately intertwined, and it is quite a Gordian knot to unravel. European policies have also been incoherent as EU Member States have not agreed on the question of military intervention and on arming the rebels—thus sending confused and confusing signals.⁴⁶

However, the recent disclosure by the retired Lieutenant General, Michael Flynn, former head of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), given to *Al Jazeera*’s Mehdi Hasan, unfolds a different narrative. It confirms earlier suspicions that Washington was monitoring jihadist groups emerging as opposition in Syria, and it was a “wilful Washington decision” not to interfere with the rise of anti-government jihadist groups in Syria, backing a secret 2012 memo predicting their rise.⁴⁷ Thus, the US-led coalition forces’ “supposed” effort to stamp out ISIS must also be taken with a pinch of salt. Considering that the US pledge for support and forming a ‘moderate’ fighting force against ISIS and the Assad regime seems to be in slow process, and with the international community not in consonance of how to tackle the problem, one can in a way premise that all this is a “wilful” decision for the West Asian states to get drowned in their own sectarian war. Iran is moving on with its fight against the ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are on the move to form a joint coalition forces to combat ISIS and also to remove Assad from power. The most recent instalment of this is the 34-state coalition of Islamic countries to fight terrorism.⁴⁸ This situation was prophetically noted by Seymour Hersh in 2007 in his article, “The Redirection: Is the Administration’s new policy benefiting our enemies in the war on terrorism?”⁴⁹ At the time of writing, the Russians have taken the lead of sorts in Syria, bombing strategic targets of the ISIS while, at the same time, supporting the Assad regime and protecting its own assets in the country. They were also instrumental in negotiating a deal with the Assad regime earlier, with regard to the dismantling/removal of its chemical weapons. In fact, the conflict has brought back Russia into the diplomatic and security game in West Asia.

India and ISIS

India-West Asia relations have traditionally been cordial, with close ties forming in the 1950s and 1960s as independent India reached out to the Arab world and developing nations via the Non-Aligned Movement. Syria, like other countries

in West Asia, was not immune to the Arab Spring unfolding in countries across the region; however, the response of the Syrian regime, led by Bashar Al Assad, was to unleash repression on the growing wave of popular support and calls for the ouster of the regime. “To stay in power, Assad resorted to unprecedented violence against his own people, including the use of chemical weapons.”⁵⁰ Beginning 2013, there were indications from Syria as well as from other countries that they would like to see India play a greater role in mitigating the civil war engulfing the country. India continued to maintain its stand of calling for and supporting a negotiated political solution to the conflict via dialogue and reiterated its opposition to external military intervention.

The situation changed in the summer of 2014 with the emergence of ISIS. India figures in the organisation’s calculations as part of the caliphate’s Khurasan province which encompasses Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of India. It was in January 2015 that the IS announced the “expansion of the...caliphate to Khurasan...[naming] former Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) leader Hafiz Saeed Khan, 42, as the ‘wali’ or governor...”⁵¹ More recently, the Islamic State has reiterated its aim to expand “...beyond Iraq and Syria...into India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan (and several other countries)”⁵² Praveen Swami states:

“In a first, the organisation also offers an analysis of the political situation in India. It notes that ‘a movement of Hindus is growing who kill Muslims who eat beef. The people who fund these organisations want to grow a huge following of Islam-haters who can turn into potential recruits for future wars in their countries’.”⁵³

While ISIS has not really taken root in India or managed alliances of such nature with existing insurgent/terror groups in India, there is a worrying trend of Indians joining the organisation as well as being attracted to its ideology. In the wake of the Paris terror attacks in November 2015, India clarified that 19 Indians were known to have joined the IS and that intelligence agencies were “monitoring some 50 others for following IS propaganda on social media”.⁵⁴ Some of those who joined the organisation have also returned back home.⁵⁵

India has a long experience in fighting different forms of insurgency and terrorism, yet the IS could pose a considerable challenge. While the calls for Indian involvement in the conflict continue, India has reiterated its stand of finding a political solution to the issue with the involvement of all concerned parties.

Conclusion

The greatest fallout of the Syrian Uprising besides the rise of ISIS is the loss of Syrian sovereignty and total surrender to foreign assistance and influence in the days to come. The “othering” of Alawites for ensuring the regime survival⁵⁶ resulted in acute marginalisation and alienation to “the other” Sunnis in Syria.

Alienation leads to radicalism, which in turn, provides fertile ground for recruitment of terrorists, which can be seen in a way in the attraction that the ISIS has for the youth. Thus, inclusion and social justice is necessary. In October 2014, the *New York Times* reporter, David Kirkpatrick, highlighted how many young Tunisians, frustrated by corruption and economic stagnation at home, perceive the caliphate as a place where honest Sunnis can set up decent lives away from the corruption that has pervaded their country. Arab governments have a huge challenge to instil hope in their existing states among bulging youth populations, large proportions of whom are prone to hear the stern but egalitarian appeal of the jihadis. Sumis Mline in *The Guardian* believes that it is the citizens of the region that can cure the malaise and not by others who “incubated” the virus. Though Joshua Landis remarks ISIS as an expression of sectarianism run amok;⁵⁷ the *fitna* with the other jihadi rebels however indicates that ISIS has a larger agenda. ISIS’s projected vision of a comprehensive society, promoting inclusion, belonging and purpose is appealing to many people who are seeking a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. It is cardinal to discredit the violent message of ISIS and effectively root it out, but mere military action is not the solution.

NOTES

1. In an interview with the *New Yorker* in January 2014, the President dismissed concerns about the group and other jihadists fighting in neighbouring Syria.
2. During the Abbasid Empire, there was a caliphate that spread from northern Africa across the expanse of West Asia to present-day Pakistan.
3. Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) led by Ayman al-Zawahiri publicly severed ties with ISIS in February 2014. Differences over tactics and ideology and Baghdadi’s escalating violence against other jihadists in Syria led to its disavowal.
4. Lina Khatib, director of the Carnegie Middle East Centre. “I describe ISIS as water that seeps into the cracks – the cracks of policy and strategy of the international community.”
5. Karen Yourish, Derek Watkins and Tom Giratikanon, “Recent Attacks Demonstrate Islamic State’s Ability to Both Inspire and Coordinate Terror”, *New York Times*, January 8, 2016, at http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/17/world/middleeast/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html?_r=0.
6. T. Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, Routledge, London, 2013.
7. It is pertinent to note that many observers now believe that it was the 2003 invasion that led to the establishment and growth of AlQaeda in the country.
8. Cited in: Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, William Collins, London, 2015, p.38; Ahmed S Hashim, “The Islamic State: from Al-Qaeda Affiliate to Caliphate”, *Middle East Policy Council Journal*, Winter 2014, XXI(4).
9. Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger, No. 8, p.41.
10. Kareem Shaheen, “Isis Controls 50% of Syria After Seizing Historic City of Palmyra,” *The Guardian*, May 21, 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/21/isis-palmyra-syria-islamic-state>
11. Joyce Karam, “ISIS in 2015: All Eyes on Mosul”, *Al Arabiya*, January 1, 2015, at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2014/12/31/ISIS-in-2015-All-eyes-on-Mosul.html>.

12. *Mukhabarat* is Arabic for the Military Intelligence Directorate in Syria. The intelligence service is very influential in Syrian politics and is controlled by the Syrian President.
13. The 10th Conference of the Arab Baath Socialist Party (June, 2005) officially adopted the Social Market Economy that in principle combines a market with social protections.
14. Samin Zeifan, "Road to Economic Reform in Syria", St. Andrews Papers on Contemporary Syria, 2011.
15. Raed, Safadi, Laura Munri and Radwan Ziadeh, "Syria: The Underpinnings of Autocracy: Conflict, Oil and the Curtailment of Economic Freedom", in Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi (eds.), *Democracy in the Arab World: Explaining the Deficit*, Routledge, London, 2011, p. 146.
16. David W. Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria*, Yale University Press, London, 2005, p.222.
17. Joshua Landis, "Deraa: The Government Takes Off Its Gloves:15 Killed", Syria Commnt, March 23, 2011, at www.joshualandis.com/blog?p=8692&cp=all.
18. Bashar's first inauguration speech stressed the need for "a comprehensive development strategy providing a specific framework for steps and measures to be taken to achieve this strategy" However, there has been no clear roadmap towards economic liberalisation and building a liberal market economy.
19. Emergency law was lifted, an election was announced, wages were raised, etc.
20. David W. Lesch, *Syria: The Fall of the House of Assad*, Yale University Press, London, 2012, p.135.
21. In November 2012, then US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton dismissed the group saying, "The bloc could no longer be viewed as the possible leader of the opposition."
22. The US-backed rebel faction, Harakat Hazzm, disbanded, its members joining extremist groups such as the Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda offshoot in Syria. Some of the men joined a group called the Levant Front, a coalition of rebel militias that also has ties to Al Qaeda. See: <http://www.ibtimes.com/four-years-later-free-syrian-army-has-collapsed-1847116>.
23. For more on this theme, see Emile Hokayem, "Iran, the Gulf States and the Syrian CivilWar", in *Middle Eastern Security the US pivot and the rise of ISIS*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014.
24. Steven Heydemann, "Syria's Uprising: Sectarianism, Regionalisation, and State Order in the Levant," Working Paper, No. 119, May 2013, Fride, Netherlands at http://fride.org/download/WP_119_Syria_Uprising.pdf.
25. Turkey hosted the Syrian National Council (SNC); the Free Syrian Army; and over 20,000 Syrian refugees who fled Assad's violent crackdown.
26. Regionally, Syria had been a key component of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) "zero problems with neighbors" policy. Domestically, engagement with the Syrian regime ensured Syrian cooperation on Turkey's three-decade fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). However, the uprising led the Syrian Government to secure the support from the Kurdish constituencies. Concessions were announced, citizenship were given to 250,000 Kurds and the Kurdish New Year (*Nawrooz*) was declared a national holiday.
27. <http://www.mideasti.org/content/kurdish-dimension-turkeys-syria-policy>.
28. For almost two years Turkey and ISIS avoided fighting. Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute, terms it as the "Cold War". Turkey finally on August 24, 2015, formally agreed to join the US-led coalition against ISIS.
29. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/12/saudi-arabia-turkey-syria_n_7012268.html?ir=India&adsSiteOverride=in.
30. <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/07/29/iraq-only-accepts-fraction-of-us-equipment-to-fight-isis>(Accessed on 18 August, 2015)

31. <http://www.thetower.org/2281-assad-nuclear-deal-will-strengthen-irans-role-internationally-benefit-syrian-regime/>
32. Interview with IRGC 'Commander Mohammad-Ali Aziz Jafari', ISNA, September 16, 2012.
33. Louis Charbonneau, "Exclusive: Western Report – Iran Ships Arms, Personnel to Syria via Iraq", *Reuters*, September 19, 2012.
34. <http://www.businessinsider.in/ISIS-will-benefit-from-the-Iran-nuclear-deal/articleshow/48089326.cms>.
35. According to *The Independent*, a projected plan for Tehran to join an alliance alongside the West and Arab states against the Islamist group, with Russia also a member, was discussed during a visit by the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, to Moscow (August 19, 2015).
36. Dina Esfandiary and Ariane Tabatabai, "Iran's ISIS policy", *International Affairs* 91(1), 2015.
37. The Deputy Foreign Minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, made an unexpected trip to Saudi Arabia recently to speak about ISIS. Mr Zarif, meanwhile, has visited Lebanon, Kuwait and also Qatar (August 2015). Zarif justified that for a new challenge [ISIS], new approaches were needed.
38. Cited in Bill Powell, "Is ISIS Winning?", *Newsweek*, June 12, 2015.
39. Holly Yan, "Why China, Russia Won't Condemn Syrian Regime?", CNN.com, February 5, 2012, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/2/05/world/mest/Syria-china-russia-relations/index.html?hpt=htm>.
40. "Russia To Focus On 'Humanitarian Ops' In Syria", *Sky News*, January 15, 2016, at <http://news.sky.com/story/1623383/russia-to-focus-on-humanitarian-ops-in-syria>.
41. In mid-April 2013, Britain and France provided the UN with evidence indicating that chemical weapons had been used in Syria. Despite the US and European warnings that such use would trigger intervention, Western governments seem to have concluded that there was not sufficient certainty about the matter to justify a military response. As of mid-May 2013, uncertainty persisted about whether chemical weapons were used and if they were, by which side in the conflict.
42. <http://www.infowars.com/isis-and-al-nusra-merge-on-syria-iraq-border/>.
43. This plan includes air strikes against ISIS targets, increased support to local forces on the ground, continuation of counterterrorism efforts to prevent future attacks, and humanitarian assistance to non-combatants in the region
44. Defence Secretary, Ashton Carter, announced 90 mercenaries, in early July, two-thirds of the Division 30 mercenaries, including the group's commander Nadim al-Hassan, were captured in Syria north of Aleppo by Jabhat al-Nusra fighters.
45. <http://www.infowars.com/isis-and-al-nusra-merge-on-syria-iraq-border/>.
46. Dr. Muriel Asseburg, Senior Fellow, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin, "Syria's Civil War: Geopolitical Implications and Scenarios".
47. The document recently declassified through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), analyses the situation in Syria in the summer of 2012 and predicts: "*If the situation unravels, there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria... and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime.*"
48. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudi-arabia/12050729/Saudi-Arabia-announces-34-country-Islamic-coalition-to-fight-terrorism.html>.
49. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/03/05/the-redirection>.
50. Kabir Taneja, "India and the Syrian Civil War", *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/india-and-the-syrian-civil-war/>.
51. Rezaul H. Laskar, "IS Announces Expansion into AfPak, Parts of India", *Hindustan Times*, January 29, 2015, at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/is-announces-expansion-into-afpak-parts-of-india/story-6oLyWpPxodwnb0jt1rhCbP.html>.

52. Praveen Swami, "Islamic State's Latest Manifesto Vows to Expand War to India", *Indian Express*, December 3, 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/islamic-state-manifesto-vows-to-expand-war-to-india/#sthash.wBdjs41P.dpuf>.
53. Ibid.
54. Parikshit Luthra, "At Least 19 Indians Join ISIS, Government Intensifies Surveillance", *IBN-Live.com*, November 15, 2015, at <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/india/19-indians-joins-isis-surveillance-on-those-following-terror-propaganda-indian-intelligence-sources-1164686.html>. A more recent report claims this number to be 23, with the majority being from the southern Indian states. See http://zeenews.india.com/news/india/23-indians-joined-isis-to-fight-in-iraq-and-syria-17-belong-to-southern-states-report_1839650.html.
55. Mugdha Variyar, "Indian Who Joined Isis Wants to Return Home, Calls Family from Raqqa", *International Business Times*, October 10, 2015, at <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/indian-who-joined-isis-wants-return-home-calls-family-raqqa-649939>.
56. According to Edward Said, in essence, the idea of "othering" suggests that the self is constructed against an "other", who possesses characteristics that are the binary opposite of the self. In referring to the "other", a regime is able to strengthen relations across the in-group in the face of an other who was increasingly framed as an enemy. In light of this, in order to ensure that basic needs were met, individuals turned to other actors to provide security.
57. <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/future-isis-sectarian-response-isis-picked-fight-win/>.

10

Managing Threats and Challenges of Terrorism in the Eurasian Region

Meena Singh Roy and Rajorshi Roy

Terrorism and religious extremism remain a major cause of concern for the predominantly Muslim but politically secular states of the Central Asian region. The drawdown of Western forces from Afghanistan and rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have created a new situation for the Central Asian Republics (CARs). There is increasing concern and fear of resurgence of local and foreign militant groups in the region. The situation gets further complicated because the Fergana valley that is split between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remains a hotbed of religious extremism. Given the rise of extremist forces in and around the region, there exist faultlines in Central Asia that have the potential to bring about instability in the whole region. These faultlines include inter-ethnic discords and socio-economic weaknesses of state structures, to name a few. The CARs also remain vulnerable due to the many drug trafficking routes that criss-cross the area.

There are indications that the region is likely to face the spillover effects of instability in the West Asian region particularly by the rise of the ISIS and its increasing attraction for the youth of the Central Asian countries. A significant number of Central Asians – around 2,000 – have joined the radical Islamic groups in Syria and Iraq.¹ Moreover, there exist social, political and cultural conditions, similar to the ones in West Asia, for the ISIS to embed itself in Central Asia. An ISIS map of 2014 highlights the group's plans to expand its territories in regions that were under the historical Arab caliphates from the seventh to 13th centuries.² Central Asia was a part of those Caliphates. Meanwhile, the violent Islamic

Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) has not only pledged allegiance to the ISIS but also sought to regain a foothold in northern Afghanistan – an area that lies in close proximity to Central Asia. Other organisations like the Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat remain active in the region. One cannot also rule out the Central Asian radicals in Syria and Iraq and their compatriots in the Af-Pak region coordinating their militant activities against CARs.

This paper intends to examine various aspects of terrorism and religious extremism in Central Asia and the prospects of regional cooperation to combat them. It argues that the case of the Central Asian region is somewhat different as compared to Southern and West Asian region. The root causes of extremism are different in the CARs. More importantly, the regime security in these countries has been a priority for the ruling party, thus depriving political space to the opposition. This clubbed with lack of political and economic reforms have led to lot of resistance in some of the countries. In addition, the resource-rich countries like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have been able to provide economic development to the people in their countries. At the same time, intra-regional issues further complicate the situation. Finally, the countries bordering Afghanistan are more vulnerable to the problems of having spillover impact of religious extremism and instability in Af-Pak region. In the light of these complexities and given the scale, nature and global reach of jihadi networks, it is not possible for any country to deal with this threat on its own. The situation gets worse given the lack of capabilities of Central Asian states to tackle this problem. Therefore, efforts at national, regional and sub-regional levels need to be scaled up to manage these new security challenges in the region.

The paper will address the following issues:

- Emerging trends of Islamic extremism
- Causes of religious extremism
- Responses of CARs
- Future of radical Islam in the region
- Role of regional organisations in combating the threat of extremism
- Prospects of cooperation between India and the CARs

Emerging Trends of Islamic Extremism in Central Asia

Islamic extremism has been a major factor in Central Asian politics right from the time of CARs' independence in 1991. After decades of Soviet repression, this period marked the revival of Islamic faith with people showing an eagerness to connect with their spiritual past. The new religious environment was further strengthened by the emergence of Islamic missionaries from the regional countries. They institutionalised religious practices by setting up mosques and translating the Koran in local languages. However, during this time the new regimes, having

no experience of state and nation building, struggled to meet the increasing aspirations of their citizens. The resulting vacuum was being increasingly filled by Islamic groups whose growing popularity went hand in glove with their demand for establishing a theocratic Muslim state, i.e., a Caliphate governed by sharia. The elites, with their restricted understanding of religion, responded by brutally suppressing any religious activity seen as a threat to their stability.³ This set the stage for a period of intense Islamic radicalisation in Central Asia wherein religious extremists from the neighbouring states began to cultivate the growing domestic unrest.

Islamic extremism in the region can be broadly divided into 3 phases:

- a) Post-independence period from 1991 to 2000
- b) Terror attacks in the US in 2001 to 2010
- c) Current phase: emergence of ISIS and drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan

The first phase from 1991-2000 was the most violent period of Islamic extremism in Central Asia. The two prominent groups that emerged during this period were the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) – an umbrella organisation of Islamic and nationalist forces in Tajikistan and the O'zbekiston Islomiy Harakati or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The UTO fought a bitter civil war from 1992-97 against the ruling Tajik regime. However, the power sharing agreement of 1997 resulted in a reconciliation that saw the UTO join the national mainstream.⁴ On the other hand, the IMU remained a major militant threat with the aim of overthrowing Uzbek President Islam Karimov's regime and replacing it with a Caliphate. A distinctive feature of Islamic radicalisation during this period was the ability of Central Asian militant groups to network with their Afghan counterparts.⁵ In due course of time, the IMU forged an understanding with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda on waging global jihad.⁶ Other transnational groups like the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami continued to enjoy broad support throughout the region.

The second phase of Islamic extremism coincided with the 9/11 terror attacks in the US and the American war on global terror. Being a partner in the anti-terror Western coalition brought about significant dividends for the CARs.⁷ The Western military operations resulted in extremist groups like the IMU suffering heavy casualties. The IMU was forced to abandon Central Asia and seek sanctuary in the Af-Pak area. There it became Taliban and Al-Qaeda's partner in waging global jihad.⁸ Consequently, the threat of extremism in Central Asia during this period was largely contained and managed.

The third or current phase of Islamic extremism has been synonymous with the emergence of ISIS and drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan. This period

has witnessed the increasing threat of radicalisation in the CARs. It has also raised the twin spectre of ISIS spreading its ideological influence in Central Asia and militancy from neighbouring Afghanistan spilling over to the region. Moreover, the likelihood of domestic radical groups networking with outside militants has further raised the stakes. Against this backdrop, the spread and impact of radicalisation has been uneven across Central Asia. Countries particularly vulnerable to this problem are Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, even the relatively well-off and stable Kazakh and Turkmen societies have been unable to buck the trend. While no major terrorist attacks have taken place in the region since 2012, yet the growing number of terror related arrests highlight a disturbing trend.

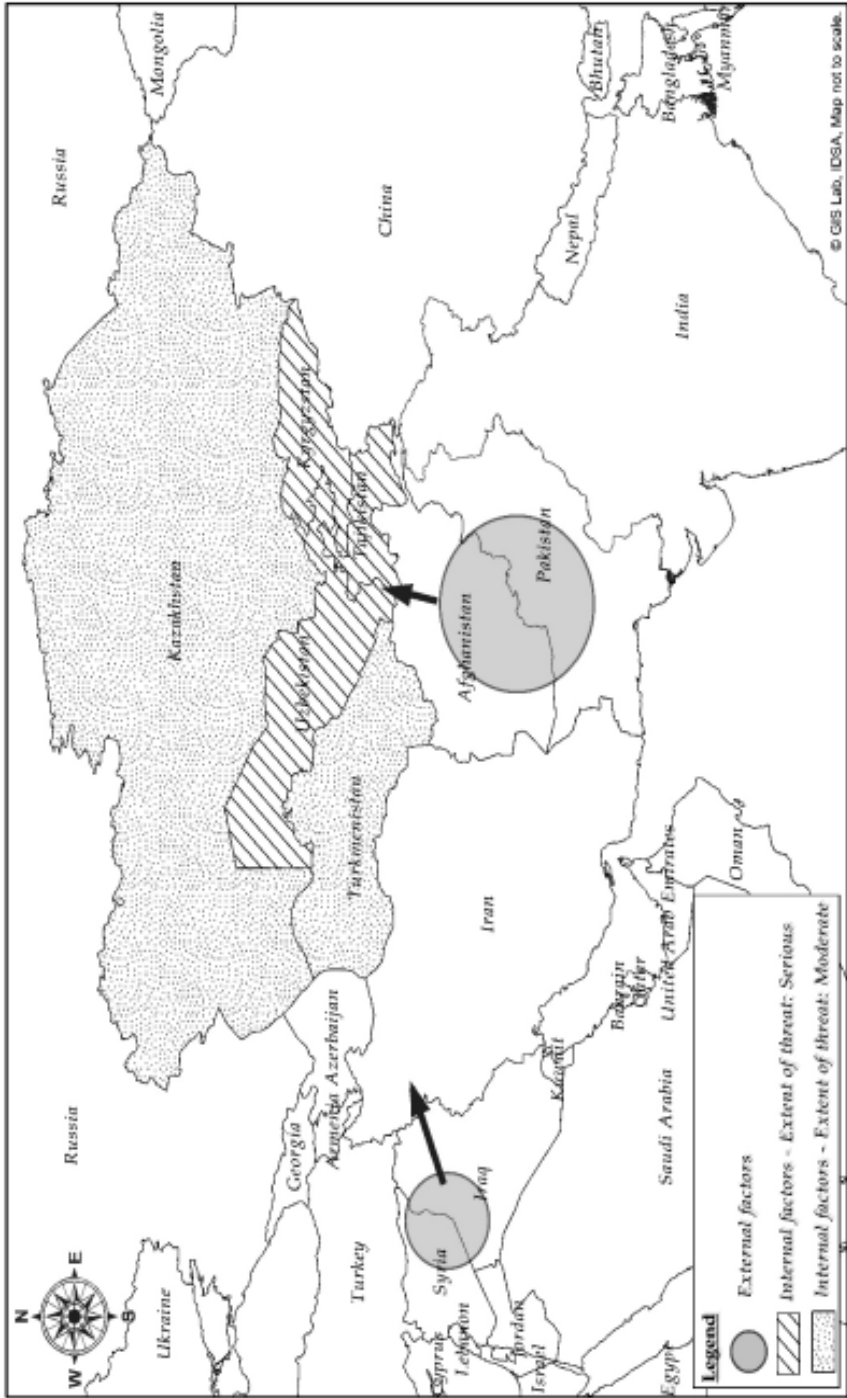
Meanwhile, a closer analysis of radicalisation in Central Asia reveals the influence of both the domestic policies of ruling regimes and the external factors in fuelling it (as shown in Figure 1). Therefore, the seriousness of Islamic extremism in Central Asia needs to be viewed not only in the context of developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria, but also in the internal policies of the Central Asian countries. The threat of extremism and terrorism is much more serious in Southern and West Asian region as compared to Central Asia. However this is not to deny the fact that instability in the Af-Pak and West Asian region does have serious implications for CARs. The internal weaknesses in the Central Asian countries provide fertile ground to the jihadists to spread their influence and attract the Central Asian youths to join their groups. More importantly, the geographical proximity to Af-Pak and West Asian region further complicates the situation for the CARs.

Developments in Afghanistan and Implications for Central Asia

In many ways, the security and stability of CARs is linked to peace and stability in Kabul. The countries of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan share 2,000-km long border with Afghanistan that remains porous and poorly demarcated at numerous places.⁹ These regions are frequently used as conduits for smuggling weapons and drugs while their proceeds are a major source of terrorist funding. The smugglers also make use of strong ethnic linkages that exist between Central Asians and their Afghan brethren. The Tajiks (27 per cent), Uzbeks (9 per cent) and Turkmens (3 per cent) comprise of a significant part of Afghan population.¹⁰

Against this backdrop, the drawdown of US troops from the region is likely to encourage the Taliban and other terrorist organisations to step up their militant activities in Afghanistan. The Taliban's recent successful terror attacks, especially in the northern parts of Afghanistan that border CARs, have set the alarm bells ringing.¹¹ More worryingly, there have been reports of the IMU trying to re-establish a foothold in this region.¹² The fact that it has pledged allegiance to

Figure 1: Extent of the Threat of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Central Asia



Source: Prepared by Geographical Information System (GIS) Lab, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

ISIS indicates a convergence of interests on establishing a Caliphate in Central Asia. A strong IMU presence in border regions of Badakhshan, Badghis, Faryab and Takhar can once again act as a staging post for militants seeking to attack Central Asia. There have already been reports of skirmishes between the Taliban and Tajik and Turkmen border guards during 2014-15.¹³

Analysis of Militant Groups Operating in the Region

To understand the threat of radical Islam in CARs, it is important to know the nature and activities of various Islamic groups operating in the region. As such, they can be broadly categorised into extremist and relatively moderate groups.

A) Extremist Groups

Three key extremist groups operating in the region are the IMU, Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and Jund al-Khilafa (JaK). These groups are based in Pakistan's northern Waziristan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), have links with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and participate in militant attacks in Afghanistan. The IMU and IJU in particular have imparted extensive militant training to terrorists from around the world and their fighters have experience of combat fighting. They are also said to be well-equipped with lethal weapons.¹⁴ Given their linkages with Central Asia, this combination of weapons reserves, terrorist networking and combat experience make them dangerous militant groups.

More significantly, the IMU has pledged allegiance to ISIS. This is a significant development especially when there exist fundamental differences between IMU's ally, the Taliban, and ISIS. It highlights a convergence of interests between ISIS's call for the establishment of Khorasan in Central Asia and IMU's original goal of a Caliphate for the region. Moreover, this pledge of allegiance can help IMU attract more fighters from Central Asia for a cause that still holds appeal among a few sections of the CARs' societies. Besides, ISIS and IMU have an ideological underpinning in the Salafist school of thought.¹⁵ In contrast, IMU's relationship with the Taliban who follow the Deobandi sect is often described as 'tactical' designed to achieve common goals.¹⁶

While it is too early to predict how the contradictions between ISIS and Taliban will play out yet, there exists a possibility of IMU acting as a mediator to manage their differences. This will potentially create an even more volatile situation in the region where Islamic militants from Syria and Afghanistan coordinate their terrorist activities. Table 1 gives a comparison of the main extremist groups operating in the region.

B) Other Groups

The two relatively moderate groups operating in the region are the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Liberation party) and Tablighi Jamaat. Both these groups aim

Table 1: A Comparison of Extremist Groups Operating in the Region

	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)	Islamic Jihad Union (IJU)	Jund al-Khilafa (JaK)
Established	1990s	2002 – Offshoot of IMU	2011 – set up by Kazakh radicals
Based out of	Northern Waziristan	FATA	FATA
Terror linkages	Taliban, Al-Qaeda and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)	Haqqani Network, Taliban and Al-Qaeda	Haqqani Network, Taliban and Al-Qaeda
Aim	Waging global jihad	Establishing global Islamic Caliphate	Establishing global Islamic Caliphate
Fighters	5,000 Central Asian fighters with top leadership dominated by Uzbeks	Substantial number of Central Asian fighters along with numerous Turks and Germans	Significant number of Salafists from southern Kazakhstan
Nature of recent activity	Violent – Carried out attacks on Karachi airport in June 2014	Violent –Partnered the Taliban in carrying out militant strikes in Afghanistan's eastern and northern provinces of Pakrika and Badakhshan	Violent – carried out attacks in Kazakhstan in 2011 – Carried out a murderous attack in France in 2012–Participated in the militant attacks in Afghanistan
Activity in Central Asia	– Recruits new members for ISIS – Retains significant influence in the Fergana Valley and has been able to tap into the region's several socio-economic, political and religious faultlines – Has embraced social media to spread its propaganda	– Recruits new members for ISIS – Called on followers to carry out terror strikes in their countries under 'individual jihad' by attacking targets like the railways and energy pipelines	Religious indoctrination
Specialisation	– Imparting militant training to terrorists from around the world – Solid combat experience – Large weapons stockpile	– Solid combat experience – Large weapons stockpile	

to establish a Caliphate and enjoy broad support in the region. Table 2 summarises the other groups operating in the region.

Table 2: Comparison of Other Groups Operating in the Region

	Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami	Tablighi Jamaat
Nature	Sunni transnational political organisation that aims to topple corrupt regimes and replace it with a Caliphate	Aims to promote Islamic faith
Activity	Prefers peaceful means but holds the view that violence will be unavoidable in the light of repressive measures adopted by the Central Asian states.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Places emphasis on non-violence and prioritises missionary activities – Considers establishment of a Caliphate as a long-term goal that can be achieved only after implementing significant reforms in the Islamic community – Remains an apolitical organisation with politics seen as <i>fitna</i>, i.e., source of division within Islam – Has raised concern among CARs due to its call for return to conservative Islamic principles; the frequent arrests of terrorists who were former members of the Jamaat have also added to their anxiety
Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enjoys broad support throughout the region even though banned by all the CARs – Has continued with its policy of religious indoctrination – Particularly active in Kyrgyzstan where membership estimated to be in excess of 20,000;¹⁷ has successfully exploited Kyrgyzstan’s inter-ethnic discord that prevails in the Osh and Jalalabad regions – Has stepped up its indoctrination activities in Kazakhstan’s Jambul and Almaty provinces¹⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Banned throughout Central Asia with the exception of Kyrgyzstan – Concentrated in the Fergana Valley around the cities of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken – Made inroads into the Russian provinces of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan

Central Asia and ISIS

An important element of Islamic radicalisation in Central Asia is the growing ideological influence of ISIS. Not only have the people been receptive to the ISIS propaganda but also followed it up by joining the group in large numbers. While the sheer distance between Central Asia and the Middle East may offer a sense of detachment from the unfolding ISIS situation, yet the group’s plans for establishing a Khorasan in CARs is a worrying development. The region also faces the threat of radicalised fighters returning home to wage jihad against the ruling regimes.

However, there also exists a counter-narrative wherein regional security experts like Alexey Malashenko argue that the “threat of Islamic State is often exaggerated although fears do exist”. They attribute this to the geographical distance between the two regions and CARs defining themselves as different from the West Asian region in psychological, cultural and political terms.³ Therefore, despite the various viewpoints the emerging threats should not be ignored.

Central Asians in Syria and Iraq

An analysis of Central Asians with the ISIS reveals a sizeable presence from each of the five CARs. This includes more than 500 Uzbeks⁴, 400 Kyrgyz⁵, 380 Tajiks⁶, 360 Turkmens⁷ and 300 Kazakhs.⁸ Surprisingly, the list includes a significant number of women and children.⁹ This indicates the presence of families in this defacto state.

The Central Asian jihadists in ISIS are divided into *Jamaats* or groups on the basis of ethnicity and language.¹⁰ This has led to the formation of Kazakh and Tajik *Jamaats* whose members are active jihadi fighters. Their membership is open to other ethnicities and nationalities and includes Tatars, Chechens, Uyghurs and Dagestanis. Many of the Tajiks in particular are veterans of the Tajik Civil War and as such battle hardened. Meanwhile, the Uzbek *Kateebat* or battalion – the Imam Al-Bukhari (KIB) and *Kateebat* Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ) have collaborated with the Al-Qaeda linked Jabhat al Nusra.¹¹ KTJ is headed by Abu Saloh who is an ethnic Uzbek from Osh.¹² It has been widely reported that ethnic Uzbeks are at the forefront of militant activity for the IS.¹³ The Uzbeks belong not only to Uzbekistan but also to the different countries of the region. This is due to the significant presence of Uzbek minorities in countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. It is estimated that more than 70 per cent of Kyrgyz nationals in the IS are ethnic Uzbeks from the volatile region of Osh and Jalalabad.¹⁴

The Central Asian *Jamaats* and *Kateebats* have widely used the Internet and social media to spread their propaganda. This includes producing media content. The KTJ has a media outlet called Jannat Oshiqdari (lovers of paradise) while the KIB media wing is called Ál-Fatah studio.¹⁵ The videos are professionally made and dwell on the faultlines that can be exploited in the region. They project the allure of fighting for a ‘just’ cause and the virtues of an Islamic state where genuine equality is putatively practised. In November 2014, the ISIS released a video titled, “Race to God”, showing young Kazakh children studying in a madrasa and getting instructions at a training camp in Syria’s Raqqa province.¹⁶

Radicalisation and Recruitment

The recruitment of Central Asians takes place at both the domestic and

international levels. Domestically, the indoctrination is initiated clandestinely by various extremist Islamic groups like the IMU and IJU in mosques and prayer meetings.¹⁷ The Internet and social media have also made it easier to radicalise people especially when the CARs lack the capabilities to comprehensively track the online content. Besides, the radical groups have devised ingenious methods to avoid detection. This includes transferring radical propaganda through memory sticks in cell phones that at most times fail to arouse any suspicion.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Central Asians are also indoctrinated in countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey where they go for work and to study Islam.¹⁹ This is more acute in the case of Russia where a sizeable number of Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz migrant labourers are employed. These people are mostly under the age of 35, often do not have legal work permits and are engaged in the least appreciated and most exploited jobs. The Islamic groups have tapped into their prevailing discontent to promise them a better alternative. There are reports of migrants being offered US\$ 5,000 to join the ISIS.²⁰ In comparison, a Tajik migrant working in Russia earns somewhere between US\$ 226 to US\$ 454 per month.²¹ Religion also provides these migrants solace from loneliness that arises by staying away from families. In March 2015, Tajikistan's Interior Minister revealed the exodus of 200 Tajik migrant labourers from Russia to Syria.²² The majority of these recruits join ISIS in Syria by going through Turkey²³ since all CARs have a favourable visa regime with Ankara.

ISIS retains a far greater appeal among Central Asians than the Af-Pak Taliban. This is to a large extent rooted in ISIS's message of creating a just world order that resonates with the marginalised sections of Central Asia. In comparison, the turbulent era of 1990s perhaps acts as a reminder to the dangers of Islamic extremism from Afghanistan.

ISIS Footprints in Central Asia

Central Asia's first major tryst with ISIS came in September 2014 when the ISIS flag was hung on a Tashkent bridge.²⁴ This was followed in quick succession by reports of IMU pledging allegiance to ISIS²⁵ and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appointing an *amir* for Uzbekistan.²⁶ But the real shock was the defection of Tajikistan's Head of Special Forces, Col. Gulmurod Khalimov to ISIS in May 2015.²⁷ For an officer who was extensively trained by Russia and US in anti-terror operations, this was as much an indictment of the failure of Tajik regime as it was about ISIS's ability to penetrate the most secure layer of Tajik security. More worryingly, this has been followed by an increase in arrests of people with ISIS links. In January 2015, the Kyrgyz security agencies arrested four people in the city of Osh on terror charges. They were trained in Syria.²⁸ Similar arrests have taken place in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Therefore, looking

at the activities of various Islamic groups operating in the region, it is likely that the problem of Islamic radicalisation will exacerbate in the future. Related to the problem of religious extremism is drug trafficking and proliferation of small arms.

Problem of Drug Trafficking in Central Asia

The CARs face a renewed challenge and threat of drug trafficking due to their proximity to Afghanistan which remains the world's largest opiate-producing country. Despite the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s decade-long presence in Kabul, there have been no signs of a decline in opium production. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has stated that the total area under opium cultivation in Afghanistan increased by a record 7 per cent in 2014.²⁹ The country produces an estimated 93 per cent of the world's opium³⁰, of which 90 per cent is trafficked out of its borders³¹ and only 3 per cent seized.³² The turnover from illicit Afghan opiate is around US\$ 40 billion annually.³³ In this context, the Tajik Foreign Minister had stated that "the amount of narcotics being transported from Afghanistan through the neighbouring countries on to Europe...is growing. This is because over the years the international community has been fighting terrorism and forgotten that the drug business has been the main occupation of the people of Afghanistan."

Linkages between Drug Trafficking, Terrorism and Crime

Ominously for the CARs there appears to be a pattern of growing linkages between drug trafficking groups, criminals and militants operating in the region.³⁴ Reports have emerged of IMU facilitating the trafficking of opium in Central Asia and beyond on behalf of the Afghan Taliban.³⁵ In doing so it has forged an alliance with the criminal groups of CARs and the Russian mafia. David Mansfield, a development expert on Afghanistan, points out to the existence of a barter system to exchange drugs for weapons in the border region of Badakhshan.³⁶ Meanwhile, reports have also emerged of ISIS tapping into the lucrative potential of smuggling Afghan drugs.³⁷

This widespread trafficking of narcotics highlights the insufficient detection capabilities of CARs. More worryingly, the business of smuggling drugs has permeated their social, economic and political lives. Corruption remains widely prevalent and there exists a notable collusion between ruling elites, government officials, police, drug smugglers and the mafia. The reasons are apparent – price of heroin on the Tajik-Afghan border rises from US\$ 20,000 per kg to US\$ 400,000 per kg in London and Paris.³⁸

Ironically, the upgradation of Central Asian infrastructure and expansion of trade links with the region has only worsened the conduit of drugs. The newly constructed roads and bridges like the one at Nizhniy Pyanj on the Afghan-Tajik

border has helped move larger quantities of narcotics.³⁹ Strong ethnic linkages between CARs and Afghanistan have further facilitated the transit. The UNODC has estimated that drug smugglers made a net profit of US\$ 1.4 billion in 2010.⁴⁰ In comparison, Kyrgyz and Tajik GDP's were worth US\$ 7-8 billion during the same period.

Causes of Religious Extremism in Central Asia

Twenty-five years after their independence, the growth of Islamic radicalisation and extremism remains a major cause of concern for the CARs. Therefore, any attempt to understand and examine this problem will be futile without mentioning its root causes.

A) Regulation and Suppression of Religious Activities

The majority of Central Asian regimes have continued with the policy of regulating and suppressing any religious activity that is not sanctioned by them. This has its roots in the tumultuous period of 1990s when they failed to accommodate Islam and viewed its growth as a threat to the stability of their countries. The current outlook does not differ much and can be broadly defined under the framework "to Islamise is to radicalise".⁴¹ This has resulted in a number of controversial restrictions that have hurt the religious sentiments of the people.

In this light, the Tajik Government since 2011 has sought to curb religious freedom under the pretext of combating Islamic radicalism. Under this policy, the police have targeted men with beards and women in head scarves. A similar trend is observed in Uzbekistan which has closed down a number of religious schools and banned beards and Islamic dresses.⁴² In the same vein, Kyrgyzstan frequently monitors the clergy and has clamped down on religious preaching. This has led many scholars to argue that the ban is based on "ideas, intent and rhetoric and not necessarily the advancement of physical violence".⁴³

These crackdowns have often been linked to the debate on whether CARs have 'securitised' Islamic radicalisation for retaining their hold on power.⁴⁴ The ruling regimes have frequently exaggerated Islamic radicalisation as an existential threat in order to justify the strengthening of state control. It also diverts attention from a myriad of social and economic problems that prevail in the region. Besides, the tactic has helped CARs receive foreign assistance to tackle militant extremism. Therefore, the regimes inability or unwillingness to differentiate between piety and radicalisation does give credence to the securitisation argument. However, this strategy of managing people's religious lives often proves counter-productive since it breeds discontent that is cultivated by radical Islamic groups.

B) Lack of Credible Democracy and Absence of Political Reforms

The lack of credible democracy and absence of political reforms have also helped the radicals' cause. Barring Kyrgyzstan, the rest of the four CARs place significant restrictions on political activities in their territories. The leaders of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have been in power right from the very beginning. Despite promising broader democracy in their speeches, they have hardly taken any initiative to put that into practice. On the contrary, a common trend that is visible across the region is the increase in appointment of clan members to key government posts.⁴⁵ This has resulted in widespread repression of political parties and frequent crackdown on media. Recently, Tajikistan banned the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) which was the only legal Islamic opposition party in Central Asia. Moreover, in the absence of credible democracy the ageing leaders of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan face the tricky choice of succession. There is no attempt on the part of current ageing leadership to build a second level of top leadership who can take on the responsibilities after the demise of existing leaders in these Republics. If the recent house arrest of Uzbek President Islam Karimov's daughter is an indication, it is plausible that inter-clan rivalry will turn out to be explosive. One cannot rule out the clans using the bogey of Islamic extremism to push their agenda.

C) Economic Slowdown Leading to Rising Unemployment and Poor Living Conditions

The prevailing economic conditions in Central Asia have also bred Islamic radicalisation. The CARs have experienced a triple bogey of decline in economic growth and rising poverty and unemployment levels. This is even more acute in the populous Fergana Valley that remains the hub of Islamic radicalisation. According to the United Nations (UN), 36 per cent of the Tajik and Kyrgyz population live below the poverty line.⁴⁶ An Asian Development Bank (ADB) report states that average growth in Central Asia slowed down by 1.5 percentage points to 5.1 per cent in 2014.⁴⁷ The prognosis for 2015 has been on similar lines.⁴⁸ The national currencies of these countries have also been sharply devalued while rising inflation remains a matter of concern.

However, it is the Russian rouble's devaluation that has hit the Central Asian economies the hardest. The majority of CARs remain heavily dependent on remittances sent by their citizens working in Russia. According to the World Bank, remittances are the biggest source of foreign currency – around 40 and 33 per cent – for the Tajik⁴⁹ and Kyrgyz economies.⁵⁰ The rouble's depreciation and shrinking of work opportunities in Russia have not only reduced the value of remittances but also forced a significant number of migrants to return home.⁵¹

Meanwhile, as part of a wider trend across the region, corruption and inefficient governance remains endemic. The CARs, including the relatively well-

off Kazakhstan, have struggled to provide essential social services particularly in the rural areas.⁵² The ongoing economic crisis has further exacerbated the problem. It has led Turkmenistan to cut gas and electricity subsidies for the first time since independence while Tajikistan has deferred plans to increase wages and pensions.⁵³ Kazakhstan has also suspended several social programmes.⁵⁴

Arguably, the lack of economic opportunities and credible governance has alienated a significant number of Central Asians. They remain disillusioned with the failure of their governments to provide even a basic resemblance of a just and efficient state. The demographics of the region also plays a part in this disillusionment. People under 35 form 60 percent of Central Asia's population.⁵⁵ This section has been the most vulnerable target for the radicals who promise them a better alternative.

D) Inter-ethnic Discords

The prevailing inter-ethnic discord in Central Asia has also enabled the radicals to wean away the marginalised. Over the years, frequent inter-ethnic clashes have broken out due to CARs promotion of nationalism, disagreement over power sharing with minorities and presence of poorly demarcated boundaries. However, the process of integrating the minorities has been few and far in between. This has allowed the inter-ethnic tensions to brew. Tensions remain particularly acute in the Fergana valley which is Central Asia's most populous and fertile region. Kyrgyzstan, wherein ethnic Uzbeks comprise 14.4 per cent of its population⁵⁶, has already witnessed two major ethnic riots in 1990 and 2010. Recently in August 2015, ethnic clashes broke out along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in the village of Kok-Tash over a narrow and uneven lane.⁵⁷ This highlights the tinder box like scenario that a few regions of Central Asia are exposed to. Therefore, it is not a surprise when the majority of Kyrgyz citizens fighting for the Islamic State are ethnic Uzbeks who have been marginalised. Consequently, there exist conditions throughout the region that create a fertile breeding ground for organisations that promise a better life. It is here that the radical Islamic groups with their call for the establishment of a Caliphate have a resounding appeal to the marginalised sections of Central Asian societies.

Response of CARs

The CARs have employed different tactics to combat the emerging threats. With the risk of Afghan militancy spilling over to Central Asia remaining high, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have reinforced their borders and increased domestic vigilance. This includes building a new military base in Tajikistan's southern region of Kulob⁵⁸, mobilising Turkmenistan's reservists and stepping up the arrests of people on terror-related charges.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, in order to tackle the growing influence of radical Islamic groups

Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have passed legislations that prohibit their citizens from joining the Islamic State.⁶⁰ Kazakhstan has also mobilised the support of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and imams to counsel people on the ideals of Islam.⁶¹ This is expected to tackle the ideological aspect of Islamic radicalisation. Furthermore, several countries have used the media to discredit the ISIS by pointing out its malpractices. They frequently monitor the Internet and block radical websites.

The CARs have also attempted to tackle the Islamic radical threat by accommodating Islam “to an extent”.⁶² Bayram Balci, a regional political scientist, highlights Uzbekistan’s “self-Islamisation” programme that aims to create a “new national, broadly ethnic Islam”.⁶³ He dwells on the Uzbek Government “building new Islamic establishments to form Islamic elites tasked with developing a tolerant version of Islam that is compatible with the state’s religious policy”.⁶⁴ This has brought about a positive change in the perception towards the Karimov government even though religion continues to be regulated in the country.

However, this dual strategy of “co-optation and regulation”⁶⁵ of religion is still a work in progress. The attraction towards radical Islam is likely to grow in Central Asia if the internal issues are not addressed on a priority basis.

Future of Political Islam in Central Asia

The majority of Central Asians are Muslims who belong to the liberal Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence.⁶⁶ Historically, Sufism had been popular throughout the region and Islam considered a part of the region’s cultural heritage. However, the Soviet policy of suppressing all religious activities resulted in Sufism losing its appeal as the region turned more secular. Post-independence, the CARs have witnessed an increase in influence of orthodox Salafism even though officially the Republics remain secular.⁶⁷ Against this backdrop, the prospects for the spread of political Islam is likely to vary across Central Asia. As this paper argues, the domestic policies of ruling regimes are generally responsible for the rise in radical ideas. Therefore, the way these Republics manage to address their internal issues will likely shape the course of political Islam in the region.

In this context, hydrocarbon-rich Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan appear more likely to undercut the appeal of radical Islam. These countries have been more successful in managing discontent through efficient distribution of resources. In the traditionally nomadic Kazakh society, Islam is considered a “basic element of national culture and contributes to the affirmation of Kazakh identity”.⁶⁸ This sense of attachment to religion is cultivated by people getting their dues and has contributed to the relative stability of Kazakh society. Nevertheless, since 2011 the country has witnessed the emergence of Salafists in its southern regions. These groups are opposed to the Nazarbayev government and in the long run may carve out a space for themselves.

Similarly, Turkmenistan has tactfully managed to avoid widespread radicalisation. It has not only handed out generous welfare schemes to its citizens but also efficiently handled its ties with the Taliban. The country has also declared itself a neutral state in an attempt to buy peace. The Sufi fraternities in Turkmenistan remain strong and the majority of its citizens practice official religion which is the Hanafi Sunni Islam. It is likely that Turkmenistan will successfully deal with radical Islam in the future.

On the contrary, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, where Islam is deeply rooted, are far more vulnerable to radical Islamic ideas. The Fergana Valley remains the hub of religious extremism where the now banned Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) has been accused of spreading orthodox ideas. The likelihood of its now underground members spreading radical ideology cannot be ruled out. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan too faces growing radicalisation in the ethnically sensitive regions of Osh, Batken and Jalalabad.

Role of Regional Organisations in Combating the Threat of Extremism

The geographical location of Central Asia, situated at the heart of Eurasia, has often meant that developments here have implications for the wider Eurasian region. Therefore, all major regional powers have a key stake in ensuring durable peace and stability in the region. Given the nature, scale and outreach of terrorism in the region, it is impossible for a country to deal with the problem on its own. This calls for a regional collective approach.

It is here that one needs to highlight the centrality of Russia in forging a meaningful regional cooperation. At a time when Russia's ties with the West have sharply deteriorated, the geo-political importance of Central Asia to Moscow cannot be underestimated. This has seen Russia strengthen its presence in what has traditionally been its sphere of influence. Nevertheless, the realignment of its partnership with the West has also resulted in a substantial rapprochement with China that covers even Central Asia. Beijing too has enormous economic and energy stakes riding on the region. The success of 'One Belt One Road' initiative depends on an enduring stability throughout Eurasia. Moreover, the close linkages between Central Asian militant groups and Uyghur terrorists add an even more critical dimension to the problem of extremism. In the current context, Russia is also working towards engaging Pakistan bilaterally and in the regional cooperation framework.

Against this backdrop, the two regional organisations that come to the forefront are the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)

The CSTO is primarily a military organisation comprising of countries in the post-Soviet space. It includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia. However, Russia remains its main driving force. CSTO's principal focus lies in combating "international terrorism, drug trafficking and other security threats".⁶⁹ During the September 2015 summit meeting, held in Dushanbe, the organisation expressed grave concern over the deteriorating security situation in northern Afghanistan and growing influence of ISIS.⁷⁰ There are reports of the organisation reinforcing the capabilities of its Collective Rapid Reaction Force (KSOR) which is likely to remain the main bulwark against security threats to the region.⁷¹ Therefore, it is likely that CSTO's activities will increase in the future.

Nevertheless, CSTO faces a number of inherent challenges. This starts with the perception of Russia trying to dominate the region through CSTO. Post Ukraine, the CARs have been more suspicious of Russia's strategy towards them. However, they also realise that without the CSTO umbrella it will be difficult to tackle the growing threats. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who share a border with Afghanistan have refused to join the organisation. In fact, Uzbekistan joined and then withdrew from the CSTO. Technically, this makes them much more vulnerable to the threats emanating at their borders. Given the dynamics of this region, instability in one country can easily engulf the whole region. The CSTO members have also complained of Russia being unable to fulfil its military commitments.⁷² Moreover, doubts remain about the organisation's efficacy to respond timely to a threat given its inability to intervene during the 2010 Osh riots.

Interestingly, CSTO has called for a closer cooperation with China and the SCO.⁷³ This marks a radical shift in Russia's position of being the sole security architect in Central Asia. The Russia-China cooperation provides a new dimension to this changing security cooperation in the region. It appears that in future Russia and China are likely to enhance their cooperation in the region on security arena in addition to their cooperation in political and economic arena.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The other regional organisation that has the potential to tackle extremism in the region is the SCO. Established in 2001, it has moved from being a mechanism to settle border issues to address security problems and improve economic cooperation between member states. SCO members and partners include not only the key countries of China, Russia and four CARs – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, but also other regional powers in India, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey. This highlights its expanded engagement beyond Central Asia.

The SCO charter dwells on the goals to combat the threats of terrorism, separatism and extremism.⁷⁴ The organisation's success in dealing with drug trafficking has been widely acknowledged. Its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is an important body at work since 2005. The first joint exercise on countering the use of Internet for terrorism, separatism and extremism related activities were held in China in October 2015. According to the RATS press release: "The main purpose of the 'Xiamen-2015' joint command post exercise is to improve the cooperation mechanisms of SCO Member States competent authorities with regard to identifying and preventing the use of the Internet to carry out terrorism, separatism and extremism activities, to exchange views on the legal procedures, organisational and technical capacity."⁷⁵ The member countries have thus expressed their desire to make the RATS more effective to address the new security challenges. As such, there is an increasing convergence between them on security threats faced by the region.

The SCO has frequently expressed concern over the evolving security situation in Afghanistan. While there exist contradictions between members on its role in stabilising the country yet most have favoured some kind of an involvement. In this context, Pakistan's expected full membership is seen as an attempt to make it a stakeholder in the maintenance of regional order.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, it is argued that the SCO can facilitate greater security cooperation between member countries through intelligence sharing and interaction between law enforcement agencies. Emphasis can also be placed on capacity building and strengthening border defence capabilities.

However, the SCO needs to overcome a number of challenges. It has been argued that the organisation is quite passive and ineffective at a time when Central Asian countries need an active involvement in the region.⁷⁷ There also exist serious differences between member countries. In this light, China had for a long time refused to acknowledge the threat of Al-Qaeda. Some Kazakh experts are of the opinion that the RATS is mainly an analytical centre.⁷⁸ China, which is the driving force within the organisation, has relied more on bilateral rather than multilateral cooperation. In addition, the rivalry between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has further complicated the situation. Moreover, unlike the CSTO, there are no mutual security obligations among SCO member states. While SCO has conducted a number of military drills yet this does not indicate a radical shift towards military cooperation. However, despite its limitations, the SCO remains an organisation with the potential to deal with the security challenges faced by the regional countries.

Meanwhile, some Central Asian experts like Farkhod Tolipov have articulated the need for an organisation that comprises only CARs.⁷⁹ It is often perceived that the presence of big powers like Russia and China does not allow the regional

organisation to focus on Central Asian concerns, but delves more on big powers' problems. These experts refer to the now defunct Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO) and argue that a similar body without the presence of outside powers is likely to be more effective in dealing with the inter-state problems of Central Asia.

Prospects of Cooperation between India and CARs

India, which considers Central Asia as part of its extended neighbourhood, has vital security stakes in the region. The reports of Central Asian militant groups networking with other terrorist organisations in the Af-Pak area are worrisome. This can inspire radical elements throughout the region. In the meantime, the potential base of Khorasan in the Af-Pak area can be the pivot to spread ISIS influence in Kashmir. ISIS has already threatened to attack India, kidnapped Indians in the Middle East and indoctrinated a few. Related to the problem of terrorism is the growing linkages between drug trafficking, weapons smuggling and organised crime. Therefore, given the emerging security trends in the region, an arc of instability running from Northern Caucasus through Central Asia to Xinjiang cannot be ruled out. India too is likely to face the brunt of this volatility. Against this backdrop, there exists convergence of interests between not just India and CARs but also between India, Russia and China. India can play a constructive role at both the bilateral and regional levels. It already has a Joint Working Group with Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to combat international terrorism.⁸⁰

As a victim of terror, India has developed specific skills to combat the threat of terrorism. These include building up expertise on policy aspects, counter-terror operations, intelligence gathering, training, disaster management, and border protection.⁸¹ In fact, intelligence gathering mechanisms depend mainly on satellite and information technology tools. India has strong expertise in both these areas. It also cooperates with other countries at the regional and international levels. Therefore, India can share its experience and even offer customised solutions, if required.

The CARs have been receptive to India's proposal of increased security collaboration.⁸² This will likely strengthen the defence partnership that already exists with all the Republics. Interestingly, 'neutral' Ashgabat is now on board after it signed a defence cooperation agreement with India in July 2015.⁸³ It appears that geo-politics is likely to have also played a part in the CARs calculus since India is seen as a potential balancer against the competing interests in the region. Meanwhile, the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to CARs has given a new impetus to the India-Central Asia partnership. The key theme of discussions revolved around building security, energy and economic linkages. India is uniquely placed to complement not just the security but also

the economic landscape of Central Asia. This flows from the argument that apart from improving security collaboration, the region also needs to focus on economic development in order to undercut the appeal of Islamic radicals. Given India's economic potential, vast experience and institutional capabilities, the country can add value and share best practices at both the bilateral and regional levels. This can also help formulate a common vision for the region.

In this light, India has articulated a 'Connect Central Asia' policy that seeks to build long term cooperative partnership with the CARs. This also involves strengthening the capacities of these countries. Meanwhile, at the regional level India has consistently articulated its desire to play a more meaningful and constructive role in the SCO. Prime Minister Modi, during the 2015 Ufa summit, spoke about the SCO's potential to strengthen regional cooperation in the fields of counterterrorism, trade, investment, energy and connectivity.⁸⁴ With India's full membership being accepted in principle it is likely that New Delhi's engagement with the SCO will grow in the future.

However, as always, the devil lies in the details, and there exist a few inherent geo-political and strategic challenges. This is where India can leverage its long-standing partnership with Russia to overcome them. Nevertheless, it appears that on the issue of combating terrorism almost every country is on board. This portends well for an India-Central Asia partnership that aims to combat the growing threat of extremism.

Conclusion

After having examined the various aspects of terrorism and Islamic radicalisation in Central Asia, it is clear that the region faces renewed security threats. However, the nature of these threats vary not just in their intensity but also the geographical spread. While it is easy to distinguish these threats on the basis of domestic and external factors, yet their close interplay reflects their dangerous but very complex dimensions. From an immediate security perspective, the challenge emanating from Afghanistan, where regional militants have stepped up their attacks, seems notable. With the US commitment to the region appearing to be on the wane, the intensity of these attacks is likely to increase in the future. Given the linkages between drug trafficking, terrorism, organised crime and ethnicity, instability in the Af-Pak area can easily spill over to Central Asia. Violent terror organisations with links to CARs have already been re-energised. As such, the ability of these Republics to combat terrorists who are better trained, better equipped and aware of the tactics used by state security forces remains suspect.

Meanwhile, the growing ideological influence of ISIS highlights the two pronged external threats that the CARs face. The trend of increasing number of Central Asians joining this group reflects the success of radical groups in

permeating the region's societies. This includes even the relatively stable Kazakh and Turkmen ones. More worryingly, ISIS's plan of establishing a Caliphate in the region can have serious ramifications for the stability of these Republics. It can not only inspire the ISIS Central Asian fighters to return and wage jihad but also reinvigorate terror groups like the IMU to seek a foothold in the region. One cannot also rule out the prospect of terrorist organisations from Syria and Afghanistan coordinating their militant activities. This will push the security envelope even further.

Nevertheless, in addition to the external threats, the major challenge that CARs face is the threat from within. Short sighted, hardline and repressive policies of the ruling regimes have created faultlines that the radical Islamic groups have exploited. This, to a large extent, explains the receptiveness of Islamic State among the marginalised Central Asians. The ongoing economic crisis is likely to further widen the prevailing discontent. So long the regimes continue to deny the political space to the opposition and remain un-accommodative to people's concerns, the attraction for people to join and get attracted towards the extremist ideology is likely to continue. Instead of accommodating people's concerns, the Republics have once again used the threat of Islamic radicalisation to tighten state control. This has proved to be counter-productive. In such a scenario, the region provides a fertile ground for the extremist forces to attract the attention of the youth and unsatisfied sections of the CARs' societies.

However, a closer analysis reveals that the threat of terrorism and extremism in Central Asia is not as serious as it is in the South and West Asian region. While there has been an upward trend in Central Asians joining ISIS, yet this comprises just a fraction of the region's population. The majority do not support radical Islam. Perhaps, the turmoil of 1990s acts as a reminder to the prospect of renewed instability. This is complemented by the secular nature of the Central Asian psyche. The reports of disillusioned ISIS fighters returning back also indicate the weaning off the attractiveness of jihad. Even ISIS has not shown an overriding interest in setting up a base in the region. It seems that the group, at least for the time being, is mainly focussed on West Asia.

In Central Asia, the need is for the countries to address the issue of terrorism at three levels – national, regional and global. At the national level, regimes need to address the concerns of their unsatisfied and unemployed people rather than focus on regime security. At the regional level, cooperation with the regional actors need to be enhanced in order to address the external threats emanating from Af-Pak and West Asian region. At the global level, cooperation with the international institutions need to be worked out to address this challenge which is global in nature.

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SOUTH ASIA

Reaping Whirlwind: The Defiant Genies and their Masters in Pakistan

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Pakistan has used subversion/militancy/terrorism as an instrument to achieve its strategic objectives in the region throughout its existence as a sovereign state. Whether it was the tribal invasion of 1948 when the *lashkars* motivated, equipped and sent by the Pakistan Army looted and plundered in Kashmir in the name of jihad, or in 1965 when armed irregulars were infiltrated from Pakistani soil to fuel an uprising in Kashmir, the use of asymmetrical warfare has been an important policy choice for Pakistan over the years. It received an additional moral boost when it was funded by the world powers to use militancy or terror as a strategic instrument, during the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s. Prolonged use of terrorism as a state policy has given rise to a well-heeled terror infrastructure to support large-scale indoctrination, training of radical elements and use them in its covert operations in the region.

The jihad factory that the Pakistan State produced has been used to spread terror especially in Kashmir after the Soviet withdrawal and also to destabilise Afghanistan from time to time. As a result of the involvement of a 'sovereign' state in the business of jihad and terrorism, multiple radical and militant outfits – raised as de facto paramilitary arms of the security forces – have acquired both legitimacy and autonomy of their own. The leaders of some of these outfits continue to remain loyal to the state while many of their field commanders and ground-level operatives have gone rogue, revolted against the state and challenged the 'Islamic' identity of the Pakistani State, as defined by both military and civilian leaderships. These neo-radical elements, used as tools for a long time, have

challenged their onetime masters – the state agencies – and posed a critical existential challenge to the Pakistani State in recent years. This paper seeks to study this phenomenon, isolate the worldview of anti-state elements, trace their origin, cull out the reasons for growth of such outfits and enumerate implications of this phenomenon for the State of Pakistan in the long run.

The Jihadi Genies (1979-2001)

It is well-known that the decade of 1980s witnessed the rise of radical ‘jihadi’ outlook in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region. It was a blend of the ‘Islamist impulse’ haunting Pakistan because of the state’s emphasis on Islam as an important marker of its identity, especially after Zia-ul-Haq’s coup in 1977, and the ‘tribal-Islamic resistance’ taking shape in Afghanistan against the communist rule that followed the Saur Revolution in April 1978. Such jihadi sentiment was nurtured and successfully manipulated by the US and its allies to defeat the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. In a proxy war that lasted almost a decade– from the entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan in 1979 till the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan on February 15, 1989 – Pakistan (in fact, its army), heavily funded by the US, its allies, Saudi Arabia and many other gulf states, midwived the mujahideen resistance against Soviet-backed communist government in Afghanistan. The virus of jihad planted in the Pakistan-Afghanistan (also referred to as Pak-Af) borderlands continues to afflict the socio-political dynamics in Pakistan to this date.

The successful use of radical Islamic militancy or terror by Pakistan in the Afghan theatre led to the use of terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy with added zeal. In fact, Pakistan had used subversion as asymmetric war in Kashmir much earlier in October 1947, when it had gathered, trained, funded and launched an irregular army of Pashtun *lashkars* against the Maharaja of Kashmir and later India, when the Maharaja acceded to India. Pakistan attempted another insurrection through armed irregulars sent into Kashmir in 1965. The experience of Afghan Jihad lent further strength to such strategy. As the ‘jihadi genie’ un-bottled during the Afghan Jihad roamed about the Pak-Af theatre transforming the socio-political landscape, Pakistani state found it opportune to use such a radical force for strategic purposes in its immediate neighbourhood.

The immediate aftermath of the Afghan Jihad witnessed a steep rise in terrorism in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) actively supported and funded by Pakistan. Pakistan found in such a policy two distinct advantages – (i) destabilise India, who it considered its enemy; and (ii) divert the attention of domestic radical elements towards Kashmir. The surge in violence in J&K during 1989-1996 led to further consolidation of the radical constituency in Pakistan. The genie let loose by its masters in Pakistani Army grew further in size and

strength within Pakistan during this period. There was violent assertion of sectarian outfits like Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and reactive militant Shia outfits like Tehrik-e-Jafaria Pakistan and Sipah-e-Muhammadi, which widened the Sunni-Shia gulf and even divided the Sunnis on Deobandi-Barelvi lines. The state patronage of armed Islamic groups, during and following the Afghan Jihad, unalterably changed the Pakistani social landscape. It will be useful now to turn our attention to the gradual hardening of ideological orientation of Islam in the region.

Churning in the Sunni World

It is useful to remember here that in the aftermath of the Shia revolution in Iran (January 1978-February 1979), there was an upsurge in the Sunni Islamic world for a similar kind of a revolution in favour of chaste and pure Islam. In fact, around the time Soviet forces were planning to push into Afghanistan, on November 20, 1979, a group of about 400 to 500 Saudi insurgents led by a Salafi zealot named Juhayman al-Otaybi seized the Grand Mosque in Kaaba and held it for about two weeks, until they were flushed out by a joint French-Saudi operation. This group, called Juhayman's Ikhwan, demanded stoppage of oil supply to the US, expulsion of foreign experts advising local governments in the Arabian peninsula, abolition of television and education for women, and return to pristine and pure form Islam as practised by the *Salaf* (the predecessors). The group aimed at dislodging the Saudi Government, which had deviated, it claimed, from the path of Wahabism, and establishing theocratic rule based on the Salafi conception of Islam. Many of the followers of the Ikhwan spread around the world and kept the ideology alive by plugging into local radical outfits advocating similar Islamist worldviews. It is interesting to note that among them, the Bahaziq brothers (Mahmoud and Hamid), who trace their origin on their mother's side to Hyderabad in India, played a role in encouraging Pakistani Ahle Hadith elements to establish Markaz-ud-Dawa-wal-Irshad (Centre for Preaching and Guidance), the precursor of and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).¹

A day after the Mecca seize, on November 21, 1979, a rumour – based on the allegations levelled by Ayatollah Khomeini on the US forces for seizure of Kaaba – set off a spontaneous protest in Islamabad, Pakistan in front of the US embassy. The demonstrators shouted anti-US slogans, turned violent and set the embassy building on fire.² The turn of events since December 1979, especially after Soviet forces entered Afghanistan, brought the US and Pakistan together, and interestingly, the same Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) which reportedly organised the protest against the US was chosen by both the US and the then military dictator ruling in Pakistan, Zia-ul-Haq, as the conduit for engagement with Afghan rebel mujahideen leaders. In the following months and years, streams of jihadi volunteers from all over the world rushed to the Afghan theatre in their zeal to participate

in a holy war. By early 80s, cutting across sectarian and other theological divides, Muslims fought the jihad in Afghanistan for a decade.³

Competitive Radicalism: Salafi-Deobandi Cocktail

Such a jihad-friendly environment was conducive for display of competitive radicalism among different groups. There was a progressive hardening of sentiments along religious lines and gradual demotion of less-radical eclectic strands of Islam in the process. Rather than leading to a cross-fertilisation of ideas, the hardline Salafi strand advocated by jihadi groups from the Arabian states emerged as the most prominent version of Islam and gained tacit legitimacy among the fighters. The Sunni Deobandi version of subcontinental Islam could not remain insulated from an overall 'Salafisation' of Islam during this period. The Salafi infection of subcontinental Islam continues to this date in the Pak-Af theatre.

Following Soviet withdrawal, peace and stability continued to elude Afghanistan as the international community disengaged itself from the war ravaged country. The situation worsened due to internecine fights among Deobandi and JI mujahideen groups as well as fight among ethnic militant groups. In the prevailing anarchy and chaos, Pakistan backed a new Deobandi militant group which called itself Taliban (the students of Islam), who received their education in Pakistani madrasas during the Afghan Jihad. The group appeared in southern Afghanistan in Kandahar – led by Mullah Omar, the one-eyed mujahid of the Soviet era – and fed with millenarian zeal to bring true Islam to Afghanistan. In the meanwhile, the mujahideen government in Kabul tottering on its last legs allowed Osama Bin Laden to come to Afghanistan fleeing Sudan under US pressure on May 18, 1996, four months before Kabul was to fall (on September 17, 1996) to the Taliban. They, like their predecessors, sheltered Osama Bin Laden (allegedly in the hope of benefiting from his wealth), and were further influenced by his Salafi outlook.

The people of Afghanistan backed Taliban out of sheer fatigue and frustration, in their desperate quest for stability and order, only to discover soon that the hardline Islamic agenda of Taliban militated against the traditional Afghan view of Islam. As the Taliban leadership imposed a stricter version of Sharia in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden took advantage of its conservative outlook, and consolidated his position in Afghanistan. As he went ahead with his plans to launch attacks on US interests,⁴ his aggressive Salafi ideology influenced the radical Deobandi Islamic worldview of the Taliban. Bin Laden's Al Qaeda made common cause with the Taliban and joined its battle against the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras in northern and western Afghanistan. After taking Kabul by storm, the Taliban advanced towards the north, as jihadi elements from the Pashtun majority areas of Pakistan crossed the border to join its efforts.

Attacks on Twin Towers and its Impact on Pakistan

It is important to note that the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad had affected the social and religious landscape significantly – so much so that even before the Taliban made its appearance in Afghanistan, an outfit called Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi appeared in the Malakand Division of Pakistan (comprising (Dir, Swat, Bajaur, Chitral) in 1992, led by Maulana Sufi Muhammad till then a member of Jamiat-i-Islami. It led an armed movement to impose sharia in Malakand. Haunted by the Islamist wave, a new generation of youth, fresh from the Pakistani madrasas, fighting alongside the Taliban and Al Qaeda, were imbued with a militant Islamic zeal for establishing rule of sharia on earth.

During this time, many Kashmiri militant groups established their training camps in Afghanistan under the guidance and control by Pakistani intelligence agencies.⁵ The prominent militant outfits which enjoyed the patronage of Pakistani military agencies during the time were LeT, Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM)⁶, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), Harkat-ul-Jihad-ul-Islam (HUJI) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM). The jihadi recruits joining these outfits were exposed to radical Salafi Islamic ideas, while undergoing training in Afghanistan.

Gulf and/or Nexus between the Military and Militants?

By the middle of 2001, the Taliban had firmly established itself in Kabul by decimating rival factions with the help of both Pakistani military and Al Qaeda. Pakistan was firm in its resolve to gradually mainstream Taliban into international politics. However, the attack on the twin towers in New York on September 11, 2001 (henceforth referred to as 9/11) by Al Qaeda terrorists dealt a severe blow to such plans. Under pressure from the US, Pakistani military had to reverse its policy when Taliban refused to surrender Bin Laden despite pressures from the Musharraf regime. This led to massive US strikes on Kabul in alliance with anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces. Pakistan decided to officially back US efforts, while streams of Pakistani youth under the leadership of Sufi Muhammad crossed the border to support the Taliban against the US. Many of them were killed in action while those who survived came back to Pakistan. There were reports that by joining US efforts the Pakistani authorities could manage to evacuate Pakistani contingents along with many Taliban operatives during the infamous ‘Kunduz airlift’⁷ in November and continued to shelter Taliban leadership fleeing Afghanistan. The Americans were rewarded with one top Al Qaeda operative after another – mostly non-Pakistani ones – while the Taliban leaders were allowed to hibernate in Pakistani territory.

Nevertheless, the official reversal of Pakistan’s policy coupled with its inability to use Afghan soil for covert operations in India (especially Kashmir) created a context which led to the emergence of a constituency of hardliners opposed to

the military, then ruling Pakistan. The military's somersault was unacceptable to the battle-hardened jihadis from the tribal areas who had fought with the Taliban wedded to the idea of sharia rule in Afghanistan, as well as trained non-Pashtun jihadis from other parts of Pakistan.

In the post-9/11 context, international pressure following the attack by LeT and JeM terrorists on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, and subsequent mobilisation of Indian Army along the border (Operation Parakram) compelled Musharraf administration to ban some of the militant outfits including LeT and JeM on January 12, 2002 (HUJI was not banned). However, such steps were regarded as cosmetic and far from being sincere. All the banned outfits continued to operate under new names according to reports by Pakistani media.⁸

Undeterred by such steps, the militants went on to kidnap Daniel Pearl on January 23, 2002, and later kill him. On May 8, 2002, 11 French nationals were killed in a suicide attack on the Karachi naval base. These plots were jointly planned by militants associated with HUJI, Sipah-e-Sahaba and Al Qaeda.⁹

Targeting Musharraf: Jihadi-Subaltern Nexus

By October 2003, the US Department of Treasury came out with an investigative report that JeM had started running a charity called Al Akhtar Trust which "was providing a wide range of support to Al-Qaida and Pakistani-based sectarian and jihadi groups", specifically LeT, Lashkar-I-Jhangvi, and JeM, and these efforts "included providing financial and logistical support as well as arranging travel for Islamic extremists".¹⁰ The report suggested linkages among all these outfits and also indicated that the patrons of this trust were funding Al Qaeda efforts in Iraq and were involved in Daniel Pearl murder case.

Against this setting, every act of Musharraf government to restrict the activities of these jihadi organisations was regarded as a betrayal of the cause(s) for which they were raised over the years by the agencies. While the top leadership of these outfits waited in patience for a change in the milieu, those operating on the ground grew restless and held such decisions by the government as proof of its insincerity in matters concerning jihad. The first signs of military-militant divide slowly emerged during 2002-2003.

The twin failed attempts on Musharraf's life within a gap of 11 days (on December 14 and 25, 2003) clearly showed the gulf between the military leadership and the militants. The investigators soon discovered nexus between lower-rank military officials and militants to target top military leadership. The move by the top military leadership to avenge these attacks led to combing of all the three services as well as arrest and purging of many servicemen at lower levels. In the first attempt on Musharraf, which took place near Jhanda Chichi bridge in Rawalpindi on December 14, 2003, one soldier from the army named

Islamuddin Siddiqui along with six Pakistan Air Force (PAF) personnel were convicted. Among the convicted was a PAF technician named Adnan Rashid, who was freed from Bannu Central jail in a dramatic attack by more than 200 heavily armed militants on April 15, 2012. Adnan went on to join Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and head the Ansar Al-Aseer (“Friend of Those Imprisoned”) unit tasked to free militant prisoners.¹¹

In the second attempt on Musharraf’s life, Naik Arshad Mehmood a paratrooper from the Special Services Group (SSG) of Pakistan Army was convicted along with some civilians, including Akhlah Ahmed, a Russian citizen of Pakistani origin, from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). Arshad Mehmood was hanged in Faisalabad jail on December 21, 2014. The funeral of Arshad in his village named Javera, 60 kilometres from Islamabad, was attended by a large crowd of sympathisers and supporters, which was widely splashed in social and print media as a proof of popularity of radical elements in Pakistan, who dream of bringing sharia rule to Pakistan fighting the un-Islamic rule of the elite in Pakistan.¹²

The HUJI Connection: Amjad Farooqi, Ilyas Kashmiri and Dr Usman

These two attacks were reportedly masterminded by a notorious terrorist associated with HUJI, named Amjad Farooqi along with then operational chief of Al Qaeda, Abu Faraj Al Libi. It has to be remembered that HUJI was one of the best-networked militant group enjoying the patronage of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan for a long time.¹³ It played a critical role in enrolling thousands of Punjabi fighters for the Taliban. Farooqi, as the representative of HUJI amir, Qari Saifullah Akhtar, enjoyed the confidence of Mullah Omar. He had facilitated shifting of Bin Laden’s camp from Jalalabad to Kandahar at Taliban’s behest. Farooqi was also involved in Daniel Pearl killing in early 2002, and the attack on Karachi Corps Commander in June 2004.¹⁴ The latter attack was planned jointly by him, Jundullah (Karachi)¹⁵ and an amalgam of Chechen and Uzbek fighters operating in South Waziristan working closely with Al Qaeda.¹⁶ Farooqi was killed in a raid in Nawabshah, Sindh on September 26, 2004. A split-away HUJI group, named after Farooqi, continued to operate in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

Musharraf’s effort to curb radical elements who opposed his policies resulted in arrest and torture of many jihadi fighters who had earlier been lapped up as heroes by the military of Pakistan¹⁷ for joining its subversive agenda in J&K. Apart from Farooqi, another notorious terrorist from HUJI, also suspected for his involvement in attacks on Musharraf, was Ilyas Kashmiri, who was arrested and finally released after interrogation. The case of Ilyas is representative of many such militants severing their bond with the military and reinventing themselves

as avowed enemies of the Pakistani State. Ilyas, like Farooqi, was a member of HUJI.

Ilyas had joined HUJI in the 1990s when its attention shifted towards Kashmir. Hailing from Mirpur region of PoK, he received training from ISI and ran terror camps in Waziristan before infiltrating into Kashmir. He gained notoriety after being arrested and managing to escape from an Indian prison. Ilyas was reportedly rewarded by Musharraf in 2000 for his daring act of attacking an Indian Army outpost along the LoC and walking away with the head of an Indian soldier, which was displayed in a procession in Mirpur. Ilyas formed Brigade 313 to continue his activities in Kashmir but could not proceed because of lack of support from the military. He was picked up again in 2005 when he refused to shut down his operations, only to be released soon afterwards. Immediately afterwards, he fled to Waziristan and joined anti-state groups operating in the terrain.

In changed circumstances, quite ironically, the same Ilyas, who was once feted by Musharraf, was nabbed by ISI for his suspected role in attacks on Musharraf's life. Ilyas went on to mastermind the assassination of Major General (R) Faisal Alavi, the Mumbai attacks of December 26, 2008 (henceforth 26/11), attack on Sri Lankan cricket team in March 2009, on GHQ in October 2009 and on PNS Mehran. The GHQ attack was led by Aqeel Ahmed alias Dr Usmani who was also a HUJI cadre and had participated in Taliban efforts in Afghanistan.¹⁸ After 9/11, he had returned to Pakistan and joined Army Medical Corps as a male nurse. He left the job in 2005 and joined the Farooqi group, along with Ilyas plotted and executed the attack on GHQ. According to the investigative journalist, Saleem Shahzad (suspected to be killed by ISI in May 2011), 26/11 was conceived by an ex-Army and ex-LeT cadre named Haroon Ashiq who worked with Ilyas. The plan was operationalised through Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakvi of LeT, with active help from ISI. In his last interview with Shahzad in October 2009, Ilyas threatened even deadlier attacks compared to which 26/11 would be "nothing".¹⁹

As revelations by David Coleman Headley indicate, Ilyas's involvement in 26/11 could not be overlooked. Ilyas's overtures during the course of the interview with Saleem suggested that he had decided to take on the army if needed and use all channels to realise his dream of defeating the great Satan (the US) in the Pak-Af theatre and also take on India over Kashmir. Ilyas also hinted in the interview that he had no problems with the entire army of Pakistan but certain elements who wanted to appease their masters who held him as their enemy. As Hamid Mir would note after Ilyas's killing in a drone-attack in June 2011, his case demonstrated that the Pakistani establishment "must not create private armies and ... they should not mishandle them ... [because, if they do so] they can become genies like Ilyas Kashmiri".²⁰

The Case of Lal Masjid and Swat Operations

The military woke up to the reality of radicalisation in the very heart of Islamabad when it was confronted with Lal Masjid vigilantes trying to enforce sharia in Pakistan in July 2007. The military action against the armed students inside the Mosque snapped the link further between the military and militant groups. Rather than consolidating its position, the military allowed the mosque to operate as the nucleus of Islamist resistance against the state operating from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Its *khateeb* (chief sermon giver), Maulana Abdul Aziz, continues to back TTP activities against the security forces.²¹ The TTP attack on Army Public School in December 2014 was even indirectly defended by him as a reaction to inappropriate action undertaken by the Pakistani Army (he apologised for it later).²² However, he continues to go scot-free despite FIRs registered against him and continues to make such provocative pronouncements every now and then.

Saleem Shahzad, a perceptive observer of the politics of the radical Islamic groups in Pakistan, observed that during 2004-2007 – period between the attacks on Musharraf’s life and on Lal Masjid – many militants from different jihadi outfits moved to Waziristan and made common cause with tribal militant groups, then under fire from military for their support to foreign terrorists against the government’s wishes.²³ During this time, some of the principal aforementioned anti-state actors who had honed their skills in jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir, earlier trained by ISI, “played a significant role in bringing the latest guerrilla tactics to Afghanistan” and “introduced major changes in the fighting techniques of the tribal militants against the Pakistani forces”.²⁴

Against this backdrop, the Pakistani State’s vacillations in Swat during 2007-2009 gave further push to radicalisation in the region. In October 2007, the army conducted the operation Rah-e-Haq and entered Swat when the local Taliban elements led by Mullah Fazlullah – known as Radio Mullah who later became head of TTP – tried to impose sharia in the area. Fazlullah is the son-in-law of Maulana Sufi Muhammad, head of Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) who had marched into Afghanistan with thousands of madrasa students to help Taliban in their fight against the US in 2001. By November 2007, the army inflicted heavy losses on Fazlullah’s men and shut down his radio station. However, by early January 2008, the militants staged a comeback leading to renewed fighting throughout the year. The democratic government led by Asif Ali Zardari, which had come to power in early 2008, tried its best to win peace even by conceding sharia rule in Malakand Division (including Swat) in February 2009. Maulana Sufi Muhammad was released from prison to negotiate a deal with the government to this effect.

However, this deal collapsed over the issue that any decision taken by the

Shariat Court of Malakand could be appealed in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. From April till September 2009, the army conducted operation Black Thunderstorm and Rah-e-Rast in Swat, rearrested Maulana Sufi Muhammad and recaptured Swat from militant control. While Sufi Muhammad denied any links with TTP, Fazlullah who managed to escape Swat, allied himself to TTP and continued with his attacks on security forces and later, due to his uncompromising attitude on Islam, he was nominated as the leader of TTP in November 2013, after the death of Hakeemullah Mehsud in a drone strike in October that year.

The FATA Theatre: The Jihadi Brew²⁵

If Kashmir-focussed jihadis were turning away from their masters in the rest of Pakistan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region, the mujahideen that had returned from the Afghan theatre after the US attack on Afghanistan in October 2001, had a stronger grouse against Pakistani State and its policy reversal. Most of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and foreign militants fleeing Afghanistan poured into FATA and sought shelter among the local populace. Despite pressures from Pakistani agencies, who were functioning under close watch of the US intelligence, the local mujahideen offered these foreign militants refuge both because of ideological and financial reasons. The Al Qaeda and Uzbek militants offered lots of money to their benefactors in return for refuge granted to them. This is not to deny that they were also ideologically charged and regarded Pakistani somersault on Taliban as unjustified and un-Islamic.

The local militant leadership in FATA was comparatively younger, fed with millenarian dreams propagated by madrassas which were raised in the terrain with the express aim of recommending jihad or holy war for legitimising the decade-long Afghan Jihad (1979-1989). They had also fought with Taliban and Al Qaeda, backed by Pakistani military. Pakistan's backing of US attack was thus considered an opportunist act and hence the younger leaders like Nek Muhammad (1975-2004), Baitullah Mehsud (1974-2009), and Hakimullah Mehsud (1979-2013) – all killed in drone strikes between 2004 and 2013 – felt it legitimate and perfectly ethical to protect the radical elements, aimed at bringing sharia rule to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Army Operations (2002-2007) and Formation of TTP

After unsuccessful attempts by the Pakistan Army to convince pro-Taliban elements in FATA not to shelter foreign mujahideen (Uzbeks, Chechens, Uyghurs, Arabs, etc.), military operations were conducted in full swing since 2004. Between 2004 and 2007, pro-Taliban groups in FATA were united in their support to Taliban efforts, despite their differences over attacking Pakistan army and sheltering foreign Al Qaeda elements. As noted above, the attack on Lal Masjid

and subsequent flow of radical elements from other parts of Pakistan, especially Punjab, led to a complex amalgam of forces ranging from cadres of HUJI, Al Qaeda, to former affiliates of LeT, JeM and HUJI.

In December 2007, under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud, these forces came together to form TTP – a veritable arm of Al Qaeda in the tribal areas. TTP has since pledged its loyalty to Afghan Taliban, although its ideology and strategic goals are significantly different. While Afghan Taliban does not intend to antagonise Pakistan Army and maintains a strong link with Pakistani intelligence, the TTP considers it an article of faith to introduce Islamic sharia in Pakistan by pulling down the existing state structure. The TTP has a more rigid and orthodox Islamic outlook than Taliban and unlike it regards fight against the Pakistani Army as a holy war recommended by Quran. TTP is closer to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; also called al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham [Daesh]) in its *takfiri* orientation (excommunication from the fold of Islam). The *takfiri* categorisation of Pakistani State (as well as army) as an embodiment of evil, and as being worse than even *kafir* countries, is the running theme in much of literature dealing with Pakistan. The jihadi genies nurtured by Pakistan agencies have thus turned against their past masters and consider them apostates.

The Takfiri Phenomenon

With the assertion of TTP, the militant conglomerate, a new *takfiri* ideology is gaining currency in Pakistan, according to which the state has been declared as a *dar-ul-harb* (a territory of war), where jihad has to be waged to impose sharia rule. The word '*takfir*' has been derived from the word *kafir* (unbeliever). It is used by radical Sunnis to excommunicate somebody claiming to be a Muslim from the fold of Islam. The *takfiri* strain first appeared during the time of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328) who was confronted with attacks by Mongols, who had converted to Islam. Taymiyyah claimed that Islam faced the most dangerous threat to its existence from such *munafigins*²⁶ (hypocrites) and *murtads*²⁷ (apostates), who claimed themselves to be Muslims but acted against Islam. He considered it the duty of every Muslim to oppose and kill such Muslim rulers who did not act according to the sharia. As per Islamic law, according to followers of *takfiri* ideology, the punishment for apostasy is death.

Such a hardline TTP position, which predates the ideology now being espoused by ISIS has had an independent growth in the tribal terrain of Pakistan. It has led to the widening of Shia-Sunni sectarian divide and even divided the Sunnis along the lines of various *maslaks* (schools of thought) in Pakistan. The TTP has now emerged as an unrepentant jihadi-terror group with the singular agenda of bringing Islamic rule to Pakistan and it is appealing to the Pakistani people and soldiers to revolt against their hypocritical leadership. The slow

penetration of Daesh and its ideology into Pakistan – with the discovery of Daesh/ISIS cells in Karachi, Daska and Lahore – could further “catalyse existing extremist tendencies in the direction of ultra-extremism, and provide an advanced model to other terrorist groups”.²⁸

Notwithstanding such challenges staring at the Pakistan Army in the face, it continues to nurture a host of groups, or the so-called good Taliban or good jihadis, as strategic allies ignoring the fact that cadres of these groups are wedded to the radical Islamist causes that TTP espouses. The process of radicalisation continues unabated and has led to greater ‘militantisation’ of the society at large.

Despite Operation Zarb-e-Azb, TTP Remains Defiant

The efforts by the state to negotiate with the TTP since the middle of 2012 led to talks in February-March 2014. The TTP came out with its 15-point demands which involved, among other things, commitment from the state to impose Sharia and repeal the existing constitution.²⁹ Quite predictably, the talks failed to take off after two meetings. According to media reports, the newly elected government of Nawaz Sharif (in May 2013) was more intent at resolving the issue through dialogue than the army. Finally, the provocations by TTP in the shape of gunning down of 23 FC soldiers (captured by them in 2010) in February 2014, and attack on Karachi airport on June 8, 2014 led to launching of Operation Zarb-e-Azb by the army on June 10, 2014 against the TTP.

During this operation, the tribal areas, mainly North and South Waziristan agencies, were heavily bombed leading to TTP militants crossing over the border into Afghanistan. Later, Khyber I and II were launched to flush out militants operating under Lashkar-e-Islam, which joined as an affiliate of TTP in early 2015. While these operations led to lowering of militant activities, the propaganda literature spawned by the TTP continued to display its sense of defiance and enumerate its targeted attacks on security forces. Among the high-profile attacks were the ones on Pakistan Air Force base in Badaber, Peshawar, on September 18, 2015, and on Army Public School on December 16, 2015. The TTP has not shown any sign of wilting under pressure, despite defections and divisions within its ranks. It stays committed to its goal of bringing down the existing state structure by all means and imposing Sharia in Pakistan. Even if it owes its allegiance to Afghan Taliban which maintains its close nexus with Pakistani agencies, it has made its antipathy towards Pakistani military quite obvious.

Despite the success of army operations in the tribal areas against the anti-state militant/terror groups, the Pakistani Army continues to maintain an ambivalent posture towards the Islamist radical elements operating within the country. India-focussed jihadi groups as well as Afghan Taliban groups like the Haqqani group operating in Waziristan area, known for their hard-core Islamic

outlook and agenda, are kept out of these operations. Moreover, security forces failed to nab high-value TTP militants who escaped the theatre of war and reappeared keeping their propaganda war alive against Pakistani military and state.

TTP Worldview: Jihad against Pakistan Army

The TTP media wing is controlled by the Urdu speaking militants from interior Pakistan. Its monthly publication, *Nawai Afghan Jihad*, has so far run 80 issues between January 2009 and October 2015. From October 2014, TTP is running another website in the name of Umar Media and using it to express its views on various issues. The TTP publications are replete with accounts by Al Qaeda, Afghan Taliban and radical Islamists from other theatres of the world. There is an excessive emphasis on a rigid interpretation of *jihad-fi-sabilillah* (holy war in the name of Allah) and the need for Muslims to wage armed jihad and not to rest until the goal is reached. Like radical Islamic literature elsewhere, there is condemnation of the US, Israel and India and often these countries are bracketed together as an axis of evil against whom waging jihad is perfectly legitimate. There is regular mention of sufferings of the Rohingyas in Myanmar, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Palestinians in the Middle East and the Muslims in India. The Muslim ummah is urged to undertake jihad for ameliorating their condition.

Fighting Pakistan Army is Legitimate

In *Nawa-i Afghan Jihad*, January 2013 issue, then chief of TTP, Hakeemullah came out with an impassioned plea to all Pakistanis to rise in revolt against the state and uproot the un-Islamic regime (*Utho aur iss taghouti nizam ko ukhad phenko*).³⁰

A serialised interview with Adnan Rashid³¹, carried in the same magazine since March 2013, dwelt on his experience as an officer in the Pakistan military. In these interviews, he argued very forcefully that Pakistan Army was a *kafir* army because it had *kafir* officers and, whoever died in the army (whether he was a Christian or a Shia) was called a *shaheed* or martyr which was unacceptable to him. About jihad in Kashmir he said that he was asked to fight in Kashmir against the Indian forces, but he did not accept it because he realised that even if Kashmir was liberated from Indian control it would become part of a country (*read Pakistan*) which did not function according to Islamic principles.³² Therefore, it was necessary to undertake jihad against the military.³³

He also mentioned that the Pakistan Army wrongly invoked Islam to wage jihad against India for its own interests rather than for its love of Islam. On every Friday, the official ulema employed in the services of the Pakistan military would receive a written sermon from the ministry of religious affairs through fax, which he was obliged to relay to the soldiers. He could not say anything of his own.

When relations with India suffered and war seemed inevitable, the ulema were instructed to provoke the soldiers for jihad against India by invoking relevant passages from Hadees and Quran. Adnan held that there were many within the Pakistan Army who were always ready to help the mujahideen, and that the TTP should exploit such sentiments.³⁴

The November 2013 issue carried an article by Fazlullah, immediately after he succeeded Hakeemullah as amir of TTP,³⁵ where he warned the ruling elite as well as the media to stop paying obeisance to non-Islamic powers and start advocating the cause of Islam. Fazlullah urged Pakistani soldiers to join TTP's jihad to enforce sharia. The November 2014 issue carried an article entitled, "Pakistani Regime Is an Agent of the Satan", by Adam Yahya Gadahn, the Egyptian-American Al Qaeda spokesperson (who was later killed in January 2015 in a drone strike by the US). Gadahn held that "Pakistani military and security agencies have been, for the past 65 years, dancing to the tune of Uncle Sam and the Bull Dog [Britain]", who have "control over all our 55 Muslim nations" with the help of Saudi Arabia, their "most wicked and Satanic partner". He went on to exhort Pakistani people to rise in revolt:

I invite all my Pakistani brethren to revolt against *the present rulers in Islamabad and Rawalpindi* ... We have to dislodge the present rulers and target US/Western interests, ... and this should continue till all the foreigners retreat ... Or should we wait until Pakistan is torn into further pieces and Uncle Sam takes over our atomic assets, or China and India plan attacks on Pakistan with the help of their own local assets inside Pakistan? Have we not learnt our lessons from losing Bangladesh?³⁶

In the December 2014 issue of *Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad*, the deputy amir of Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Ustad Ahmed Farooq (who was later killed in the tribal region in April 2015) went on to provoke people by narrating the brutal action of the Pakistan Army:

In their operations they dumped our sisters and wives into dungeons (police secret cells) where there was no ray of light. Our ladies were molested and raped ... they have made an excellent show ... to please their bosses (*read* US) and win their favours at the cost of national dignity ... Waziristan is being penalised because it is an eye-sore for America, Israel and Bharat and all the infidels ... *Do our people pay taxes for such Army actions, which are fully dedicated to Kafirs and are murdering unarmed, gullible Muslims?*³⁷

In the same issue, Ayman Al Zawahiri called upon the people of Pakistan to turn their country into a citadel for mujahideen of the world.

... the Americans have carried out attacks in Pakistan as a supplement to their war in Afghanistan. But we should try our best to have safe haven place for the mujahideen in Pakistan. This should be our sole objective so that Pakistan

would function as a “citadel” for jihad and implementation of Sharia laws. Our sole aim is that we should have an Islamic regime in Pakistan.

Justifying Attack on Army School at Peshawar

In the March 2015 issue of *Nawa-i-Afghan Jihad*, the TTP justified the barbaric attack on Army Public School on December 16, 2014.³⁸ TTP leaders justified the suicide attack on Peshawar army school as a tit-for-tat act which should not have neither surprised nor shocked the military of Pakistan:

It is time to ponder that there was no halt to oppression inflicted on us for 13 long years. All these years, the bodies of our small infants and school-going children were smothered by indiscriminate shooting from helicopter gun-ships ... They were also school children like those in the military school at Peshawar. They were not terrorists. No candle-light vigil was observed for them. Needless to say, these killings continued for 13 long years.³⁹

Very brazenly, one of the commentators even drew parallels from Muhammad’s acts and justified the killings in Peshawar:

There was some special medical course being taught by military officers and we were their target ... we only killed those children of army officers, who had developed moustaches. *From the point of view of Shariab, this is akin to the killings of Banī Quray’ah, which is quite legitimate.* [italicised by author]... [the] civilians and small children were killed by firing opened by the Army.⁴⁰

Interestingly, quite, on the very day of the school attack, which coincided with the anniversary of the defeat of Pakistan Army in 1971, LeT Chief Hafiz Saeed wrote along similar lines, in daily *Ummat*, that the creation of Bangladesh became inevitable because the leaders of Pakistan strayed from the path of Islam, which used to unite the people of both parts of Pakistan. He held that with the weakening of the hold of Islam, insignificant issues like language came to the fore and led to the creation of Bangladesh.⁴¹

In a video released by Umar Media⁴² on the eve of Independence-day celebration in Pakistan on August 14, 2015, Adnan Rashid built an antithesis of the history being taught in Pakistan. In the video he urged Pakistanis to ask themselves whether they should celebrate August 14, “as a day of independence or a day of partition of the Muslims of the subcontinent (*Yum-e-taksheem-e-Musلمانان-e-Hind*); whether Pakistan was established in the name of Islam or ‘Islam’ was used by some vested interest to attain power; whether the two-nation theory (*do-quomi nazriya*) was a fact (*haqeeqat*) or a deceptive idea (*gumrah kun tasavur*)?” He even went to the extent of saying that the leaders of Pakistan movement fell victims to the imperial policy of divide and rule and unnecessarily provoked the Muslims to fight their *hamwatan* (fellow countrymen) Hindus. Taking a sectarian position, he alleged that most of the prominent advocates of

Islam – Sir Syed Ahmad, Aga Khan, Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, Khwaja Nazimuddin – were Shias, while others were either *Qadianis* or *kafirs*. He regarded it as a pious duty to recast Pakistan as a truly Islamic state though armed jihad.

Genies Gone Rogue: Remain Defiant

The way the anti-state terror groups have surfaced in Pakistan signals a deep-rooted animus against the army and the state. Despite the measures taken by the state to handle them, they have not been effectively countered. The ideological underpinnings that drive these groups are reinforced by the very emphasis on Islam by the state every now and then. If the state pronounces itself as an Islamic one, then the question arises: Whose version of Islam should prevail? As the current head of TTP puts it:

I want to ask my countrymen: why have our people sacrificed so much? Hundreds of thousands of people sacrificed their lives just because the essence of Pakistan was “*La ila ha Illallah*”... otherwise it would have been better to live with the Hindus. We did not fight for this country just to pray, fast, go for Haj and open madrasas. [Even] when we were under British rule, nobody stopped us from doing all this. *Namaz* is allowed in America and Europe. If a country becomes Islamic just by allowing its citizens to offer prayers and go to Haj then India is also an Islamic country; so are Europe and America. Unless and until the state is ruled by sharia, a country cannot be called ‘Islamic’.⁴³

The state has failed to develop a counter-discourse to such formulation by ultra-radical elements, who argue that the ruling elite use Islam symbolically to continue their hold on power. The existing state structure has to go if the state were to become truly Islamic in character.

The groups aiming at dissolution of the present state of Pakistan have developed an intricate network of terror primarily in the tribal areas and slowly moving into interior Pakistan. They are overwhelmingly Sunni and Salafi/Wahabi/Ahl-e-Hadees in orientation, and continue to assert themselves in spite of the counter-terror measures the country has adopted so far. A keen observer of the evolving situation in the tribal areas and assertion of radical Islam would acknowledge that the TTP has evolved as an ideologically “anchored outfit keen to spread its brand of sharia across not just provincial but state boundaries as well”. He would argue that the tactical restraint the TTP and its allies have shown in Punjab is only aimed at biding time till things become clearer in Afghanistan. He would caution Pakistani leadership that:

in this sordid saga, the grand prize remains the Pakistani state, which the TTP may never get but, in its mind, deems imperative for helping and waging the global jihad. The Punjab-based rulers can try to [quarantine] the TTP within the Pashtun lands but they are sitting on the powder keg of jihadism with

assorted 'jaishes' and 'lashkars' headquartered in their province. The reprieve bought at the expense of the Pashtuns will run out in years, not decades.⁴⁴

Conclusion

It is a clear case of the genies defying their masters in Pakistan over the last decade. As it has been argued above, most of the terror elements confronting the state today were nurtured by the state agencies over the last three decades. Many of them are still being raised as unofficial arms of the security machinery of the state to be used as strategic levers in the neighbourhood. The trend would suggest that they could also turn against the state in future. In such a situation, the sanest option for Pakistan is to dismantle the terror infrastructure altogether; disarm the private armies raised by agencies over the years; and pursue a peaceful agenda with its neighbours rather than resorting to asymmetric strategy which has posed an existential challenge for itself.

The combination of internal and external insecurities that such strategy engenders has also been counterproductive as far as creating a sound and functioning political culture in Pakistan is concerned. It has allowed the army to wield disproportionate influence over statecraft and led to civil-military imbalance. At another level, emphasis on religion in the public sphere has interfered with the process of democratic politics and created a constituency of vocal clerics legitimising even armed resistance to the state in pursuit of their 'sacred' objectives granted by their 'holy books'. Without an imaginative reset of the Pakistani State, it will continue to labour under the existential crises it has invented for itself.

NOTES

1. A detailed account of this is provided in: Arif Jamal, *Call for Transnational Jihad: Lashkar-e-Taiba 1985-2014*, Kautilya Books, New Delhi, 2015.
2. A graphic account of this is provided in: Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*, Penguin, New York, 2005.
3. Among the prominent jihadis joining the Afghan mujahideen in their struggle were Abdullah Azam (1941-1989) from Palestine, Osama Bin Laden (1957-2011) from Saudi Arabia, Ayman Al Zawahiri (1951-) from Egypt, Riduan Isamuddin alias Hambali and Jafar Umar Thalib (1961-) from Indonesia and Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani (1959-1998) from the Philippines. Ahmed Rashid wrote that between 1982 and 1992, about 35,000 Muslim radicals from 43 Islamic countries from all over the world participated in the Afghan Jihad. See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond*, IB Taurus, 2000, p.130.
4. He pronounced his anti-US fatwa on February 23, 1998 and formed his International Islamic Front in on May 28, 1998, with the avowed aim of attacking the US. The group had members from various Islamist outfits of Pakistan, like the Markaz Dawa Al Irshad (Centre for Preaching), its armed wing, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), and the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). Soon afterwards, on August 7, 1998, Bin Laden's Al Qaeda struck US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania simultaneously killing 223 people. The US was quick

- to launch attacks with tomahawk missiles on August 20, 1998 targeting camps allegedly run by Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in Khost.
5. During 1996-2001, several attacks were launched in Kashmir to this effect, including killing of Hindus (of seven Pandits on March 22, 1997 in Sangrampora, 24 Pandits in Wandhama on January 25, 1998, 26 Hindus in Prankote on April 17, 1998, 25 Hindus in Champanari on June 19, 1998, 30 Hindu pilgrims on the way to Amarnath on August 1, 2000), the hijacking of Indian plane to Afghanistan and the attacks on Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on October 1, 2001 and on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001.
 6. JeM was founded by Masood Azhar upon his release by Indian authorities in exchange for passengers held hostage by Kashmiri militants after their successful hijack of an Indian plane from Kathmandu, Nepal, on December 31, 1999. The plane was made to land in Kandahar and the Taliban facilitated the communications between the Indian authorities and the hijackers leading to Masood's release. Rather than re-joining his parent organisation, the HuM, he formed his new outfit called the JeM.
 7. "India Protests Airlift of Pak Fighters from Kunduz, Fears They Will Enter Kashmir", *Indian Express*, January 24, 2002, at <http://expressindia.indianexpress.com/news/fullstory.php?newsid=6813> (Accessed January 2, 2016); also see: Seymour M. Hersh, "The Getaway: Questions Surround a Secret Pakistani Airlift", *The New Yorker*, January 28, 2002, at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/01/28/the-getaway-2> (Accessed January 2, 2016). It was reported by the media that several thousand surrendered to the Jumbish-i Milli soldiers loyal to General Rashid Dostum and taken as prisoners. They were either shot or suffocated to death while being transferred from Kunduz in metal containers and were buried in the Dasht-i-Leili desert just west of Sheberghan, in the Jowzjan Province, at <http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/issues/mass-atrocities/afghanistan-war-crime/dasht-e-leili-photos.html> (Accessed January 2, 2016).
 8. Mubashir Zaidi, "Back to the Drawing Board", *The Herald*, Karachi, September 2003; Amir Rana, "JD Continues Raising Funds Despite Ban", *Daily Times*, November 19, 2003, at <http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/national/19-Nov-2003/jd-continues-raising-funds-despite-ban> (Accessed January 2, 2016).
 9. Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, then the number three of Al Qaeda worked in concert with cadres of different jihadi outfits to execute its plans during this time. After his capture in March 2003, a Libyan named Al Faraj Al Libi, now under detention in Guantanamo Bay, operated as operational chief of Al Qaeda until his arrest in May 2005.
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 11. "Prison Escapee Evolves into al Qaeda-Backed Jailbreak Artist", *The Express Tribune*, August 30, 2013, at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/597407/prison-escapee-evolves-into-al-qaeda-backed-jailbreak-artist/> (Accessed January 10, 2016).
 12. "Arshad Mehmood: Hanged, Then Buried by Crowds of Well-Wishers", *Dawn*, December 21, 2014, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1152270> (Accessed January 10, 2016).
 13. It was quite intriguing that HUJI has escaped ban by Pakistan so far even if it has been banned in India, Bangladesh and the US. See Khaled Ahmed, "The Biggest Militia We Know Nothing About", *The Friday Times*, Lahore, May 20, 2002.
 14. "Karachi: Investigators Enact Attack on Army Convoy", *Dawn*, June 12, 2004, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/361605/karachi-investigators-enact-attack-on-army-convoy> (Accessed January 2, 2016).
 15. "The group was founded by Attaur Rehman, a Karachi University student of Statistics and a leader of Jamaat-e-Islami student wing Islami Jamiat-e-Talba." Ali Chisti, "How Jundullah Became Al Qaeda: The Changing Face of the Terror Network", *The Friday Times*, November

- 14, 2014, at <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/how-jundullah-became-al-qaeda> (Accessed January 2, 2016).
16. B Raman, "Why Amjad Farooqi Had to Die", *Asia Times*, September 30, 2004, at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/FI30Df05.html (Accessed January 10, 2016).
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21. He was nominated by TTP as its representative during the unsuccessful dialogue with the government during February-March 2014 and made the talks conditional on implementation of sharia in Pakistan.
22. "Lal Masjid Protest: FIR Registered against Maulana Aziz ", *Dawn*, December 22, 2014, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1151858>; "Aziz Has Apologised for Defending APS Attack, Says Nisar", *Dawn*, February 22, 2015, at <http://www.dawn.com/news/1165114> (Accessed January 10, 2016).
23. Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Inside Al Qaeda and the Taliban*, Pluto Press, London, 2011, pp. 47-53.
24. Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Why Pakistan is gun shy?", *Asia Times*, December 24, 2008, at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JL24Df03.html (Accessed January 10, 2016).
25. This section draws upon the analyses by Pakistani observers on the rise of Pakistani Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The facts and figures cited here are from these analytical works: Amir Mir, *Talibanization of Pakistan: From 9/11 to 26/11*, Pentagon Press, India, 2009; Imtiaz Gul, *The Al Qaeda Connection: The Taliban and Terror in Pakistan's Tribal Areas*, Penguin, London, 2010.
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27. A *murtad* is one who rejected her/his faith and walked out of the fold of Islam.
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31. Former PAF technician, convicted in the first attack on Musharraf and later rescued from Bannu jail in 2012.
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33. Adnan Rashid, "Pakistani Fauj Mein Deen-Dari Ki Wajaye, Deen-Bezari Aur Islam-Dushmani

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 35. Mullah Fazlullah, “Hamari Qurbani Jumhuriyat Ke Khilaf Aur Shariyat Ke Qiyam Hai”, *Nawai Afghani Jihad*, November 2013, p. 13.
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 41. Hafiz Saeed, “Bangladesh Kyun Bana?”, *Daily Ummat*, December 16, 2014, at <http://ummatpublication.com/2014/12/16/news.php?p=idr6.gif> (Accessed January 10, 2016).
 42. “Azadi ka faryb”, “*Jasn-e-Azadi?? Pakistan ki azadi ka bhayanak tarikh... Razon se pardah utha hi gaya delkhiye, is video mein... link par klik karein..*”, video distributed by Umar Media at <https://umarmedia.wordpress.com/videos/> (Accessed January 10, 2016).
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 44. Dr Mohammad Taqi, “Pashtuns: Thrown under the Sharia Bus?”, *Daily Times*, February 13, 2014, at <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/13-Feb-2014/pashtuns-thrown-under-the-sharia-bus> (Accessed January 10, 2016).

12

Radicalisation in Pakistan: Youth Bulge as a Factor

Priyanka Singh

Introduction

In 2015, Mohammad Naveed, barely 20 years old, followed closely by Sajjad Hussain, in his early 20s, were apprehended in Jammu and Kashmir by Indian security agencies. The young militants infiltrated the Line of Control (LoC) as part of a larger conspiracy of staging a terrorist attack in India. The capture of terrorists alive was a significant breakthrough. More significantly, the young men symbolised, even if fractionally, the rising, relentless peril of youth radicalisation taking place inside Pakistan. Mohammad Naveed's subsequent confessions during interrogation revealed a trajectory similar to Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving attacker in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks (tried and executed in India).¹ Apart from the fact that both were attached to the same terrorist outfits, i.e., the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), their origin was rooted in conditions of abject poverty, hunger and, more significantly, lack of an alternative role or way of living.

The pattern revealed – poor family background, lack of education and economic deprivation – is not peculiar to Pakistan. The symptoms are quite similar in other societies undergoing radicalisation. However, in Pakistan – a country infested with militancy, a social landscape plagued with deep-rooted sectarianism, where extremist forces dominate, and most importantly, comprises an ever growing population of youth – radicalisation does become the foremost imminent threat. Radicalisation in the context of youth in Pakistan is aptly defined as: “The process through which an individual changes from passiveness or activism to become more revolutionary, militant or extremist, especially where there is intent towards,

or support for, violence”.² The steep precipitation in Pakistan’s internal security crisis and escalating levels of violence indicate deepening radicalisation of the state and society.

The phenomenon of radical extremism in Pakistan has been, for decades, a perennial problem that has only intensified in the period post 9/11. It has penetrated well into the cross section of Pakistani social and political ecosystem. In a country with a vast youth population amounting to two-thirds below the age of 30 years, the scourge of radicalisation is bound to acquire serious proportions. In Pakistan, the situation is further exacerbated by dismal economic indicators with high level of unemployment and resistance to modern education. In a nation beset with religious extremism, the tremendous potential emanating from an expanding youth bulge needs to be channelled constructively and effectively. If not, it could certainly bear adverse impact on Pakistan’s ongoing efforts to tide over the wave of radicalisation and militancy.

Linking Radicalisation and Violence

One of principal challenges while studying radicalisation in a militancy ailed nation like Pakistan is regarding conceptual differentiation between radicalisation, militancy, terrorism, insurgency, etc. Undoubtedly, a crucial link exists between radicalisation and an individual’s actual resort to methods of violence. But the two are neither same nor could be applied interchangeably. There is an inherent tendency that the term radicalisation is often confused with actual violence or militancy. Herein lies the potential danger of neglecting the critical process which drives a radicalised mind towards adopting violence.³ It is argued that the particular intervening phase is something less attended to and not understood well. Describing the evolving traits in young men’s behaviour, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report 2015 divides it into two broad phases – pre-radicalisation and radicalisation – laying out the following as several phases of the radicalisation process:

- (i) Peaceful and tolerant outlook, (ii) Intense dislike for/ dismissive, of other individuals or groups, (iii) Intolerance, (iv) Polarization among groups, (v) Sympathy for violence, (vi) Support for violence, (vii) Actual involvement in violence.⁴

An important thesis explaining the critical link between radicalisation and actual perpetrators of violence is the pyramid model. This particular approach makes a stage-wise differentiation between the wide base of supporters/sympathisers and the actual militants (fewer in number) at the apex. The pyramid model also accounts for the various levels of radicalisation and kinds of radicalisation – individual, group or in masses.⁵ The upward trajectory is determined by a web of multiple forces – political, social and economic. In Pakistan, such forces have

crystallised into notable affinity amongst masses towards extremist agenda, even though violence as a method may not have across-the-board support. Existence of a dense network of militant organisation – spread from the far flung Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to relatively developed provinces of Punjab⁶ and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – makes Pakistan's quest with radicalisation somewhat unique and equally perilous. Receptivity among people towards terror outfits has risen sharply mainly due to the state's failure in delivering basic means of living and security. This linkage has further intensified the challenge which now lies in "weakening this bond".⁷

Radicalisation as a concept has been defined in varied ways, and there is more or less no consensus on its proportion or ambit. Then there are misperceptions on radicalisation/terrorism/militancy/insurgency being binary concepts. The dyad needs to be dealt by delineating distinctions before the interrelation between these problems can be determined. As a result of the conceptual ambiguity, the domain has been inhibited by what is referred to as the "intellectual haze".⁸ Nonetheless, in view of the alarming prospects of radicalisation in Pakistan vis-à-vis an inflating youth bulge, there have been series of surveys and case studies on the subject, mostly emanating from the West. Most of them have attributed lack of sources and statistical information from the ground, and have therefore confined their scope to laying broad policy measures to contain radicalisation or eradicate the root causes behind it. What is left wanting from the flurry of surveys is a focussed symptomatic analysis, closer to the ground realities, and a set of concrete, practical and immediately doable measures to address the problem.

In this backdrop, the paper attempts to study the emerging trends of youth engagement in the radicalisation process and its consequences in Pakistan. It seeks to unfold recent patterns witnessed in youth radicalisation – social, economic and political realities that conduce large scale radicalisation and gauge trends in youth perceptions (from open sources) to see whether the magnitude of radicalisation is likely to rise or decline in future with regard to numbers of youth embracing radical activities. The paper also makes a critical assessment of how seriously the Pakistan State has acknowledged the issue and whether it has taken steps to overcome what is largely seen as an imminent threat. Summing up the findings, the papers brings forth some of the broad future implications for Pakistan and the adjoining region.

Youth Radicalisation and Pakistan: A Precarious Mix

The complex interplay of multiple forces in Pakistan provides a conducive, enabling environment for radicalisation of youth. The social stratification in Pakistan as such, large swathes of rural population, education lag and a stagnating

statistics of growth all add up to create a vicious cycle leading to an insecure society that develops cracks and several vulnerabilities. Besides the societal impact, the influence of the army in the country's system, perceived as the pivotal authority, and the forged nexus with the so-called non-state elements have tilted the delicate balance in favour of radical forces. Some of the pertinent drivers/enablers of radicalisation in the context of Pakistan have been discussed as follows:

The Demographic Deluge

Demographic projections unanimously indicate long- and short- term trends pointing towards youth concentration. With a projected population of 191.7⁹ million in 2015, Pakistan has one of the fastest growing populations in the world, at the rate averaging nearly 2 percent per year.¹⁰ By this measure, Pakistan's youth population below 24 years is estimated to form the approximate bulk of population by the end of 2030.¹¹ Startlingly high fertility rates, which have refused to recede significantly in the last 5 years, hovering way above 3 per female,¹² disparities in income, substantial chunk of population still lurking under the poverty line and dismal figures of social and economic (human development) indicators appending to a looming bulge of youth portend serious challenges for Pakistan in managing the scourge of radicalisation. While the current (2015) median age stands at 23.2, it is likely to shoot up to approximately 27.9 by 2030 and 34.1 in 2050.¹³ By 2030, Pakistan's global ranking in population is projected to go up from 7 to 6.¹⁴

Social and Economic Indicators

Figures narrating Pakistan's socio-economic profile have not been encouraging even as the current rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth at 4.24 per cent is an improvement from 2014.¹⁵ Pakistan needs to grow exponentially in order to be able to channelise the youth capital reserve which is growing every year. The problem of disproportionate distribution of growth benefits needs to be checked and a fair trickle-down effect needs to be brought in.¹⁶ In view of the domestic security situation, external engagements, the prospects of Pakistan propelling a quantum leap in growth are bleak despite the international monetary assistance/loans. The ratio of job creation vis-à-vis population growth, more significantly, the widening bracket of disengaged youth surplus, requires extensive employment generation. Pakistan ranks low on the human development index and the majority of population is deprived of food and literacy. For instance, Ajmal Kasab's confessions revealed how young men like him are willing to risk their lives for small bounties in cash or kind. Young boys are enrolled, recruited as 'child soldiers', and later some of the naïve impressionable minds get trained to die as *Fidayeen* (suicide bombers).

In insular societies, like in Pakistan and most of South Asia, young women

population gets easily absorbed in roles prevalent in the societal patterns – household, family, etc. However, the male member across generations is expected to earn, faces pressures from all sides if he is unable to do so. As a result, the study on prospects of youth radicalisation have tended to inadvertently focus on the male youth population. This tendency, however, cannot be really contested or rejected as in most cases, the given context for sampling is one where few girls attend school, fewer aspire to work, and still fewer, actually go out and work.

There is the other side of the coin too. Contrary to the popular perception that radicalisation is confined to lower layers of the economically disadvantaged social strata in Pakistan, certain studies have concluded otherwise. Ayesha Siddiqa in *Red Hot Chilli Peppers Islam: Is the Youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical?* observes:

Youth from affluent socioeconomic background and those, who have better career opportunities can fluctuate between being socio-culturally liberal but have a closed approach in matters pertaining to geo-politics, geo-strategy and identity politics.¹⁷

Challenging such platitudes in the existing discourse that flags socio-economic lag as the primary driver of radicalisation, Moeed Yusuf, similarly contends that the elite sections of youth still harbour a sense of siege and danger against Islam and Pakistan, especially against the West, even as they could be open to adopting Western modes of life.¹⁸

Overarching Religiosity

A predominant religious identity of a state, Pakistan in this case, has been instrumental in unleashing regressive atmospherics considered ideal for proliferating extremist ideologies. Pakistan was conceived based on the two-nation theory, as a separate homeland for the Muslims. The precepts of a religiously defined identity of Pakistan State has permeated down to the social stratum, especially at the lowest levels. According to a survey conducted by the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) in 2010, at least 92.4 per cent of the youth covered, acknowledged an unfailing abidance to religion in their daily life.¹⁹ The figures oscillated on the scope of religion and the role it has/ought to have in the country's growth, and whether the legal system should be sourced from the *Sharia*.²⁰ However, compliance to religion and ethnicity is noted to be emphatic and more or less all-pervasive throughout the spectrum.

Against protracted Islamisation of the state and society in Pakistan, forces of plurality and freedom have been severely constrained. The process has continued over decades initially under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and later under the military dictator, Zia-ul-Haq – policies that virtually underwrote the security mess Pakistan faces today. The systemic impact of stringent religious undertones in every sphere

of life thins the line between radicalisation and actual espousal of violence. In Pakistan, where democracy and pluralism have been reeling under enormous pressures both from internal political dynamics and external exigencies, radicalisation among youth is easy to naturalise.

There is a thriving network of religious bodies in the country – as many as 232 religious organisations and militant outfits which propagate, amongst other things, “transformation of society according to their ideologies, enforcement of Shariah law, establishment of Khilafah (caliphate) system, fulfilment of their sectarian objectives and achievement of Pakistan’s strategic and ideological objectives through militancy”.²¹ These organisations operate freely and most of them have parallel auxiliary bodies to cater to education and social activities. Their social manifestations have played key role in militant organisations forging ties with common people. The needier and deprived sections of society are susceptible to the spreading influence of religious bodies, and, sooner or later, they start abiding by their propaganda and practice.

Regardless of the overall political tribulations and the fluctuations between military rule and civilian governments, a core jihadist constituency has been a perpetual reality in Pakistan. Organisations such as Tablighi Jamaat have been actively disseminating and advocating Deobandi teachings inside Pakistan. Post 9/11, the militant groups inside Pakistan have been more or less under some kind of scanner. However, the more serious threat originates from “the accelerating social and religious conservatism that is more socially corrosive, providing the gateway to radicalisation”.²² The state in Pakistan has shown reluctance to put such organisations on leash despite acknowledging that such organisations and their well-attended congregations are the “breeding ground of extremism”.²³ Cognisant of the possible fallouts, well-regarded analyst, Arif Jamal, advocated that such religious propagators should not be patronised as “non-political or non-militant preachers”.²⁴ On the contrary, they should be put in the purview of counter terrorism as their activities “by radicalising various layers of the society, will ignite it”.²⁵

There is a perceptible gap between the people at large – the desperate sections of populations and the state apparatus. The vacuum has been filled up by the constellation of jihadist extremist forces with their religiously pronounced concepts of equality and fair justice. Amongst the burgeoning section of youth, such manoeuvring by jihadist organisations goes a long way in pacifying their angst and aspirations.

Entrenched Religious Orientation

Studies on youth radicalisation in Pakistan have unanimously indicated the gross impact of the model of education/curriculum with regard to madrasas or the

religious seminaries. While stream of education in local madrasas is loaded with religious undertones, there is hardly any focus on scientific and modern means of education.²⁶ Here, young minds are infused with predominance of religious pursuits and endorse primordial routines. The domain of religion-centric education has been discussed at length by studies on jihadi extremism – affinity to violence and revolt has a great deal to do with the texture of the academic curriculum being taught in madrasas.

Madrasas or seminaries offer low-cost options of schooling for the majority of people in Pakistan. Poor infrastructure of education impels children from the underprivileged sections towards local madrasas. While labelling madrasa education as futile may be sheer generalisation, the fact remains that the curriculum in such religious seats of teaching remain injected with religious dogmas. The products from such seminaries remain alien to modern liberal ideas and way of life. On the contrary, they develop tendencies to find solace in extremist, religious ideas and practices.

Near Aversion to Democracy

A democratic state in principle, Pakistan's trajectory has been determined more by the whims of military than by the popularly elected civilian leaders. Seven decades into being, Pakistan politics has been perpetually overruled by the military not only during wars but in peaceful times too. The characteristics of civilian leadership, its conspicuous subservience to military, lack of will and courage to take on the army, have shaped negative perceptions amongst youth on the capability of popularly elected governments to govern the country well. Also, the prevalence of fraudulent practices in the electoral process have notably had an adverse impact and repelled the youth from participating in political processes.²⁷ Few studies indicate a noticeable political aptitude and awareness amongst youth in Pakistan. However, the inability of democracy to supersede the military and the overall failure of the state to cultivate democratic culture and practices in several processes concerning common people leave very little scope for the youth to vent out their political aspirations.

With high periodicity of military rule that firmly controls the political sphere, the majority of youth in Pakistan, especially amongst the downtrodden and deprived, have developed an adverse opinion or indifference to democracy.²⁸ Beside, a substantial chunk in this age group express confidence and align with religious groups. Such trends in thinking have potentially been seen translating into bitter aversion to democracy at times. As it is, the army in Pakistan has successfully build a perception that they are the ultimate saviour of the country. In the context of the youth, the impulsive go-getters, the army is considered a better option to be able to help in realising the goals of their country.

Democracy in Pakistan has remained under-flourished and largely non-inclusive. Since 1947, it has been dominated by the elite and there is not much scope for grass roots to make forays into the higher echelons of power and authority. This is in contrast to Indian and Western experiences where democracy has successfully experimented by raising leaders even from the most underprivileged layers of society. In Pakistan, the exclusive character of politics has scaled up disgruntlement amongst masses, especially youth.

Contiguity to Afghanistan, India and Pakistan's Strategic Proxies

Pakistan's adherence towards the anti-communist bloc during the Cold War years was marked with the inception of the practice of proxy instruments of war against adversaries. A strategy similar to the Mujahidin-led guerrilla warfare against the erstwhile Soviet Union was later replicated against India during the late 1980s. Thus, the long drawn out state complicity in nurturing terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan has been a major factor conducting radicalisation of youth in the country. While attempting to balance out geopolitical objectives and strategic priorities – divided along allegiance to the US's regional agenda, upholding the centrality of a powerful army, and fulfilling the state's own interests against arch rival India – Pakistan has landed in a situation where it has been errantly engaging with proxy instruments of war.

The mounting proportion of youth population in the country and Pakistan's perennial association with militant-leaning policy have led to what has also been argued as the "demand and supply" phenomenon.²⁹ Since there is a large proportion of young men sitting idle, assigning themselves to the state's agenda or pursuits, not only gives them a sense of objective but fulfils their basic requirements of living. They become receptive to radical viewpoints inculcated by militant outfits. The absence of basic necessities in life like food, shelter and proper education impairs their overall development, and at the same time, they become devoid of rational thinking.

A recalcitrant cohort of youth with untapped potential and near zilch opportunities to engage them constructively, forces as in many societies, the marginalised, the neglected and the "dispossessed" to take to violence for being able to be heard, to feel that sense of purpose by taking up arms either against the state or against the purported enemies of state.³⁰ As a nation, Pakistan rides high on anti-India and anti-West (read the US) sentiments. Mind-set amongst youth is heavily injected with hostility against these two, fed by an utterly imbalanced view of history and geopolitics in schools and higher institutions of learning.

Divided Society, Divisive State

Sectarian and ethnic tensions and religious divides have had serious repercussions on Pakistani society as a whole. As a result, an individual's psyche is also shaped

by thinking based on these lines of differences. Over the years, the state instead of calibrating the differences and bridging the divides has, on the contrary, politically capitalised the crises to survive in the power struggles. Consequently, there is great deal of domestic discord and fewer means to usher popular mobilisation. In fragmented societies, radicalisation is likely to seep and spread much faster than in unified cohesive ones. Radicalisation can be one of those rallying points where groups or individuals can identify and feel integrated with.

Pakistan's state complicity with militant proxies as instruments of state policy have ended up forming a 'deep state' that functions based on principles diametrically opposed to modern democratic values and freedom. Radicalisation is easy to penetrate into closed systems. For instance, lately, there is this debate on the extent of radicalisation in the ranks of Pakistan Army. The media sector, especially the vernacular media is also alleged to be generating a discourse almost bordering radicalised and extremist ideology. The contagion impact of vernacular media is rapid since it caters to the largest section of population. Amongst youth, the effect can be terminal as they are quick to absorb rhetorical statist propaganda making them "susceptible to conspiracy theories and popular discourse that strikes an emotional chord even if it defies strict strategic logic".³¹

The 18th amendment to the Pakistani Constitution abolished several ministries at the federal level and instead conferred related exercise of power concerning those areas/issues to the provinces, youth affairs being one of them. Since Pakistan does have a track record of internal discord, at the level of inter-provincial and federal-provincial ties, a lot would depend on how the various units forge a common understanding and together deal with the challenge of youth radicalisation in unison.³²

Global Stimuluses

The gruesome mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, in the US orchestrated by Pakistani-origin Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife Tashfeen Malik once again spurred the debate on radicalisation becoming a global spectre. According to the relatives, one of the prime culprits, Tashfeen Malik, originally from Pakistan, based in the US, became "hardline" during her stay in Saudi Arabia.³³ Hence, media reports splashed in the aftermath of the attack underscored the intensifying challenge from the booming transnational global nexus of jihadist extremist ideology. A debate was yet again unleashed on the deceptive role of countries like Saudi Arabia in underwriting this worldwide threat.³⁴ The Arab giant is being increasingly alleged of lacking "credibility and capability" in containing the fundamentalist forces it "inspires, supports and exports".³⁵

Radicalisation is Pakistan with its cross-national links, therefore, cannot be perceived as a case in isolation. It is pertinent to take into account the wider complex networks and linkages in which countries like Saudi Arabia have a pivotal

role. The Saudi connect in abetting radical ideology and harbouring radical elements is vital to understand this particular menace in Pakistan. The two countries have a long-standing strategic partnership underpinned by constant flow of Saudi aid and assistance to Pakistan and also the strong influence the former holds on Pakistan's domestic politics.

Parallel to the emerging trends in the global radicalisation index, a constant churning has been witnessed in the Islamic world led by the so-called Arab Spring. As a result of staple use of social media tools and the widening circumference of information/news, the impact of developments across one country is percolating to others much faster than ever before. Escalating levels of violence in countries of the Middle East like Syria and Egypt, grisly attacks such as the Paris 13/11 and the disparate, incongruent global responses to each of these have the world clearly divided. The fault lines are resurfacing between the West and the Islamic world stirring sentiments, anguish which ultimately feed into radicalisation in various countries including Pakistan.

Prospects

The expanding surge of radicalisation in Pakistan necessitates concerted measures to reverse the tide. Hence, the moot question: What could Pakistan do to neutralise radicalisation? In conventional terms, radicalisation is a foremost systemic challenge facing a society and state. To curb the menace, abundant measures can be forwarded for the states to follow. In a country like Pakistan, however, the challenge compounds, first, due to the intense, sometimes severely violent manifestations it takes. Second, Pakistan has been complicit in nurturing this industry of young radicalised minds, at times to meet its external strategic agenda or in adherence towards shared geopolitical objectives with allies, especially the United States. While a set of suggestions or key measures is put across to Pakistan to combat radicalisation, Pakistan's own vested objectives need to be accounted. Pakistan today is envisaged as a country where militants or radicals elements are not really non-state. For Pakistan, the battle therefore, has to be first fought and won at the level of perception – more on the intangible plane than on the tangible ground. A reluctant half-hearted state cannot fight terrorism, neither quell one of its prime root cause – radicalisation. Unless the breeding sanctuaries cease to exist/operate, not much expectation can be pinned on Pakistan's intention in neutralising radical thoughts and practice in the growing youth cohort.

Based on projections foretelling an expanding youth bulge in the country, Pakistan needs to brace up efforts to engage this group constructively. Of late, a profusion of surveys on youth has been witnessed – most being conducted by think tanks in the West than by Pakistan itself. These surveys have made useful

contribution in terms of offering vital feedback on youth perspectives by measuring and assessing their views on a variety of issues: their socioeconomic antecedents, social conditioning and moral/intellectual development, political aptitude, extent of religious allegiance and whether religious education has deprived them of a modern scientific outlook, etc.

Proliferation of radicalisation needs to be tamed right at the grass roots. Thus, first and foremost, the state needs to micromanage and transform the centres of learning, especially the local madrasas. The 2002 Voluntary Registration and Regulation Ordinance was one such positive step in the direction. However, the ordinance designed to mainstream madrasas (through state funding) achieved limited success as a result of stiff resistance offered by several religious bodies.³⁶ It remains utmost pertinent to infuse the madrasa curriculum with scientific modern concepts and theories. The scope of religious education needs to be restricted to essential limits – where religious education deems necessary, the scope could be enhanced to include tolerant views of Sufi Islam. Madrasa reforms should be reinforced based on the feedback provided in surveys on youth perceptions. Besides, objective official surveys free from bias and prejudice become necessary to ascertain the cause and cures for early radicalisation in seminaries.

Post Peshawar school massacre in December 2014, the Government of Pakistan has taken a somewhat serious view of the gravity of situation. Sabaoon Centre for Rehabilitation, Mishal (run by the Pakistan Army), Sparley, Rastoon, Pythom, and Heila are some of the important de-radicalisation initiatives underway.³⁷ These institutions not only seek ideological rehabilitation of radicalised extremist youth but also cater to the families of men who embraced radicalisation or became violent.

In addition to the ongoing efforts, the government also needs to chalk out comprehensive medium- and long-term de-radicalisation strategies. At the political level, the democratic deficit needs to be addressed by promoting popular participation, and thereby make systems and processes more inclusive and transparent. There should be planned action to enhance the level of constructive youth engagement. At the governance level, employment deficit needs to be bridged so that the so-called youth bulge becomes a strength rather than weakness. Possibilities need to be explored whether the same youth could act as a counter force for “combating growing extremism”.³⁸

Pakistan’s way ahead in managing the youth cohort is a stringent challenge. Oft-characterised as a failing, failed state, Pakistan has nevertheless shown remarkable resilience in being able to hold the country together during extreme violence and instability. It is with such resiliency, resolute, firm and determined stance that Pakistan could successfully liquidate the growing tide of youth radicalisation, once it decides to.

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13

Growing Radicalism in Bangladesh: Assessing the Response of the State

Smruti S Pattanaik

Bangladesh, a state founded on secularism among other ideals, is facing the growing challenges of religious radicalism which is now threatening the country's social fabric and its foundational values. The threat of fundamentalist and radical forces can be described as an existential threat. The growing radicalisation is a result of many factors that have contributed to the political relevance of the Islamists and politics of religion. First, the developments in the Muslim world have their resonance in Bangladesh and cannot be ignored even though domestic context remains a major factor; second, the activities of the Islamic Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), funded by oil-rich Arab countries, are engaged in propagating values and idioms leading to the Wahabisation of Islam in Bangladesh; third, the role of religious political parties and their patronisation of radical groups;¹ fourth, the return of the Afghan war veterans and their international linkages have provided the Islamists ideological impetus and financial sustenance; lastly, the linkages between the militant groups and state actors like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and external agents like Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and its supported fake currency racket that funds militant activities both within Bangladesh and in India.² While these are important factors and have contributed to the entrenchment of the fundamentalists and have expanded the Islamic constituency, they have also benefitted from the increasing polarisation in the Bangladesh society and polity.

This polarisation was perceptible since the restoration of democracy in 1990. The growing salience of religion as an instrument of political mobilisation was

utilised by the two parties who canvassed for popular support. In the process the religious political parties got prominence and gained political currency. The fact that Awami League (AL), a party that prides itself in introducing secularism, did not hesitate to court JI for electoral benefit attests to the electoral value of Islamism. Yet, the division between the secularist and the Islamists is very much a factor in Bangladesh politics. This provides fertile ground for international militant groups like the Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the Islamic State (IS) and groups associated with them to grow. The country has recently witnessed further polarisation with the trial of war criminals.

The Shahbag movement³ and its resultant polarisation have further divided the society in the middle, i.e., the atheist versus the believers. Both the categories are extremely broad and depend on how a protagonist defines it. The division has become so deep that any criticism of Islamists or questioning the role of religion in politics is not tolerated. In 2015, four bloggers were hacked to death for their 'atheist' writings. This chapter will dwell on the reasons for growing radicalism in Bangladesh, various groups that are operational and the response of the Bangladeshi State to the phenomenon of radicalism. However, religious radicalism needs to be examined in the historical context, and it would be interesting to track the trajectory of the post-1971 fundamentalism.

Transformation in Bengal Islam

Islam in Bengal, what Asim Roy described as syncretic⁴ and Abdul Momin Chowdhury referred to as "Bengali Muslim sub-culture"⁵, draws heavily from Bengali culture and tradition and amalgamation of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufi Islam and other subcultures that flourished in Bengal. In the rural areas, visiting pirs and mazars are part of Bengali Muslim life. However, from time to time, Bengal witnessed reform movements to purify Islam and clean it from the Hindu influence. In the early 18th century, the Faraizi movement led by Shariat Ullah and the Tarika-e-Mohamandi movement led by Titu Mir are some examples where attempts were made to revive purist form of Islam, as was prevalent during the Prophet's day. These revivalist movements aimed to oppose British rule and were also a reaction to the Suddhi movement in the Hindu society. Since the 19th century, organisations like the Tablighi Jamaat have been playing a role in inculcating Islamic values and urge the Muslims to confirm to the five basic tenets of Islam. In spite of these attempts, the Mazar and Khanqah culture remain dominant factors and the practice of wearing *tabiz*, amulet etc. is widely prevalent mainly among the poor peasants in rural areas, pointing to the characteristic of Islam in Bengal.

Politics of Religion: Creeping Wahabism

Secularism, democracy, Bengali nationalism and socialism defined the new nation state of Bangladesh after its creation. Soon after its creation, the Islamist impulse of the state found precedence over its secular and plural foundation. The military government of General Zia ur Rahman, who took over power after Mujib's assassination, lifted the ban on the politics of religion. Several changes to the Constitution were made under the Fifth Amendment⁶ to re-establish centrality of religion. His decision to diversify foreign policy brought major impact. Clause 2, which now has been amended through the 15th Amendment Act of 2011,⁷ was inserted to Article 25 of the Bangladesh Constitution, which emphasised on strengthening "fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity"⁸ for ideological succour and opened up employment opportunities for the Bangladesh workers in the growing economy of West Asia buoyed by oil economy of the 1970s. The religious political parties revived their links with the Muslim countries and developed symbiotic relations. In return they were provided generous monetary help to open madrasas and expand global Islamic agenda of these Arab countries. As a result, Bangladesh witnessed the flourishing of madrasas funded by the Middle Eastern Arabic countries, which teach religious orthodoxy especially Islamic jurisprudence based on Nizm-e-Adl,⁹ and are controlled by orthodox and fundamentalists Islamic parties, some of whose members are Afghan war veterans. Money in form of remittances and charity flew in from Arab countries along with values of Wahabi Islam undermining local religious cultural values. Religion was seen from the perspective of Wahabi Islam championed by the Arab states.¹⁰ The returnee workers also brought back with them the religious mannerism, dress and Wahabi Islamic values of Arab origin..

According to a scholar, the imams in the village are often "accountable for the legitimacy of Islam domiciled in the Arab countries...aiming at linking the local village community politically to the totality of the Muslims without any consideration of distance, of nationality and of political regime...and young Imams are objects of solicitation by the Arab countries.... Little mobilised now, the most educated Imams of Bangladesh constitute potentially the troupes of ideological radicals..."¹¹ The Imams are co-opted for political influence in the village and sometime they include political agenda of the Islamic parties in the Friday sermons and propagate them through *waz mehfihs* attended by mostly the poor and marginalised class who seek peace in religion.¹²

General Ershad's decision to declare Islam as state religion led to the emergence of groups like Islami Shashontantra Andolan ("Movement for Islamic Rule") which demanded a sharia-based state. The Islamic groups were already deeply entrenched in society and politics when Bangladesh transited to democracy in 1990.

Democracy and the Religious Political Parties: Creating Space for Radical Islam

In 1990, many of the Islamic political parties participated in the election and chose the democratic path to achieve the goal of establishing a sharia-based state. Role of religion in politics became part of public discourse. It is important to mention here that the orthodox and modernist views on Islam are different, and their attitude towards ‘non-believers’ is determined by how they perceive Islam. According to Razia Akter Banu, who undertook a study on assessing attitudes on Muslims in Bangladesh in the early 1990s wrote, “Muslims would tend to oppose anti-Islamic views and stances in a fanatical way”,¹³ though popular Islam, continues to dominate Bangladesh’s social and political landscape.¹⁴

Democracy helped religious political parties, and especially the Jamaat Islami which was well organised and had its own resources. The Jamaat’s decision to ally with the BNP helped it to strengthen its organisation further and penetrate the administration.¹⁵ The Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ) was another partner in the four-party alliance government. This was for the first time that the Islamic political parties captured power. As a result, the Islamic forces got emboldened and they received assurance that no action would be taken against them.¹⁶ The political mainstreaming of the religious political parties helped the cause of ‘Islamism’ in Bangladesh, and the germination of radicalism was a matter of time.

The footprint of radicalism was already visible in Bangladesh in the 1990s. It was reported that Bangladeshi Afghan war veterans had returned home and established Harkat ul Jihad ul Islam (HuJI) led by Shauqat Osman or Sheikh Farid in Chittagong, who was part of Osama bin Laden’s International Islamic Front. Once they returned to Bangladesh, these groups wanted to model Bangladesh on the line of Afghanistan under the rule of Taliban. These groups coined the slogan, “*Amra sobai hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghanistan*” (“We all will become Taliban and Bangladesh will become Afghanistan”). On April 30, 1992, the HuJI held a press conference and openly declared its agenda of jihad, and briefed the press on how they had fought the Afghan war while the government had ignored their presence. Later, in 2005, Begum Khaleda Zia also met HuJI members Shaikhul Hadith and Habibur Rahman, who came to meet her as ‘Islamic scholars’. This meeting was facilitated by Maulana Obaedul Haq and IOJ lawmaker Mufti Shahidul Islam.¹⁷ This underlines the access the radical groups enjoyed in Bangladesh and the government approach dismissing the potential threat they posed.

Mapping the Jihadi Landscape

Post 2001, the global war on terror brought home a sense of injustice against the Muslims. Yet, the radical elements remained focussed on the domestic agendas

and targeted cultural symbols that were considered un-Islamic and the secularists who they considered as apostate. Attack on *pohela Boisakh* (first day of the Bengali New Year) celebration in Ramna Botomul in 2001 where 10 people were killed in a bomb blast; series of bomb blasts in cinema halls in Mymensingh in December 2002; attack on Udichi cultural function in Jessore in 1999 and in Netrokona in 2005; attack on Sheikh Hasina in 2004; killing of Kibria in 2005; blasts at the Valentine's Day programme at the Teacher Student Centre in Dhaka University in February 2005; country-wide bomb blasts in August; and suicide attacks on the courts at Chittagong and Gaibandha in November 2005 are many of the instances of radical elements announcing their presence – from discreet existence to challenging the existing socio-political order. Targeting performance like: singing and dancing, statues, jatra, *pohela boisakh* or the attempt to demolish Baul statues in 2008 clearly point to the Arabisation of Bangladeshi culture. The rising tide of intolerance was such that organisations like Khatme Nabuwat, and leaders like Mufti Noor Hossain Noorani, spearheaded the anti-Ahmediya campaign during the BNP regime and demanded that the government declare them as non-Muslims, and got the Ahmediya publications banned. Thus, the radical elements were able to exert influence over the government as the BNP was dependant on the JI to remain in power. The influence of Islamists is so pervasive that the AL, committed to secular values, removed Baul sculptures from the airport intersection in Dhaka in 2013. The Islami Ain Bastabayan Committee's Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini called for removal of all the sculptures from Bangladesh as they promote idolatry.

Radical Islamists are increasingly focussed on attacking bloggers, particularly secular thinkers who inspire the youth to think on secular lines. For example, in 1997, poet Shamsur Rahman was attacked, however, he survived and the responsibility was taken by the Harkat ul Jihadi Islami (HuJI); a group that consists mostly of Afghan war veterans. Earlier, Taslima Nasreen received death threats from radical groups for her book, *Lajja*. Similarly, in 2004, Humayun Azad was attacked for his book, *Pak sar jamin*, the opening line of the national anthem of Pakistan, in which he criticised the activities of radical elements. He survived a machete attack in 2004, but the attack brought into focus the growing intolerance under the BNP regime and activities of the radical elements in Bangladesh who appeared to have political support. These groups carried their activities with impunity as the government denied their presence and accused the opposition of defamation.¹⁸ Many in Bangladesh believe that JI discreetly patronises these militant groups. Some of the arrested Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) militants were not only former Jamaat cadres but also Afghan war veterans.¹⁹

From attacking cultural symbols and organisations affiliated to the left political parties, the radical elements went a step forward when they organised countrywide coordinated bomb blasts on August 19, 2005 – nearly 460 bombs went off within

a span of half an hour, in all the districts except for one. The JMB took the responsibility.²⁰ Pamphlets were found at the blast sites calling for Islamic revolution and terming the government ‘*taghut*’, as it was elected through un-Islamic method.²¹ These bomb blasts were followed by suicide bombings in a court. After JMB went underground following government ban and its top leaders were hanged in 2007, the police found Allahar dol, a group active in Lalmonirhaat in 2013, trying to occupy the vacuum created by the JMB.

It needs to be recognised that the madrasas are not the only source of radicalisation; rather educated youth who are part of Hizbut Tahir (HuT) could pose a new challenge as they empathise with the global Islamic agenda and aims at Khelafat.²² Activities of HuT illustrates the case of urban radicalism. The cadres are active, and according to a report, they not only distribute leaflets, including the one that asked the army to take over power to establish a caliphate, but some of its members are actively collaborating with the militant groups.²³ Posters, believed to be a campaign by Hizbut Tahir, appeared in Bangladesh asking: “*Deshpremi sainik ra hastakhep chai?*” (“Want the patriot soldiers to intervene?”) *Amra ki sudu eibe jalim, Yehudi Christian der agent Sarkar kache barambar kakutiminati kore thakbe?* (“Do we need to beg in front of the oppressive government which is the agent of Jews and Christians?”).²⁴

Domestic Jihadists and their International Linkages: The IS, AQIS and their Local Surrogates

Bangladesh is not new to the linkages between the home-grown radicals and the international jihadists. In the early 1990s, Bangladeshis were fighting in Afghanistan.²⁵ Organisations like the HuJI were branches of international jihadi groups operating under same name; Khilafat Majlis led by Maulana Muhammad Habibur Rahman, who was a former Afghan war veteran and a former member of HuJI,²⁶ is now associated with the Hefajat politics.²⁷ The extremist group, Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) was formed in 2005, funded through an NGO called Research Cooperation United Development (RCUD), and recruited people for jihad; it is linked to Tehzib Karim, brother of Rajib Karim, a British Bangladeshi disciple of Al-Awlaki.²⁸

The Islamists can be broadly divided into three categories: (i) Islamists/jihadists having domestic agenda of Islamisation; for example, JI, ABT and JMB (until it went underground) (ii) Jihadis having regional agenda; for example, AQIS and HuJI (iii) Jihadi organisations having global agenda like the IS and HuT. It is apparent that the AQIS and IS are competing for influence and are eager to partner Bangladeshi Islamists.

The Bangladesh Government strongly denies the existence of the IS though the police, from time to time, have arrested sympathisers of the IS. Many in

Bangladesh believe that the AQIS has some presence, unlike the IS that is yet to find a foothold. Many of the killings and bomb attacks in places of worship in 2015, though claimed by the IS, actually could have been inspired by the IS and may not be directly linked to the group. The links between IS and Bangladeshi jihadists at the most appears to be indirect. Attempts were made by British citizens of Bangladeshi origin and sympathisers of the IS to recruit fighters from Bangladesh through Bangladeshi jihadi outfits.²⁹ For example: the police arrested Samiun Rahman, a British citizen of Bangladeshi origin, in Dhaka in 2014 for allegedly recruiting Bangladeshi youths interestingly to join IS and al Nusra.³⁰ Similarly, Touhidur Rahman, a British citizen of Bangladesh origin was arrested for killing bloggers.³¹ In May 2015, the police arrested Abdullah Al Ghalib, a person claiming to be a former HuT cadre who later joined the ABT, for his alleged links to the IS.³² In total, according to a media report, 15 people having suspected links to the IS were arrested in Bangladesh in 2015.³³ Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina dismissing the claim by the IS said, “I can say that no outfits like the IS can carry out their activities here. Our intelligence agencies are very much alert. We don’t want to see any activities of such outfits in Bangladesh.”³⁴

The IS has been eager to spread its ideology and has not hesitated to provide a legitimacy stamp to the activities of the Bangladeshi jihadis who are eager to associate themselves with global Islamists for greater visibility. Interestingly, the IS has claimed its association with the JMB. In an article on “The Revival of Jihad in Bengal”, the IS spoke of expanding its activities in Bangladesh and praised the JMB for waging jihad against the ‘*taghut*’ government.³⁵ It considers JMB the only “proper jihad organisation in Bangladesh based on the Kuran and Sunnah” and refers to BNP-Jamaat partnership as a “coalition of murtaddin (apostates)”.

The IS is competing for political and ideological space with the al Qaeda in South Asia. For example: The November 2015 issue of the IS magazine, *Dabiq*, states,

The soldiers of the Khilafah in Bengal pledged their allegiance to the Khalifah Ibrahim (hafidhullah), unified their ranks, nominated a regional leader, gathered behind him, dissolved their former factions, performed the necessary military preparations, and hastened to answer the order from the Islamic State leadership, by targeting the crusaders and their allies wherever they may be found.”³⁶

It further said the fragmented jihadi groups in Bengal are now united and urged those who support the IS “to close their ranks, unite under soldiers of Khalafah in Bengal and aid them in every possible way”.³⁷ The issue also states,

The mujahideen of Bengal realized that there was no room for blind partisanship towards any organization once the Khilafah had been declared and that there was no longer legitimacy for any independent jihad organisation,

whether ‘Jamaatul Mujahideen,’ ‘Al-Qaeda,’ or any other group. Thus, the sincere men from the various jihad groups rushed to support the Khilafah and join the ranks of its soldiers in Bengal.³⁸

Therefore, it is not surprising that the JMB activities is now attributed to the IS which are evident from the arrests that are made by the law enforcing agencies (refer to annexure). The radical groups have found it easier to function and conduct separate and coordinated attacks. Some examples are: Shafiul Islam, a sociology professor at Bangladesh’s Rajshahi University (RU) was hacked to death in November 2014 for asking the female students not to use burqa in his class.³⁹ In January 2015, a female Hindu teacher of Chittagong Nursing College was killed for raising her voice against a fatwa that made hijab compulsory for female nursing students;⁴⁰ and coordinated attacks on publishers and writers in November are incidents inspired by jihadis with domestic agenda; while the killing of the Italian aid worker in Dhaka, shooting of a Japanese in Rangpur and of an Italian priest in Dinajpur, attack on Baptist pastor, Luke Sarker, and attacks on Shias and Ahmediya mosques indicate the involvement of groups with an international agenda which may have been inspired by the IS ideology.⁴¹

Among the domestic groups, it appears that the ABT wants to emphasise its links with al Qaeda. After Avijit Roy, the founder of Mukto Mona – a web-based blog which literally means ‘free thinker’ was brutally murdered, first the ABT claimed the killing, and later attributed it to the AQIS. The ABT on its Twitter handle asked journalists, “Use#AQIS while reporting about the killing. Don’t use Ansar Bangla 8 again. More on this later.” The Bangladesh Police arrested Mainul Islam, the AQIS chief coordinator in Bangladesh, for the murder. It is interesting to note that the hacking of bloggers and publishers are claimed by the AQIS. The ABT regularly translates IS’s *Dabiq* and al Qaeda’s *inspire* into Bengali. The problem in Bangladesh is that most of the militant groups have morphed into different groups. In spite of HuT going underground, many of the members have joined the JMB and ABT. Though many argue that the ABT and Anasar al Islam are the same, having links with the AQIS, in a statement on August 22, 2015, the Ansar al Islam said that they are two independent organisations.⁴²

Government Response: Domestic Legislation and Policing

Fighting Islamic radicals has been a major problem in Bangladesh for two reasons. First, political compulsions constrain the government’s approach. Islamism is seen as political tool to mobilise the voters in a Muslim majority country. Government fears that action against radicals and fundamentalists could be perceived as anti-Islam, given the social base of the Islamists. In this contest between the Islamists and secularists, no political party wants to be seen as anti-Islam. Second, the adoption of law and order approach and treating radicalism

and terrorism at par is problematic. Imposing ban on militant groups and various websites is inadequate unless it is combined with a counter-narrative. Establishing counter-radicalism centres to de-radicalise and reform of the *Quami* madrasas would be important. The law and order approach also criminalises the extremist/radical activities and looks at the violence perpetuated by them as terrorism. However, as has been discussed, tackling urban radicalism and dealing with radicalism in cyber space would require a separate approach and the counter-narrative may not entirely suffice. In the past, the BNP government was not even willing to recognise radicalism as a problem. The AL that pledged “zero tolerance to terrorism”,⁴³ however, has been found wanting in terms of its response. The government does not make distinction between its political opponents and the radical elements⁴⁴. Though the Hasina government has done a commendable job of regularly busting militant dens, recovering arms and ammunition and busting fake currency rackets that fund illegal activities,⁴⁵ it has not made a strong legal case to bring the perpetrators of crime to justice. In many cases, these militants after getting bail have been involved in killing secular activists.⁴⁶ In the last five years, total 482 militants who were arrested by the security agencies have got bail. Out of which 421 belong to HuT, 42 to JMB, 15 to HuJI and four to ABT. The government did not have strong grounds to oppose their bail, nor did it approach the higher court against the bail.⁴⁷

The government, instead of getting to the core of growing radicalism, tends to take a political position. It arrested bloggers under the Information and Communication Technology Act of Bangladesh, 2006, Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for “hurting religious sentiments”⁴⁸ to appease the Islamists, while no such action was taken against the fundamentalists who used cyber space to threaten the bloggers and engage in a hate campaign. Government’s ambiguity was apparent as it adopted a populist policy of protecting Islam to deflate pressure from the Hefajat-e-Islami (HeI), led by the 92-year-old cleric, Shah Ahmed Shafi, who wanted action against the “atheist-internet bloggers” for defaming Islam. The government allowed the HeI to hold its rally in Dhaka because it wanted to curb the influence of the Jamaat and BNP nexus. Its objective was to cater to the Ulemas in order to defeat the political agenda of the Islamists. However, the Islami Chatra Shibir (ICS) cadres supported the HeI rally foiling the government design. The Jamaat had earlier stated that the “main objective of the Shahbagh protesters is to root out Islam from the country”.⁴⁹ It used Khelafat Majlish, Islami Oikya Jote and Olama Mashayekh Parishad to counter the Shahbagh protesters.

Similarly, the government took the help of the party-affiliated Ulema League and Anjumaan-e-Baiyanat. Interestingly, Anjuman Al-Baiyanat announced rewards to kill the apostates, and its head, Allama Muhammad Mahbub Alam, submitted

a list of 84 bloggers to the government in 2013 whom they wanted to be punished for being involved in anti-Islam activities.⁵⁰ However, the bloggers defended themselves by saying that they have written against Jamaat Islami and Islami Chatra Shibir and the politics of religion.⁵¹ Thus, it is clear that the Islamic parties uphold larger Islamic agenda in a competitive environment which points to the danger of using one Islamic group against the other.⁵² After projecting itself as protector of Islam from the blasphemers, the government now finds it impossible to take action against those involved in the murders of bloggers or even adopt measures to promote a culture of tolerance as the killings are being justified in the name of religion.⁵³

Sammilita Sangskritik Jote, Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, Sector Commanders Forum and 24 other socio-cultural organisations organised parallel rallies against the HeI's 'long march'. Interestingly, the BNP and Jatiyo party came to the support of the HeI. The HeI accused that by encouraging these groups to oppose and disrupt its march the government has presented its real face to the believers of Islam.⁵⁴ It needs to be mentioned here that AL is more keen to project its Islamic credentials, as it is seen as a party with an anti-Islam agenda.

The approach of the law enforcing authority is equally appalling. For example, when the blogger Neeladri Chatterjee approached the police after he received death threats, the police advised him to leave the country. When the police was questioned for its inaction against groups who were threatening the bloggers, the IGP said in a press conference, "No one should cross the limit. And for hurting someone's religious sentiment, the person will be punished by the law,"⁵⁵ drawing criticism from secular activists. Similar inaction was recorded when Avijit Roy was hacked to death in a place that had heavy deployment of the police, and in 2004, when Humayun Azad was fatally attacked while returning from *boi-mela* to celebrate Ekushey February.⁵⁶

The police force remains highly politicised and poorly equipped to tackle the spectre of radicalism and related violence that is taking place. According to a report by *Daily Star*, "During interrogations, police show sympathy to militants, treat them softly and in some cases get motivated by them...This tendency is high among lower-tier police members."⁵⁷ The same report also says that while training is imparted to senior officers at the Police Training Academy, the same is not available at the junior level.⁵⁸ A Police Bureau of Investigation was established in 2012 ostensibly to investigate "hi-tech, clueless and serious cases throughout the country".⁵⁹ But tackling radicalism and related terrorism would require a different set of investigation methods which cannot be tackled by the Police Bureau of investigation that confuses the issue of radical violence with criminal activities. There was a proposal for National Police Bureau of Counter Terrorism in 2012

after the militants successfully freed three JMB convicts who were being taken to the court in a prison van in a spectacular attack in the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.⁶⁰ The proposal is yet to be implemented. Sheikh Hasina, in a reply to the lawmakers' query regarding militancy, said that the Parliament has "approved a proposal to raise manpower in the police force by 32,031 while 15,775 persons in different categories have already been appointed and 6,000 would be recruited soon".⁶¹ The ground-level investigation to implicate various groups in killings has been poor.

The government has passed the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009, which was amended twice to implement various obligations arising out of the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Combating Terrorism and Financing of Terrorism provision.⁶² There is a Counter Terrorism Unit at the Police Headquarters. However, there is no collaboration between different agencies of the government. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) consisting of paramilitary forces are engaged in counter-terror operations, but they are focussed more on criminal activities.⁶³

Prime Minister Hasina also announced her intention to form a South Asia terrorism task force,⁶⁴ however, the country remained focussed on addressing the issue domestically. The government formed 17-member National Committee on Militancy Resistance and Prevention after it came to power. Representatives from the ministries of home, law, education, religious affairs, Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD), and Information, and different law enforcement and intelligence agencies are its members. In 2011, the government unveiled National Counter Terrorism Strategy. Money laundering laws are also in place. According to Bangladesh's permanent representative to the UN, Bangladesh has adopted the "national counter radicalisation strategy through imparting education, women's empowerment and the propagation of secular and moderate cultural values, creating a mind-set of tolerance, friendliness and love in line with our 'culture of peace' resolution".⁶⁵ The police organised a discussion with the *alim-ulema* on how Islam can help in preventing radicalism. The ulemas have decided to issue a fatwa that "Islam and its followers have no connection with militancy", and an effort is on to collect one lakh signatures from ulemas across the country.⁶⁶

Reaction of Political Parties to Radicalism

The political division within the country has constrained state action, and the debate on believers and non-believers or atheists in the background of Shahbag movement has turned the issue of radicalism into a deeper debate on religion and the attitude of the state to Islam. None of the political parties have condemned the killings in the name of Islam given its larger political ramification. There is complete absence of voices that support the liberal thinkers as the state remains

divided over the freedom of speech and expression and the duty to ensure that the free speech does not hurt religious sentiments.

Most of the political parties have adopted play-safe attitude in articulating their views on radicalism. For example, the Prime Minister's son, Sajib Wajed Joy, said in an interview to *Reuters*, "We are walking a fine line here...We don't want to be seen as atheists. It doesn't change our core beliefs. We believe in secularism...But given that our opposition party plays that religion card against us relentlessly, we can't come out strongly for him. It's about perception, not about reality."⁶⁷ Joy went ahead and equated Avijit's murder by the Islamists with 160 people who were victims of political violence unleashed by the opposition demanding fresh elections. This also reflects the attitude of the government which sees this primarily as a law-and-order problem that requires a simple law-and-order approach.

The AL holds the opposition political parties responsible for the killings that have taken place in Bangladesh. In a press conference, Prime Minister Hasina said, "BNP and Jamaat responsible for the recent killings after having failed to dislodge the government through subversive activities, arson, petrol bomb attacks and killings. They have now taken resort to secret killings. They want to create an unstable situation."⁶⁸

The government portrays these killings to be isolated incidents. While the government use them to arrest the Jamaat and BNP cadres; its effort to convict some of the arrested Islamists and charge them with violence and killings has not survived the scrutiny of law. The arrests have taken place only due to public pressure and the government's effort to showcase that it is fighting the radical elements and is in control of the state. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Government while admitted that the 27 deported Bangladeshi workers from Singapore were infected with radical Islam and only 14 of them were sympathisers of ABT and JMB.⁶⁹ The government is extremely conscious of the repercussion for the country in terms of economic and political implications, if it admits the presence of the IS.

BNP, the major opposition political party in the country, from time to time has only condemned the killings. Moreover, the party uses these killings to drive home the point of holding elections under a non-party administration – a stand the party has taken since the caretaker government was abolished by the 15th Amendment Act.

The Jamaat argues that if the militants "manage to get a foothold in this country's politics, it is Jamaat that will be affected the most".⁷⁰ Therefore, the party argues that it is not supportive of the radical extremists.⁷¹ The party though issued statements condemning the killing of the bloggers it chose not to criticise the Islamic groups who claimed responsibility for the killings. Jamaat views that

the radical forces are active due to lack of democracy and argues that banning of Jamaat would strengthen the radical forces. It does not perceive these groups as a threat to its political bastion given its well-knit cadres and unmatched resources, rather, it perceives them as working towards establishing an Islamic political order.⁷² In any case, it believes that these groups can threaten AL's hold on power by their activities. The broad group of Islamists operating in Bangladesh are supportive of each other and refrain from criticising the other. They have their own area of operation and ideological beliefs and believe that they are working towards same goal.

Another problem in Bangladesh is that the intellectuals and many in civil society deny the problem of radicalisation and cite the Bangladesh's cultural heritage that is fundamentally opposed to extremism. There is complete refusal to recognise the problem, and they are defensive about the nature of radicalisation.⁷³ They attribute it to lack of democracy and denial of political space.⁷⁴ The civil society remains completely divided. There are others who recognise the problem and are conscious of the direction that Bangladesh is taking.⁷⁵ But their number is very small. However, many support the government narrative that denies the presence of the IS. They argue that most of the militant organisations are Jamaat's protégés and cannot have independent existence. Domestic roots of radicalism are simply overlooked by attributing their rise to global factors and rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and rightist politics in India. It is a fact that the slogan "Islam in Danger" is gaining ground, and the AL finds itself in a tight spot and feels constrained to strengthen the secularist agenda.

International Cooperation

The US Government is assisting the Government of Bangladesh through its Anti-Terrorism Assistance [ATA] programme. In May 2013, it conducted a nine-day training programme for Bangladeshi security officials on tactical management. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) joined the investigation against the killers of Abhijit Roy, who was a US citizen. The Department of Justice has provided prosecutorial skills training, and also helped Bangladesh to institute community policing in targeted areas of the country. The US Special Operations Command Pacific also trains Bangladesh security forces. Bangladesh is also part of Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience, a public-private global fund to support local, grassroots efforts to counter violent extremism.⁷⁶

British support to Bangladesh on the issue of radicalism has been extremely controversial despite the fact that the British High Commission was targeted in 2004 in Shahjalal shrine.⁷⁷ Martin Bright, a British journalist, wrote that earlier attempts to prevent war crimes convict, Maulana Sayeedi, from delivering hate speech in London and also the telecast of his various speeches in Britain elicited a curious response. The UK government argued that the British Muslims, who

are followers of Sayeedi, should not be alienated by such actions because they would impact its counter-terrorism efforts.⁷⁸

Bangladesh also have close bilateral cooperation with India. Both the countries have tried to collaborate at the bilateral level to address the issue of terrorism through Home Secretary meet and intelligence coordination. The Burdwan blast brought into focus the cross-border spectre of terrorism. Following the blast, there is high-level cooperation between India and Bangladesh in sharing intelligence and pursuing joint investigation. Bangladesh police arrested JMB activists after India provided intelligence and gave access to the Indian authorities to interrogate them. The two countries had two joint counter-terror exercises in Jorhat and Shylet in 2012.

Conclusion

Taking into account the threats to Bangladesh, the government has focussed on busting the terror network. However, its counter radicalism program is yet to take off in a major way. It has put in place training for ulemas and madrasa teachers, and made efforts to regulate the course structure of the Quami madrasa. However, majority of them are privately funded. The government therefore would require a fresh look at establishing schools in the rural areas. Five major trends are comprehensible in Bangladesh's radicalism landscape. First, the morphing of various groups, which makes it difficult to distinguish one from the other; second, the existence of larger bonding of camaraderie between various shades of Islamists that makes it difficult to deal with political Islamists and the militants separately; third, radicalism is feeding into terrorism and generating public support for militancy in the name of religion; fourth, the growing appeal for the AQIS, IS and HuT that are focused on issues confronting the Muslims globally and remain a major attraction for Bangladeshi jihadists; and lastly, domestic agenda of the militants will remain less appealing to the people in Bangladesh though polarisation between Islamists and secularists would continue to shape the domestic narratives.

Radicalisation is still at a nascent stage though religious exhibitionism in terms of wearing attire confirmed by religion and following Islamic precepts shape Muslim identity. The fundamentalists continue to be marginal actors, but they have become more daring in orchestrating attacks on those whom they believe are '*munafiquns*' (broadly meaning non-believers). They have spun a counter-narrative to the prevailing societal culture through a narrow definition of 'believers' and 'non-believers'. Among the religious political parties, the JI shares approximately 10-12 per cent of votes. Islamic impulse is likely to serve the party's political interests. In a political scenario where muscle power plays a major role in enforcing the programme of the political parties, the Islamists have become a

tool in furthering the political agenda of the religious parties. This process provides political space and publicity to radical groups. Groups like the JMB, AQIS and ABT are manifestations of the churning that politics of religion produces. Counter-narratives, political space to express opinion within the confines of law and a vigilant judiciary and policing will help Bangladesh to blunt that radical streak that the country is witnessing at the moment. If not checked, as Bertil Linter had written way back in 2002, Bangladesh would emerge as a “cocoon of terror”⁷⁹ ready to be exploited by global Islamists.

NOTES

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Appendix: Militant Groups Involved in Various Attacks in Bangladesh, 2015

Date	Incident	Claimed by	Arrested
January 22	Anjali Debi Chowdhury hacked to death for opposing the fatwa to wear burqa		Chatra Shibir cadres arrested
February 27	Avijit Roy attacked and killed while walking home from a book fair	Initially claimed by ABT and later by AQIS	Farabi Shafiur Rahman, allegedly is a member of HuT, arrested
March 30	Washiqur Rahman hacked to death near his home in Dhaka	ABT	Two ABT cadres, caught red-handed by a passer-by, arrested
May 12	Blogger Ananta Bijoy Das attacked and killed in Sylhet	ABT	Touhidur Rahman, ABT activist and British citizen, arrested
August 7	Blogger Niloy Neel hacked to death at home by a machete-wielding gang	Ansar Al Islam/ABT – Bangladesh chapter of AQIS	ABT operatives arrested
August 21	Shaikh Nurul Islam Faruqi, host of TV talks shows, <i>Kafeela</i> and <i>Shantir Pothe</i> , and central committee member of Islami Front, killed at his residence in the capital's Rajabazar area	No claims (ABT suspected)	Mozaffor bin Mohosin, a preacher who had called Faruqi an apostate, arrested
September 5	Pir named Rahmat Ullah killed along with an attendant inside his shrine in Bayezid area of Chittagong city in Chittagong district	No claims	JMB militants were the accused
September 7	Hazrat Moulana Mohammad Salahuddin Khan Bishal, a pir and a leader of the religious group, Darbar-e Resalate Naqshbandi Mozaddedia Tarikat, shot dead in the Vorotpur area of Pabna district	JMB suspected	
September 28	Italian charity worker Cesare Tavella, a technical director working at the Netherlands-based development organisation, Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), killed	Claimed by IS	Arrested alleged killers militant links are not proved
October 3	Japanese national Hoshi Kunio, a researcher, gunned down	Claimed by IS	JMB cadres arrested

October 5	Luke Sarkar, pastor of the Faith Bible Church, killed at his house in the Ishwardi upazila of Pabna district	No claims	JMB arrested
October 5	Muhammad Khijir Khan, former chairman of the Power Development Board (PDB), freedom fighter and a pir, killed after having his throat slit by seven unidentified armed men at his Madhya Badda house in Dhaka	No claims	JMB activist Tariqul Islam Tareque alias Mithu arrested
October 22	Darussalam Police Station Assistant Sub-Inspector Ibrahim Molla killed by unknown assailants	No claim	Shibir activists were arrested
October 24	Shia mosque Hussaini Dalan attacked	Claimed by IS	Arrested people's militant links not proved
October 31	Faisal Arefin Dipon of Jagriti Prokashoni publishing house hacked to death; Ahmedur Rashid Tutul, another publisher, attacked	Claimed by Ansar ul Islam	
November 4	Policeman, at a checkpoint on the outskirts of Dhaka, hacked to death by two motorcyclists	Claimed by IS	
November 9	A military policeman attacked by a machete-wielding man at an army checkpoint in the Bangladesh capital	No claims	
November 11 and 25	At least 24 pastors and priests in Dhaka, Savar, Rangpur, Dinajpur and Satkhira threatened	A group calling itself IGMB	
November 18	Assassination attempt on Italian priest Piero Parolari	claimed by IS	11 people, including district Jamaat secretary general, arrested
November 26,	A Shiite mosque in Northern Bangladesh's Bogra district attacked	IS	Three people, a madrasa principal and students, arrested
December 18	Bomb blast in the highly secured Isha Khan Mosque at the Navy Station in Chittagong and a nearby hospital area mosque	No claim	Two navy members, suspected to be JMB cadres, arrested
December 25	Suicide attack on the Ahmediya Mosque, in Bagmara town in Rajshahi district	IS	JMB cadre arrested

Sources: Data compiled by the author from various Bangladeshi newspapers – *The Daily Star*, *The Dhaka Tribune*, *Pratham Alo* and *Bangladesh Pratidin*.

The Maldives' Approach to Islamic Radicalism, Terrorism and Terrorist Financing

Gulbin Sultana

The Maldives, the smallest country in South Asia, got independence in 1965. Since then the country has experienced significant political, economic and social changes. Within three years of independence, it became a republic in 1968. After 40 years of independence, multi-party democracy was introduced in 2008. The new system brought political and media freedom in the country, but at the same time, cases of political unrest, intolerance, insecurity and extremism increased. Since 1970s new sectors like fishing and tourism were introduced to improve the economy. With the growth of tourism, new technologies, and expansion of government's foreign policy, Maldivian interaction with the outside world increased. Unfortunately these interactions and new technology had negatively impacted the Maldivian society. The country is increasingly becoming "Wahhabised". Religious intolerance, Islamic fundamentalism and extremism became rampant. Growing radicalisation of the society has encouraged hundreds of Maldivian youths to join foreign militant groups. According to a rough estimate, between 50-200 Maldivians are fighting in foreign wars. A Maldivian national was also reported to have been part of the 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai sponsored by Pakistani-based terrorists.¹ The Maldives itself has experienced terrorist attacks in 2007.

The Maldivian Government since 1990s opposed the radicals and claims to have taken measures to counter radical activities in the country. Despite that, radicalisation, extremism and conservatism are growing exponentially. This means the government effort so far has been ineffective to counter radicalisation. The question therefore is: Why could not government control or suppress the radicals?

The chapter will analyse the Maldivian government's approach towards growing Islamic radicalisation, intolerance and Islamic fundamentalism. The chapter will also focus on government's approach towards would be Maldivian Jihadis and the Maldivians who return back to the country after fighting jihad in foreign countries. But before looking at the government's approach, this chapter would try to analyse the transformation of a section of Maldivian society from a moderate Muslim society to a conservative society and the contributing factors for this transformation.

Entry of “Wahhabism and Salafi-Jihadi” ideology in the Maldives

Islam was introduced in the Maldives in the 12th century.² Since then the basis of administrative-political governance has been Sharia laws. However, it became part of Constitution in 1932 for the first time.³ Education system was also based on religion until recently. Koranic schools were the major institutions for dissemination of formal education.⁴ Yet Maldivian Islam was unique and different from the Arab and Middle Eastern countries. Islam in the Maldives was a mixture of “Islamic teachings, Buddhist *Eveyla* traditions and Sufi practices and rituals”.⁵ As a result, unlike many of the Islamic countries, the Maldives practised a liberal version of Islam. There was no capital punishment. Maldivian women enjoyed complete freedom. Women used to participate in all activities, hold important positions and never used to wear veil. Controlled modernisation began under President Nasir (1968-78) – educational facilities were expanded and telecommunication and transport system were improved. They were further given impetus under President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Tourism industry got a boost. Multi-party democracy was introduced in 2008. Nevertheless, quite contrary to all these reforms, radicalisation and religious intolerance have increased in the country.

Off late, Maldivian society has been following an orthodox version of Islam. Now women started wearing the veil. The change in the society has also influenced the functioning of the administrative and judiciary of the country. Like many other Muslim countries, Maldivian judiciary has started practising flogging and stoning to death as punishment.⁶ Traditionally, Maldivians belonged to the Shafi school of Sunnis.⁷ Over the period, the country is gradually becoming “Wahhabised” and many of the Maldivians are adopting “Salafi-Jihadi ideology”.⁸

Contributing Factors Responsible for this Transformation in the Maldivian Society

Foreign Influence

When the Maldives became independent in 1965, it lacked adequate human resources to run the country. There was high level of literacy, but most had the

capacity to read only religious texts. In 1977, there were 56 graduates all of whom had to go abroad for higher studies as there was no provision for higher studies in the Maldives.⁹ As the country required trained man power, the government sponsored scholarships for education abroad. Several Maldivians went to Middle East and Pakistan for education under the state-sponsored scholarship. As Saudi education is based on Wahhabi ideology, several Maldivians were influenced by Wahhabism during their stay there. Similarly, several Maldivians studied in Pakistani madrasas where they learnt about Salafi-Jihadi ideology. On their return many of them started imparting "Salafi-Jihadi" ideas to the Maldivians. Mohamed Ibrahim Sheikh and Ibrahim Fauzee, who have allegedly instigated fanaticism in the country, have had links with Pakistani madrasas known for terrorist connections, such as Jamah-Islamiya Madrasa and Jamia-Salafiya.¹⁰

Ibrahim Sheikh returned to the islands in 1983 after finishing his education in Pakistan, where he learnt about the "neo-conservative Salafism".¹¹ After coming back to the Maldives, he started criticising the mainstream Sha'afi-Sunni traditions practised by the Maldivians. As punishment, Gayoom banished Sheikh from Male to the southern atolls.¹² However, Sheikh continued to preach his faith and influenced many over the years. Ibrahim Fauzee went to Pakistan in 1995 to study at Jamaat Salafia and later at Abu Bakar in Karachi. He was arrested by Pakistani authorities under suspicion of being an Al-Qaeda member after a raid on his residence, where some Al-Qaeda members had gathered for a meeting. The Pakistani authorities took him to Afghanistan and handed him over to the US forces. On August 5, 2002 he was shifted from Afghanistan to the custody of Joint Task Force 170, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was reportedly sponsored by an Al-Qaeda facilitator at the Madrasa. He was transferred to the Maldives in March 2005.¹³ On his return, he formed a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called the Islamic Foundation which imparts Islamist ideas.¹⁴

According to media reports, Moosa Inas, a Laamu Atoll resident who was charged with triggering the explosive device which went off in Male's Sultan Park on September 29, 2007, crossed the India-Pakistan border at Attari to meet contacts linked to the Jamia-Salafiya in Faisalabad.¹⁵

According to the former President Nasheed, influx of Saudi funding is responsible for radicalisation in the Maldives.¹⁶ Saudi Arabia has funded huge amount of money to Maldives. In 2014, the Saudi Prince announced US\$1.7 million in free aid for the construction of ten mosques in the country.¹⁷ Scholarships are provided to the Maldivian students for their education in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia also announced its decision to build new schools in the Maldives in November 2015. Maldives and Saudi Arabia signed a religious cooperation agreement on November 19, 2015. Maldives Islamic Minister, Dr. Ahmed Ziyad Bagir, said that under the agreement, Saudi Arabia would help the

Maldives to promote religious harmony in the country, strengthen its alms system, and translate religious books from English into the local Dhivehi language. The agreement will also facilitate the exchange of visits by religious scholars of both the countries.¹⁸ On January 4, 2016 Saudi Arabia donated \$100,000 to the Islamic University of Maldives.¹⁹ It is believed that Saudis are trying to impart Wahhabism in the Maldives through the financial assistance.

Tacit Political Support to the Radical Activities

In a 100 per cent Sunni Muslim society, political mobilisation is done on the basis of Islamic credentials of the leader— whether the person is Islamic or un-Islamic. Therefore, to maintain the Islamic credentials, political leaders extend their tacit support to radical activities. While the so-called liberal governments in the Maldives do not want radical influence in the society, they also do not want the label of being un-Islamic which can potentially spoil political careers. Therefore, Maldivian governments over the years have taken selective action against the radicals who can pose political threat to the government.

It should be noted that Ibrahim Didi began modernisation, and women's education, but he was thrown out using the religious rhetoric.²⁰ Maumoon Abdul Gayoom during his presidency pushed the Maldivian economy to be based on "luxury tourism".²¹ However, the tourism industry did not benefit everybody in the country as income distribution was not equal. There was an inconsistency between those who profited from the tourism industry and the employees who worked in this industry. Decades of political and economic repression made people disappointed with Gayoom administration. As a result, the alienated section of the population began joining the Salafi radical groups which criticised the tourism industry and Gayoom administration as un-Islamic.²²

As the radicals strengthened their influence in the society, Gayoom on the one hand tried to suppress the radicals, on the other, brought new constitutional laws to prove his image as the "true Muslim and the protector of the Islam". To convince the Maldivians that Islam in the Maldives is not threatened by the tourism industry, he brought the Protection of Religious Unity Act in 1994. The Protection of Religious Unity Act restricted the freedom to practise any other religion. In the 1997 Constitution, Islam was designated as the official state religion. These laws created an atmosphere of religious intolerance in the country. Non-Muslim tourists and workers associated with the tourism industry in the Maldives are not allowed to offer prayers publicly. Several Christians were imprisoned in June 1998 on religious grounds.²³ A shop in Male was attacked in 2005 for displaying images of Santa Claus. Government also encouraged moral and cultural policing. In December 1998, the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs appealed to the police to impose ban on nightclubs on the eve of New Year celebrations. The government also prevented the importation of non-Muslim books and other religious items.²⁴

This was done to discourage tourists from staying in the cheaper guest houses in the inhabited Islands. Tourist resorts were allowed only in the uninhabited Island, so that the tourists could not influence the local Maldivian culture. Nevertheless, it is believed that President Gayoom has a huge stake in the luxury tourist resorts. He used religious excuses only to protect his own economic interests.

After the introduction of multi-party democracy, political parties across ideologies took the support of radical elements to come into power. During the 2008 Presidential elections, former President Mohamed Nasheed allied with Adalath Party (AP) which is known for radical ideas. Similarly, President Yameen allied with the AP to defeat Mohamed Nasheed in the 2013 Presidential elections. Under the influence of AP, both Nasheed and President Yameen ignored the radical activities in the country for narrow political interests. Though a radical party like the AP does not have large number of seats in the Parliament, it can pose a challenge by mobilising popular support against the government in the name of Islam. Therefore, in an attempt to give the impression that the government is not un-Islamic, government refuses to take strong action against radicalism, extremism and religious intolerance.

The Maldives becomes a Fertile Ground for Jihadi Terrorism

As large number of Maldivians are inclining towards the Salafi-Jihadi ideology, Maldives has become a fertile ground for recruitment by the jihadi groups around the world. There are examples of several Maldivians fighting for Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and other countries.²⁵ As mentioned earlier, Ibrahim Fauzee, a Maldivian cleric was arrested in May 2002 in a suspected Al-Qaeda house in Karachi. In March 2009, nine alleged Maldivian terrorists were arrested in South Waziristan.²⁶ Ali Jaleel, another Maldivian national who fought for the Taliban forces in Pakistan, was seen in an Al-Qaeda video circulated in November 2009.²⁷ Off late, several Maldivians have joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). According to the United States Department of State's Country Report on Terrorism 2014, 200 Maldivians had travelled to Syria or Iraq and at least six had been killed in action.²⁸

These Maldivians are not only fighting for foreign militant groups abroad, but also involved in recruitment within Maldives for the foreign militant groups. Lashkar-e-Tayeba since early 2000 has been trying to set up modules in Maldives. Asif Ibrahim, a Maldivian national arrested in Kerala in April 2005, confessed that he had been tasked with the setting up of a support unit for a new Maldives-based terror group, the Jamaat-ul-Muslimeen.²⁹ He could not set up the cell. According to an Indian intelligence report, Dawood Ibrahim Kaksar also tried to set up operations in Maldives through a Dubai-based firm, Dolphin Management Services.³⁰ Ali Jaleel, who fought for the Taliban forces in Pakistan, was involved

in recruitment in the country.³¹ The militant groups fund the local Islamists preaching groups: Odyssey of Dawa, Ibrahim Fareed's Islamic Foundation, Jamaat-ul-Bayan and Jamaat-ul-Salaf to recruit Maldivian youth.³² The funding comes in the name of charity. It is believed that Idara Khidmaq-e-Khalq, the Lashkar's charity wing had financed the Maldivian Islamists, in guise of tsunami relief.³³

These Islamist groups target drug addicts and criminals in prisons to radicalise their mind.³⁴ Many of the Maldivians left for Syria reportedly belong to criminal gangs like the Kuda Henveiru gang.³⁵

Social media is used extensively to encourage people to join for jihadi movements. Earlier, the Maldives was mostly secluded from global developments. But with coming of the new technology, and the Internet, Maldivians have got access to the emerging developments around the world. Today 43 per cent of Maldivians use social media.³⁶ Bilad al-sham and other social networking sites are disseminating propaganda in Maldives. Bilad-al Sham is encouraging Maldivian youths to take up jihad and is giving detail guidelines how to go abroad for jihad.³⁷

Security Situations

Increasing radicalisation and extremism in the country have impacted heavily the security situation in the country. In 2007, the country experienced the first bomb blast in which 12 foreigners were injured.³⁸ It is believed that the main objective behind the bomb blast was targeting the tourism industry, because it was considered un-Islamic. Though after 2007, there has been no such bomb blast in the Maldives, the possibility of a brutal attack by extremists cannot be ignored. Today, the jihadists who have left Maldives for Syria believe that the "Maldives is a land of sin".³⁹ Therefore, Islamic state needs to be set up in Maldives.

Democracy in Maldives is also in danger. Large number of people joined a protest march in Male on September 5, 2014 in support of the Islamic State of Maldives. They were shouting slogans for rejecting democracy and forming Islamic State. "We want the laws of the Quran, not the green book (Maldivian Constitution)", "Islam will eradicate secularism", "No democracy, we want just Islam", and "Shariah will dominate the world", read some of the placards carried by protesters.⁴⁰

Maldives has become unsafe for liberal journalists, scholars and civil society members. Liberals are being targeted for expressing their views on religion and gender issues. Dr. Afrasheem Ali, a renowned liberal religious scholar and lawmaker, was assassinated in early October 2012.⁴¹ Writer and social activist, Aishath Velezinee,⁴² and Khilath Rasheed were attacked in January 2011 and in June 2012, respectively.⁴³ Islamists make use of the local gang members to attack

the liberal journalists and bloggers for their writings against the extremists. Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla, a secular journalist, has been missing since August 2014. According to an independent investigation conducted by the Glasgow-based Athena Intelligence and Security, radical gangs are behind his abduction. The same gang members reportedly also vandalised the Minivan News office.⁴⁴

Islamists have a significant influence on the judiciary and the administrative system in the Maldives. Under the influence of radical non-governmental religious groups and Islamist political parties, Maldivian judiciary and several ministries are taking radical steps. This has had a negative impact on the human rights of the Maldivian citizens. For example, public flogging as punishment for adultery has become common practice. Muslim courts in the country had sentenced almost 150 women to public flogging for adultery.⁴⁵ A Muslim woman has also been sentenced stoned to death for adultery.⁴⁶ Arbitrary arrest, disappearance, societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation and belief have become common practice in the Maldives.

The developments in the Maldives will also have negative impact in the region. There are reports that one Maldivian was involved in attacks against India. One of the Mumbai attackers from Pakistan originally belonged to the Maldives.⁴⁷ According to an Indian intelligence report, eight Maldivians were called to join a Mumbai-like attack on another Indian city in late-2013.⁴⁸ There is also evidence of several Maldivians fighting in Pakistan for the Taliban.⁴⁹

At present, large numbers of Maldivians have joined the ISIS. As mentioned earlier, 200 Maldivians had travelled to Syria.⁵⁰ For a small country like the Maldives, it is a huge number. However, according to Home Minister of the Maldives, Umar Naseer, the total number of Maldivians in Syria, including rebel fighters and their families, does not exceed 100.⁵¹ According to him, the actual number of fighters fighting in Syria is 79. Even though the Government of Maldives is trying to downplay the threat of religious extremism in the country, the protest march in Male on September 5, 2014 in support of Islamic State of Maldives proves the point that there exist a significant number of IS sympathisers in the country. This is alarming not only for the Maldives, but for the entire South Asia.

ISIS has expressed its intention to spread its activity in South Asia. However, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan have opposed ISIS. There is no such jihadi organisation in the Maldives as of now who opposes ISIS. Therefore, the Maldives can emerge as an important base for ISIS in South Asia. Large number of people from countries like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka work in Maldives' tourism sector. They can be easily targeted by the 'soldiers of Caliphate' to fight for them in South Asia.

As of now, the Maldivian IS fighters have not conducted any terrorist activities within the Maldives. They are fighting in Syria. But very soon, they can emerge

as a serious security challenge if adequate measures are not taken by the Government of the Maldives immediately.

Government needs to deal with the issue at three levels: 1) initiate anti-radicalisation measures; 2) initiate counter-terrorism measures and; 3) counter terrorist financing. Maldives has some legal provisions in place in these regards, which are discussed in the following section.

Anti-radicalisation Approach of the Maldivian Government

A background analysis of profiles of the Maldivian jihadists available online proves that they are going abroad for fighting, not for monetary reasons, but because of their faith in jihadi ideology indoctrinated by the Islamists in Maldives and through social media. Hence initiating the anti-radicalisation/de-radicalisation approach by the government is the most important step to prevent the Maldivians from joining the militant groups.

President Gayoom tried to counter the influence of Islamist ideology by actively intervening in religious life. Gayoom, through the Religious Unity Act and the 1997 Constitution, had become the ultimate authority to impart Islam. During Gayoom's period, Pakistani-educated Maldivians started preaching Salafism by constructing special Dar-ul-Khair Mosque.⁵² Gayoom made it a law that only government mosques were allowed to offer prayers and citizens were directed to go only to the state-administered mosques. In 1996, Gayoom formed the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs to oversee religious affairs in the country to curb the Islamist influence. Ironically, the Supreme Council behaved like the radicals. It practised moral and cultural policing of alleged "anti-Islamic activities"; and imposed ban on night clubs and music concert. It shows that Gayoom's counter-radicalisation approach was meant for his opponents. He was not serious to remove conservatism from the society.

In order to reduce the influence of the Islamists, the Nasheed government made it compulsory for persons who wanted to serve as imams to undergo a six-month state-approved training, as well as disseminating approved sermons for Friday prayers, so that the imams could not disseminate radical ideas.⁵³ During Nasheed's period, Religious Council was replaced by Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and all the positions in the ministry were filled by the members of the AP, which was then Nasheed's alliance partner. With this the ministry came under the influence of the Islamists. Even though Nasheed is not an Islamist, his decision to hand over the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to members of a radical party led to further increase of religious intolerance and extremism during Nasheed's period.

After Mohamed Nasheed was thrown out by a "constitutional coup", Mohamed Waheed became President. During his one year rule, he was favourable to Islamist radical ideas.⁵⁴ According to the US department of State, cases of

religious intolerance and abuse of religious freedom and governmental restrictions of religious freedom increased under Mohamed Waheed.⁵⁵

The current Yameen government got the bill passed in the Parliament in April 2015 to build an Islamic University in Male that will offer courses in comparative religion in addition to Islamic studies. It is expected that the Maldivian students will be able to pursue Islamic studies within the country without any foreign influence. Moreover, the university will be able to expose the Maldivian students to existing alternative narratives to the extremist discourses.⁵⁶ However, this university has been funded by Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is doubtful that it will be able to impart alternative ideas to extremist discourses. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs of the Maldives regularly organises conferences to discuss various aspects of Islam and to examine the concept of jihad by the Islamic scholars from all over the world to provide an alternative view to radical Islam. The intended objective of this exercise is to prevent Maldivian citizens from becoming 'jihadis' in Syria and Iraq.⁵⁷ However, it has been alleged by liberal Maldivians that the ministry often invites radical Islamic scholars to deliver lectures.

Government's Counter-terrorism Measures

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) 1990 has been the legal framework to deal with the issue of terrorism since 1990. According to Maldivian law, killing or causing bodily harm, kidnapping, abduction, taking hostage, hijacking of any vessels or vehicles, unauthorised import of any explosive substance, ammunition or fire arms, or production, storage, sale or interchange of such substance or intent to carry out all these with the intention of creating fear or terror or with a political motive are construed as acts of terrorism. Aiding or financing of all these acts is also considered an act of terrorism.⁵⁸ The Prevention of Terrorism Act 1990 was applied to arrest the suspects believed to be harbouring the first terrorist bombing in Maldives in 2007.

Before 2007, several Maldivians returned back to the Maldives after fighting for the Al-Qaeda in foreign countries. It was a known fact that many of them were propagating Al-Qaeda in the Maldives. Posters of Osama bin Laden were seen on the walls in some parts of Maldives.⁵⁹ No one was however charged under the PTA, as PTA 1990 does not consider propagating an ideology as an act of terrorism. Gayoom administration only destroyed the Dar-ul-Khair Mosque which was constructed by the Islamists to preach Wahhabism. This was done as per Maldivian law, which allows only the government mosques to offer prayers.

After the 2007 bomb blast Maldivian security forces undertook operations in the Himandhoo Island suspected to be harbouring radicalisation. Terrorism charges were filed against 16 people, out of which 10 fled the country.⁶⁰ Under the PTA 1990, three people were sentenced to imprisonment for 15 years, as no lives were lost in the bomb blast.⁶¹ Islamists were tortured in the prison.⁶²

As a champion of democracy, Mohamed Nasheed did not support Gayoom's approach of detaining and torturing suspected radicals. He wanted to experiment a new approach to deal with the extremists, which was to rehabilitate the detainees charged under terrorism, and take on board the radicals. People arrested from Himandhoo Island because of their involvement in the Sultan Park bomb blast were released by Nasheed. This gave the impression that Nasheed released the detainees under the pressure of his alliance partner that time –the AP. Nasheed however rejects that claim. According to Nasheed, the prisoners were being rehabilitated in order to prevent them from further indoctrination, as those inside the prison are the main targets of the Islamists for proselytism.⁶³ In an interview with *The Hindu* on April 20, 2012, he said that he was inspired by the positive results of the rehabilitation of the Jemaah Islamiyya prisoners in Singapore.⁶⁴

The Nasheed government tried to work on a counterterrorism bill to empower security agencies to act “pre-emptively on matters of national security, including terrorism with the help of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Interpol to replace the Prevention of terrorism Act”.⁶⁵ However, before he could realise his ideas, he was thrown out by a constitutional coup.

The Maldivian Parliament in 2014 passed a new penal code to improve government's ability to prosecute individuals for recruiting, financing or otherwise supporting terrorism. It was supposed to come into force on April 13, 2015. However, government MPs in the National Security Committee of the Parliament passed an amendment to delay the coming into force of the new penal code.⁶⁶

A new anti-terrorism bill has been ratified by President Yameen on October 28, 2015. Government claims that the law would take tough action against terrorists.⁶⁷ There are certain provisions in the bill which will address the problems faced by the Maldives. As mentioned above, media and social networking sites are playing an important role in imparting Islamic fundamentalism. According to the bill,

“Sharing and circulating documents and papers of a terrorist group is also considered terrorism. And so selling, giving away and publicly displaying such documents so that people can read, hear or see and making it available on websites is also considered acts of terrorism. The bill states prison sentences of 7-10 years as punishments for such crimes. Sharing such information via TV, radio, or internet is also a crime, which carries a prison sentence of between 10 and 15 years; as is encouraging or supporting terrorist agendas, which carries a prison sentence of between 17 and 20 years”.⁶⁸

Thus, the new anti-terrorism law allows actions against those who provide support to terrorists, too.

However, opposition parties in the Maldives and the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives expressed concerns that the new law violates basic human rights. According to the new law, peaceful assembly will also amount to

the charge of terrorism. The new law also allows “home minister to apply for a ‘monicon’ (monitoring and control) order to tag, intercept communications and conduct surveillance on terrorism suspects if the suspect commits an act that endangers the community. The minister does not have to inform the suspect and the court is not obliged to summon the suspect before issuing the order”.⁶⁹ This will violate the basic privacy of the citizen. Opposition parties consider the bill as a means to target the opposition political parties rather than the terrorists.

Counter Terrorist Financing Measures

There is limited framework available in the Maldives to deal with money laundering and terrorist financing. Anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing provisions are introduced in the banking and security sectors. However, they are at early stages of implementation. Maldives has criminalised money laundering only for the offences listed in the Drugs Act.⁷⁰ The PTA 1990 criminalises “aiding or abetting any form of terrorism as defined in the section 2 of the PTA 1990 through finance or property”.⁷¹

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessment report, there are around 1,108 non-profit organisations (NPOs) in the Maldives registered as associations. These NPOs basically promote social values and religion of Islam in the communities of Maldives. There is no mechanism in the Maldives which can allow the authorities to track the NPOs’ finances. The 1990 PTA allows termination of the registration of the organisation for “aiding or abetting of any form, through finance or property, or planning of a terrorist act stipulated under the PTA” which does not include promotion of faith and the religion of Islam.⁷² Though some NPOs are suspected to financing terrorists abroad, no charges are being made under the 1990 Terrorism Act.⁷³ Moreover, there is no strong mechanism in Maldives to investigate the source of the fund. Though it is mandatory for the NPOs to submit report on international funds, failure of submitting the report is not a panelised offence. Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is operational but without any legal basis.⁷⁴

There are allegations that Pakistan and Saudi funds are being used to spread Wahhabism and jihadi ideology in the Maldives.⁷⁵ Opposition parties and the liberal civil society of Maldives raised doubt about Saudi grants offered by the Saudi Prince to construct mosques and education facilities to the Maldivian students. Current government however has ignored such concerns towards friendly countries like Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion

The above discussion shows that the Maldives has very limited and inefficient legal mechanism to deal with the problem of radicalisation and terrorism. The

main problem is that the Maldivian authorities perceive the issues as political problems and not as social problems. Consequently, the solutions to the problems are sought from the prism of narrow political interests. Hence, the Maldivian government utterly failed to find a sustainable solution to the problem of growing radicalisation in the Maldivian society. In the highly radicalised society, Maldivian youth are getting attracted towards the jihadi ideology and making the country “fertile for recruitment” by the terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. Even though, numbers of Maldivians fighting in foreign wars are increasing day by day, government practically has done nothing, either to stop them from going abroad for jihad, or to take any action to de-radicalise the jihadists after they return back to the Maldives.

NOTES

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Islamist Terrorism in India: Is the State Prepared to Combat Terror?

Amit Kumar

Islamist terrorism has remained an issue of major security concern for the central government as well as state governments in India for more than two decades now. However, after reaching an alarming height in the preceding decade, Islamist terrorism has shown declining trends in recent years, as is evident from the fact that major terror attacks as well as resultant fatalities have come down considerably in the country. While there were at least seven major terror incidents in 2008 resulting in 368 fatalities, including 329 civilians; it came down to two such incidents resulting in 25 deaths, including 24 civilians in 2013. No such incident was recorded in 2014. In 2015, two such incidents resulting in nine deaths (two Security Force personnel and seven militants) were recorded.¹ Though, the numbers show a respite from the menace of terrorism, yet the security establishment of the country remains as worried as ever as this form of terrorism is evolving rapidly and posing several new and complex challenges. Moreover, the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) on the horizon and its spreading tentacles in our neighbourhood has further added to the woes of the security establishment.

Islamic terrorism first made inroads in India in the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) which shares its borders with Pakistan. Aided and abated by a hostile neighbour this form of terrorism then gradually spread across India. However, there is a general perception that security situation has improved in the state after a period of deep turbulence; though during the last couple of years there has been an increase in terror-related incidents in the state.

India's Terror Landscape

Terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) that operated out of Pakistani soil under the aegis of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)², first started targeting Indian interests in J&K. Subsequently, some of these terror outfits expanded their network and were involved in terror attacks in other parts of the country as well. Over 35-odd Islamist formations were active at one time or the other in India. Barring the LeT, almost all of them have predominantly focused on Kashmir only. Since 1988, when insurgency began in Kashmir, the state has witnessed 43,873 terrorism-related fatalities.³

The LeT, also known as the Army of the Righteous, was formed in the early 1990s. It is based in Muridke near Lahore in Pakistan, and is headed by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, who is on India's most-wanted terrorists' list.⁴ Its presence in India was first recorded in 1993. Subsequently, the outfit carried out numerous attacks in J&K.⁵ The outfit gradually started to spread its tentacles in other parts of India. The most ferocious attack carried out by the LeT on Indian soil, till date, is the multiple terror attacks in Mumbai on November 26, 2008. Around 166 civilians and security personnel were killed, including 26 foreign nationals, and several hundred persons were injured in the attacks.⁶

In its pursuit to extend its presence across India, just as the ISI supports LeT as a proxy in order to maintain plausible deniability, LeT fosters proxies in India among radical Islamist militias in India. The Indian Mujahideen (IM) is Lashkar's most important ally in India.⁷ In fact it had contracted its bombing campaign in mainland India to the IM⁸. Some of the most ghastly acts of terror inflicted by this combine include the twin bomb blasts at the Gateway of India and Zaveri Bazaar in Mumbai, killing 52 and wounding over 200 in 2003; triple bombing at crowded markets in New Delhi, which killed 62 and injured 210 in 2005; two near simultaneous blasts in Varanasi, a temple and the city's train station, killing over 20 people and wounding over 100 in 2006; and serial bomb blasts targeting commuter trains throughout Mumbai, killing 209 people and wounding 714 in 2006.⁹

The LeT and IM were acting in tandem and in many of these attacks it was difficult to determine if the attack was an LeT operation in which IM provided support, an IM-LeT joint operation, or an IM operation that received LeT support. Constant LeT training and support helped IM build the necessary organisational capabilities to carry out attacks on its own in the coming years.¹⁰

The IM announced its arrival on India's terrorism terrain in 2007 when it had claimed responsibility for the serial blasts in court compounds in Faizabad, Lucknow and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, on November 23, 2007. Since then the IM has been involved in over a dozen major attacks. The year 2008 witnessed

some of the most dreaded strikes carried out by IM, including the May 13 Jaipur bombings; the July 25, Bangalore serial blasts; the July 26, Ahmedabad serial blasts; and the September 13, Delhi serial blasts. The IM was then involved in the Pune German Bakery blasts of February 13, 2010; and the Mumbai serial blasts of July 13, 2011.¹¹ Subsequently, Indian Mujahideen was also held responsible for the twin blasts at Dilsukhnagar in Hyderabad on February 21, 2013 which killed 17 people and October 27, 2013 serial blasts in Patna, Bihar which killed eight people.

Emerging Trends of Islamist Terrorism in India

In the aftermath of the November 26, 2008 Mumbai terror attacks carried out by the LeT,¹² India's security establishment tightened the noose around the terrorist outfit. While several of LeT's sleeper cells outside J&K were neutralised, LeT's infrastructure inside J&K was also targeted more vehemently. Meanwhile, India also succeeded in exerting diplomatic pressure on Pakistan, which therefore asked the outfit to 'slow down' its activities in India.

Conspicuously, the LeT started looking to fulfil its global terror agenda. It became increasingly involved in the fight against North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the US in Afghanistan.¹³ With the beginning of the American drawdown, the LeT has brought back its focus on India and is making attempts to intensify its operations in the country. Consequently, it is trying to strengthen its existing terror infrastructure further. However, it is important to note that at no point of time it ceased its activities in India totally.

The LeT is now in the process of regaining the lost ground in India – both in J&K and elsewhere. For this it seems to have changed its strategy with the help of its mentor, the ISI. The outfit has started to look for areas which in the past had witnessed high intensity of violence and had been left relatively unguarded because of improvement in the security situation. Indeed, showcasing such a significant change in strategy, the outfit carried out an attack at Gurdaspur in Punjab. Four Security Force personnel and three civilians were killed when terrorists who had infiltrated from across the border carried out a coordinated attack in Gurdaspur District on July 27, 2015.¹⁴ Another attack was carried out few days later in J&K's Udhampur District, which was also relatively unguarded for quite some time. Notably, it was after a long hiatus that a terror attack had taken place in Punjab and Udhampur.

It is also in the process of expanding its recruitment 'zone'. According to reports, LeT has been using IM cadres to recruit youths from border areas of Nepal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Youths are easy prey for the terror outfits in these economically backward areas where unemployment is very high.¹⁵

While the outfit is posing new challenges as it is redefining its areas of

operation, of late it has also started adopting new measures to escape security forces. Security agencies believe that the LeT is using a new technology for communication which is difficult for the agencies to intercept. As per an Intelligence Bureau (IB) alert on December 3, 2015, an improvised version of 'goTenna' is being used by LeT operatives. It enables LeT operatives to send text data packets on a particular frequency band, making almost impossible for security agencies to tap the message.¹⁶

Describing the current capabilities of the LeT, counterterrorism expert, Bruce Riedel says, "Lashkar-e-Taiba paid no penalty for its attack, nor did its Pakistani patrons. The group's senior leadership operates freely in Pakistan and enjoys the support and protection of the Pakistani Army. LeT is more dangerous today than ever."¹⁷ Despite being listed by the US as a terrorist, LeT Chief, Saeed, is attending rallies in Islamabad and Lahore. Similarly, one of the main perpetrators of 26/11 attacks, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, is roaming free as the court has freed him due to lack of evidence. Giving credence to the Riedel's assertion, an unnamed official of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) says, "The LeT is the most potent terror threat that we have to face and is likely to be the source of any future attack."¹⁸

Amidst these developments, two diametrically opposite views about LeT and IS relations have started emerging in media. In response to a question on the possibility of IS joining hands with other terrorist outfits like LeT and launching Paris-type attacks in India, General Officer Commanding of the 16 corps of the Indian Army, Lt Gen R.R. Nimbhorkar on November 19, 2015 said, "Yes, that [IS joining hands with LeT to launch attacks in India] can be a possibility as the motive of the terrorists is to spread their propaganda. They want their name and for that, they can do anything. And if they get successful, they can take advantage of it by using any name. Yes, it is a possibility."¹⁹ However, these two terror outfits have denied any such prospect. On November 21, just two days later, the LeT spokesperson, Dr Abdullah Ghaznavi, denying any such prospect said, "Kashmiri people don't want aid and support from an external group. They are capable enough to fight against the Indian aggression themselves."²⁰ He also described the IS as the creation of anti-Islamic Western countries. Only a few days later, the IS in a release mocked the LeT, and in an indirect reference to it said, "In India, they [al Qaeda] are the allies of the nationalist Kashmir factions whose advances and withdrawals are only by the order of the apostate Pakistani Army."²¹

Both these scenarios – IS and LeT joining hands or opposing each other – are worrying developments. In an article entitled, "Competition between Islamic State, LeT Is Real Threat for India Arising out of Paris Attacks", Saikat Datta has quoted a counterterrorism official as saying, "We know that the LeT is ready with several plans to attack India. They continue to get support from the Pakistani military leadership – travel documents, money, material and training. But the

success of every attack by a competing outfit like the ISIS [IS] increases pressure on them to carry out an attack on India. So it is a twin threat – ISIS and the LeT – that we have to deal with.”²² Their worries have some basis in the past. According to the interrogation report of David Coleman Headley, an American of Pakistani origin, who worked with the LeT to plan 26/11, a key reason for the assault on Mumbai was the outfit’s worry that they would lose their cadres to the Taliban if they did not carry out a “spectacular” attack. Now, with a “spectacular attack” in Paris, the LeT is likely to renew its efforts to repeat a 26/11-styled attack.²³

On the other hand, if they join hands, the security agencies will have to fight with an enemy that has a much larger global presence. For instance, the IS has in all, between 27,000 and 31,000 foreign fighters recruited from 86 countries.²⁴ If the IS and LeT join hands, even the Pakistan Army would face a huge dilemma, whether to continue its support for the LeT, as the IS has openly criticised the Army.²⁵ However, there might also arise a situation where the LeT itself will lose its ‘utility’ for the Pakistani Army and will come on its radar, as has happened in the case of other terror outfits operating out of Pakistani soil. Giving credence to this hypothesis is Pakistan’s former President, Pervez Musharraf’s interview to *Dunya News* on October 25, 2015, in which he has said that terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba were trained by Pakistan in furtherance of its policy of ‘religious militancy’ to carry out attacks against India in Kashmir. Similarly, the Mujahideen and Taliban were also trained by Pakistan to fight against the Soviets. The Taliban, Haqqani, Osama Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and Lashkar were Pakistan’s heroes at different points of time in history. Significantly, signalling a shift in Pakistan’s policy of state-sponsored terrorism, Musharraf said, “But now the time has changed. People who were heroes then, have now become villain. Religious militancy has now become militancy. Now we also are a victim of terrorism.”²⁶ Musharraf’s interview also illustrates the dilemma faced by Pakistan in dealing with terrorism. It continues to support terror outfits in order to promote its national interests, while at the same time, it is haunted by the spectacle of Frankenstein’s monster.

Like LeT, its ally in India, IM, also suffered major losses at the hands of the Indian Security Forces in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. Following the September 13, 2008, Delhi blasts that killed 24 people, the security forces launched massive manhunt against IM, neutralising IM terror infrastructures. Several IM cadres were arrested across the country. The killing of Atif Amin and Mohamed Sajid in the September 19, 2008, Batla House encounter was a major blow to the outfit and nearly decimated its “Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh) module”. Its top leaders, Riyaz Bhatkal, Iqbal Bhatkal and Amir Reza Khan, escaped to Pakistan.²⁷ IM was weakened considerably. However, it began to resurrect its activities after some time as Yasin Bhatkal filled the vacuum thus created. Bhatkal is known to be a

motivator, logistics provider and explosives expert. He set up the “Darbhanga (Bihar) module” and launched several attacks across India. However, Indian security agencies arrested Yasin Bhatkal on August 28, 2013 from Raxaul in the East Champaran District of Bihar along with an accomplice, Asadullah Akhtar. Yaskan Bhatkal is believed to be the IM’s operational chief in India. His successor, Tehseen Akhtar alias Monu was also arrested from Naxalbari in Darjeeling District of West Bengal on March 25, 2014.

IM lost its ‘relevance’ after the arrest of Yasin and his successor Monu. Notably, since the arrest of Yasin in August 2013, India’s mainland had witnessed only one major attack by IM. On October 27, 2013, eight people were killed in serial blasts in Patna, Bihar. Yasin’s successor Monu’s role was suspected in it. Monu was arrested subsequently. Not a single major incident related to IM was recorded after Monu’s arrest. The Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), the parent organisation of the IM, subsequently attempted to fill the vacuum. The development came to light on September 12, 2014, when a low-intensity blast occurred inside a house in the Bijnor District in Uttar Pradesh. Though no casualty was reported, police recovered some explosives and materials used in bomb-making, apart from a .32 bore pistol and laptop. On the same day, Union Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, stated that SIMI sleeper cells might be involved in the blast.²⁸ However, very soon SIMI faced a jolt to its revival attempt. Two cadres of the SIMI were killed in an encounter with the police near Janakipuram in Nalgonda District of Telangana, on April 4, 2015. One police constable was also killed in the encounter.²⁹

However, the SIMI-IM complex which has strong ties with global Islamist organisations, including the LeT and HuJI, as well as other organised crime groupings, continues to pose a challenge. Being the only terror group which has substantial number of Indian recruits, it enjoys maximum support from the ISI, as is evident from the National Investigation Agency’s (NIA), 2nd Supplementary chargesheet filed on September 22, 2014, against 20 accused persons. The case was registered against the operatives of IM including its absconding co-founders, Riyaz Bhatkal and Iqbal Bhatkal, for their involvement in the larger conspiracy to wage war against the Government of India by executing terrorist acts in the country. The chargesheet thus notes, “...Investigation has established that in pursuance of the conspiracy, the accused A-10 [referring to Riyaz Bhatkal] has remained closely connected with the ISI of Pakistan. The ISI organised training of the IM operatives and also provided shelter to several accused persons including A-10, after they were wanted by Indian Courts for their involvement in terrorist activities.”³⁰

Meanwhile, the IM like other terror outfits has been reportedly engaged in using social networking sites to tap new recruits to revive its cadre strength. This

piece of information was revealed by Tahsin Akhtar, who had replaced Yasin Bhatkal as outfit's India operations chief before his arrest, and his associate, Zia-ur-Rahman alias Waqas.³¹

Moreover, though there were several reports of IM facing split in the past, it indeed happened in the aftermath of the formation of the IS. Columnist Vicky Nanjappa writes,

While Riyaz was hell bent that the IM should join the Al-Qaeda, he had found opposition from Sultan Armar also a resident of Bhatkal. Armar was of the view that the Al-Qaeda would eventually lean towards the ISI and hence the ISIS was a better bet. The declaring of the Islamic Caliphate by the ISIS had become a major draw and had impressed Armar as well. He felt that the purest form of Jihad was being practiced by the ISIS. This led to a major fight between Riyaz and Armar and the Indian Mujahideen split up.³²

Notably, out of the six Indians killed so far in Syria/Iraq fighting along with the IS, three belong to this faction of IM, including Sultan Armar.

Meanwhile, the emergence of IS as the most potent global terror force has brought about major changes in India's terror landscape. For the first time in decades, young Indians have shown a dispensation to align themselves with a "global jihadi ideology". The IS also released a 'world domination map' in June 2014, which included India in the projected Islamic region of 'Khorasan'. The outfit which has mentioned India in many of its releases thereafter (post June 2014) has succeeded in attracting the fringe among Indian nationals. Many Indians have joined the jihad in Syria and Iraq under the IS, and 150 suspects are under the scanner for following the IS propaganda.³³ It is a major shift from past tradition, when Indian Muslims had always rejected the call for joining global jihad. Between 2005 and 2011, only one person from Hyderabad was found to have travelled west to join the Al Qaeda. The man returned disillusioned and finally committed suicide.³⁴

Though the IS has not carried out any attack, thus far, on Indian soil, according to media reports, as of now, seven Indians are part of the IS – two hail from Maharashtra, one each from Telangana and Karnataka. Another three have travelled to Iraq/Syria from overseas destinations such as Australia, Oman and Singapore. Notably, only one of the seven Indians who has joined the IS is handling a fighting assignment, while the remaining six are doing odd jobs for the outfit.³⁵ Further, the six Indians already killed in the "war zone" include Athif Vaseem Mohammad, Mohammad Umar Subhan, Maulana Abdul Kadir Sultan Armar, Saheem Farooque Tanki, Faiz Masood and Mohammad Sajid alias Bada Sajid.³⁶ Of these, three were from Karnataka, and one each from Telangana, Maharashtra, and Uttar Pradesh. Of the six Indians killed, three – Armar, Tanki, Sajid – belonged to the IM. Reports also indicate that several Indians, lured by the IS's Internet

campaign, have been detained while planning to travel to Syria/Iraq to fight for the IS.

The Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, on September 27, 2015, making an overall assessment on IS threat stated that the IS was not making any significant expansion of its network in India and was not an issue to worry about.³⁷ However, the home minister was forced to reconsider his views in the aftermath of the attack in Paris, and he thus opined, "ISIS is not a threat for any particular country but for the entire world. India is alert about ISIS."³⁸ Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, referring to the IS threat told Karan Thapar in an interview to the India Today TV programme, *To The Point*, "Challenges are there. We have to accept that it is a reality. The threat is there."³⁹ Also, the MHA in an advisory released on November 16, 2015, post terror attacks in Paris, cautioned against the IS threat and the looming danger of its expanding footprints. The advisory said,

Though ISIS/ISIL has not been able to establish any significant presence in India, its success in radicalising some youth, attracting certain sections of the local population/Indian diaspora to physically participate in its activities or the possibility of piggy backing on terrorist groups operating in India has opened up the possibility of ISIS-sponsored terrorist action on Indian territory.⁴⁰

The advisory also put a note of caution for the security agencies and asked them to be on alert, identify vulnerable target areas and take necessary measures to prevent any untoward incidents. It also asked the agencies to beef up the security arrangements for the diplomatic interests of France, the US, UK, Germany, Russia, Australia, Turkey and Israel, who are the most likely targets of terrorist violence.

At a time when Pakistan is under immense pressure and finding it increasingly difficult to continue its support for jihad in India, the now weakened terror formations, like IM, might start looking more towards the IS. It might lead to some attacks if we are caught unprepared. Praveen Swami writes,

Yet, the fact is some of those fighting with the Islamic State have been involved in past acts of mass terrorism, notably the Indian Mujahideen's urban terrorism campaign. Having been trained in actual combat conditions, the lethality of these individuals will have significantly increased. The bottom line is: it doesn't matter how many individuals participate in the Islamic State's jihad – it's how many get past India's intelligence and police services.⁴¹

Analysing the threat from the IS, Colonel (retd) Vivek Chadha writes,

... First, the ISIS can become the fulcrum of terrorism against India, thereby focussing the combined energy of different groups under its umbrella. Second, it can be supported by Pakistan's ISI, thereby providing it a well-established

intelligence and logistic network, in a symbiotic relationship. Third, the social media campaign by the ISIS is ideally placed to exploit alienated members of the society.

Delving on the motivation for the IS to target India, he writes,

... while India may be amongst the most challenging targets for a radical organisation like the ISIS, given the strong roots of liberalism, democracy and secularism in the country, from the perspective of the ISIS, this is a prize which could well tip the balance in its favour, not only in the region but also beyond. This could imply that the resources and energy likely to be employed against India will make the terrorist group amongst the most serious challenge faced by the country so far.

Col Chadha stresses that the fight against IS will be India's own fight and any attempt to piggyback US or its allies will not yield desired dividends:

The ISIS has foreseen the possibility of the US and its allies standing alongside India. However, past experience suggests limited cooperation by the US against terrorist threats specifically aimed at the country. It is more likely that it will be India's fight for its safety and security on the basis of its resilience and capacity.⁴²

Soon after the IS brought the Indian subcontinent under its 'purview', Ayman al-Zawahiri, chief of al Qaeda on September 3, 2014, announced the formation of al Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) with Maulana Asim Umar as chief. In his statement he referred specifically to Kashmir, Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Assam. The AQIS began its 'campaign' in the subcontinent by attacking a Pakistani Naval ship in Karachi and carrying out some other attacks inside Pakistan. It also made its presence felt by killing several bloggers in Bangladesh. Though, like its parent organisation, the AQIS has not found support within India; the fact that it is operating so close to the Indian border, especially in Bangladesh, is worrisome. It is notable that Bangladeshi terror outfit, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), has also established some cells within India.⁴³ Moreover, in the backdrop of the IS slamming the al Qaeda there is a possibility of AQIS flexing its muscles.⁴⁴ Already there is a strong rivalry between the al Qaeda and the IS. The attacks in Paris and Mali have exposed this lethal rivalry.⁴⁵

Preparedness of the Indian State

Terrorists are constantly posing new challenges before the national governments. They are always in the lookout for opportunities to be exploited. They seem to be functioning on the basis of 'You miss and I hit' formula. Terror networks are evolving fast and are well coordinated unlike the national governments which are still grappling to come to terms with such a formidable challenge. The Indian

State also seems to suffer from this syndrome and lacks a well-coordinated and united effort to tackle terrorism.

To begin with, securing the land border is the utmost priority. While, a lot of work has been carried to secure our land borders,⁴⁶ the border along Nepal which has been used regularly by terror formations to move in and out of the country still remains vulnerable. It is now that India has decided to beef up the security along the Nepal border. A multi-layered security along the 1,751-km long border with Nepal will be set up within 15 km from the border areas in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim.⁴⁷ The increasing influence of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh has resulted in large-scale migration into the bordering areas of Assam and Bengal in particular and the North-East in general. These are not only economic migrants but also the foot soldiers of jihadi terrorism. This could have serious implications for our national security. The terrain and the demographic composition of the border area make it conducive for Bangladeshis to sneak into the Indian territory and then to get easily assimilated into the local Indian populace.⁴⁸ Taking note of potential security implications of such migration, in December 2014, a two-member bench of the Supreme Court expressed its concern over the Centre's laxity in leaving the border with Bangladesh porous. The court directed the central government to erect fences and strengthen vigilance on the Bangladesh border to prevent the illegal inflow of people through the porous border. Moreover, the Supreme Court also directed the central government to take necessary actions for deportation of illegal migrants. The MHA in 2014 in an affidavit apprised the Supreme Court about the progress of fencing work. As per the affidavit, out of the 3,326 km of fence along the India-Bangladesh border (including reconstruction of damaged fences) that has been sanctioned, construction of 2,828 km has been completed and another 78.8 km will be completed by May 2016.⁴⁹

Similarly, we have moved ahead in terms of securing our coasts. The Ministry of Defence in a statement released on November 25, 2014, declared:

After the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai in 2008, several measures were announced by the government to strengthen coastal and maritime security along the entire coast. Due to the coordinated efforts of all concerned, all these measures are now in place and overall maritime security is much stronger than before ... As a result, potential threats have been detected and actions have been taken to mitigate them in good time ... Since 2008, coastal and maritime security has been strengthened substantially by successful implementation of technical, organisational and procedural initiatives, by all maritime security agencies. Plugging gaps, where identified, is continuous process that is being addressed appropriately.⁵⁰

However, the picture is not so rosy. An audit report by the IB states that though

there are 12 major ports in the country which are heavily secured, the problem arises in the case of the 75 smaller ports which remain without security. These include ports in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Puducherry, Goa, Andaman Nicobar Islands, Kerala and Odisha. The highest number of smaller ports (21) which remain without security are in Gujarat. Additionally, there are 45 ports in the country which are non-operational. These ports are used as landing points for jetties. Although the activity is minimal here, security cannot be lowered in such ports. Post 26/11 a series of suggestions were made to enhance security at the coastal belts. The ports in particular had to install scanners, a proper record book and CCTVs. However, in many of the major ports these measures have not been taken. Moreover, the report states that the security is lax when it comes to scanning employees at a port. It is mandatory that even employees are checked at ports, but the same is not done in several major ports, the report states.⁵¹

Moreover, the CAG 2014 report on Maharashtra's Coastal Security stated,

Audit scrutiny revealed that the patrolling boats were grossly underutilised and not maintained adequately. No joint patrolling was being done by the coastal police with other Services/agencies indicating the probability of critical gaps in coastal patrolling ... The implementation of Coastal Security Scheme in the State suffered as full complement of equipment and other capital assets initially planned for but not approved by Government of India were not procured or constructed by Government of Maharashtra from its own resources ... Of the total staff posted in coastal police stations, only 43 per cent were trained by the Coast Guard in marine operations while 57 per cent did not possess swimming skills.⁵²

Highlighting the urgent need to plug the holes in our coastal security arrangement the report lamented that the objective of creating adequate infrastructure could not be achieved despite a lapse of three to nine years. The report asked the state government to complete the infrastructure works like, construction of remaining coastal police stations and check posts as well as operational rooms in the jetties without further delays.

Such a state of affairs is regrettable as the threat continues even to date despite several measures being announced after 26/11 to secure our coasts apart from measures enunciated earlier. In the most recent manifestation of continuing existence of such threats, an IB alert had warned on September 26, 2015, that 12 to 13 armed terrorists entered Gujarat through the Arabian Sea between Friday [September 25] night and Saturday [September 26] morning. The alert, which was sent to airports across the country, added that these were "trained terrorists" and might "target vital installations and/or crowded areas".⁵³

The air space of the country remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The MHA in a report tabled in Parliament on December 1, 2015 said that terror groups

may carry out attacks across India using sub-conventional aerial platforms and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) was in the process of formulating regulations for certifications and operation of UAS and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Indian air space. That it took so long for the DGCA to formulate the policy itself shows the lackadaisical approach of the government.⁵⁴

While India is still struggling to put in place adequate measures to deal with terrorist threats over land, sea, air and space, it finds itself wanting in dealing with this threat in the realm of cyber space which has emerged as the fifth domain and the strongest challenge. The arrest of IS operative Mehdi Masroor Biswas on December 13, 2014, from Karnataka and subsequent revelations underscored the potential of such threat. Biswas had made 124,000 tweets, of which 15,000 tweets were directly in connection with the IS. The tweets were glorifying the savage acts of the IS like mass beheadings. Biswas was inspiring youth to spread the IS ideology and join the war in West Asia as jihadists. At the time of his arrest, Mehdi had more than 17,800 Twitter followers of which about 15,000 were from foreign countries.⁵⁵ With 70 per cent increase in cases of cyber crime, Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, on November 5, 2015, said,

Today, due to technology and Internet, a person living in a remote area can have access to such information by which he can indulge in an act of terror, despite not being associated with any terror group. Such forces are also active in the cyber space which works in the direction of radicalisation of youth. Cyber security experts need to be alert especially towards the online radicalisation.⁵⁶

Though the Government of India has initiated some measures to de-radicalise youths who have been influenced by such activities, the limited capabilities of the Indian State in dealing with this menace is worrisome. We need to move beyond the Cyber Security Policy of 2013 as the challenges are ever growing. Talking about these challenges, Cheri McGuire, vice president, global government affairs and cybersecurity policy, Symantec Corporation, in an interview stated,

According to Symantec's annual Internet Security Threat Report, we found an increase in targeted attacks on industries dealing with critical infrastructure in India in 2014. The year also saw 317 million malware variants globally or nearly 1 million new malware daily. In India, we saw targeted attacks in businesses dealing with critical infrastructure particularly in financial sector, communication, transportation – thus underpinning the national security and economy. Among these attacks, 60 per cent were on large enterprises.⁵⁷

As per the interview, India is third in the global threat rank by source. Moreover, India ranks No. 1 when it comes to the number of social media scams in the APJ region, and No. 2 globally. While acknowledging that cyber crime has no boundaries and is a global challenge, McGuire lamented that law enforcement is

one of the biggest concerns in India. The Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice T.S. Thakur, on November 19, 2015, thus said, “Cyber crime has emerged as a major challenge for law enforcement agencies. There is a need to create an agency to formulate laws and have recommendations for the judiciary on this [cyber crime] subject.”⁵⁸ It becomes more worrying noting that the Government of India had realised about this threat much earlier, when the then Union Home Minister had stated on May 5, 2012:

“... there are terrorist threats in the cyber space, which is the fifth domain after land, sea, air and space⁵⁹. Much of our critical infrastructure lies in the cyber domain. Cyber crimes such as hacking, financial fraud, data theft, espionage etc. would, in certain circumstances, amount to terrorist acts. Our counter terrorism (CT) capacity must be able to meet the threats in cyber space. Since there are no boundaries in cyber space, how will the Central Government and the State Governments share the responsibility to face the threats in cyber space?⁶⁰

The lack of synergy between the central agencies and state police forces to fight terrorism has been one of our biggest lacunas. This lack of coordination is omnipresent. Turf wars have led to confusion over operational jurisdictions and disputes over investigations and custodies of the terrorists. One such example of turf war has been the battle between NIA and Delhi Police over the investigation of terror cases and custodies of operatives. Moreover, the tenuous relationship between the centre and the states has also not helped the cause. Tamil Nadu government’s decision not to accept the central government’s offer to order an NIA probe into the train blasts at the Chennai Central railway station is a case in point.⁶¹

Therefore, a concerted effort to improve inter-agency coordination and cooperation along with healthy centre-state relations is the primary need to combat terror. It is imperative for the government to take all states on board to formulate a national policy on countering terror within India at the earliest. This is necessary more than ever before, as in the present context no area is less vulnerable than the other. The role of states and their police is going to be the key in deciding the outcome of our war on terror in such a situation. As K.P.S Gill rightly suggests:

Despite the visible deficiencies of the response of the Punjab Police [during the Gurdaspur attack], this is the only sustainable model to protect against the depredations of terrorists and extremists of various hues across unpredictable locations across the country. The Army and NSG cannot be everywhere, and cannot be deployed within an acceptable time frame at every new location of terrorist attack.⁶² Local authorities cannot, and must not, wait interminably for the Centre to send in appropriately trained or equipped Forces. The local Police, the first responders, must be ready, willing and highly motivated to react immediately and effectively on their own, and must take

rightful pride in so responding. Every crisis across India cannot be handled from New Delhi. Decentralisation is absolutely necessary, certainly in security matters.⁶³

Though, “in terms of Entries No. 1 and 2 of List II – ‘State List’ – in the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India, ‘public order’ and ‘police’ are the responsibilities of States, Article 355 of the Constitution enjoins the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.”⁶⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that states and their police are primarily responsible for the maintenance of law and order, Islamist terrorism is much more than a simple law-and-order problem and has serious external dimensions, too. The state police on its own cannot do much about the problem. Hence, the union government and its various agencies, including the armed forces, which have been deployed in some cases as a measure of last resort, play a key role in combating terrorism. Here the role of Special Forces (SF) assumes significance. The SF are specifically organised, trained and equipped to conduct and support special operations. SF operations can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces or other security agencies. An analysis of the roles and functions of India’s SF shows that counterterrorism is a primary and one of their most important tasks. An attack of the magnitude of 26/11; the 1999 Kandahar hijack episode; and the 2001 Parliament attack all show the reach of India’s adversaries. Moreover, the state police forces and normal CAPFs are not geared to tackle challenges of this nature on their own. The use of SF to tackle the threat of this magnitude which strikes at the very root of our system and poses an existential threat makes sense. India has been a victim of proxy wars unleashed by its neighbours and has been under the constant threat of asymmetric forces; here, the SF can play the deterrent role to perfection. However, it may not be a good idea to employ them on a regular basis.⁶⁵ Specific high-value targets or tasks could be given to them. Gurmeet Kanwal, echoes the same view: “The greater reliance on invisible and quiet SF operations, marked by surgical strikes based on precise and trustworthy intelligence gathered by the SF personnel themselves, will yield greater dividends.”⁶⁶ The final decision to deploy SF in an internal security role⁶⁷ will be political, and here the question of political will or acumen comes into focus. We have employed SF in countering terrorism with demonstrable successes in the past and the present government at the centre is also not averse to the idea of employing them in a strategic manner.

Though efforts have been made to address manpower shortage in counterterrorism units, which was greatly emphasised post 26/11, the problem still remains at an alarming level. According to the National Crime Records Bureau

(NCRB), the total number of State Police Force personnel, who are the first respondents to any terror activity, as on December 31, 2013, stood at 1,731,537.⁶⁸ In that year, the Police population ratio stood at 141 policemen per 10,000 population much below the United Nations (UN) standard norm of 220 policemen per 10,000 population at peace time. There is acute shortage at the police leadership level too. As of April 21, 2015, there was a shortage of 19.06 per cent at the IPS level, i.e., against a sanctioned strength of 4,754 IPS officers, only 3,848 were in position.⁶⁹ More worryingly, the state police forces continue to remain ill-trained, ill-equipped and ill-motivated. Though, some state police forces have formed SF to combat terrorism like the Anti-Terrorism Squads (in several states), C-60 in Maharashtra and Greyhounds in Andhra Pradesh, but they have achieved limited success, especially against the Islamist terrorism. Also, the Crime Investigation Department (CID) which acts as the investigative as well as prosecuting agency at the state level lacks manpower. The total strength of CID in the state police forces stood at 11,729 personnel in 2011. In the same year, 6,252,729 offences were registered yielding a ratio of 533.09 cases per officer. It, is therefore quite understandable why so many cases go uninvestigated.⁷⁰

Though not all Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) are directly involved in counterterrorism, some of them play a key role in anti-terrorist operations and strategy, like the Border Security Force (BSF) in J&K, Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in protecting vital installations and so on. It is pertinent to discuss here the role of the National Security Guard (NSG); the most potent force geared up to counterterrorism tasks under the MHA. The NSG was raised on October 16, 1985 as a Federal Contingency Force under the MHA to tackle all facets of terrorism in the country. Thus, the primary role of this force is to combat terrorism in all forms, especially in areas where terrorist activity assumes serious proportions and the state police and other central police forces find themselves unable to cope with the situation. The NSG is specially equipped and trained to deal with specific situations and, therefore, is to be used only in exceptional situations.⁷¹ It has two complementary elements in the form of the Special Action Group (SAG), comprising army personnel, and the Special Rangers Group (SRG), comprising personnel drawn from the CAPFs/state police forces. NSG is a 100 per cent deputationist force, with 53 per cent of its manpower drawn from the army and 47 per cent from CAPFs/state police organisations. NSG commandos can shoot the enemy even in total darkness. Recently, women commandos have also been inducted by the NSG. Significantly, NSG has created a new commando category – the Phantom category – consisting of personnel equipped with the best of the combatant skills, both armed and unarmed. Only 1 per cent of the total force in NSG can achieve the Phantom status. At the attainment of this status, the

commando is removed from the NSG training centre at Manesar and taken to some classified ultra-secret location for a new kind of training regimen.⁷²

The intelligence agencies⁷³ support the fighting forces. The IB is the oldest intelligence agency, functioning under the MHA, which is tasked to provide inputs on developments affecting internal security and counter intelligence. It works both at the central as well as the state level. The government on March 12, 2013, informed the Lok Sabha, "As against the sanctioned strength of 26,867 personnel in IB, at present 18,795 personnel are available with a total of 8,072 vacancies (30 per cent)."⁷⁴

While the shortage of manpower in the forces and intelligence agencies is creating hurdles in fighting terrorism, the problem is compounded further by the weakness of agencies which are involved especially in data collection. These agencies can play a vital role in capacity building of police force in the country, and thereby streamlining their functioning. Notably, Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) is one such agency which is still not fully operational. Creation of CCTNS was announced after 26/11 attacks. Recently, on November 18, 2015, the government gave its approval to the proposal of the MHA for a major revamp of the CCTNS Project. The government has decided to implement Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS) by integrating CCTNS with e-courts. This project is also now fully in sync with the Smart Policing and Digital India programmes of the Government of India. With the implementation of the CCTNS Project, police functioning in the country will be fully computerised. The total outlay for the project is ' 2000 crore.⁷⁵ Similarly, after the 26/11, the government initiated the process of establishing National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) with the aim to link databases of 21 departments and ministries and collect comprehensive patterns of intelligence that can be accessed by security agencies. The NATGRID is still in its nascent stage.⁷⁶

While many of these agencies essential for countering terror activities lack teeth, some investigative/prosecuting agencies which act on the basis of information provided by the intelligence agencies also have failed to provide any significant result. For instance, the NIA, which was formed soon after the NIA Act was enacted on December 12, 2008, as on date, has a total of 106 cases registered at its various police stations.⁷⁷ Till January 2014, it had managed to successfully prosecute only one case⁷⁸, while many major terror cases remain unresolved. Despite being the premier investigative and prosecuting agency of the country, it suffers from acute manpower shortage. As against a sanctioned strength of 816 personnel, the NIA has only 579 people in position.⁷⁹ Commenting on the precarious situation, Navneet Rajan Wasan, former director general, Bureau of Police Research and Development writes,

Central investigation agencies like the CBI, the NIA and the Enforcement

Directorate continue to have huge vacancies, as officers from states are not willing to join and sister agencies are staffed with officers from the Central armed police forces. Even the apex court's direction to fill these posts and experiments like additional remuneration have not yielded the desired results. This is unfortunate, and it can't be allowed to persist.⁸⁰

More worryingly, in the absence of a cyber forensics team, the NIA has been seeking the cooperation of foreign agencies. This does not augur well as it not only delays the investigation, but also exposes the data which the Indian investigators are seeking to a foreign agency.⁸¹

Future Prospects

The Government of India has taken measures to minimise the threat emerging out of the changes fast taking place globally as well as in our immediate neighbourhood. Yet, the threat from the emergent IS and the resurgent LeT combined with IM-SIMI remains potent. The following future prospects may be discerned on the basis of the above analysis:

To begin with, the IS's future in India will depend upon its 'successes' elsewhere. Its success will be a factor in the international community's resolve to fight against terrorism. Since the Paris attacks, the world powers have shown determination to take the fight to its logical conclusion. Moreover, the IS is reaching limits of military expansion in Iraq-Syria. It may be one reason that it is carrying out scattered attacks outside the conflict zone. If it fails to maintain its supremacy in the 'war zone', it is more likely that it will lose its 'support' in India. Notably, reports have started emerging that the IS has already started 'losing ground' and is facing desertion within its ranks.⁸² So far two Indians have deserted the IS ranks.⁸³ On December 18, 2015, the Iraqi forces flew the national flag above the main government complex in Ramadi, in Anbar Province, about 110 km from Baghdad, which had fallen to the IS in May 2015. The Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, proclaimed that the coming year will see his forces defeat the IS. A jubilant Abadi said, "We are coming to liberate Mosul and it will be the fatal and final blow to Daesh."⁸⁴

There are, however, no such conditions aligned with the LeT. As Bruce Ridell has pointed out, it is now a more potent a threat than earlier. Any slackness on the part of the Indian security establishment will allow this terror outfit to regain its lost ground. The LeT continues to possess the capabilities to carry out terror attacks anywhere in India.

The IM also remains a potent threat. While it is widely considered that the IM was created by external powers inimical to India,⁸⁵ taking benefit out of prevailing communal tensions within India, we find that there has been no respite from such conflagrations in recent past. It will therefore not be a problem for the

IM to resurrect itself in case of any lackadaisical approach of the Indian agencies. We must also look beyond these groups. C. Christine Fair writes,

While Indians are likely correct to anticipate that the next attack on India may well come from the LeT; I encourage Indians to also remember the Jaish-e-Mohammad which launched the attack on India's parliament in December 2000. JeM had been dormant for years in part because their cadres had defected to the Pakistani Taliban. In recent years, the Pakistan army and ISI have resuscitated JeM in hopes of luring some of the previous cadres back into the fold with the lure of killing Indians ... Indians would be wise to keep an eye on JeM in addition to LeT. The Pakistan army and the ISI needs both of these groups if its twin goals of pacifying Pakistan and setting India on fire are to be advanced.⁸⁶

More importantly, Indian interests outside the country remain as vulnerable as they were earlier. We have witnessed several attacks by the LeT and its accomplices inside Afghanistan.⁸⁷ The threat to Indian interests in other parts of the world particularly in the gulf has increased manifold since the emergence of the IS, as is evident in the abduction case of Indians in Iraq.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The threat is all pervasive, with a range of terror groups breaking geographical and 'ideological' boundaries to wage a united war. The security along India's land, sea and air space needs to be strengthened further and keep pace with the advances made in the security arena to pre-empt terrorists' designs. In addition, cyber security is one of the most important dimensions to be taken note of by the security establishment. Notably, almost all the major terror outfits are using this medium to further their reach and agenda. The challenge in the cyber domain becomes even bigger as the exploitation of social media as a tool of propaganda by the terrorists is very easy, whereas checking the spread of such ideologies in the cyber space is an uphill task for the security agencies. It becomes even more difficult given the fact that India does not even have a strong cyber security law in place, forget about a dedicated and trained team of cyber warriors as in the case of developed world countries like the US and Israel who have a trained team of professionals only for this purpose.

Nevertheless, the Government of India is taking the latest threat emanating from IS and other terror outfits in the cyber domain seriously. It has formalised a strategy to neutralise extremist ideologies such as those espoused by the IS. As a part of this strategy, involvement of community elders, monitoring of radical social media platforms and real-time sharing of information would be ensured. Special emphasis would be on counter-radicalisation efforts. It would include counselling of youths and taking the help of community elders to educate and

sensitise them about the dangers of extremist ideologies. The focus would also be on how to quickly respond to any report of youths planning to join terror groups like the IS. Moreover, to address the challenge of terrorist threat in cyber space, the government set up a committee on December 15, 2015. The committee will examine the feasibility of setting up a multi-agency 24x7 social media analysis centre and prepare a blueprint for the creation of a ‘Situation Room’ to analyse social media.⁸⁹ Soliciting international cooperation to fight terrorism in general and the IS in particular has also been part of India’s strategy. The efforts have yielded results as UAE and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have deported IS operatives and youths sympathetic to its cause recently to India and tightened the noose around their neck.

On the diplomatic front, India needs to engage with its neighbours proactively. Of late, Sri Lanka and Maldives have also emerged as new avenues of Islamist terrorism that can be exported to India. Sometime back, India entered into a maritime security cooperation agreement with Sri Lanka and Maldives. It is strategically important for India to develop such partnerships to protect India’s maritime boundaries from the scourge of terrorism. Regarding Pakistan, the least that the government can do is to evolve a consistent policy – to engage Pakistan on the talks table, while simultaneously making the cost of Pakistan’s adventurism unaffordable to it as articulated by many top policymakers in the government for some time now. The options on table range from covert operations to economic blockade and isolating Pakistan diplomatically in the international arena.

Notwithstanding the lackadaisical approach of the Indian Government, which is further hampered by the contentious issues in centre-state relations and politicisation of terror, our security personnel have succeeded in minimising the threat from traditional form of Islamist terrorism; but they need further support from the state to defeat terrorism in all its manifestations.

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16

The Obama Administration's Approach to Terrorism in South and West Asia: Implications for India and India-US Relations

Saroj Bishoyi

Introduction

When Barack Obama took over as the 44th president of the US in January 2009, his Administration inherited America's two wars on terrorism – one in South Asia and another in West Asia. The Administration came to power with the promise of developing a new and comprehensive approach to defeat terrorism and restore American leadership in the two strategically important regions of the world. After years of fight against terrorism, spending trillions of dollars and costing thousands of lives, however, the Administration is yet to accomplish its key objectives in the regions. Instead, the terrorist groups have significantly spread their tentacles beyond these two regions as well as the proportion of terrorist attacks and death rates have significantly increased worldwide rather than decline. According to the *Global Terrorism Index 2015*, in 2014, 32,658 people were killed in terrorist attacks, an 80 per cent increase from 2013. The vast majority of deaths occurred in the five countries, namely Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. Four of these countries are from South and West Asian regions. India ranked sixth in the *Index* with 416 deaths in terrorist attacks which represents the highest number of terrorist incidents and deaths since 2010.¹ Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda which were mostly confined to South Asia's Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) region have now spread into other regions of Asia and beyond. New forms of terrorism such as the Islamic State (IS) – also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Daesh – have

also emerged, throwing enormous security challenges at the US and regional countries through its “power, reach, and appeal”.

With the Al Qaeda and ISIS enjoying safe havens in South and West Asia, in addition to ever increasing terrorist attacks worldwide, serious doubts have arisen about the effectiveness and sustainability of the Obama Administration's approach to terrorism. At the same time, the US's regional allies and strategic partners including India are weighing the Administration's approach and assessing going along with the Administration in this fight against terrorism. While India which has been fighting its own war on terrorism over the last three decades and has significantly improved counterterrorism cooperation with the US, especially after the 9/11 attacks, the Obama Administration's changing approach to terrorism has deeply impacted India and continues to shape the evolving India-US strategic partnership.

Against this background, the present paper focuses on the Obama Administration's approach to terrorism in South and West Asia regions, and how it has affected India and the India-US relations. It mainly concentrates on the Administration's changing counterterrorism strategy and its implications rather than on the terrorist groups, their growth and increasing level of attacks worldwide. The paper has been divided into four broad sections. The first section provides a detailed analysis of the key features of the Obama Administration's approach to terrorism that it has been developing since January 2009. The second section examines whether the Administration's approach has helped it or not in achieving its broader foreign policy objectives of defeating terrorism and restoring American leadership in the two vital regions of Asia. The third section deals with the implications of the Administration's approach to terrorism on India and the India-US relations. And, finally, it aims to provide the way ahead.

The Obama Administration's Approach

As the terrorist groups' “power, reach, and appeal” have steadily grown over the years, President Barack Obama and his Administration officials have also unveiled various counterterrorism approaches to defeat the growing threats since they came into power in January 2009. On June 28, 2011, the White House released the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*² which formalised the approach that they had been “pursuing and adapting for the past two-and-a-half years to prevent terrorist attacks and to deliver devastating blows against Al Qaeda, including the successful mission to kill Osama bin Laden”.³ In this strategy, the Obama Administration tried to shift the earlier Bush Administration's focus on Iraq to Af-Pak region by redirecting American troops, civil workers and financial resources. The ultimate objective of this strategy was to “disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately defeat Al Qaeda – its leadership core in the Af-Pak region, its affiliates

and adherents to ensure the security”⁴ of the US citizens and its national interests. It also aimed at countering the potential threat posed by the supporters of “Al Qaeda’s extremist ideology inside” the US. As John O. Brennan, President Obama’s then chief counterterrorism adviser, in a briefing in Washington on June 29, 2011, said, “This is the first counterterrorism strategy that focuses on the ability of Al Qaeda and its networks to inspire people in the United States to attack us from within.”⁵ The main components of the strategy focused on enhancing counterterrorism cooperation with its allies and strategic partners for defeating the terrorist menace and to make a determined effort to restore its leadership in the world, especially in the South and West Asian region. Though the strategy was developed on the progress that the US had made since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, it was neither a complete ‘overhaul’ nor a complete ‘retention’ of the Bush Administration’s “policies and strategies”.

In a major counterterrorism policy speech at National Defence University in Washington DC in May 2013, President Obama announced a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy.⁶ Outlining how the nature of terrorist challenge has changed substantially since 9/11, President Obama explained his Administration’s changed approach to meet those emerging threats. One of the key features of this changed approach to terrorism that Obama outlined in his speech was on tighter rules and oversight on the use of drone attacks. This announcement came following the mounting protest against the increasing use of drone strikes led by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to kill terrorists, which eventually resulted in more civilian deaths. For instance, according to *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, since Obama Administration came to power on January 20, 2009, it has used 456 drone strikes in which at least 2,464 people have been killed, out of which 314 were civilians. In comparison, there were only 52 drone strikes under the Bush Administration which killed 416 people, of whom 167 were civilians.⁷ As a result, President Obama called on American lawmakers to rethink the United States drone strategy against terrorism. However, he defended the use of drone strikes by saying that it has “saved lives” by killing many terrorists. He argued this is a legal part of a “just war” against terrorist groups. But Obama stressed that under a new set of rules, drone attacks will be confined to suspects “who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the American people”, and who cannot otherwise be captured. He however insisted on clear guidelines and oversight to bring more transparency to the use of drones.⁸ In this regard, the CIA Director, John O. Brennan, in his Senate confirmation hearing said that the United States should publicly acknowledge and reveal “the overall numbers of civilian deaths”⁹ that resulted from US drone strikes while targeting terrorists. This would reduce the risk of creating new enemies and restore US credibility at home and abroad.

Another step that President Obama announced in his May 2013 speech was closing the Guantanamo Bay prison, also called GTMO. Though this is not directly linked to the Obama Administration's counterterrorism strategy, but the Administration believed that closing the prison would enhance American image in the region and the world that it respects human rights and international law. As Obama said, "GTMO has become a symbol around the world for an America that flouts the rule of law."¹⁰ The Administration thus hoped that transferring the remaining detainees and closing the prison would restore American credibility as a nation committed to the rule of law. Obama also said that his Administration has changed many of the previous Administration's policies including treatment of terrorist suspects which he called "torture", and had stressed on further improving its relations with regional countries, particularly with the Muslim world. More than two years after this announcement, however, there are still 112 prisoners at the GTMO, and the Obama Administration is facing tough challenge in transferring the remaining detainees and closing the prison.¹¹ The Administration has been openly making plans to transfer the 59 detainees to the United States and other 53 to other countries. On November 10, 2015, however, the US Senate passed a broad defence bill with overwhelming and bipartisan vote of 91 to 3 which blocked Obama's plan to bring the 59 detainees to the United States.¹² Meanwhile, the White House spokesman, Josh Earnest, called the provision an "unfortunate perpetuation of the status quo", but he stressed that the block "does not alter the Administration's efforts to craft a plan to close the facility".¹³

The rapid rise of the IS, after the failure of Arab Spring¹⁴ has further thrown serious security challenges at the US and other regional countries. In yet another major policy speech on "Combating Terrorism and ISIS", on September 10, 2014, President Obama laid out his Administration's comprehensive and sustained approach to terrorism. In its objective to "degrade, and ultimately destroy" these groups, he announced four pronged strategy: to "conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes against these terrorists" groups; to increase the US "support to forces fighting these terrorists on the ground"; to work with its partners for increasing its efforts to prevent and defeat ISIL; and "to provide humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians who have been displaced by this terrorist organisation".¹⁵ The Administration, probably fearing of domestic opposition to America getting into another overseas conflict after Afghanistan and the Iraq War, emphasised on the use of airstrikes against militant groups and training of the moderate opposition fighters in Syria. It also emphasised on Congressional approval and international support for fighting the emerging terrorist groups in the West Asia. He believed that in "each of these four parts of strategy, America will be joined by a broad coalition of partners".

In his State of the Union address in January 2015, Obama reiterated his

Administration's continued efforts to strengthen counterterrorism partnership and stressed on providing arms including drones to fight against terrorism. He said, "Instead of sending large ground forces overseas, we're partnering with nations from South Asia to North Africa to deny safe haven to terrorists who threaten America."¹⁶ In this context, he cited the example of Afghanistan to demonstrate the progress that it has made in reducing the number of American troops. He further stated that training of Afghan security forces helped them gradually taking over their nations security responsibility. He thus believed that by strengthening American relationship with regional countries, training of Afghan and Iraqi security forces, and providing military and economic aid will help reduce American costly troop's deployment in these two regions and will help effectively fighting the terrorist groups.

As part of the Obama Administration's effort to strengthen international cooperation against terrorism, it began "reengaging at the UN and in multilateral fora". It recognised UN's central "role in harnessing member states efforts to further international counterterrorism objectives".¹⁷ Under President Obama's leadership, the UN Security Council (UNSC) members unanimously passed resolution 2178 (2014) to address "the growing threat posed by terrorist" including ISIS and Al Qaeda.¹⁸ The resolution requires all the nations to stop the "recruiting, organising, transporting or equipping of individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning of, or participation in terrorist acts".¹⁹ It also calls for "disrupting financial support to foreign terrorist fighters" and urges the member nations "to improve international, regional, and sub regional cooperation" to counter the growing terrorist threats. President Obama applauding the resolution insisted that the measure "must be matched and translated into action" to have any effect. Obama also noted that "US intelligence agencies estimate over 15,000 foreign fighters from more than 80 nations" have travelled to Syria and "have joined terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda's affiliate, the Nusrah Front, and ISIL, which now threatens people across Syria and Iraq".²⁰ He said America is leading the fight, but it cannot do it alone. President Obama in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 further urged the international community to work together to defeat ISIS. He stressed that the United States "is prepared to work with any nation"²¹ to resolve the ongoing crises in the West Asian region. In November 2015, the UNSC unanimously adopted another resolution 2249 (2015) that determined the ISIS "constituted an 'unprecedented' threat to international peace and security" and called "upon member states with the requisite capacity to take 'all necessary measures' to prevent and suppress its terrorist acts".²²

Countering terrorist financing has also been a key element of the Obama

Administration's approach to terrorism. Most recently, the US Department of Treasury announced on September 29, 2015 that it has frozen the "assets or preventing banking transactions for 15 people deemed to be key facilitators for the Islamic State". This measure against the IS however may be far less effective "than [it was] against Al Qaeda because the Islamic State commands territory from which it extracts taxes, extortion fees, ransoms and other payments".²³ However, this could help "shut down some financing channels" which take place through "legitimate businesses".

Despite the Obama Administration's such evolving approaches, however, threats emanating from terrorist groups continue to remain a major security challenge for the US and regional countries. Moreover, the proportion of terrorist attacks has increased significantly worldwide. The recent attacks in Paris, where 129 people were killed, are clear proof of this.²⁴ At the same time, the Obama Administration continues to improve upon its counterterrorism strategy. While President Obama clearly acknowledges the limits of his Administration's strategy, it continues to stress upon developing new and better ideas and strategy to "degrade and ultimately destroy" terrorist groups like the ISIL. As he recently said, "Ideologies are not defeated with guns, they're defeated by better ideas – a more attractive and compelling vision."²⁵ He had also stressed that "in an age when ideas and images can travel the globe in an instant, our response to terrorism can't depend on military or law enforcement alone. We need all elements of national power to win a battle of wills, a battle of ideas".²⁶ He hopes this strategy will help his Administration to win in the battle of both ideas and the military that the Al Qaeda and ISIL pose in the 21st century.

Strategy in South Asia

President Barack Obama inherited the United States' war on terrorism in South Asia where his Administration renewed the American approach to achieve the goal of establishing a stable and successful Afghan Government by defeating terrorism in the region.²⁷ In this endeavour, President Obama unveiled *A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan* on March 27, 2009 which aimed to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and its safe havens".²⁸ The strategy came out after two months of careful "interagency strategic review".²⁹ Obama said that more American troops, civilian officials, and money will be required for implementing this strategy. He also stressed that the US will seek support from its allies and partners for additional help. He added that Afghan security forces will be trained and they will finally take over their own national security responsibility. This new approach intended to be more "flexible and adoptive" and it set the benchmarks to measure progress on a periodic basis which "included frequent evaluations of the progress being made".³⁰

Through this new strategy President Obama tried to separate his Administration's approach from that of the Bush Administration's which he described as "years of unfocused, failed policy" that directed American attention and resources towards Iraq. He had vowed to shift the US focus from Iraq to Afghanistan and to develop a good relationship with the Pakistani Government and Army for achieving its regional goals. Believing that developments in Pakistan are "inextricably linked" to success in Afghanistan, Obama "pledged support for a new \$7.5 billion aid package, new military equipment, and a constancy and concentration of effort".³¹ He viewed Pakistan's capacity to eliminate the terrorist safe havens within is "tied to its own strength and security." He however stated that the US "will not, and cannot, provide a blank check. Pakistan must demonstrate its commitment to rooting out Al Qaeda and the violent extremists within its borders."³² So far the US has given over \$30 billion security and non-security assistance to Pakistan under various programmes since the 9/11 incident.³³ The US officials have justified this assistance on the grounds that "they secure Pakistan's ongoing cooperation in Afghanistan, bolster Pakistan's ability to fight terrorism, and give the US Government influence over the country's ever-expanding nuclear weapons programme."³⁴ However, Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden's killing in May 2011 inside Pakistani Garrison town, Abbottabad, raised fundamental questions about the seriousness of Pakistan's support to the US and the importance of US-Pakistan relations. Serious questions were also raised about the logic of the United States continued aid strategy to accomplish its regional goals vis-à-vis Pakistan as the later continues to maintain close ties with extremist groups, follows strategic depth strategy in Afghanistan, and uses American resources to counter India's growing regional prominence.³⁵

As part of his new Af-Pak strategy, Obama had also promised to increase troop's deployment in Afghanistan, in addition to providing hundreds of civilian and diplomats for helping improve Afghanistan's governance and economy. As a result, in December 2009, he announced a surge of 30,000 troops, along with plans to begin withdrawing the reinforcements in 18 months which was seen as a potentially high-risk political and military strategy.³⁶ According to the December 2014 *Congressional Research Service (CRS)* report, "There were 32,800 US troops on the ground in Afghanistan when Obama entered office" in January 2009 which increased to 98,000 by September 2010.³⁷ Obama had said that this troop surge would help accomplish its mission of defeating Al Qaeda, "reversing the Taliban's momentum and denying" them "the ability to overthrow the Government".³⁸ While the troop surge increased American casualties, its mission in the region remained unaccomplished.³⁹ Consequently, the Administration increasingly relied on drone strikes and subsequently accelerated attacks on militant groups in western Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, President Obama publicly announced for

tightening rules and oversight on the use of drone strikes, but “he secretly approved a waiver giving the CIA more flexibility in Pakistan than anywhere else to strike suspected militants”.⁴⁰ This increased the civilian death rates and anti-Americanism grew inside Pakistan, especially after the US commandos killed Osama Bin Laden in a covert military operation, code-named Operation Neptune Spear. Though the support for the drones still remains strong across the US Government, the growing civilian deaths “have renewed a debate within the Administration over whether the CIA should now be reined in or meet the tighter standards that apply to drone” programmes outside of Pakistan.⁴¹

In an effort aiming at complete withdrawal of American troops from the region by the end of 2014, the Obama Administration had also begun peace talks with Taliban in 2012 in coordination with the Afghan Government. The peace talks came after the Administration shifted its initial goal of establishing a stable and successful Afghan Government to an acceptable Afghanistan. President Obama, addressing the nation from the Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, had said, “We’re pursuing a negotiated peace. In coordination with the Afghan Government, my Administration has been in direct discussions with the Taliban.”⁴² He stressed that “they (Taliban) can be a part of this future if they break with Al Qaeda, renounce violence and abide by Afghan laws”.⁴³ Since then the Taliban and Afghan leaders often indicated their interest in this peace talks and reconciliation process to address the terrorist and security problems in Afghanistan. However, given the Taliban’s brutal and authoritarian rule in 1990s and its barbaric vision, any negotiated peace agreement with it would most likely fail and will leave Afghanistan and the neighbouring region in a dangerous security situation.

Nevertheless, after the rise of ISIS in Iraq and the failure of its troop’s withdrawal strategy, the Obama Administration signed a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the new Afghan President, Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, to allow American troops to stay in the country post-2014. “Under the agreement, 12,000 foreign military personnel” were “expected to stay after 2014, when the combat mission of Afghanistan’s US-led NATO force ends”. The force was “expected to be made up of 9,800 US troops with the rest from other NATO members”.⁴⁴ In 2015, the administrated reiterated to maintain this troops level beyond 2016. Thus, unlike the earlier US decision of complete drawdown of forces, this diminished troop’s deployment somehow would help Afghanistan fight against terrorism, and help restore peace and stability in the region.

President Obama also emphasised his Administration’s plans to bring together “all who should have a stake in the security of the region”, including India, China, Iran and Russia, “as part of a new international contact group”.⁴⁵ As a result, India has significantly contributed to the Afghanistan’s reconstruction process and has provided it with over \$ 2 billion civilian assistance. Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's recent inauguration of the Indian-built Afghan Parliament is another sign of India's continued commitment to rebuild the Afghanistan.⁴⁶ Identifying terrorism, narcotics and extremism as "serious challenges", Prime Minister Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in their December 2015 joint statement said that "peace in Afghanistan required elimination of terrorism perpetrated and supported from sanctuaries and safe havens".⁴⁷ In the joint statement, Prime Minister Modi "reiterated India's full support to Afghanistan for strengthening its defensive capabilities for preserving Afghanistan's unity and territorial integrity and ensuring security". Earlier his government took an important step towards operationalising the 2011 India-Afghanistan "strategic partnership agreement by deciding to deliver four Russia-made Mi-25 attack helicopters" to the Afghan National Army.⁴⁸ This is expected to boost Afghan's capability against Taliban terrorists. The decision came "against the backdrop of growing resentment in Afghanistan about Pakistani military establishment's unwillingness to change its strategic agenda vis-à-vis Afghanistan".⁴⁹ However, the prevailing security threats in the South Asian region pose serious challenges for India and greatly affect its ability to play larger role beyond this region. India's growing investment in Afghanistan's reconstruction process has also "aroused immense Pakistani suspicion and since many of the terrorist groups operating" in the region have ties to the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) or Army, "they are poised to strike at Indian interests in Afghanistan or directly against India. This remains the case despite signs of improvement in bilateral Indo-Pakistani relations". In this regard, Stephen Blank, senior fellow at the American Foreign Policy Council, has rightly stated, "Without a US presence in Afghanistan, the challenges to India to sustain its investment there in the face of declining Western support, continuing terrorism, and Pakistani machinations multiply."⁵⁰

In this evolutionary juncture, while the Obama Administration has been making efforts to discount Pakistan's security concerns vis-à-vis India, it has significantly improved its relations with India by balancing its relationship with both the countries. The India-US relationship has in fact transformed into a global partnership based on their shared interests on bilateral, regional and global issues. The relationship is now broad-based and multi-sectoral, which covers almost the entire gamut of human endeavour including trade and investment, defence and security, counterterrorism, high-technology, civil nuclear, space technology, cyber security, clean energy, environment, education, agriculture and health.⁵¹ During President Obama's three day historic visit to India in January 2015 to participate in the Indian Republic Day celebration, he declared along with Prime Minister Modi to build a strong India-US defence and security relationship in the 21st century. Importantly, in the January 2015 joint statement identifying terrorism as a major security challenge, the two sides for the first time officially

asked Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks to justice. They also stressed the need for joint and concerted efforts to disrupt terror entities including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), D Company and the Haqqani Network which have their roots in Pakistan.⁵² This reflected the two countries growing counterterrorism cooperation and their changed approach to defeat the menace. The Washington now recognises the immense opportunities that the US and India have in further advancing their relationship. It believes that a robust relationship will benefit the people of the two nations and also positively shape the peace, stability and security of the South Asian region and the world at large. At the same time, it sees the necessity of engaging with Pakistan for attaining its goal of stabilising Afghanistan, fighting against Al Qaeda and Taliban, and countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This objective assessment of the intrinsic value of each country to the US strategic interests has led to completely differentiated approaches towards India and Pakistan.⁵³ Considering the history of troubled relationship between India and Pakistan, the US now maintains a fine balance in its strategic engagement with the two countries and encourages both sides to develop a good relationship for the benefit of the people of South Asia. However, it rules out playing any mediating role to resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries including Kashmir and cross-border terrorism.⁵⁴ It states that it is up to India and Pakistan to decide the course of their relationship. This approach has helped the US in strengthening its relationship with both the countries simultaneously.

In the meantime, Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, during his October 2015 visit to the US, agreed “to take effective action against UN-designated terrorist individuals and entities, including Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and its affiliates, as per its international commitments and obligations under UNSC resolutions and the Financial Action Task Force”.⁵⁵ In this regard, the Pakistani Government has recently taken some counterterrorism measures, including military actions against the terrorist groups in the North Waziristan and banned media coverage of terrorist groups.⁵⁶ It has also announced a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP) to crack down on terrorism by preventing terrorist financing and creating a dedicated counterterrorism force.⁵⁷ The NAP came after the deadly Peshawar school attack in which Taliban killed nearly 150 people, mostly school children.⁵⁸

In spite of such recent efforts by the Pakistani Government, serious doubts still persist because Pakistani leaders had made such promises and farcical efforts in the past, too, but they failed to take action against terrorist groups operating inside its territory. Probably this could be the main reason behind the US Congress' introduction of a new spending bill in December 2015, which requires “all military aide and coalition support fund to Pakistan subject to separate certifications by

the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence". The bill states that both Secretary of State and Defence Secretary need to certify that the Pakistani Government is cooperating with the US "in counterterrorism efforts against the Haqqani Network, the Quetta Shura Taliban, LeT, JeM, Al Qaeda and other domestic and foreign terror groups. They also need to certify that Pakistan is taking steps to end support for such groups and prevent them from basing and operating in Pakistan and carrying out cross border attacks into neighbouring countries".⁵⁹ Though "the bill does not specifically mention any country", but India and Afghanistan have often "accused Pakistan of having terrorist safe havens that indulge in cross border terrorism".

Therefore, despite such measures by the Obama Administration, terrorism originating from the Af-Pak region remains one of the biggest challenges for the US and regional countries and continues to pose serious threats to region's peace, stability and security. According to the *2015 Index of US Military Strength*, it remains an "elevated" threat to the United States' vital interests.⁶⁰ Most importantly, over the years, Pakistan's selective approach has been a big challenge for the US in removing terrorism from the region. For instance, while the Pakistan Army took actions against Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants in North Waziristan after the militants attacked the Peshawar Army School, it released "Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the LeT mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks" that killed 166 people, including six Americans. Such double standards continue to pose serious threats to American national security goals in the region. As Lisa Curtis, senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation in her recent article, has rightly pointed out, "So long as Pakistan's military allows groups that follow an extremist Islamist ideology to operate freely, they make their territory an environment in which global terrorism can flourish."⁶¹

In addition, the potential threat of ISIS getting foothold in South Asia is ever increasing with its growing appeal and influence. The ISIS leader, Al-Baghdadi, "has openly proclaimed" its "intention to expand eastwards to establish the Islamic state of Khorasan" that would include Afghanistan, Pakistan, eastern Iran and the Central Asian Republics.⁶² On September 25, 2015, the UN Al Qaeda monitoring team released a report that indicated the IS was gaining influence in Afghanistan. The UN report also said that the Afghan security forces estimated about 10 per cent of Taliban militants to be IS "sympathisers", and that IS had some form of "branding or sympathy" in about two-thirds of the country's provinces.⁶³ A day after the release of the UN report, on September 26, 2015, after the US, Afghan and Chinese officials led a high-level meeting on Afghan development and cooperation, a senior US State Department official commented that the US was concerned about the militant group's efforts to try to establish a stronghold in Afghanistan. The official said, "It is a newly emerging

threat ...It is unpredictable as yet how it might evolve. It is something that we are taking seriously.”⁶⁴ The meeting was held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in which Afghan Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah; Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi; and Secretary of State, John Kerry, participated. Secretary Kerry said that while Al Qaeda remains a threat in Afghanistan, “the presence of Daesh, ISIL, has brought a new and unprecedented element of risk” into an already “volatile environment”.⁶⁵

Strategy in West Asia

Following the Bush Administration's Iraq War and the revelation of the systematic “torture” of the terrorist suspects at the Guantanamo Bay prison, American reputations were tarnished in the West Asian region and the world. President Obama came to office with an ambitious foreign policy agenda to fix American failing West Asia policy and restore its leadership in the region. The Obama Administration believed that American “soft-power” tools including diplomacy, economic assistance, and strategic communications will help it gain regional support, especially from the Muslim countries. In an effort to “reach out to the Muslim world”, therefore, in his first interview as President, to *Al-Arabiyya*, Obama said, “The United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world, that the language we use has to be a language of respect.”⁶⁶ This was a clear break from the previous Bush Administration, which used the terms like “Islamofacism” and “crusade” that intensified tensions between the two sides. In his Cairo speech in June 2009, he further called for “a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect”.⁶⁷

Besides, President Obama redefined the United States' approach to terrorism by shifting focus from “war on terrorism” to “counterterrorism strategy”. The strategy primarily focused on the withdrawal of US troops, training and arming of local security forces, because the Bush Administration's intervention in Iraq and the military strategy to resolve the political and security problems including the rising terrorism post-Iraq War had worsened the region's security environment rather than improving it. As Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr. has rightly pointed out that America's “interventions worsened – not improved – the region's stability, politics, and prospects. “Our unmatched military prowess has not enabled us to impose our will in West Asia, in Eastern Europe, or elsewhere. The record of covert action at solving political problems in all of these regions has been no better.”⁶⁸ Therefore, addressing at the US Military Academy-West Point on May 28, 2014, President Obama reiterated that “US military action cannot be the only – or even primary – component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail”.⁶⁹

Consequently, he had slowed down the Bush Administration's forceful strategy of democracy promotion and issued executive orders to ban torture and to improve interrogation technics along with the announcement of closing the Guantanamo Bay prison. These initial measures by the Obama Administration had raised greater hope for improving ties between the US and the Muslim world and the security situation in the region.

Implementing his West Asia policy, President Obama announced on August 31, 2010 the end of combat operation in Iraq by stating that "the American combat mission in Iraq has ended. Operation Iraqi Freedom is over, and the Iraqi people now have lead responsibility for the security of their country".⁷⁰ By the end of 2011, the Obama Administration had withdrawn all US troops from the Iraq. However, the sudden rise of ISIS following the failure of the Arab Spring reversed the Obama Administration's West Asia policy. ISIS's spectacular success in early 2014 "is often blamed on the failure of the Obama Administration to secure American troops presence in Iraq beyond 2011", as keeping troops was very critical to secure peace and stability of the country in this volatile region. The ISIS quickly spread across the Iraq-Syria border claiming large areas of territory approximately 300,000 square kilometres and declared the formation of the Islamic State. They also captured a large quantity of American made M1A1 tanks, vehicles, small arms and ammunition from the depleting Iraqi security forces and the Cold War-era weaponry built by the former Soviet Union from Syrian forces.⁷¹ These have actually enabled them to take and hold large areas of territory. Soon they spread their tentacles with new ideas of religious purity, freedom and equality in defying the Western-dominant ideas of religion, freedom and equality.

As mentioned earlier, President Obama has adopted a four-pronged strategy to prevent and defeat the ISIS/ISIL, i.e., conducting systematic airstrikes against the group; increasing support to forces fighting on the ground; strengthening ties with regional allies and partners for enhancing collective efforts against the group; and taking initiatives to provide humanitarian assistance to war displaced civilians. As part of an ongoing effort to "review and constantly strengthen" the Administration's strategy against the ISIS, President Obama further stressed at the Pentagon on December 14, 2015 that the Administration's "strategy is moving forward with a great sense of urgency on four fronts: hunting down and taking out these terrorists; training and equipping Iraqi and Syrian forces to fight ISIL on the ground; stopping ISIL's operations by disrupting their recruiting, financing and propaganda; and, finally, persistent diplomacy to end the Syrian civil war so that everyone can focus on destroying ISIL".⁷²

Obama also noted, while providing an update on the Administration's progress against the ISIS in Iraq and Syria, that the US-led international coalition forces have "launched nearly 9,000 airstrikes" against the group since the campaign

began in 2014 and the “number of bombs dropped in November 2015 was higher than any previous month”.⁷³ Meanwhile, the United States’ allies especially France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Australia and Canada have also conducted separate airstrikes to prevent and destroy the ISIS. These efforts have resulted in the ISIS losing about 40 percent of its controlled territory in Iraq, including Kirkuk province and Baiji, with its oil refinery. On December 28, 2015, the Iraqi forces retook most of Ramadi, the most populous city in western Iraq, from ISIS after a seven-month occupation.⁷⁴ ISIS has also “lost thousands of square miles of territory in Syria”, including Kobani and Tal Abyad. In addition, the US-led military airstrikes have killed key ISIS leaders, namely Abu Sayyaf, one of the ISIS’s top leaders; Haji Mutazz, group’s second-in command; and Junaid Hussain, a top online recruiter.⁷⁵ The Obama Administration believes that these ongoing efforts will ultimately degrade and defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

However, after Russia began airstrikes against ISIS in Syria at the end of September 2015, the security situation in the region further complicated and differences between the US and Russia widened. In a series of statements, President Obama and his Administration officials criticised Russia for not coordinating with the US-led coalition forces to fight against the ISIS and accused Russia of bolstering Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, by bombing moderate opposition forces, including al-Nusra Front –Al Qaeda’s franchise in Syria which has been trained and supported by the United States.⁷⁶ The US and its allies have been at odds with Russia both over Assad’s future and the Ukraine conflict. The differences have raised “questions about the precise nature of the Obama Administration’s ISIS strategy in Syria, with Republican leaders criticising the Administration for ceding the ground to Russia”. While Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman, John McCain, an Arizona Republican, said on the floor of the Senate that the Russian airstrikes are “the inevitable consequence of hollow words, red lines crossed, tarnished moral influence, leading from behind and a total lack of American leadership”, Republican Mac Thornberry, McCain’s counterpart on the House Armed Services Committee, echoed by saying, “What it looks like to me is the Administration is willing to just run out the clock...the world is spiralling increasingly out of control, and it doesn’t look like this White House is even wanting to do something about it.”⁷⁷

The US and Russia agree that the ISIS is common enemy, a severe threat to regional security, and that the civil war in Syria must have a political solution, but they have different allies and contrasting views on how to deal with these problems. The US and its allies oppose both ISIS and President Assad, accusing him for attacking the civilians that led to the radicalisation of the opposition. They insist that Assad has no place in a post-war settlement in Syria.⁷⁸ But Russia and its allies including Iran and Syria criticise Obama’s ISIS strategy as short-

sighted. Russia and Iran support the Assad government and want the post-war settlement to be decided by the people of Syria. But President Obama warned Russia and Iran, by saying, “An attempt by Russia and Iran to prop up Assad and try to pacify the population is just going to get them stuck in a quagmire and it won’t work.”⁷⁹ He has also played down international support for Russia’s strategy in Syria, saying his Administration has greater backing for its counter-ISIS strategy than the Russians.

Meanwhile, President Obama who had repeatedly refused to send American ground forces inside Syria over last four years, but on October 30, 2015, “ordered several dozen Special Operations troops into Syria for the first open-ended mission by United States ground forces”, deepening American involvement in an ongoing war. The White House officials have said that these troops would advise local forces fighting ISIS and will not play a direct combat role, but it has opened the possibility of sending more troops in the future. The deployment was “latest incremental step into the expanding conflict in Syria”. Obama has already “sent 3,500 American troops to Iraq”.⁸⁰ This decision came just weeks after Russia began airstrikes in Syria. The military move has further complicated the ongoing war in the Iraq-Syria border with diverse forces and sometimes unclear allegiances.

The Obama Administration however has been heavily relying on the drone strikes to combat ISIS which resulted in more civilian deaths and failed to destroy the terrorist elements in the region. The drone strategy had serious regional repercussions as more people with anger and frustration were attracted towards the ISIS ideology, and thousands of people joined the militant group. Explaining this precarious situation, four former US drone operators, in an open letter to President Obama in November 2015, said that the United States’ drone strikes in West Asia have fuelled “hatred towards the West and spurring the expansion of Islamist militant groups such as ISIS”. They asked President Obama to re-evaluate “his Administration’s use of drones, which critics say can engage innocent civilians and drive angry survivors into militancy”. However, the supporters of drone strikes against the ISIS argue that “they are highly accurate”, and “they spare American soldiers from the dangers of on-the-ground combat”.⁸¹

Amidst growing criticism of its West Asia policy, thus, the Obama Administration is vigorously trying to improve upon its West Asia counterterrorism “strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS and to achieve its goal of establishing peace, stability and security in the region which is critical for protecting and promoting American foreign policy interests. Though the US-led international coalition forces continue to strike against ISIS, the security situation in the region has been severely deteriorated. This has created gigantic international refugee crises with a massive humanitarian problem. In the meantime, while the Obama Administration is struggling to grapple with the situation, ISIS continues to attract

more young people from all over the world and is quickly spreading its tentacles across Asia and beyond.

Implications for India and India-US Relations

South and West Asia are very close to India and have great strategic significance for it. The two region's peace, stability and prosperity are closely connected with India's own progress. At present, however, the epicentre of global terrorism is located in these two sub-regions of Asia which pose enormous challenges to India. Though India has been fighting against this menace in the form of cross-border terrorism over the last three decades, the 9/11, 2001, attacks brought the US and other powers to the South Asian, and subsequently to the West Asian region after the Iraq War in 2003. Since then the US which is geographically isolated from the epicentre of global terrorism has been deeply involved in the two regions. And its evolving counterterrorism strategy has created wider regional ramifications and continues to shape India-US relations.

It is quite pertinent to mention here that India-US counterterrorism cooperation existed well before 9/11. As in the early 1980s, India and the US cooperated on counterterrorism when Sikh organisations such as Babbar Khalsa and Dal Khalsa started engaging in terror acts in India, including hijacking of aircraft. The US had shown greater sensitivity by extending security cooperation to fight against these groups.⁸² In 1990s, when Pakistani-based terrorist groups such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), the LeT, and the JeM frequently perpetrated violence across India, the US again played a critical role in de-escalating the India-Pakistan war over cross-border terrorism incidents. It may be recalled that most of these terrorist groups emerged during the Afghan war of the 1980s with the support of the US and Pakistan in order to combat Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan. The US stopped its support to these militant groups after the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1987. Pakistan, however, continued its tacit support to these terrorist groups by shifting their focus from Afghanistan to Jammu and Kashmir. Consequently, these forces have coordinated and executed numerous terrorist attacks in India.⁸³

In 1998, the near simultaneous terrorist attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, had raised serious security concerns for the United States. In Nairobi, where the US "embassy was located in a congested downtown area, the attack killed 291 persons and wounded about 5,000. The bombing in Dar-es-Salaam killed 10 persons and wounded 77".⁸⁴ These attacks led to a greater convergence of the US and Indian interests on counterterrorism cooperation. The US in particular began to pay greater attention towards international terrorism including Pakistan-based terrorist groups and their

support to these groups. For instance, the US Department of State's 1999 annual report on terrorist nations pointed out that "credible reports continued to indicate official Pakistani support for Kashmiri militant groups that engage in terrorism such as the HuM. The hijackers of the Air India Flight 814 reportedly belong to one of these militant groups. One of the HuM leaders, Maulana Massod Azhar, was freed from an Indian prison in exchange for the hostages on the aircraft in the Air India hijacking in December and has since returned to Pakistan".⁸⁵ The free reign given by the Pakistan Government to these militant groups augmented the perception of official Pakistani complicity in terrorism.⁸⁶ It was, however, the increasing threat of terrorism to US interests in South Asia and beyond that brought the two countries closer in building consensus on counterterrorism cooperation.

As a result, following the meetings between the then US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, and India's External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, in London, India and the US established their first Joint Work Group (JWG) on counterterrorism in January 2000. The JWG institutionalised an area of cooperation that had already existed between the two countries in the past. Then US President Bill Clinton's historic five-day visit to India in March 2000 was very significant in further expanding India-US counterterrorism cooperation. During the visit, then President Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee agreed to strengthen their joint efforts to counter the growing terrorist threats to their nations. Then Prime Minister Vajpayee's follow up visit to the US in September 2000 further helped improve counterterrorism cooperation. While addressing a joint session of the US Congress, Prime Minister Vajpayee had urged the "US to recognise that the South Asian region had become one of the greatest sources of terrorism in the world". He categorically said, "No country has faced as ferocious an attack of terrorist violence as India has over the past two decades: 21,000 were killed by foreign sponsored terrorists in Punjab alone, 16,000 have been killed in Jammu and Kashmir."⁸⁷ He added, "Distance offers no insulation. It should not cause complacency... that is why the United States and India have begun to deepen their cooperation for combating terrorism."⁸⁸

Since Vajpayee's September 2000 visit to the US, the world has witnessed a momentous change. The 9/11 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States' World Trade Centre (WTC) and the Pentagon were a watershed for post-Cold War international relations. India was one of the first countries to condemn the terrorist attacks and extended support to the US-led international coalition against terrorism. During the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, it provided all necessary logistic supports to the US. The December 13, 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament further proved the growing common challenge to their security which required urgent efforts from both the nations. These attacks

in fact led to a greater convergence of the US and Indian interests and they became natural partners against terrorism. Although India wanted the US-led international war on terrorism to be extended to eliminate terrorism inside Pakistani territory including Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), but this could not happen. However, India's political and diplomatic efforts led the US to openly recognise "the kind of terrorism that affects India".⁸⁹

The US soon recognised India as "a key partner in the global coalition against terrorism" which had to be "ended everywhere".⁹⁰ Its focus on terrorism was spelled out clearly in the Bush Administration's *National Security Strategy (NSS)* issued in 2002. The NSS proclaimed, "We share an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia."⁹¹ The US Department of State's 2004 *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report also recognised that India has suffered more "significant terrorist incidents" than many other countries.⁹² Another important aspect needs to be highlighted here is that India, despite having the second largest Muslim population in the world, never supported or became a base for any Al Qaeda recruitment, a fact which the US well recognises.⁹³

This shared perceptions of security threats from terrorism and the urgency felt by the two sides to address this growing challenge further strengthened the India-US counterterrorism cooperation. Counterterrorism cooperation has in fact emerged as an important dimension of their burgeoning strategic partnership in the last one-and-a-half decade. Since then the two sides have formalised their cooperation by establishing various bilateral mechanisms such as the JWG on counterterrorism to promote cooperation at the functional level; Cyber Terrorism Forum (CSF) to counter the unconventional nature of "cyber terrorism"; Defence Policy Group (DPG) to promote military-to-military cooperation for countering terrorism; Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative (CCI) to expand cooperation "on counter-terrorism, information sharing and capacity building"; and Homeland Security Dialogue (HSD) to further deepen operational cooperation, counterterrorism technology transfers and capacity building. They have also worked together closely on multilateral initiatives on counterterrorism including on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1373. Given the growing threat of terrorism to their economic and strategic interests in the two sub-regions of Asia, India and the US have clearly gained benefits by instituting these mechanisms which indeed helped enhance their counterterrorism cooperation. Besides, issues relating to terrorism have prominently figured in almost all bilateral dialogues, both at official and non-official levels.

The real strategic logic behind the emergence of India-US counterterrorism cooperation however lies with India's growing economic and military power and its geo-strategic significance to the US in Asia. As the global power began to shift rapidly from the West to Asia, the US has been increasingly dependent on Asian

markets for trade and investment to sustain and grow its own economy. In addition to the growing terrorist threats to American regional interests, assertive China has also challenged American primacy in the region. India is often seen as a counterbalance to the Chinese assertive rise in Asia.⁹⁴ The US strongly believes that India's rise with a stable democratic political system is in American interests and it contributes to maintain region's peace and security. The US expects India to play a leading role in addressing the emerging security challenges, by working along with its regional allies and partners to ensure peace and stability in the region. Because of this growing strategic significance of India to the United States' interests, the Obama Administration often says that India is a "defining" and "indispensable" strategic partner of the US in the 21st century.⁹⁵

Despite the expanding India-US counterterrorism cooperation and India's increasing strategic significance to the United States' larger geopolitical and geo-economic interests, significant differences remain with regard to United States' approach to terrorism. One of the key differences that impacts their relationship is defining terrorism. While the United States sees it as a global challenge, India is more concerned about the cross-border terrorism which it has been confronting over the last three decades. On a number of occasions, India has brought out this concern and insisted on defining terrorism at the earliest possible in order to take effective measures to counter this threat. For instance, on the 70th anniversary of UN, India's Prime Minister Modi urged the UN and international community to define terrorism soon in order to fight against it. Modi said, "Since there is no definition, talk about good terrorism and bad terrorism is going on. We cannot protect humanity with this good and bad terrorism".⁹⁶ He added, "Terrorism is terrorism." Condemning the recent terror attacks in Paris as an attack on humanity, he reiterated to the UN to define terrorism before it was too late so that it became clear who was siding with terrorism and who was fighting the menace.⁹⁷ Speaking at the G20 summit on November 15, 2015, he urged President Obama and other "G20 leaders to urgently adopt a comprehensive convention on international terrorism and called for restructuring the international legal framework to deal with" the challenge. Modi said, "We must isolate those who support and sponsor terrorism; and, stand with those who share our values of humanism."⁹⁸ In addition, he called for increasing international cooperation on intelligence sharing and strengthening efforts to prevent supply of arms to terrorists, disrupt terrorist movements, and curb and criminalise terror financing.

The two countries views on the root of terrorism also impact India and the India-US relations. While India sees Pakistan as the root of the terrorist problem, the US views Pakistan as a key ally in its counterterrorism strategy.⁹⁹ "Pakistan's support, at the Government level at least, for the United States' war against terrorism" has also been affecting the evolving India-US relations time and again.

The US in its war against terrorism has thus “not only accepting the support of a state, India has been asking to be declared” a terrorist state, but the US economic and military aid to the Pakistan is a major cause of concern for it.¹⁰⁰ In spite of the United States’ changed perceptions towards the Pakistani-based terrorist groups and its recognition of the threat posed by these groups to India as well as regional security, differences still persist between the two countries on this issue.

The impending international troops’ withdrawal from Afghanistan is another major concern for India and could seriously affect India-US relations. It is especially worried about the post-troops’ withdrawal developments in Afghanistan and its security implications for India. In case of Iraq, it was clearly witnessed that the Obama Administration’s complete troops’ withdrawal not only helped the ISIS to capture large territories but they also seized significant numbers of American and Russian-made semi-automatic rifles, apart from heavier weapons like M1A1 tanks, anti-tank HEAT, and shoulder-fired anti-tank rockets from the Iraqi as well as Syrian forces. After analysing “thousands of videos and images taken in Iraq and Syria”, Amnesty International in its December 2015 report “determined that a large proportion of ISIS’ current military arsenal is made up of ‘weapons and equipment looted, captured or illicitly traded from poorly secured Iraqi military stocks’”.¹⁰¹ “Much the same situation might arise in Afghanistan after the departure” of US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). According to reports, significant numbers of tanks, “vehicles, small arms and ammunition will be left behind as they are prohibitively costly to ship back to the United States. Much of this materiel might find its way into India via terrorist groups operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, but with interests in Kashmir”.¹⁰² India and the US need to hold regular dialogues on this issue to address its current and future implications.

Most importantly, India is increasingly worried about the ongoing war against the terrorist groups in the greater West Asian region and its fall out on India’s oil imports and the security “of seven million Indian citizens living in the region”.¹⁰³ Currently, a major portion of its oil imports come from this region. Iraq and Saudi Arabia are the largest suppliers of oil to India.¹⁰⁴ The US intervention in Iraq; rise of militant extremism and ISIS; and the follow-up US-led coalition airstrikes against the groups have created instability and political rivalry in the region with potential threat to India’s energy security. India is also extremely concerned about the security of its large diaspora living in the region. In 2014, India evacuated over 100 nurses trapped in the conflict zone north of Baghdad.¹⁰⁵ In addition, though both India and the US recognise ISIS as a major terrorist organisation and its growing threat to regional peace and stability, there are differences in their approaches to address this threat. Particularly, the United States’ unilateral military actions against ISIS have led to negative consequences,

even though it has contained the group's further expansion for now.¹⁰⁶ Though the US would like India to join its allies in the ongoing war against ISIS, which poses long-term security threat to India as well, India would rather prefer to address this menace through a comprehensive approach involving all the concerned regional and extra-regional countries under the UN initiative.

Moreover, the terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda are propagating their ideas of religious purity, freedom and equality to counter the cultural and political dominant ideas of the Western countries, especially that of the United States. It would be very difficult to defeat these ideas by the Obama Administration's current military strategy of bombing, training opposition forces and providing them military equipment. This calls for new ideas to defeat them. As the country with the second largest Muslim population in the world, India is also worried about the eruption of sectarian conflict between the Shias and Sunnis in the region and its likely implications. Though Prime Minister Modi during his first visit to the US in September 2014 had said Indian Muslims adhere to a "non-violent tradition",¹⁰⁷ but its fall out on India looms large.

Lastly, the Obama Administration seeks to extricate itself from the South and West Asia conflicts to focus on its Asia rebalancing strategy where India is seen as "lynchpin". During President Obama's historic January 2015 visit to India, the two sides signed an important "Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" for expanding their cooperation in the emerging Indo-Pacific region. Modi Government's current "Act East Policy" to India's earlier "Look East Policy" is also complementing more with the Obama's rebalancing strategy. Both sides look to proactively engage with the regional countries. This requires shifting of the United States' focus and resources towards this emerging region. However, the growing security crisis in these two regions has wider repercussions including implementing its rebalancing strategy.¹⁰⁸

The Way Ahead

After years of fight against the terrorist groups, the Obama Administration is yet to accomplish its core objectives of defeating terrorism and restoring American leadership in both the South and West Asian regions. Its counterterrorism strategy of training security forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, arming them with weapons and drones, providing airstrikes and financial support from time to time and withdrawing American troops have not worked against the terrorist groups in both the regions. There is need of a long-term strategy and concerted international efforts to "degrade, dismantle and ultimately destroying" the terrorist groups. Besides winning in the battle of ideas and military, a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy also requires long-term commitment to help the civilian governments to succeed in providing basic governance. Given the current security

situation in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the US needs to make such a long-term commitment and presence to defeat terrorism.

So far as the India-US counterterrorism cooperation is concerned, both countries have been confronting the challenge of terrorism which poses serious threats to their economic development, terrorises citizens and their way of life. The two countries have shared views and common interests to counter terrorism. They have institutionalised the counterterrorism cooperation by establishing various bilateral mechanisms, and they also support the regional and international efforts to combat terrorism. And, yet they need to work more closely for developing a common strategy to counter the growing threat of terrorism to their shared interests. The two sides not only need to urgently define terrorism and its roots, but they have to strengthen their policy and operational cooperation.

In this regard, deepening their bilateral defence and intelligence cooperation is very significant. Though the two sides have come a long way in developing their defence cooperation since the 9/11 attacks, they further need to enhance counterterrorism skills and capacity building through joint military exercise, military training and intelligence sharing. After the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks, threats coming from the sea have also increased. It is thus highly imperative that both India and the US cooperate in strengthening their coastal security as well, and the latter can share its advanced technology with India in building a robust coastal security system. There is also great opportunity for Indian defence forces to learn from the US Marines and the Special Forces who have acquired counterterrorism skills in their decade-long deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁰⁹ As an emerging world power, India also has a vital role to play in addressing the terrorist challenge in the two regions. It can provide logistic support wherever possible, intelligence information and its long experience in dealing with terrorism. It can further contribute to both regions' peace, stability and prosperity by greater economic and diplomatic engagement.

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CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Terrorism and Unrest in Xinjiang: Drivers, Policies and External Linkages

Avinash Godbole and Gunjan Singh

Introduction

In the recent history of China's ongoing conflict against Uighur extremism, 2014 was arguably the most violent year. The fact that more people died in that year's violent incidents than during the 2009 riots amply attest to the significance of the new wave of violent extremism in Xinjiang. Therefore, there is a need to take a closer look at incidents of extremist violence and state response in Xinjiang. In the 2009 riots, the total number of deaths according to official estimates stood at 197. The total number of deaths during 2013 was 110, whereas in 2014 it was above 308. And this trend of increased violence continued in 2015 as well. It was in 2014 that international terrorism in the form of the Islamic State (IS) movement began to peak, and China also claimed that there was some impact of developments in Iraq and Syria within its restive northwestern province. The year was unique in terms not only of the number of incidents and the number of deaths but also in terms of the nature of violence seen in Xinjiang.

Usually in Xinjiang, except for the two early incidents of small-scale bus bombings in 1992 and 1997, the nature of violence by extremist groups was in the form of attacks on the security or some other state establishment. However, in 2014, violent incidents looked more and more like terrorism experienced elsewhere as it targeted ordinary citizens without ethnic identification and without establishing their direct connection with the Chinese State. The increasing number of suicide attacks aimed at mass killings and destruction attest to this changing nature of conflict in Xinjiang. Recent reports by independent media suggest 50

deaths in a terrorist attack on a coalmine residential quarters in Aksu on September 18, 2015, which would make it the biggest terrorist incident in terms of number of casualties at a single location.¹ The victims in this attack have mostly been the ethnic Han mine workers.

This paper looks at how the extremist element of the ethnic insurgent movement has transformed into terrorism, the possible factors for this transformation and the components of the Chinese State's strategy in dealing with the new forms of terrorism.

While the radical elements in the Uighur society were largely on the fringe until 2009, the Chinese State's excessive focus on stability has created more number of sympathisers for the radical elements. At the same time, state's social tactics like advisories during Ramadan have limited people's freedom of practising their faith in an *autonomous* region and further increased the sense of alienation among the Uighur society.² However, the Chinese State officials do not agree with this notion and see the developments in Xinjiang in line with the general global trend of rise in extremism.³ Further, scholars also believe that China's engagement with the global community, its normalisation as a rising power and the alignment of its interests with that of the US on the issue of anti-terrorism have made it a target of a global nexus of terrorism that supports the Uighur separatism in Xinjiang, which was not the case before 9/11. Moreover, China thus far not being a rule-maker of global stature was not perceived as being a symbol of injustice or discrimination like the US was. With its increasing stake, China is now seen as part of the multilateral system against which the international terrorism nexus operates.⁴ It is argued that "the signs of China's emergence as a power increase its symbolic value as a target of a major international terrorist attack".⁵ Thus, it can be observed that the Xinjiang challenge operates at two levels: The first is at the social level, which marks the tensions between the Hans and Uighurs, and also a genuine peaceful resistance that demands solutions to issues like environmental degradation, impacts of nuclear testing and storage, unequal access to meaningful employment, religious freedom, freedom from excess surveillance and policing, unlawful detentions and kangaroo justice. The second is the challenge of terrorism that is inspired by the Taliban and the Islamic State movement.

Situating Xinjiang

At the outset, it is interesting to note that the largest number of Muslim community in China is not Uighurs but the Hui Muslims. The number of Hui is estimated to be 11 million whereas the number of Uighurs is nearly 10 million according to official records.⁶ While the Uighurs are located in the Xinjiang province, the Hui are inhabitants of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. While the Hui predominantly speak the Mandarin, Uighurs speak the Turkic language.

Whereas the social interaction between Hui and Han Chinese nationals is largely normal and not subject to biases, Uighurs tend to face the prejudice of being viewed as thieves and hotheads leading to their lack of adequate interaction with the Han Chinese. The traditional Chinese name of Islam is *Huijiao*, which literally translates as “the religion of the Hui people”. Xinjiang, on the other hand, translates as “new frontier”. This difference of interpretation is symbolic of the distinct fates of the two different Muslim nationalities in China.⁷ The Hui narrative differs from the Uighur in terms of territoriality; that the Han Chinese *occupied* a mass of land belonging to some other ethnicity is somewhat understandable in case of the Uighur narrative and not in case of the Hui. Comparing Hui and Uighur ethnicities also helps overcome the commonly stated narrative that “China’s regime is Islamophobic” because the state’s response to two different kinds of Islamic identities is diverse and born of concerns over territoriality and secessionism and not due to lack of understanding of the religion as such.⁸

The Chinese State’s relation with Xinjiang and its Islam can be mapped through three distinct phases. In the first phase, marked by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Xinjiang’s mosques, community centres and cultural and historic relics were destroyed during this phase of elimination of the old.⁹ However, what is important to note is that there was no violent backlash since the Uighur identity was not seen as being hurt in the clash, which was essentially against those labelled as class enemies.¹⁰

Equally opposite practice was undertaken during the Deng era. In Xinjiang, the religious practices were revived with state support during the 1980s. Mosques destroyed only a decade earlier were rebuilt and new places of religious learning were created and the religious elites disgraced earlier were restored, compensated and institutionalised within the party hierarchy.¹¹ Yat Sun argues, that as the religious elites were restored, the importance of religious teachings as well as the social influence of these elites rose exponentially.¹² Soon after the state relaxed its policies on the usage of Arabic language, private madrasas followed and strengthened the religious aspect within the Uighur identity, which was in turn bolstered when the Central Asian “stans” were created in the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration.

In the same period, Salafism/Wahhabism¹³ also entered Xinjiang through the literature from across the borders, from the increasing Haj visits from the region and the Gulf money that came in for the religious schools and madrasas.¹⁴ The first wave of violence in the early 1990s, in which local imams and government officials were killed in targeted attacks, has been attributed to Wahhabism’s clash with the more accommodative practices.¹⁵ Revival of the same trend can be seen in cases like the assassination of Jume Tahir in July 2014, discussed later in more

detail. Also, it was only in the aftermath of this phase that Uighur extremists began training alongside the Taliban mujahedeen ranks in its early stage. Thus, the open-door policy of the Deng era exposed the Uighur youth to the extremist ideologies.

However, following Xinjiang's first major ethnic riots, in April 1990, in a town called Baren in which 130 people were killed according to official estimates, religious clampdown began.¹⁶ More than 7,600 Uighurs were detained subsequently. The state took over the process of religious education and began appointing imams for all the mosques. Continuous patrolling in sensitive areas began. Understanding with universities and madrasas in Egypt and Pakistan and more than 10,000 scholars trained abroad came under constant supervision of the security agencies.¹⁷ China's strike hard campaign that began in 1996 in the aftermath of this episode was the first systemic response to the spread of extremism. Since then the Chinese State in Xinjiang has resembled the notion of a security-state, with central focus of the state's language being on stability, harmony and peace and development.¹⁸ Moreover, since then it has used the carrot-and-stick policy: offering development and progress, on one hand, and surveillance, policing and a quick fix justice system of summary judgments and executions, on the other hand.

One important feature of the recent development in Xinjiang has been a distinct Arabisation of the Uighur society. There are two examples of this trend. The first indicates that while the Uighur women did not commonly wear a black burqa earlier, instead using multi-colour headscarves, in the last decade, the number of women using burqa has increased exponentially. Further, when in December 2014 authorities banned the use of burqa in public places in Urumqi, calling it "non-local attire", it was met with protests as this move was seen as a curb on the people's religious freedom.¹⁹ Burqa while being non-Uighur in origin, also represents a failure of the Chinese State's assimilationist project in Xinjiang; the more the Chinese State pushes for harmony, the stronger grows the response of an independent Uighur identity. The second trend, with the introduction of Salafism, was the segregation of the Uighur and Han hotels from mid-1990s onwards. Because of religious pressures, Uighurs gradually gave up eating in Han restaurants because those served pork, and the ones who still ate there were looked down upon.²⁰

Thus, it can be seen that the state's push for assimilation was met with equally powerful and opposite backlash in form of conservatism at the social level. It is interesting to note that unlike Xinjiang, there are no government-issued advisories during Ramadan in Hui-dominant regions. Similarly, while Hui Muslims increasingly travel to Haj, travelling abroad is not as easy for ordinary Uighurs.

Within the Xinjiang conflict various strands of human tragedy can be located

and the fate of two individuals, sealed as it was in the last couple of decades, exemplifies the expanse of that tragedy. The first of the two individuals is Jume Tahir, the government-appointed Imam of China's largest mosque, the Id Kah mosque in Kashgar, who was stabbed to death on July 30, 2014, and the second is Professor Ilham Tohti, faculty at the Economics department, Minzu University, Beijing, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in September 2014 for inciting separatism.

Jume Tahir was one of the government-appointed Imams who took government line and stressed on stability and peace in the period when advisories to eat well and stay healthy were also doing rounds during the month of Ramazan. Tahir was described as a "patriotic religious person".²¹ Tahir's assassination happened exactly two days after the violence in Yarkand/Sache County in the neighbourhood, which reportedly began as protests against the Ramadan directive and against the alleged killing of a family of five a few days earlier. Tahir used to be frequently quoted by the Chinese media for denouncing "separatism" and the use of violence. He had also supported the government's harsher policies since the 2009 riots, which had in turn made him quite unpopular in the province.²²

Ilham Tohti had earlier researched on Xinjiang and said that unemployment among the youth was the biggest cause of the dissent in the region. He had also added that while 1.2 million jobs were available in the province, most of those went to migrants. He had suggested to the state to ensure that more locals were employed ahead of migrants. He had also called for the inclusion of the Uighur intellectuals in the governance and decision-making process.²³ In the immediate aftermath of the Urumqi riots in 2009, Tohti had questioned the credentials of the provincial governor, Nur Bekri, calling him incompetent and appealed the central government to listen to the people of Xinjiang on what they wanted instead of listening to the provincial government alone. While other public intellectuals went underground in this phase, Tohti's outburst led to his detention in the aftermath of the riots; however, he was released a few weeks later. However, he was again arrested in January 2014, and in September 2014, a Xinjiang court found him guilty of inciting separatism and he was sentenced to life imprisonment, his property and bank accounts were also confiscated²⁴ Tohti's sentencing was criticized by the international media and human rights advocacy groups. However, it has had no effect on China's policy.

While China could possibly have used Tohti's advice well in recasting the economic picture of the region, perhaps also using his expertise and goodwill as a bridge across the ethnic divide since what he was doing was nothing more than constructive criticism, his sentencing shows that there is little scope for dissent even through dialogue and discourse. Tohti can be seen as a victim of China's stability first approach as far as its border regions are concerned. Chinese media,

on the other hand, compared the sentencing against Ilham Tohti as being at par with the bombings against IS; one article in *Xinhua* argued,

(The) accusations against the court's ruling came as the warplanes of the United States and its allies bomb the 'Islamic State' militants in their anti-terrorism war. China's painstaking efforts to eradicate the three evil forces of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism in Xinjiang should have been viewed as part of the world's anti-terrorism endeavors. Ilham Tohti should have been denounced as a criminal threatening the peace and stability of a country.²⁵

Elements of China's Anti-terrorism Policy

Evolution of the Policy: China's anti-terrorism policy has evolved over the years – from supporting extremist regimes and organisations in the name of revolution to a more nuanced and balanced approach.²⁶ Two drivers – first, concerns over the deteriorating domestic scenario and second the stake as a responsible great power – have led to this change of policy.²⁷ The anti-terrorism policy also helped broker peace between the US and China in the aftermath of the Hainan EP3 incident, as China firmly supported the global war on terror led by the US. Anti-terror cooperation was perhaps the first Chinese positive response to the calls of becoming a more responsible power. Thus, China managed to benefit, in that it got the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and other such organisations banned or blacklisted across the world and earned global sympathy as a victim of terrorism during a period when the Xinjiang scenario looked more like unrest rather than rebellion or terrorism.

Improved Internal Security Budgets: It is interesting to note that China's internal security budget surpassed its declared national defence budget in 2011, and this continues in 2015 as well. The former was \$154.2 billion, while the latter \$144.2 billion. The two budgets were up by 11.4 and 10.7 percentages, respectively, from previous years. The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) government doubled its public security bureau's budget in 2014 to CN¥2 billion. The total budget for public security stood at CN¥6.1 billion.²⁸ Before this, the biggest raise in the total budget for public security apparatus was in 2010 when it was raised from CN¥1.54 billion to 2.89 billion, which was nearly 90 percent increase over the previous year.²⁹ That year's budget raise was in the aftermath of the 2009 Urumqi riots. What experts argue is that this is leading to militarisation of policing in Xinjiang with the People's Armed Police (PAP) being deployed across China at 40 airports, 170 train stations, 130 entry and exit points and 150 high-priority locations.³⁰ PAP is actively present in Xinjiang's every city, town and county. In addition, the PAP is bigger not only in terms of numbers but also better equipped, mobile and coordinated as a consequence of the drastic increase in budgetary provisions. For example, many PAP units now have rapid

response tactical assault units (RTU), armoured personnel carriers (APC), and armoured riot-control and patrolling vehicles.³¹ It was recently announced that Beijing is now covered entirely by a web of surveillance cameras and a similar process is underway in other mega cities.³² However, this heightened *weiwen* or stability management strategy has its critics, and rightly so. Experts like Xi Chen argue that while it may improve the management of short-term challenges, it would create grave long-term challenges for the regime.³³ This is likely to be true especially in minority provinces like Xinjiang or Tibet where more sensitivity may be required.

Media and Information Control: Terrorism thrives on publicity; the burning Taj Hotel dome and plane crashing into the World Trade Centre are the first memories that come to mind when one thinks of 26/11 and 9/11, respectively. Media control has been one of the strong pillars of China's anti-terrorism policy. China has strict controls over search engines as such, but it's even stricter in Xinjiang. In case of media reportage as well, China has consistently attempted to ensure suffocation of the news of terrorist attacks. Even when news of a terrorist attack is reported in the state media, focus is on the courage and sacrifice shown by the security forces.³⁴ To some extent, this policy may be working in favour of the Chinese State. However, the problem is that the canvas gets painted by the same broad brush as Internet blockades, SMS restrictions and overt and covert surveillance tend to increase the sense of control and alienation among those who do not necessarily support terrorist organisations and activities.

In June 2014, CCTV released a documentary made with the support of the State Internet Information Office. This documentary argued that the perpetrators of recent attacks in China had all watched propaganda videos made by the IS and that the ETIM itself was making and sharing video and audio clips that aimed to educate on making bombs and carrying out terrorist attacks.³⁵ The press statement released alongside the documentary begins by saying, "If terrorism is threatening the world like a cancer, online videos and audio promoting terrorism are like cordial that speeds up the growth of the cancer."³⁶ It also cites the example of the perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombing who learnt the bomb-making techniques watching online propaganda videos. Controlling and monitoring the patterns of Internet access in Xinjiang has been one of the important strategies of the government towards identifying potential terrorists. In this regard, during the second central works conference on Xinjiang, President Xi Jinping gave a call for "spreading the net from the earth to the sky" for an effective anti-terrorism policy implementation in Xinjiang.³⁷

Role of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC): According to the White Paper on XPCC,

It is a special social organization, which handles its own administrative and judicial affairs within the reclamation areas under its administration, in accordance with the laws and regulations of the state and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and with economic planning directly supervised by the state. It is subordinated to the dual leadership of the central government and the People's Government of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.³⁸

Figure 1: Divisional Headquarters of the XPCC³⁹



As seen in Figure 1, XPCC is concentrated mainly in Northern Xinjiang. In 2009-10, the average annual income in Southern Xinjiang was CN¥3142, which was less than one-third of the average rural income in the entire Xinjiang province.⁴⁰ Inequality is attested also by the fact that in case of the energy industry, which accounts for 58 percent of the province's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), only 1 percent of its workforce is drawn from Uighurs.⁴¹ Additionally, while XPCC is responsible for 12 percent of the region's GDP, only 6.5 percent of its workforce was ethnic Uighurs.⁴² XPCC was envisaged as a special operations force that could either defend the borders or combat terrorism. XPCC set up regimental farming system, mostly in northern Xinjiang border regions, and it was envisaged as a militia force that would be ready to change forms when

needed.⁴³ It is important to note that in the XPCC administered cities, it enjoys exclusive administrative and judicial powers. XPCC has more than 70,000 square kilometres under its administration and 2.6 million people under its ranks. According to the 2014 White Paper on XPCC, 13.9 percent of the members come from China's ethnic minorities.⁴⁴ It is also responsible for administration of eight urban centres, cities and towns, which it has built over the years. These include, Shihezi, Wujiaqu, Alaer, Tumushuke, Beitun, Tiemenguan and the recently built Shuanghe and Kokdala.⁴⁵ XPCC also operates nearly 400 different companies, 44 of which are listed on China's stock markets, which gives an idea of the strength as well as expanse of XPCC. It is interesting to note that China was extremely secretive about the nature and functioning of the XPCC until about couple of years ago. XPCC and its subsidiaries are likely to be the first set of beneficiaries of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project that is discussed later in greater detail. XPCC has also hosted four "China-Eurasia Expos" to bring together industries and business from across the border. The most recent one of these was in September 2014 with a focus theme on "Opening up and Cooperation for Building Silk Road Economic Belt".⁴⁶

China has issued numerous white papers on Xinjiang and on terrorism and national security. The most recent white paper on Xinjiang came out in September 2015 ahead of 60th anniversary of founding of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).⁴⁷ The white paper titled, "Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang", states that in 2014, out of Xinjiang's total population of 23.2 million, 14.6 million or 63 percent were ethnic minorities.⁴⁸ The major focus of the discussion in this white paper is on how the carrots of the state policy have worked and how the state is ready to use the sticks for those who do not accept the carrots. Important focus is on infrastructure growth in the region in the last decade and since 2009 in particular.

Regional Linkages

There are three regions that have linkages with terrorism in Xinjiang. First is Central Asia due to its ethnic similarities with the Uighurs. In this regard, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and China's effort to make it the centrepiece of the regional anti-terrorism efforts is a significant strategy. Second is South Asia and in particular Pakistan's North Waziristan area and Afghanistan. The third area, which has also been more active in the recent past, is Southeast Asia.

China has initiated various regional processes and mechanisms to control cross border terrorism. SCO has been at the forefront of this China-led regional anti-terrorism initiative. Founded in 2001, SCO originally includes China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia.⁴⁹ Anti-terrorism is

the bedrock of SCO activities as the organisation aims to fight “terrorism, extremism and separatism”. One of the first achievements of the SCO was the establishment of the SCO Regional Counter Terrorism Centre (RCTS) on June 15, 2001 when the member states signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism.⁵⁰ That this framework was established well before 9/11 showcases the regional anti-terrorism consensus. The RCTS serves as a coordinating agency for regional counter-terrorism efforts. RCTS has also been an important platform for intelligence sharing, military cooperation and exercises. SCO exercises have usually been large-scale, involving between 4,000 and 10,000 troops in various editions. What is equally important to note is that on many occasions, the PAP units have been part of the Chinese contingent for the SCO peace mission exercises, besides other bilateral counter-terrorism drills.⁵¹ How the nature of SCO and its activities are affected after India and Pakistan join will be interesting to observe since China, Pakistan and India are not on the same page as far as terrorism is concerned.⁵² In the past, the Chinese special envoy on Afghanistan also praised Inter-Services Intelligence’s (ISI) role in fighting terrorism in the Af-Pak region.⁵³

Xinjiang’s home-grown extremist organisation, ETIM, and its subsequent and more violent version, Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), have linkages with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). When the ETIM/TIP leader, Abdul Shakoor Turkistani, was killed in an American drone strike in 2012, 17 more militants including two leaders of TTP were also killed.⁵⁴ Turkistani’s power as well as proximity to al Qaeda is attested by the fact that he was considered to become its supreme leader after Osama bin Laden was killed in May 2011.⁵⁵ In 2013, ETIM also released a video of an ongoing training camp in North Waziristan where young children were undergoing weapons training.⁵⁶ These camps are said to be operated by al-Qaeda. Various estimates suggest the number of TIP fighters trained in Pakistan to be between 200 and 300. Chinese official press releases and reports in the state media suggest that the ETIM’s collaboration with the groups in Pakistan has been underway since 1998. That year one Memetiming Memeti (also known as Aximu and Abuduhake) travelled outside China to join a terrorist camp in Pakistan. However, the media refrained from naming Pakistan in its report and only stated that Aximu joined the training camp in “a South Asian country”.⁵⁷ Memeti became the leader of the group’s training camp inside Pakistan and Pakistani officials have also supported the claims of collaborations.⁵⁸

As discussed above, Uighurs came in direct contact with Pakistan in 1980s when the open-door policy was announced, travel became easy and Pakistan also allowed Uighurs to settle down inside Pakistan as Pakistan became a major transit point for the Uighurs going for Haj.⁵⁹ It is reported that around 3,000 Uighur families live in Pakistan today, primarily in Rawalpindi, Gilgit, Islamabad and

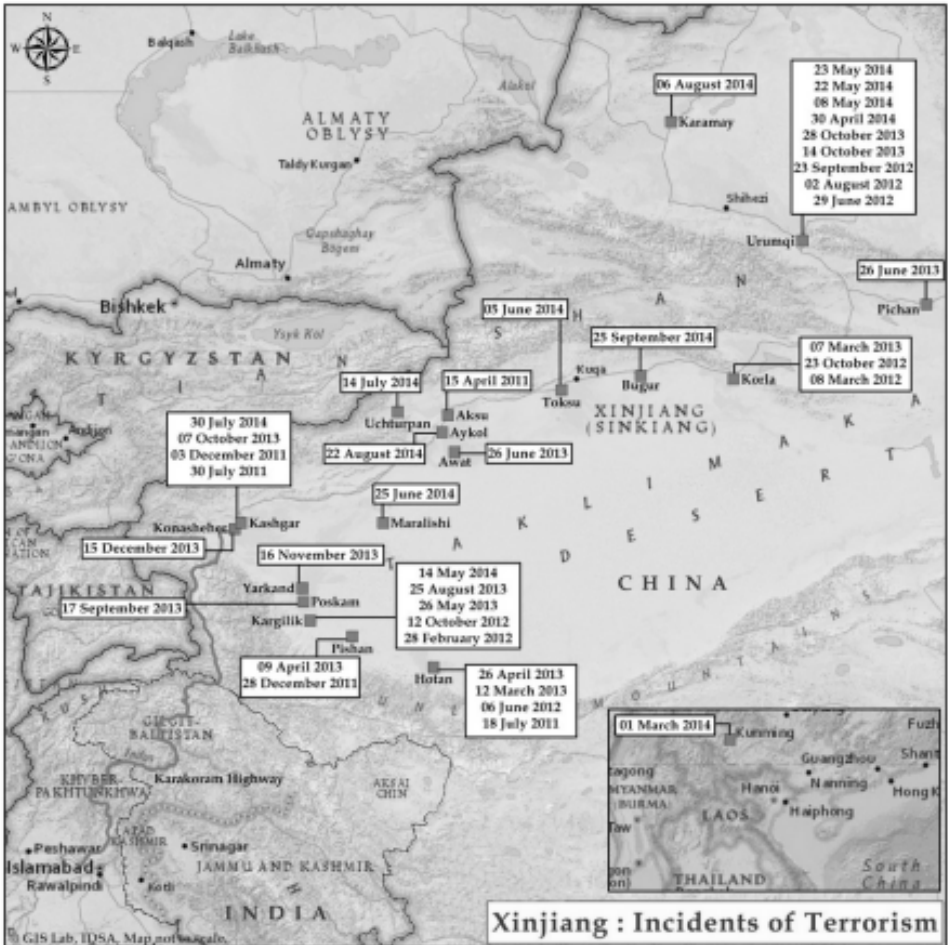
Karachi.⁶⁰ Some families have been settled in Pakistan since 1949.⁶¹ At the same time, there are reports that during this period, when the extremist elements were crossing over to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Chinese Government was apparently aware of the Uighur participation in the anti-Soviet war alongside the local mujahedeen forces that later came to be known as Taliban.⁶² This happened perhaps because China did not anticipate the impending collapse of the Soviet Union that would go on to create states based on ethnic identity, which in turn could further fuel the ethno-national feelings in Xinjiang.

Reports suggest that the number of ETIM fighters in Pakistan is around 400 and they are based in the Mir Ali region and there are about 250 such fighters in Afghanistan.⁶³ In 2015, the Pakistani President during his visit to China said, "Almost all members of the Uighur militant group the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) have been eliminated from Pakistan."⁶⁴ Similar assertion was made by Pakistan Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif. He said, "I think there (were) a small number in tribal areas, they're all gone or eliminated. There are no more there."⁶⁵

It is not a mere coincidence that the new wave of terrorist incidents in Xinjiang have occurred in Southern Xinjiang that shares its borders with India and with Pakistan via Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). Southern Xinjiang is relatively poorer compared to northern Xinjiang where nearly 90 percent of the Han settlers live and where the XPCC operates.

As Figure 2 shows, the incidents of terrorism outside the provincial capital Urumqi are concentrated largely in the Southern Xinjiang region. Southern Xinjiang is mainly Uighur, and in these parts of Xinjiang that are relatively poorer, economic inequality brings in a sense of alienation and the fundamentalist ideology is in no short supply thanks to the Karakoram highway that connects Xinjiang with Pakistan via the PoK. In 1997, China also constructed a fence along the 750 kilometre border between Pakistan and Xinjiang in order to prevent help coming from Pakistan to the Uighurs militants.⁶⁶ About 700 Pakistani traders were thrown out of Xinjiang in 2003 as China suspected them of helping the terrorists.⁶⁷ According to Ziad Haider, "Today, Pakistanis in the region and the Islamabad government alike continue to shun the Uighurs as Beijing seeks economically to coax the latter and politically to compel them into embracing a Greater Chinese consciousness."⁶⁸ A senior Taliban commander was also quoted, "They live here with us but are always concerned about their people and mission in China. They are nice people, good Muslims and the best fighters."⁶⁹

China's successful anti-terrorism cooperation in Central Asia and closing of its porous borders in western region seems to be forcing those seeking asylum as well as those seeking weapons and training to travel via the Southeast Asian route. Some of the extremists from Xinjiang are also reported to have established links

Figure 2: Incidents of Terrorism since 2011 and the Karakoram Highway⁷⁰

with Southeast Asian terrorist groups such as the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). Three Uighurs were recently given six-year imprisonment in Indonesia on charges of conspiracy and cooperation with the MIT.⁷¹ MIT has also declared its allegiance to the IS.

In the recent past, the *Global Times* has claimed that 300 Uighurs were fighting in Syria for the IS. China has also extended cooperation with Turkey for ensuring repatriation of the arrested the Uighur IS fighters.⁷² It is noteworthy that the IS has declared Xinjiang as a part of its caliphate.⁷³ Also, in July 2015, a propaganda video by the IS called on the Muslims in China to join its fight. The 12-minute video features a Uighur national speaking in Uighur language.⁷⁴ Reports suggest that in December 2014 IS killed three Chinese nationals who had joined the IS

but tried to flee after they were disillusioned with the IS model.⁷⁵ Killing of a Chinese national by the IS in November 2015 also led to strong reactions from China and while the government response spoke of holding the perpetrators accountable, comments in the social media in China sought more proactive Chinese role in protecting its interests abroad.⁷⁶

In July 2015, Thailand also deported 109 Uighurs back to China. Thailand is a crossroads for Rohingyas, Uighurs and the other asylum seekers from the region. Usually, in the recent past, Uighurs travelled to Southeast Asia illegally and then moved onto Turkey using illegal passports. Thailand came in for lot of criticism for unilateral repatriation of the Uighurs, something that also strained its relations with Turkey for a while. Turkey is one of the few countries which has provided entry to fleeing Uighurs since 1950s.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the August 17, 2015 blast in Thailand's Erawan Shrine that killed 20 people has been attributed to Uighur terrorists. Thailand recently also arrested two suspects, Yusufu Meeralee and Adem Karadag, said to be Chinese nationals from Xinjiang who allegedly worked as handlers for the Uighurs seeking asylum and joining the terrorist camps.⁷⁸ Few other alleged conspirators behind this blast are believed to have fled to Turkey. However, there is no link with the repatriations and the bomb blast as yet as no group has come forward to take the responsibility for the Erawan Shrine blast. In addition, certain assessments of the mysterious disappearance of the MH370 flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing attribute it to the ETIM. However, these claims remain unsubstantiated.

Conclusion

The Xinjiang conflict has come a long way since the days of the Cultural Revolution when the Red Guards created havoc, without much local protests. In its present outlook, the resistance in Xinjiang spans from peaceful and silent protests demanding more genuine autonomy to violent local extremism. Some Uighurs have associated themselves with the IS in Syria despite the fact that its premise goes against the Sufism-dominated practice of Xinjiang and a potentially independent ethnic state. China's stability first approach has created more fissures in the region and the increasing numbers of incidents where more number of people losing their lives attests to the pitfalls of this approach. Uighurs also continue to face racial stereotypes and social harassments in other parts of China in the same manner that had led to the deadly clashes in Guangzhou which in turn had caused the July 2009 Urumqi riots, the most recent landmark in the history of the province's troubled relations with Beijing.

Xinjiang has certainly been influenced more by the political forces and processes outside China than those within China. Even then, extremism in Xinjiang is in no less measure a creation of the Chinese State's alternation between

hands-off and hands-on policies in the region since the Mao era. The state's heavy-handed approach in Xinjiang has been futile. Moreover, the desire for short-term results has resulted in a pushback that has only created more and bigger long-term challenges.

NOTES

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11. Yat Sun, "The Roots of China's Ethnic Conflict", *Current History*, 113 (764), September 2014, p. 232.
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14. Ibid. Also see: Kendrick T. Kuo, No. 10; M. EhsanAhrari, "China, Pakistan, and the 'Taliban Syndrome'", *Asian Survey*, 40(4), 2000, p. 659.
15. Yat Sun, No 11, p. 233.

16. Unofficial sources put the total number deaths to be 1600.
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Buddhist versus Islamic Extremism: A Case Study of Myanmar

Sampa Kundu

“We don’t use drones – we haven’t killed [Osama] Bin Laden or Saddam Hussein or the Taliban...”

“We are just preaching and posting on the Internet and Facebook for the safety and security of our nation. If, we are all protecting our own nation who’s the bad guy – Wirathu or Barack Obama?”

—Ashin Wirathu, BBC¹

Since its foundation some 2,500 years ago, Buddhism has managed to reckon itself as a religion of peace and tranquillity. Some 50 years ago, Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese monk, was burnt to death as he raised his voice against the South Vietnamese regime. Such instances of sacrifice for social and political welfare by Buddhist monks are not rare. Even in 2007, Buddhist monks in Myanmar were seen protesting against the oppressive Junta government. However, the present scenario in Myanmar and other countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand testifies that social activism has given way to political violence and militancy when it comes to a few Buddhist monks and their leaders.² It can be said that like other religions in the world, Buddhism too has been affected by politics, sectarianism as well as chauvinism, and Myanmar is a case in point.

The above-mentioned two statements by Ashin Wirathu, the face of Buddhist extremism, as he is often being projected by the Western media, express the political awareness and ambition of a monk who is believed to be the leader of religious zealotry in Myanmar.

The two numbers, 969 and 786 not only represent the clash between majority and minority in Myanmar, they also demonstrate religious hatred and extremism, ethnic cleansing and political violence.³ The involvement of the state in favour of the majority community makes it a more complex problem. Simultaneously, the allegations by the Myanmar State that the Rohingyas in Myanmar, in particular, and all Muslims in the country, in general, are involved with the jihadi groups from other parts of the world need to be scrutinised and examined thoroughly.⁴

In this given context, first, this paper makes an attempt to briefly review the historical backdrop of this issue which explains that religion-based clatters are nothing new in Myanmar. Second, it deals with whether fanaticism has gained a new variety in Myanmar in the name of Buddhism, contrary to the prevalence of Islamic extremism across South and Southeast Asia. As Islamic fundamentalism has swayed over South and Southeast Asia, the possibility of escalation of Buddhist extremism in Myanmar, which connects both the regions, is crucial. The third section explores whether Myanmar Muslims are involved in Islamic militancy, as claimed by the Myanmar State. Lastly, effort has been made to assess the role of the state in combating the so-called 'terrorists', who belong to the Muslim minority community in the country. Simultaneously, it also sees whether the state uses religion as a tool to eliminate Muslims, particularly the Myanmar Rohingyas.

Legacy of History

In the 19th and 20th centuries, migration from Madras, Bengal, Chittagong and Sri Lanka to Burma was quite regular. Gradually these migrants occupied leading positions in the Burmese economy, especially in areas like agriculture, transportation, construction, rice mills; in the civil services, military and as merchants and moneylenders. Most of them preferred to stay in the cities and in parts of lower Burma. By the advent of 20th century, the indigenous Burmese started to express their dissatisfaction as the South Asians were economically much well-off than the Burmese people. Violent riots erupted in 1926, 1930 and 1938 against the rise of the South Asians in Burma. The South Asians were called *Kala* (roughly meaning 'dark-skinned foreigner') by the Burmese particularly the Barmars, the majority community in Burma.⁵ During Ne Win's era, extensive anti-Indian and anti-Muslim agitations became a regular practice in the country. Along with this, the government's efforts to make Burma a socialist country forced many South Asian immigrants to leave the country. Those who chose to stay back in Burma were dispersed in several parts of the country with a large part of the Muslims concentrating in south-western Burma (in Arakan, now Rakhine). However, one should remember that Muslims in Arakan had started their habitation long before the British occupied the Indian subcontinent. Besides the Muslim migrants from Bengal, there were other Muslims as well who used to

live in Arakan. But the media and some scholars began referring to all Muslims living in Arakan as Rohingyas, derived from the word, *Rohang* (the name of Rakhine state in Rohingya language).⁶ The Bamars in Myanmar largely believe that the Muslims in Rakhine (or Rohingyas as they are called) are ‘foreigners’ in their country, and hence, they must leave. The military governments in Myanmar too use the same language when it comes to the Rohingya question.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government in Myanmar supported the ideologies of the monk, Kyaw Lwin, who may be referred as the godfather or founder of the 969 movement in the country. Immediately after the uprising on August 8, 1988 in the country, the government, in its effort to subdue the pro-democratic forces in the country, used chauvinistic Buddhist religious ideologies to reinforce Burmese nationalism and in doing so, Kyaw Lwin’s ideas were used as stimulators. As the 969 movement was initiated in early 1990s, the government started to distribute writings of Kyaw Lwin including, “How to Live as a Good Buddhist” in 1992 and “The Best Buddhist” in 2000.

The 969 movement was further enthused in Myanmar following the unveiling of the 786 movement in the country in the early 2000s. In fact, it has been argued that number 786 has been misinterpreted by radical Buddhist monks in Myanmar in order to win the hearts of the common Buddhist people in the country. The Arabic Abjad numerical system is believed to have inspired the origin of number 786: the opening passage of the Koran (i.e., ‘In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful’) represents 786. In South Asia and in Myanmar, it only denotes, “This place is Muslim.” However, as jingoistic Buddhist ideologies were becoming stronger in Myanmar, the nationalist Buddhist monks interpreted 786 as Muslim willingness to dominate the world in the 21st century, because seven plus eight plus six equals to 21.⁷

Myanmar experienced one of the first anti-Muslim riots of the 21st Century in Sittwe (the capital of Rakhine) and in Taungoo (located in the Bago region) in 2001. In 2002, violence against Muslims was again witnessed in Rakhine. In 2003, Wirathu was arrested for inciting violence against Muslims in his home town near Mandalay. In 2012 and 2013 again, after Wirathu’s release from jail, Muslims were targeted several times in different parts of the country.⁸

Radical Buddhism and a ‘Popular’ Mass Leader – a New Version of Terrorism

Ashin Wirathu did not take long to earn titles like the “Burmese bin Laden” or the “Face of Buddhist Terror” by the media.⁹ In fact, the Myanmar Government too jailed Wirathu for 25 years in 2003 on allegations including enflaming hatred and rousing sectarian clashes. However, he was released as part of amnesty to political prisoners in 2011. Since then, he is involved in activities which may be

referred as terror and ethnic cleansing against Muslims in Myanmar. In a 2013 YouTube video, Wirathu urged the Bamars “to do businesses with only shops with 969 signs”.¹⁰ In an interview in 2015, he mentioned that most Muslims in Myanmar were under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists, and hence were subject to suspicion.¹¹ In the same interview, he spoke about marriages between Muslim men and Buddhist women through which, he claims, the Muslims want to outnumber the Buddhists in Myanmar. He also mentioned the Islamic desire to rule the world as well as atrocities done by groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS).¹² In another interview to the BBC in 2013, Wirathu mourned that the Muslims have “destroyed and penetrated” into Myanmar and Buddhism.¹³ However, all these claims by Wirathu are questionable as Muslims in Myanmar constitute only 5 per cent of the total population. Even then, the government in Myanmar has expressed its support towards Wirathu. The July 2013 issue of the *Time* magazine which had the Buddhist monk on its cover, labelling him as the ‘Face of Buddhist Terror’ was banned by the government. President Thein Sein referred Wirathu as a ‘son of Lord Buddha’.¹⁴ His large following is a further testament to his popularity amongst the Buddhist majority. Thus, Myanmar is one country in Southeast Asia where radical and rightist Buddhism is at the forefront, as opposed to others overwhelmed by Islamic militancy.

War against State? Limited Possibilities

Wirathu often argues that Myanmar Muslims, particularly the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) members enjoy close association with the Islamic extremists around the world and that they are responsible for various coordinated attacks on the Myanmar Defence Services (MDS).¹⁵ Wirathu’s critics however put a question mark on the rationality of this argument. Rohingya Patriotic Front, a comparatively moderate organisation was the mother establishment of RSO, set up in 1982, and had the limited aim to ensure a few rights for the Rohingyas. The Myanmar Government banned RSO and listed it as a terrorist organisation.¹⁶ It is believed that RSO operates from Bangladesh despite the ban imposed by the government.¹⁷ After the September 11, 2001 incident (9/11), the Myanmar Government started sharing intelligence information with the US Government on the Arakan Rohingya National Organisation (ARNO) which is associated with RSO. The Myanmar Government, in one of its reports in 2002, claimed that ARNO had 170 armed insurgents, five representatives from ARNO met al-Qaeda leaders in May 2000 and 90 ARNO members were selected for a guerrilla warfare training in Libya in 2001, which was facilitated by some Taliban militants.¹⁸

Later, demonstration of sympathies by the Islamic fundamentalists from around the world for the Rohingyas strengthened such claims by the Myanmar

Government. In 2012, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was perhaps one of the first terror groups that threatened to avenge the violence and discrimination faced by the Muslims in Myanmar. This happened immediately after the 2012 riots in Myanmar.¹⁹ Around the same time, few Pakistani terror groups formed Difa-e-Musalman Arakan (“Defence of Muslims in Myanmar”) to express solidarity with the Myanmar Muslims.²⁰ Lashkar Mujahideen of Rohingya, a terror group was introduced by various extremist organisations including TTP around 2013.²¹ Hezbollah of Lebanon, in July 2012, issued a statement calling the actions of the Myanmar Government as “a new racial purification trend against Muslims”.²² In 2013, some armed terrorists attacked the Myanmar Embassy in Jakarta, and it was alleged that they belonged to a group which is sympathetic towards the Rohingyas.²³ In 2013, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) claimed that it recruited a Rohingya Muslim to carry out one of the serial bomb blasts in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, in July.²⁴ In 2013 itself, the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute mentioned that Rohingyas from Myanmar established close connections with Harkat-ul Jihad-e-Islami Bangladesh, a terrorist organisation enjoying confidence with another like-minded group from Pakistan.²⁵ Other reports suggested that Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Kashmiri terror group, too, tried to recruit Rohingyas.²⁶ In 2014, Al-Zahawiri, the then head of al-Qaeda, proposed that the Muslims from Myanmar should raise their voice against the oppression faced by them. Al-Qaeda released a video which showed Zahawiri claiming that the group would save the Muslims from severity and cruelty in Myanmar, Bangladesh and elsewhere across the region.²⁷ In the same year, Abu Bakar Bashir, head of Jamah Anshurat Tauhid, an Indonesian terror group, a derivative of Jemaah Islamiya, mentioned that the Buddhists in Myanmar may face attacks in retaliation to the persecution faced by the Muslims in the country. Front Pembela Islam (“Islamic Defenders Front”; FPI), another Indonesia based terror group, noted that their members were ready to go to Myanmar and declare jihad in order to protect Muslims living there from the genocide inflicted by the Myanmar Government.²⁸ A Somali terror group, Al Shabaab, too, issued a statement and advised safeguarding the Myanmar Muslims from the Buddhist ferocity.²⁹ In early 2015, as the mass exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand was attracting world attention, Professor Rohan Gunaratna, the head of the Singapore International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism, mentioned in an interview that the IS may attract and recruit Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar.³⁰

While all these reports suggest a connection between the Myanmar Muslims and the world of Islamic extremism, the Rohingya leaders in general deny these allegations. One of the RSO leaders, Muhammad Yunus mentioned that RSO has no active army and he has never sought for any help from any international

terrorist organisation.³¹ The statement released by the Burmese Muslim Association in September 2014 (few days after Zahawiri's video about saving Muslims in the Indian subcontinent including Myanmar) urged the Muslims in Myanmar to restrain themselves from joining any Islamic terrorist organisation and live amicably.³² The statement mentioned Myanmar as their 'motherland' and said that they would not accept any threat to their nation.³³

Though some Muslims from Myanmar are likely to join the IS or other international Islamic extremist groups, they are unlikely to be involved in waging a war against the Government of Myanmar. In Myanmar, there are groups like RSO and ARNO which are believed to have linkages with the jihadi movements trending in different parts of the world. But, in reality, the resources (both human and material) of these groups are not known and one may question their capability to join global forces of terrorism in substance and begin a war inside the country. Also, the Rohingyas and other Muslims in Myanmar want to ensure an end to the discrimination based on religion in the country and while doing so, they enjoy moral support from the international human rights community. Hence, by joining the hands with terrorists at the global level, they won't risk the meagre amount of humanitarian assistance received from the international community, empathetic to their plight. However, the risk of the Rohingyas being involved with the IS may not be completely overlooked. The IS has an elaborate plan to escalate its reach in Southeast Asia, and in order to attain that goal it has established a special force (called *Katibah Nusantara*) within the IS where the Malay-speaking youths are recruited. *Katibah Nusantara* fought in Syria and captured five Kurd-held territories in April 2015.³⁴

Combating the 'Terrorists' – Role of the State

In May 2015, the government arrested more than a dozen people allegedly involved with Myanmar Muslim Army (MMA) which, according to a Myanmar court statement, was 'operating illegally' in the country. The arrested ones were accused of having linkages with the MMA, funding it and attempts of bombing in several places within the country.³⁵ The accused Muslims were arrested under the Emergency Provisions Act, 1950 often used to detain political activists in the country.³⁶ This incident was not an exception and according to a civil rights group, the Legal Aids Documentation Team, at least 100 Muslims were arrested on terrorism charges in Myanmar in 2014-15 (as of February 2015).³⁷ Zaw Htay, director of the office of the Myanmar President, mentioned that the MMA is promoting terrorist activities inside and outside the country, and therefore, the government is trying to take some pre-emptive steps to protect national interests.³⁸ Interestingly, except for the Myanmar Government, not many references have been found on MMA's activities.

The Government of Myanmar is continuing with some laws from its predecessors which include the Emergency Provisions Act 1950 and the State Protection Law 1975. While both these acts give several privileges to the military, the State Protection Law specifically gives the state the power to detain any person on grounds of suspicion.³⁹ In addition, the Myanmar Penal Code has provisions for rioting (Article 146), use of explosives (Articles 435 and 436), sabotage (Articles 430 and 431), incitement (Article 153), high treason (Article 121), conspiracies (Section 120-A) – all of which can be used as tools against the alleged terrorists by the government.⁴⁰ The government in Myanmar has recently passed the Anti-Terrorism Law in 2014. The Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Major-General Kyaw Kyaw Tun, pointed that Myanmar started drafting the Anti-Terrorism Law after consulting some international organisations (such as the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]), as terror activities including a series of bomb blasts (at least seven) in October 2013 in different cities and towns in Myanmar were lethal for the country as well as the international community.⁴¹ Besides, in an attempt to minimise possibilities of financing of terrorism, the Myanmar Government implemented the Control on Money-Laundering Law in 2002 and its Amendment in 2004. Sections 6 and 6A of the Emergency Provision Act deal with the maritime and aviation security.⁴² The same law has provisions for offences related to explosives, firearms and other dangerous materials.

At the regional level, Myanmar is a part of the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT) since 2007. ACCT and its Plan of Action aim at creating a regional environment of cooperation to handle terrorism and related activities in the region. In 2004, Myanmar also enacted the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Law and in 2009 ratified the ASEAN Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters. Beyond ASEAN, Myanmar also signed the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Convention on Combating Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking in 2009 along with the grouping's other member nations. Additionally, Myanmar is a member of the Asia Pacific Group on Money Laundering. Myanmar government has set up a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) which keeps an eye on terrorism financing activities in the country.

At the international level, Myanmar cooperates with the Office of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005) on counter-terrorism issues. Myanmar is party to 11 international counter-terrorism instruments and has so far signed one such

instrument. In 2006, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism was ratified by Myanmar.⁴³

Conclusion

In Myanmar, all Muslims, the Rohingya Muslims in particular, are unwelcome, and due to the government policies and wrath of the majority Buddhists, they feel vulnerable in the country. The Buddhists, especially the monks led by Ashin Wirathu, have been vocal against the Muslims in the country, as they are afraid of losing the majority status to them. Wirathu himself believes that Muslims in Myanmar may reduce the Buddhists in the country into a minority community and intrude into the Buddhist culture and society. These thoughts and actions by the radical Buddhist monks have been encouraged by the state and its machinery. The Myanmar State, along with a section of its citizens, considers the Muslims unsolicited in the country which is evidenced from their actions like denying citizenship to the Rohingyas. This situation is therefore ideal for terror groups like al-Qaeda and the IS, who can strategise on recruiting and engaging the Rohingya youths, and spread their activities in the region.

Today's Southeast Asia is vulnerable to terrorism, especially at the hands of al-Qaeda, IS and Jemaah Islamiyah, which are known for their movability and flexibility.⁴⁴ As early as in 2003, Omar al Faruq, anal-Qaeda leader, during his interrogation by the Indonesian authorities, accepted that the organisation has been trying to engage with the radical Muslims from Myanmar.⁴⁵

In the first few months of 2015, thousands of Rohingyas from Myanmar fled the country and undertook dangerous sea journeys to reach countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Such incidents only added to the already existing number of Rohingya refugees in those countries, and unfortunately, the host countries do not consider them economically useful due to their lack of education and skills. Hence, they largely remain unwelcome even though countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are economically much better than Myanmar and have Islam as their dominant religion. Following the 2015 exodus of Rohingyas from Myanmar, media reports indicated fear that these deprived Rohingya youths may become easy prey to a group like the IS, which is enjoying a steady rise in Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ IS has already recruited large number of youths from various parts of Southeast Asia and though the group has so far not expressed any announcement to involve the Rohingya youths there are scanty reports which show that online messages have been posted to attract the Rohingyas towards the IS.⁴⁷

Concerning the emerging trends of terrorism in Myanmar, the possibility of Myanmar Muslims joining Islamic extremism is not the only factor that needs to be addressed. The issue of Buddhist terrorism needs to be factored in with due

importance. The radical Buddhist monks from across the region may get united in the name of protecting their religion. In Sri Lanka, since 2009, Buddhist monks have been attacking minority Muslims and Christians, and there are reports suggesting Ashin Wirathu's visit to Sri Lanka in September 2014 to meet Dilantha Withanag of the Bodhu Bala Sena (BBS), the fundamental Buddhist group from Sri Lanka and form a global alliance of Buddhists to fight Islamic extremism.⁴⁸

In the end, it may be said that the politically motivated robust ethnic nationalism, coupled with strong and widespread influences often enjoyed by the monks in a Buddhist country like Myanmar, has propelled the rise of Buddhist extremism in Myanmar.⁴⁹ Thus testifying that both Islamic and Buddhist radicals use religion to justify their acts of violence, and Myanmar is no exception.

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19

The ISIS Conundrum in Southeast Asia: The Case of Indonesia

Titli Basu

The roots of terrorism in Southeast Asia run deep. Tracing the trajectory reflects that there is a history of regional elements fighting the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; footprints of outfits like Darul Islam, Jemaah Islamiah, Abu Sayyaf, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia and Mujahideen Indonesia Timor; jihadists linked with Al Qaeda gaining material support and training; and the latest development where the region is being touted as the “key recruitment centre” for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS; also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant [ISIL], or the Islamic State [IS]). ISIS has intensions of establishing a wilayah, a province of the Caliphate, in South-East Asia and established the Malay-speaking Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Islamiyyah military unit. While Katibah Nusantara was established in September 2014 in Shaddadi, Hasakah in northeastern Syria, in 2015 it was organised into three groups including the Bahrum Syah-headed KN Central; Katibah Masyariq, commanded by Abu Jandal; and Katibah Aleppo, managed by Abu Abdillah.¹

While the region witnessed several existing terrorist groups (like Abu Sayyaf, Mujahidin Indonesia Timor and Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid) and new groups (like Anshorulla) pledging allegiance to ISIS, there are many who have questioned the ISIS Caliphate and its methods, making it a divisive phenomenon. For instance, in Indonesia, groups like Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia questioned ISIS’s religious credentials, dismissed the legitimacy of ISIS’s claim of Caliphate and the appointment of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as Caliph which it argues is in violation of Islamic law.² Also, Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah spilt from Abu Bakar Ba’asyir’s Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) as it refused to support his pledge to the ISIS.³

There is a deep fault line within Indonesia's extremist society among supporters of ISIS and those who remain faithful to Al Qaeda and the Al Nusra Front. Besides, the debate online is also fierce between pro-Al Qaeda and ISIS supporters manifesting in jihadi news sites like Arrahmah.com (questioning the ISIS activities), and Shoutussalam.com and Al-Mustaqbal.net (justifying ISIS). While many local jihadists are inspired by the concept of *qital tamkin* versus *qital nikaya*⁴, Muslim organisations in Indonesia like the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have underscored that ISIS is adversative to Islamic values.⁵ Moreover, as data of sizable participation in ISIS ranks from countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines emerges, Southeast Asian governments have several concerns including the intensification of radicalisation by the social media posts and jihadi ideologues, returnee ISIS fighters with advanced combat skills; radical ideology and global network having the potential to fuel fundamentalist Sunni-Salafi circles and terrorist attacks (there are instances when Malaysian police made arrests and foiled ISIS's plan to hit targets at several places in Kuala Lumpur a day before the Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN] summit in April 2015). Southeast Asia hosts major Muslim countries including Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesian National Counter Terrorism Agency confirmed that, approximately 800 Indonesians had left for Syria and Iraq by December 2015. However, 169 Indonesians were held in the Turkey-Syria border.⁶ Moreover, former IS leader, Chep Hermawan, also acknowledged that about 750 Indonesians were in Iraq and Syria. While 200 Malaysian fighters are reportedly in Iraq and Syria⁷, assessment by police intelligence suggest that there are approximately 50,000 supporters in the country⁸. Besides, reports indicate that a few radicalised Singaporean youths have been arrested by authorities under the Internal Security Act during their attempt to join the fight in Iraq and Syria⁹. Meanwhile the Philippines acknowledges the security threat originating from radicalised Filipinos supporting the jihadi group. The Abu Sayyaf Group and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, which is a fragment of Moro Islamic Liberation Front, swore allegiance to the supporters of the Caliphate. Reports confirmed that in Maguindanao, the 6th Infantry Division foiled the civilian conscription to the Anṣār al-Khilāfah led by Mohammad Jaafar Maguid who promised loyalty to ISIS in 2014.¹⁰ Meanwhile in the ASEAN fora, Philippines underscored the ISIS threat through the Black Flag Movement in Mindanao which pledges allegiance to jihadi group leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.¹¹

Scholars¹² argue that proclamation of an Islamic State including a Caliphate, the call for fighting the enemy of the Muslim Ummah, Prophet's divination concerning the final battle Malhamah al-Kubra unfolding in Al Shaam comprising Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel, are strong motivations mobilising the Southeast Asians to fight in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, exploiting the Shia-Sunni fault line, the case of Assad administration's violence vis-à-vis the Sunnis

also encourage Southeast Asians, particularly, the Indonesians and Malaysians to pledge allegiance to the group. Moreover, returnee insights, social media campaigns, the ease of reaching Iraq and Syria facilitated by jihadi networks, and financial incentives often appeal to the unemployed youth. Some accounts indicate that Indonesian ISIS jihadists are assured accommodation and a remuneration of Rp 20 million or US\$ 1,530.¹³

Articulating the ISIS threat in Regional Fora

Countries have articulated their concerns regarding the threats posed by the supporters of the Caliphate and pledged to coordinate their response in regional multilateral platforms including ASEAN and East Asia Summit. At the ninth ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) held in Malaysia in March 2015, a *Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers for Maintaining Regional Security and Stability for and by the People* was issued expressing deep concern over the "rise of violence and brutality committed by the self-declared Islamic State"¹⁴ and agreed to "cooperate in accordance with both domestic and international law, including the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism, to counter the imminent threat of terrorist/extremist organizations and radical groups through information sharing, increasing surveillance and promoting awareness among the public about the threat of radicalism".¹⁵ Besides, in April 2015 at the 26th ASEAN Summit, Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates was adopted where member countries agreed that "violent extremism should not be associated with any culture, civilisation or religion" and identified "moderation is a core value in the pursuit of long-lasting peace and a tool to diffuse tensions, negate radicalism and counter extremism in all its forms and manifestations". To this effect, counties decided to host outreach programs, interfaith and cross-cultural dialogues, share best practices on counter-radicalisation and address the root cause of extremism such as the East Asia Summit Symposium on Religious Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration held in Singapore in April 2015.¹⁶ Moreover, the September 2014 *ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Statement on the Rise of Violence and Brutality Committed by Terrorist/Extremist Organisations in Iraq and Syria* categorically argues that threats from the radical groups are not confined to Iraq and Syria, but encompass all Middle Eastern nations and if not managed, will engulf the rest of the world. The Statement reiterates the pledge to implement ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism and the ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism. The objective is to address the source of terrorism and unsettle terror networks and financing.¹⁷

The November 2015 *East Asia Summit Statement on Countering Violent Extremism* underscored that in order to respond to the dangers posed by terrorist groups manipulating the Internet and social media to radicalise and employ

vulnerable people needs global cooperation alongside efforts by governments, civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, the member states agreed to “support each other’s efforts to counter violent extremism, including through coordination of efforts, capacity building, and sharing of information, research, experience, best practice and lessons learned”. At the 10th East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, countries further committed to work together to manage the threats emanating from terrorism and violent extremism through various platforms such as UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation and Global Movement of Moderates Foundation.¹⁸

While Southeast Asian governments have previous experience in dealing with terrorism with considerable success, ISIS is proving to be a graver challenge. The returnees from Iraq and Syria constitute a major security concern since they are equipped with deep-rooted radical ideology, international network and much-valued field training and experience including skills for operating advanced weapons. The region is brainstorming and implementing measures to curb the menace. New legislations, increased regional cooperation in counter-terrorism through stronger information sharing on terrorist movements, stringent border control, building anti-ISIS network in prisons which are the key recruiting and funding ground, and de-radicalisation programmes are yielding mixed results.

Indonesia’s ISIS Challenge

Indonesia has a long history of attempting to manage fierce Islamist movements that at times compromised national security. Sidney Jones argues that compared to the fights in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen, Indonesians are attracted greatly to Syria¹⁹ and they are increasingly travelling out of the country to participate in Syria. Several Islamist groups including the Hilal al-Ahmar Society, connected to the Jemaah Islamiyah, have mobilised funds and dispatched medical teams for the civilian victims in Syria. This has often served as a pretext for travelling and joining jihadists in Syria.²⁰ Santoso alias Abu Wardah from the Mujahidin Indonesia Timur or East Indonesian Mujahideen is first to openly pledge allegiance to the ISIS.²¹ In a recent video released in November 2015, Santoso threatened to attack the State Palace and the Jakarta Police headquarters. In December, several cities including few in Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan were put on high alert following information, gathered in cooperation with the Australian Federal Police, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Singapore, that the supporters of the Caliphate planned attacks aimed at the administration.²² Earlier, Abu Jandal has featured in numerous videos that warned of releasing leaders like Abu Bakar Ba’asyir and Aman Abdurrahman from Indonesian prisons and attacking military, police and Nahdlatul Ulama.

ISIS is capturing the minds of the Indonesians with Fachry's website, www.al-mustaqbal.net, and the teachings of Aman Abdurrahman. Fachry followed mentor Omar Bakri Muhammad's line in supporting the ISIS in October 2013 and subsequently hosted debates and organised rallies in central Jakarta intended to garner native support for the Caliphate. Several oath ceremonies were hosted in various cities including Jakarta, Poso, Malang and Bima by Fachry and al-mustaqbal to induct supporters. A few of these ceremonies happened in high security jails including Pasir Putih Prison and Kembang Kuning in Nusakambangan, housing Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Aman Abdurrahman. Indonesia has 26 prisons. Networks in high security prisons are a breeding ground for the supporters of the Caliphate. Several prisoners, for instance, Iwan Dharmawan alias Rois and Sibghotullah facilitate the transit of the jihadists to Syria, as recommendation is essential for reaching Syria.²³ Additionally, Aman Abdurrahman furthered the cause by translating the jihadi propaganda on radical websites.²⁴ On July 23, 2014, the al-Hayat Centre uploaded a video in Bahasa Indonesian titled, "Join the Ranks", where Bahrum Syah urged the Indonesians to migrate for the cause of Caliphate. Following this, former President Yudhoyono banned the ISIS on August 4. Subsequently, in September 2014, the Bahasa-speaking unit, Katibah Nusantara was established.

Impact of social media as a tool for radicalisation and jihadi recruitment is often debated. However, studies suggest that social media usage in Indonesia is not drastically shifting the radicalisation and recruitment patterns but it certainly has had an impact in reaching a larger target group. In spite of considerable dependence on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, self-radicalisation happens seldom and personal acquaintances, and direct in-person exchanges in religious discussion are vital.²⁵ While Indonesian aspirants do not turn supporters of the Caliphate just by being exposed to propaganda, nevertheless propaganda does play a role in transforming them from passive to active members. It is important to note that the transit to Syria is very firmly controlled by individuals who have links with active radical groups. ISIS needs recommendations which then fetch links to cross the Turkish border. Here social media helps in locating contacts.

Mapping Indonesia's Response

National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) instituted in 2010 focusses on counter radicalisation. BNPT head, Comr. Gen. Saud Usman Nasution, confirmed that currently 247 terrorist prisoners are taking part in de-radicalisation curriculums across 50 jails in 13 provinces. He further suggested that BNPT is attempting to create a special facility in Sentul in West Java where obliging terror convicts will be engaged in furthering the cause of undoing the indoctrination

of other terrorists. This is awaiting response from the Law and Human Rights Ministry.²⁶ Experts suggest that BNPT should further incorporate programmes to offer financial and material support along with religious and psychological counselling to the prisoners.²⁷ Indonesia should work towards effectively implementing the national plan for de-radicalisation which is composed of four programmes including prevention, rehabilitation, re-education and re-socialisation.²⁸ Short- and long-term de-radicalisation programmes designed in cooperation with the NGOs and the BNPT and National Police are expected to be more effective in addressing the challenge systematically. Community engagement programmes engaging moderate religious leaders may be helpful.²⁹

A 2015 Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) report underscores that success by curbing the Caliphate supporters' Internet activities is limited since authorities face critics arguing that human rights are violated in attempting to consolidate Internet control. Several groups including the Hidayatullah.com argue that in case the administration or BNPT perceives a problem with the content, the URL can be blocked instead of the domain. Meanwhile, blocked websites are often accessed via proxy sites without much difficulty or when they resurface with different names. One example is *daulahislam.com*. The report argues that while the authorities have hardly achieved any success in checking sentenced inmates from accessing internet over mobile phones, they might be moving Jabhat al-Nusra followers to upload anti-ISIS content online. It is very important to critically evaluate the content of the pro-ISIS Internet circulation. However, there are challenges with regard to experienced analysts and means.³⁰

Besides addressing the challenge of increasing Indonesians travelling to Syria, authorities have the overwhelming concern about the impact of returnee jihadists with leadership skills, ideological indoctrination, know-how on advanced weapons system and combat techniques on extremists inside Indonesia. The problem is that it is not outside the law in Indonesia to go abroad to fight or join an organisation that features on the terrorist list of the United Nations. Moreover, the August 2014 ban on ISIS unfortunately lacks legal force. Indonesia is in the process of strengthening the legal framework in dealing with the terror threats, particularly amending the anti-terrorism law in 2016 to give the authorities more room for preventive measures. Debates related to amending the anti-terrorism law are ongoing. The anti-terrorism law of 2003, adopted following Bali bombings, contains provisions for punishing someone running a terrorist group but cannot punish those who pledge support or join a terror group abroad. There are instances including the case of radical cleric, Afief Abdul Madjid, who went to Syria and subsequently funded the Aceh paramilitary training camp, when the anti-terror law fell short of delivering adequate justice.³¹ The amended legal framework is likely to include matters kept outside the scope of existing Law No. 9/2013 related to prevention and eradication of terrorism.³² Earlier BNPT weighed the option

of terminating the citizenship of Indonesians who travelled to fight with ISIS but as most of these jihadists enjoy dual citizenship with Malaysia or Singapore, it is not effective. To effectively manage the jihadist, government needs to strengthen coordination between anti-terrorism policy and anti-terrorism financing. Tracing the roots of terrorist finance uncovers the interconnectivity of jihadi networks and enables prevention of future terrorist activities. Jakarta is designing anti-terrorist financing policy to realise the recommendations of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on Money Laundering, Administration has made efforts aimed at improving its Anti-Money Laundering/Counter-Financing Terrorism (AML/CFT) regime together with employing terrorist asset-freezing regime. But, regardless of Indonesia's political assurance to work with the FATF to deal with strategic CFT challenges, efficiency has to be improved and FATF urged Jakarta to fully implement UNSCR 1267 and tighten the legal structure concerning freezing terrorist assets.³³

Police leads Indonesian counterterrorism efforts with Detachment 88. Moreover, law enforcement staff undertake training aimed at enhancing tactical capacity and investigative skills, done by Department of State's Anti-terrorism Assistance programme. It is important to note that former President Yudhoyono made efforts including improved inspection related to passport and visa issuances and increased monitoring of jihadi prisoners to counter ISIS. While immigration officers at important ports of entry possess access to biographic and biometric databases, there is a problem of coordination between the stakeholder agencies.³⁴ While there is a debate over the role of the police and military in fighting the menace of ISIS and the larger battle against terrorism, Sidney Jones articulates that President Jokowi would do good in trusting the police with Detachment 88 on counterterrorism instead of supporting a greater role for the military.³⁵ In a contrary view, Bilveer Singh articulates that despite hesitations, military's supplementary role will further boost Indonesia's counterterrorism capacity. He proposes a combined police-military method to counterterrorism.³⁶ Meanwhile, a new counterterrorism squad, TNI Joint Special Operations Command, has been instituted in Sentul, West Java, by the military. It reportedly drew 81 personnel from Army, Navy and Air Force's Bravo 90 Special Forces unit.

Indonesia actively engages in counterterrorism initiatives at the regional, multilateral and international levels. Jakarta has been involved in various initiatives including Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) programmes where members shared best practices and reinforced capacity building efforts; Counter-Terrorism Task Force of APEC; co-sponsoring UNSCR 2178 on foreign terrorist fighters; and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Inter-Sessional Meetings on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC). Also, Indonesia is focusing its energy on wide-ranging cooperation with regional countries with stress on information sharing, for instance with Singapore, Malaysia, etc., aimed at preventing probable

foreign fighters. In addition to strengthening border security, Indonesia and Malaysia decided to cooperate and share intelligence, monitor the movements of the jihadists and comb the social media.³⁷ While Indonesia is yet to join the US-led Global Coalition to Counter IS, both agreed during President Jokowi Widodo's visit to the US in October 2015 to reduce the traffic of foreign terrorist fighters and strengthen counter-radicalisation efforts.

Indonesia's ISIS threat is grave and the establishment is making attempts to fight the phenomenon. It is important to note that the ISIS situation is different since most Indonesian jihadists do not have intent of returning, unlike the case in the 1980s-90s. Previously, Indonesians travelled to Afgan-Pakistan border to get trained and unfold jihad at home and refrained from joining the fighting against Soviet Union. However, now Indonesian ISIS is restless to fight and die in Syria and Iraq. While political repression was a major trigger then, the ISIS generation is captivated by the call of the Caliphate which is drawing not just young Indonesian men but whole families to Syria.³⁸

In the coming times, the fault lines between Indonesian jihadists will continue between the pro-ISIS and anti-ISIS groups. The critical concern will be dissemination of the ISIS propaganda in Indonesia. The use of social media to share jihadists accomplishments on the front line, the honour in disobeying the west, and pure Islamic law practised in the controlled territories have generated enormous enthusiasm among the supporters of the Caliphate. Authorities must manage *takfiri* knowledge from enjoying greater attention. Unfortunately, majority of the officers and moderate Muslim leaders have not read the available ISIS literature or translation of *Dabiq* periodicals. An effective counter strategy can only be designed when the authorities have comprehensive understanding of the jihadi arguments and the Koranic references used by the ISIS to fuel extremism.³⁹ Nevertheless, legal framework is revamped and law enforcement has been strengthened. But unless prison management is effectively administered including stricter control on the use of cell phones in high security jails by jihadists, radical study groups and ISIS propaganda translation for external consumption, no new laws will yield the desired results. Moreover, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of National Counter Terrorism Agency's split between operation and prevention between the police and military. Some of the prevention programmes are not professionally aimed at the heart of the challenge.⁴⁰

Summing up

There is no denying the fact that Indonesia is targeted as one of the hotspots for ISIS recruitment in Southeast Asia. But as ISIS made inroads into Indonesia, it has proved to be a divisive phenomenon. Indonesian administration, drawing from its previous experience, is strengthening its efforts to mitigate the

consequences of ISIS on national security. The government has done well in engaging with Muslim clerics in its attempt to defeat the extremist ideology. Furthermore, the role of Muslim organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah has been noteworthy. To effectively manage the jihadists, government needs to strengthen the legal framework in dealing with the ISIS phenomenon. The returning jihadists from Syria and Iraq constitute a critical challenge not only for national security but also pose an important question as to how to deal with these radicalised returnees. For instance, reports in November suggested that Indonesian National Intelligence Agency is dealing with at least 100 returnee jihadists.⁴¹ There is a possibility that returning jihadists may engage in launching terror attacks like the Bali bombings or perform kidnappings or assassinations, and the local pro-ISIS terrorist outfits may supply resources and grant cover to these returnees. Authorities stress that while majority of the ISIS jihadists from the region will remain in Syria and Iraq for the time being but they will start to return home as the war nears its end.⁴² For this, there has to be a balanced approach including de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes. These returnees can serve as a vital instrument in countering the ISIS narrative, and hence, de-radicalisation programmes should draw from the expertise of the moderate religious leaders and social scientists to redefine Muslim identity.⁴³

It is also important to note that military solution alone is not adequate to root terrorism. The ideology employed by the jihadists needs to be “exposed” and “vanquished”.⁴⁴ Responses designed to combat ISIS should be more than just establishing global counterterrorism centres, military engagement and complex legal frameworks. To address the root of the cause, there is a need to relook at social justice, facilitate inclusive economic development and good governance.⁴⁵ The monumental task is to build a setting where a truly moderate and contemporary discourse of Islam can evolve.⁴⁶ Southeast Asia aptly proposed the concept of moderation as a tool to neutralise ISIS’s violent ideology, which later culminated as the Global Movement of the Moderates (GMM). The cause of moderation is furthered through the GMM, the ASEAN Foundation and the ASEAN Institute of Peace and Reconciliation.⁴⁷ Outreach programmes, interfaith and cross-cultural exchange of ideas at domestic, regional and global levels, sharing knowledge and best methods in battling violent jihadi ideologies, and information-sharing among ASEAN member regarding best practices in endorsing moderation should be encouraged. Terrorist groups often disrespect the rule of law and use the pretext of religion and theology to further extremism. It is the responsibility of political and religious leaders to discredit such narrow discourses and underscore that terrorism is not the path towards heavenly reward.

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Terrorism in Malaysia

Udai Bhanu Singh

Terrorism was a relatively neglected area of research during much of the Cold War period, and there was a diffidence among think tanks and policy-planning institutes to view it as a strategic issue. Governments and think tanks often shied away from internal security issues until the problem actually snowballed. The case of Malaysia represents the crisis being faced by the Southeast Asian governments requiring a firm resolve to counter it.

Southeast Asia and ISIS

South East Asia, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, was designated the ‘second front’ in the global war on terror. After the rout of the Taliban in Afghanistan, it was the radical Islamic groups – the Jemaah Islamic (JI), the Abu Sayyaf group, and the Kumpulan Mujahideen Malaysia (KMM) – in Southeast Asia that Washington turned its attention to. But the framing of Southeast Asia as a “second front” in the war against terrorism was pointedly questioned by some of the scholars.¹ Southeast Asia today is faced with a new threat – from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS; also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), or simply as the Islamic State [IS]) with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Caliph Ibrahim) as its leader. What is new about ISIS is that it is better organised (military style), adept at optimising the potential of social media and very well-funded. It threatened various parts of Malaysia. It has threatened to make Southeast Asia as part of its caliphate. The developments in Syria and Iraq have had their impact on South East Asia jihadist groups, especially in Indonesia. The Katibah Nusantara or the Malay Archipelago Combat Unit formed from the new recruits from Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere posits a real challenge

to not only the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) but India as well. About 20 per cent of the world's Muslims are located in the region. Indonesia with the largest Muslim population in the world faces the highest risk from IS, and according to one estimate, 400 of its citizens are said to be involved in fighting in West Asia.² These fighters then recruit new fighters by means of the social media and the Internet. Prominent groups in Indonesia include Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT) which is an offshoot of Jemaah Islamiya (JI), and the MIT leader Santoso swore allegiance to the IS. In August 2001, when a powerful explosion shook a shopping mall in Jakarta, a Malaysian national was arrested by the Indonesian police.

Malaysia and Brunei too have Muslim majority. In Myanmar, the Rohingya refugee crisis is slowly assuming dangerous proportions, and some of them are soft target for recruitment by terrorist organisations. At least since 2012 the Myanmar Government's treatment of the Rohingyas (who have been denied citizenship) has provoked reaction from the jihadists. There are significant concentrations of Muslim minorities in the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. The Abu Sayyaf group of the Philippines is involved in fighting in Syria and Iraq. The progress of the peace process in the southern region of Mindanao evoked great interest in the region because a lot hinged on its success. The 2014 agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government to establish the semi-sovereign Bangsamoro region is awaiting fruition. The Bangsamoro Basic Law is yet to be passed by Philippines Parliament. In the interim, an anti-terrorist raid in January 2015 complicated the security situation which put the peace deal into question. Southern Thailand has its own brand of Islamic militant groups that are active; these include the *Pejuang Kemerdekaan Patani* (Patani Freedom Fighters) who are fighting the Buddhists and the government. They are known to indulge in beheadings, arson attacks and car bombings. In addition, there is the New People's Army (NPA), which is a communist insurgent group.

Although it was the moderate form of Islam that emerged in Southeast Asian countries, the ASEAN leaders are painfully aware that this region has become a "key recruitment centre for ISIS". ISIS represents a direct military challenge which has targeted the political structure, the economy and society's harmony. This requires a response coordinated at the bilateral, regional and global levels. The counterterrorism effort in Singapore and also Malaysia have been somewhat successful, while the complexity of the problem in Indonesia and the Philippines has made tackling the issue more difficult. Singapore systematically monitors flights to Syria and has also detained some suspects. Much earlier, when the Singapore police uncovered a plot to blow up the American Embassy there, a Malaysian national was arrested for his involvement.

Malaysia's Experience in Dealing with Terrorism

Malaysia's strategy under British colonial rule, to deal with the communist insurgency (led by the Communist Party of Malaysia, MCP) in the period 1948 till independence in 1957 was novel because it employed non-military methods besides military ones,³ which succeeded in considerably weakening the movement by 1960. The 'hearts and minds' struggle continued under the leadership of former Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Dr Ismail Abdul Rahman. He said: "The fight against communist insurrection cannot and should not rest on the forces alone. The very important battle, one that can produce decisive victory and lasting peace, lies in the field of social and economic development."⁴ The strategy employed was KESBAN or Keselamatan (security) and Pembangunan (development). Moreover, the strategy included bilateral cooperation with Malaysia's immediate neighbours in dealing with the communist insurgency.

Besides the communist insurgency, the Malaysian Government has the experience of dealing with religious radicalism which arose in the 1970s. Malaysian Government dealt with the problem of religious radicalism by the use of disproportionate force and by the use of the Internal Security Act (ISA),⁵ especially against the Al-Arqam movement which was regarded as "the biggest security threat". It also dealt with the Al-Maunah cult and the Kumpulan Militant Malaysia (KMM) decisively. The arrest of the Al-Maunah leaders revealed their plan to overthrow the Malaysian Government and replace it with the Islamic State.⁶ These extremist elements threatened the multiracial and multi-ethnic social fabric of Malaysia. What is required is the reassertion of moderate Islamic philosophy which is tolerant. Former Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi spoke of 'Islam Hadhari' approach of promoting peace.⁷ Thus, Malaysia has had the experience of dealing with communist terrorist violence and religious radicalism. Many generations of Malaysian leaders got training in Islamic militancy – at first in Afghanistan in the 1980s, then others were trained in Salafiah Jihadiah ideology⁸ and those who went to study in madrasas in Pakistan.⁹ The IS-trained returnees are a bigger danger today because their numbers are more and they are better trained. The so-called Islamic State lays claim to Southeast Asia as part of its wilayah or province within the Islamic Caliphate. The jihadis belonging to Katibah Nusantara Lid Daulah Ilsamiah or the Malay Archipelago Unit for the IS in Iraq and Syria, the Malay-speaking combat unit, who have been battle-hardened in Syria and Iraq pose a continuing threat to the security of Southeast Asia.

Prime Minister Najib's government took a conscious decision to repeal some of the repressive legislations – only to replace with a very stringent legislation later. He first announced the repeal of the Internal Security Act (1960), and the repeal of the Banishment Act (1959), repeal of the Printing Press and Publication Act (1984 – which had enforced annual review of press and publication permits)

besides some other legislations. Speaking at the 48th anniversary of the formation of Malaysia, he had declared, "...I would like to stress in no uncertain term that Malaysia which we dream of and one that we are currently building, is Malaysia which practices functional and inclusive democracy, where peace and public order are safeguarded in line with the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law and respect for basic human rights and individual rights."¹⁰ The Najib government has now seen the National Security Council (NSC) Bill through Parliament – seeking the assent of the Agong – which critics say poses a great threat to the two Rukunegara Principles of the supremacy of the Constitution and the Rule of Law in the country.¹¹ The new Bill gives immense power in the hands of the Prime Minister (for a list of such national legislations, see Table 1).

Table 1: Malaysia: Terrorism-related National Legislations

Year	Legislation
1936	Penal Code Act (Act 574)
1960	Internal Security Act
2001	Anti Money Laundering Act, 2001 (Act 613)
2002	Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, 2002
2007	Anti Money Laundering and Anti Terrorism Financing Act, 2001 (Act 613)(AMLATFA)
2012	The Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (SOSMA)
2014	the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA)
2015	Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)
2015	Special Measures Against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act (SMATA)
December 2015	National Security Council (NSC) Bill

Malaysia: A Case Study

Malaysian Prime Minister Razak in his New Year Message articulated the concern that the country was not free from the threat of the so-called Islamic State and "the battle against radicalisation and against those that blaspheme the name of Islam with their barbarities, must also be fought here in Malaysia, not just in the Middle East."¹² He admitted that over 150 Malaysian citizens had been arrested for terrorism-related activities since the formation of IS.¹³ It was the seriousness of the threat that led the government to pass the Prevention of Terrorism Act at the beginning of 2015 and the National Security Council Bill in the latter half.¹⁴ He claimed that it did not conflict with the existing liberties guaranteed under the Federal Constitution. "It will enable our security forces to control and manage threats and react at an early stage, before a situation can escalate."¹⁵ What was the cause of the rise of ISIS in Malaysia, a country which is considered to be the epitome of multi-ethnic and multi-religious harmony? Why did ISIS find adherents in Malaysia? Joseph Chinning Liow has traced some external and

internal factors. Among the external factors he cites the US policy in West Asia, especially in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine which “inflamed Muslim sentiment worldwide”.¹⁶

There are certain internal or domestic factors contributing to the rise of ISIS. First, an important contributory factor is the politicisation of Islam in Malaysia. UMNO is a Malay-Muslim party in a Malay-Muslim majority state, trying to “out-Islam” the Islamist parties to remain in power. Second, in the case of Malaysia, it is a powerful state which defines what Islam is. Third, some political leaders have emphasised differences rather than commonalities, contributing to the marginalisation of non-Muslim communities including the Christians and Hindus.¹⁷ Fourth, there is a belief among a large section of Malaysian Muslims that “violence can be justified against enemies of Islam”.¹⁸

A number of extremist Islamist groups were active in Malaysia in the period between 1967 to 2001 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Islamist Groups Active in Malaysia between 1967 and 2001

1967	Tentera Sabilullah
1971	Golongan Rohaniah
1972	Koperasi Angkatan Revolusi Islam Malaysia
1980	Kumpulan Mohd Nasir Ismail
1985	Kumpulan Revolusi Islam Ibrahim Mahmod (alias Ibrahim Libya)
1987	Kumpulan Jundulah
1988	Kumpulan Muahiddin Kedah
1998	Kumpulan Perjuangan Islam Perak
2000	al-Ma'unah
2001	Kumpulan Mujahidieen Malaysia (KMM)
2001	Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI)

Source: “Takeover attempts by 12 groups”, New Straits Times, September 26, 2003. Cited in: Elina Noor, “Al-Ma'unah and KMM in Malaysia”, in Andrew T.H. Tan (ed.), *A Handbook of Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, Edgar Elgar, Cheltenham and Northampton, 2007.

Malaysia's Response

At the domestic level, Malaysia too has condemned ISIS and the police monitors the social media. There is an attempt to re-educate impressionable young Muslims on peace education by some Malaysian Muslim groups. Prime Minister Najib Razak on November 26, 2014 tabled a 19-page White Paper on Terrorism with the objective of containing the influence of the ISIS/ISIL.

Malaysia has been active at the regional level also in countering terrorism. It is significant that the 10th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on November 22, 2015 and chaired by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, adopted the EAS Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates and the

EAS Statement on Countering Violent Extremism.¹⁹ At the Summit, Malaysia also committed itself to establishing a digital centre for countering violent-extremist messaging (an initiative in which the US has worked closely at the conceptual stage, with Malaysia).²⁰ The Chairman's Statement noted:

We strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in recent weeks and underlined the need to address the threats of violent extremism and terrorism in a comprehensive manner, particularly by identifying and addressing the underlying factors that contribute to terrorism, lead to radicalisation and the spread of violent extremism. In this regard, we reaffirmed our support for the Global Movement of Moderates, recognising moderation as one of the approaches to counter violent extremism and stressed the importance of doing so through multi-pronged cooperation. In this regard, we adopted the EAS Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates and the EAS Statement on Countering Violent Extremism.

Malaysia is reportedly also part of a new 34-nation Saudi-led alliance based in Riyadh, although it appears less probable that Malaysia would commit any troops on the ground in West Asia.²¹

Malaysia has taken the lead in the United Nations too. Amb. Ramlan Ibrahim, Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, speaking at the Sixth Committee said:

Hence, there is an urgent need to counter terrorism comprehensively, from the ideological perspective – by countering the narratives and addressing the root causes of issues that could be manipulated to attract people into supporting these groups; from the financial perspective – by cutting the flow of funding to these terrorist groups; and from the security perspective – by preventing the physical recruitment and flow of their supporters.²²

Malaysia co-sponsored the UNSC Resolution 2178, September 24, 2014, aimed to strengthen and galvanise international action to combat terrorism in general, and the scourge of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) in particular. Further, Malaysia fully supported the UN mechanisms like “CTED [Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate], CTITF [Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force], the UNAOC [UN Alliance of Civilisations] and the relevant UNSC Sanctions Committees”.²³

Malaysia has emerged as a key partner of the United States in the war against the IS.²⁴ Malaysia joined the US-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL currently as an Observer on September 29, 2015. It is assumed that Malaysia would eventually become Member and join one of the five working groups (political-military; foreign terrorist figures; counter-finance; stabilisation support; and counter-messaging).²⁵ Malaysia has currently opted to help out with the counter-messaging group presenting an alternative vision of the future in its bid to counter ISIL's propaganda.

In this connection, Malaysia will set up jointly with the US a Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communications Centre (RDC3).²⁶ In addition, prior to President Obama's recent visit to Malaysia, the two countries signed two important documents: one, the 'Preventing and Combating Serious Crime' (PCSC) document; the other, Homeland Security Presidential Directive No. 6 (HSPD) – an agreement that enables exchange of terrorist screening information (between the two countries – US and Malaysia) critical to protect against terrorism.²⁷

The Way Forward

Malaysia has formally come out unequivocally against “all acts, methods and practices of terrorism” condemning them as “anti-thesis of the principles of Islam”. Malaysia has for long been known as the bastion of moderate Islam, and an advocate of the Global Movement of Moderates.

A military solution alone is not the answer. Enhancing security capabilities should not be limited to merely increasing the firepower. It should extend to efforts to “improve morale, professionalism and discipline in the security forces ...”, besides “intelligence and surveillance capabilities” and “propaganda and psychological warfare capabilities”.²⁸ Malaysia's moderate Muslims “must begin to reclaim ideological ground that has been lost”.²⁹

While seeking external help (especially American) augmenting material resources in the war against terrorism would indeed be invaluable for Malaysia some of the ideological tenets may prove untenable given its unique circumstance or situation. The Huntingtonian model of Clash of Civilisation or the George W Bush one of a 'Crusade' is simply not suitable for Malaysia/Southeast Asia. Tempting though it may be to imagine, the fact remains that “Southeast Asia is not the Middle East. And Kuala Lumpur is not Kabul”.³⁰ It is important to remember that perceptions matter. The war against terrorism is less likely to be equated to a war against the Muslim world if there is an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim people. This would help marginalise the extremist fringe within Malaysia. The advocates of the IS, including Ayman Al Zawahiri, realised the importance of the media and he said: “We are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.”³¹ The response to the IS by Malaysia and other Southeast Asian States has to be pitched at the same level.

A somewhat different but rather significant trajectory that Islam is taking in Malaysia is in the sphere of banking. Manzi Mohamad and Johan Sarvanamuttu have written on the concept of “post-secularisation” in Malaysia.³² The widening social and economic disparities and no perceptible improvement in the economic lot of the ummah (global Muslim community) have contributed to a sense of

alienation among Muslim youth and their attraction to radical ideology and movements. Besides, there is a parallel trend of pitting the religious and secular domains against each other and the Western and Muslim Weltanschauung à la 'Clash of Civilisation' concept. This is happening at a time when there is a contraction of the US economy; the trend, if not towards greater multi-polarity, then decidedly it is a fading of the unipolar moment which is witness to the rise of China and its other great power experiments like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Some Islamic thinkers have responded by critiquing the capitalist model and called for "Protestant Islam" seeking to "exorcise Muslim societies from the ill effects of capitalism while retaining its perceived benefits-effectively traversing both the capitalist and socialist worlds in what is hopefully maturing in to a unique 'third way'".³³ It provides a safer alternative to the anti-capitalist resistance.

As pointed in the article by Maznah Mohamad and Johan Saravanamuttu, Malaysia presents a unique case study where "17 IBF [Islamic banking and finance] institutions holding US\$ 28.3 billion worth of banking assets. Malaysia was ranked first in 2007 in terms of having the highest number of Islamic finance institutions within any one country".³⁴ Are we witnessing the emergence of an alternative to the existing banking and financial structure that is "based on the moral positioning that capital should not be delinked from its productive purposes"?³⁵

Good governance, which includes the timely delivery of services and public goods to all citizens and political avenues for airing grievances and articulating interests, is an important tool in combating rising terrorism. Malaysia, a former British colony and a Commonwealth member like India, inherited the 'steel frame' of bureaucracy. Achieving the sustainable development goals and removal of poverty would be critical for Malaysia in its war against terror. But depending on the ground situation, concentrated use of force may sometimes be the only answer. While, no doubt, scientists and technologists would always be needed in dealing with pressing security concerns, we need to look elsewhere too. Paul Wilkinson is right when he makes "a heartfelt plea" for more investment in social science research. He writes:

What on earth is the good of developing more and more expensive gizmos for security companies and business and government organisations if you do not understand the belief systems, motivations, intent and combat doctrines of the major terrorist groups we confront today?³⁶

NOTES

1. John Gershman, "Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?", *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2002. Gretna opposes this categorisation on account of the fact that it "conflates different forms of political Islam" and over reliance on the military in some of these countries tends to legitimise human rights violations there.

2. James Chin, "Clear and Present Danger from ISIS", December 17, 2015, at <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/sideviews/article/clear-and-present-danger-from-isis-james-chin#sthash.DM1ACdbH.dpuf>. The same source estimates the number of fighters from Malaysia at 200-250 in West Asia and as many as 50,000 ISIS supporters in Malaysia.
3. It was done by relocating large Chinese population, under the Briggs Plan in 'New Villages' and addressing their specific grievances.
4. Cited in: Afifi Raswan Dean, "Malaysia", in Wilson John and Swati Parashar (eds.), *Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Implications for South Asia*, Longman, New Delhi, 2005.
5. ISA allowed detention without trial for up to two years.
6. Afifi Raswan Dean, No. 4.
7. Ibid.
8. For a definition of Wahhabism and Salafism, including Jihadi Salafism, refer the Appendix in Jessica Stern and JM Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror*, William Collins, London, 2015.
9. Afifi Raswan Dean, No. 4.
10. "PM Announces Repeal of ISA, Three Emergency Proclamations", at <http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2f2011%2f9%2f15%2fnation%2f20110915205714&sec=nation>.
11. As a critic noted: "Section 18 of the NSC Bill, which empowers the Prime Minister to declare an area as a security zone (which could be the whole country), has rendered redundant and nugatory the prerogative of the Agong under Article 150 to declare an emergency." See James Sivalingam, "NSC Bill poses threat to two Rukunegara principles", December 24, 2015, at <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2015/12/24/nsc-bill-poses-threat-to-two-rukunegara-principles/>.
12. Prime Minister's New Year 2016 message, Bernama, December 31, 2015, at <http://www.english.astrovani.com/malaysia-news/prime-ministers-new-year-2016-message-87543>.
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14. http://www.pmo.gov.my/home.php?menu=speech&page=1676&news_id=788&speech_cat=2
15. Ibid.
16. Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Malaysia's ISIS Conundrum", at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/04/21-malaysia-isis-conundrum-liow>.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. See Appendix 1 and 2.
20. See Prashanth Parameswaran, "Exclusive: US, Malaysia and the War against the Islamic State", November 25, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/exclusive-us-malaysia-and-the-war-against-the-islamic-state>. Also see, "US, Malaysia to Set Up New Center to Counter Islamic State by End of 2015", October 22, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/us-malaysia-to-set-up-new-center-to-counter-islamic-state-by-end-of-2015/>.
21. Dennis Ignatius, "The War on Terrorism - Time to Get Real", at <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/324683>.
22. Statement by H.E. Amb. Ramlan Ibrahim, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the UN on Agenda Item 108, Measures to eliminate international terrorism at the sixth committee of the 70th session of the General Assembly, October 12, 2015.
23. See for instance, statement by Malaysian Foreign Minister, Mr Anifah Aman, at the UN Security Council on September 24, 2014 seeking to strengthen international mechanisms for countering terrorism.
24. Michael Fuchs, "Testimony before the US House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Asia & the Pacific", December 2, 2015, at <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/12/250315.htm>
25. Prashanth Parameswaran, No. 20.

26. The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counterterrorism (SEARCCT), which itself was established during the George W Bush administration in 2003, is likely to be involved in coordinating this with the US.
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28. Wan Ahmad Farid bin Wan Salleh, "Terrorism in Southeast Asia: How Real is the Threat?", *The Indonesian Quarterly*, 30 (1), 2002.
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32. Maznah Mohamad and Johan Saravanamuttu, "Islamic Banking and Finance: Sacred Alignment, Strategic Alliances", *Pacific Affairs*, 88 (2), June 2015, p. 196. The authors argue in support of an approach which "think[s] in favour of societies as no longer discretely divided between the secular and the non-secular ... Islamic banking and finance, ironically, is in fact the epitome of post-secularisation...".
33. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "Spirituality as an Integral Part of Islamic Business; The Case of Glocal Ikhwan", *Pacific Affairs*, 88 (2), June 2015.
34. Maznah Mohamad and Johan Saravanamuttu, No. 32.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Paul Wilkinson, "Research into Terrorism Studies: Achievements and Failures", in Magnus Ranstrop (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Directions*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. 319.

Conclusion

Vivek Chadha

The emerging trends of terrorism in Asia have in the recent past challenged the conventional wisdom that dictated and defined violence by non-state actors. This, as the papers in this Volume suggest, is illustrated by distinct characteristics of terrorism. This has forced the world at large to grapple with these threats, including volunteers from countries that had remained isolated from the contagion until now. Quite evidently, the most significant amongst these is the meteoric rise of the Islamic State (IS). The rise of this terrorist group has been so sudden and distinct that it has paled the phenomenon of Al Qaeda into the backdrop given its ruthless spectre of violence.

Peculiarities of the Islamic State

The IS has reversed a number of well-established trends of the recent after the past related to terrorist groups. Terrorists have been associated with elusiveness, which was considered their strength and gave them the ability to merge with the population, even as they planned and executed spectacular strikes. Their ability to safeguard their identity was the lifeline that allowed terrorists to survive. In contrast, *first*, the IS has carried out open attacks on regular armed forces, carving out a country of its own, which it governs through a wide network of administrative mechanisms. It raises revenues and undertakes well-planned military campaigns against its adversaries. *Second*, the IS has combined this with an army of supporters who are more than willing to challenge the established order in their respective countries, in pursuance of the ideology of the group, even as some of them are not its formal members. This has created an amorphous transnational reach of the IS, through volunteers, who willingly undertake lone-wolf attacks at its behest. *Third*, the IS has also challenged the comfort zone of countries in the West, which were relatively isolated by the Asian-African-Latin American contagion of terrorism. Their liberal democratic values and governance

systems, which were considered the model for fighting social and ideological estrangement, are being re-evaluated, since some of these countries have emerged as the largest contributors to the IS. This has simultaneously highlighted societal polarisation amongst relatively affluent societies, thereby questioning the plurality that tends to get associated with Western urbanisation. *Fourth*, the fragile fault line that remained a subterranean characteristic of West Asia has come to the fore, given the manner in which countries and their supporters have positioned themselves in the fight against terrorism. Actions have been guided by strategic interests of countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait and Qatar to the advantage of terrorists, who have exploited these regional fissures. This has been clearly evident in Syria, where the IS and Jabhat-al-Nasra have been beneficiaries of attempts to overthrow Assad. *Fifth*, the IS has succeeded in attracting existing groups, which have agreed to affiliate themselves with it, in the quest for creating a Caliphate. This not only raises the profile of the group, but also carries its ideology overseas, increasing its influence across population centres.

Contradictions in International Response

The world community, alarmed by the threat has initiated a series of counter actions against the IS. This includes bombing of targets both inside Iraq and Syria by the US since August 2014, followed a month later by the UK. In addition to the US-led alliance, Russians began their bombing runs by September 2015. Amongst the major US allies are Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which have contributed towards supporting “moderate” rebels in the fight against the IS.

However, these initiatives have been constrained by a number of contradictions that have come to characterise the fight against the IS, as covered by Dr P.K. Pradhan in his paper that provides an overview of West Asian geopolitics in relation to the IS. This is a result of country-specific strategic interests superseding the overall fight against the group. Primary amongst these is how the fight against the IS is viewed as part of the regional power equations. As an example, the Russians are keen to retain Assad in Syria, even as the US and its allies want to see him step down. This complicates the support extended by the two major powers in the fight against terrorism in the region. As events of the last year have indicated, this has led to a limited impact on IS effectiveness in Syria. Similarly, even as both Saudi Arabia and Iran see the IS as a threat to their interests, the possibility of their joining hands is precluded by their different national interests in Syria and Iraq. As a result, even a coalition formed against the IS by Saudi Arabia, does not include Iran, despite its substantial military capabilities. The fight against the IS therefore becomes a casualty in the regional jostling for power between countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia.

A number of countries also prefer to retain continuity in the political order prevalent in their countries, which could be threatened by the IS in one way or another. Saudi Arabia cannot allow the IS to pose a challenge to the monarchy in the country, nor to its perception of being the most important Sunni Muslim voice on religious issues. Both these aspects are threatened by the declaration of a Caliphate by the IS and the ensuing response to its call for support from a large number of individual volunteers from across the world.

A similar contradiction is posed by the Kurdish issue, which is viewed as a threat by countries like Turkey, despite proving to be a strong line of defence against the IS. While their success is critical for the fight against IS, their emergence as a stronger regional centre of power is viewed with scepticism by both Turkey and Syria.

Emerging Trends

The emerging trends of terrorism while dominated by the IS, are not limited to it. As Dr Ashok Bhuria and Dr Smruti Pattanaik point out, the competitive nature of radicalism has given rise to different terror outfits that are driven by their own brand of ideology. As part of this trend, the rise of Salafism has challenged Deobandi and Wahabi ideologies, in a bid to garner a larger support base. Countries like Pakistan have employed this as a strategic tool to further their perceived national interests in both India and Afghanistan. They have systematically exploited terror groups, through a policy of selective targeting beyond its borders and freedom of action to train and collect funds within Pakistan.

The emergence of violent ideologies has been accompanied by growing radicalisation. This is evident from the number of volunteers who have signed up for the IS and other terrorist groups in the recent past. Their willingness to undertake lone-wolf strikes in their respective countries has added an additional dimension to the spread of terrorism. This becomes all the more stark when the geographical spread of IS's appeal is analysed. The West is often seen as a moderate, developed and open society, which has been able to best meet the human development goals of society. However, the large number of volunteers from this region clearly indicates the importance of understanding the distinction between fulfilment of material needs and the psychological disconnect of a section of population with the mainstream. This trend could further be reinforced as a result of right-wing groups on either side of the divide, who continue to identify a very small minority of radicals as representing the larger majority amongst religious communities. However, radicalisation is not limited to volunteers joining the IS. Dr. Priyanka Singh highlights the systematic use of radical Islam by Pakistan. It has successfully produced volunteers for the jihadi factory in order to achieve

larger strategic objectives. As a result, large sections of youth have become the unfortunate victims of state sponsorship of terrorism.

Terrorism has always employed strategic communication as a tool and a force multiplier. This becomes all the more apparent, given the weakness of the state to counter the narrative of terrorists. This trend has been reinforced by groups like the IS through the employment of social media and new media technologies to spread their message and influence the youth who remain most vulnerable to its propaganda, as indicated by Shruti Pandalai in her paper. Their success in attracting technocrats has facilitated the creation of both open and secure communication systems, which facilitate passage of information, secure locations, transfer of money and broadcasting carefully doctored messages to attract volunteers. This challenge is heightened by the very character of social media and the information highway, which is very difficult to monitor and restrict. Technology, which has traditionally been a weapon of choice of state agencies, given their easy access and control over it, has instead become an equally potent weapon in the hands of capable terrorists. They are further benefitted by a coherent theme and message which emanates from a focussed ideological backdrop, unlike different countries, individuals and agencies that continue to speak in different voices, professing varied strategies.

Looking into the future, groups like the IS will continue to look for opportunities that can give them the tools and weapons to unleash large scale casualties. The use of chemical weapons as an option has already been exercised in the past, as analysed by Dr Reshmi Kazi in her paper. This underlines the need for greater international scrutiny and cooperation in this regard and a concerted attempt at eliminating such weapons and the possibility of their falling in the hands of terrorists. This raises the importance of regaining control over ungoverned spaces and failing states, which become the most probable sources of leaks of such technology.

Until now, technology has been employed as an enabler by terrorist groups like the IS as brought out by Munish Sharma. However, their growing expertise, experience with cyberattacks, cybercrimes and hacking, could lead to a capability, which does not require them to send terrorists to physically cause casualties. This could well be accomplished through disruption and destruction of networks that run communication systems, air control towers and railways. Such possibilities have until now only been ascribed to states as part of their cyberwarfare capabilities. However, with increasing proficiency and a networked world, terrorists are likely to remain on the lookout for vulnerabilities that help accomplish their primary objective of causing casualties in the most sensational manner leading to wave of fear that will serve to galvanise their supporters.

APPENDIX 1

East Asia Summit Statement on Countering Violent Extremism

WE, the Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Australia, People's Republic of China, Republic of India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russian Federation and the United States of America on the occasion of the 10th East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 22 November 2015,

RECALLING the 2014 East Asia Summit (EAS) Statement on the Rise of Violence and Brutality Committed by Terrorist/Extremist Organisations in Iraq and Syria,

WELCOMING the EAS Symposium on Religious Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration hosted by Singapore and the EAS ad hoc informal meeting on ISIL and extremist organizations convened in Jakarta on 26 April 2015,

TAKING NOTE of the process launched by the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in February 2015, and the outcomes of the Sydney Regional CVE Summit in June 2015 and the Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism held in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015,

RECALLING the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism and the ASEAN Comprehensive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism,

WELCOMING initiatives by civil society including the Content Creators' Workshop on Countering the Narrative of Violent Extremism, organised by the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation and Google in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 19 May 2015,

EXPRESSING grave concern about the spread of violent extremism and terrorism that undermines local communities and threatens peace and security, including in the Asia-Pacific region,

WELCOMING efforts to establish a centre focusing on narratives to counter terrorism at the regional level in Malaysia,

RECOGNISING that responding to the threat of terrorist groups exploiting the Internet and social media platforms to recruit and radicalise to violent extremism vulnerable individuals requires international cooperation as well as action by all tiers of government, together with civil society and the private sector,

EMPHASISING that terrorism and violent extremism should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization, and should be neither tolerated nor condoned,

RECOGNISING that moderation guides actions that emphasize tolerance, understanding, dialogue, mutual respect and inclusiveness, and is a core value in countering radicalism and extremism,

REAFFIRMING support for the effective implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2129 (2013), 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015), and relevant statements by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2014/23 and S/PRST/2015/11),

RECOGNIZING the role of governments and their competent bodies, international and regional institutions and civil society in countering violent extremism and terrorism, and in international cooperation in this field,

DO HEREBY DECIDE TO:

DENOUNCE terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including the spread of violent extremist ideologies and propaganda,

CONDEMN the heinous terrorist attacks in Bamako, Paris, Beirut, Ankara and against Russian aircraft over the Sinai, and elsewhere, which are an affront to all humanity, and emphasise our unshaken resolve to stand together in countering terrorism and violent extremism,

WORK to support each other's efforts to counter violent extremism, including through coordination of efforts, capacity building, and sharing of information, research, experience, best practice and lessons learned,

SUPPORT and share research and expertise drawn from both the public and private sectors that contribute to a thorough collective understanding of what drives individuals to violent extremism,

COOPERATE to counter terrorist and violent extremist ideology and propaganda, and promote positive messages of respect, inclusion and moderation,

including through developing a compendium of regional counter-narratives and a regional network for civil society organisations to amplify effective messages across the region and to foster peer-to-peer learning,

INVEST in enhancing the ability of communities and individuals to challenge terrorist propaganda, including building technical capacity and capability of grass roots organisations, community leaders and people with influence to promote non-extremist messages that resonate with vulnerable individuals,

PROMOTE the role of education in building resilience against violent extremism, through fostering respect for different cultures and beliefs and providing opportunities for social and economic inclusion, given that violent extremist propaganda often targets youth,

EMPOWER youth, women, families, religious, cultural and education leaders, and community groups to amplify alternative messages of respect, inclusiveness, social cohesion, diversity and moderation,

WORK closely with the private sector, particularly the media and technology sectors, to support and promote government and civil society efforts to build resilience in communities and prevent the process of radicalisation to violent extremism, particularly online,

DEVELOP and implement comprehensive strategies, to counter violent extremism that include non-legislative, legislative and law enforcement responses to the threat, including efforts to address the underlying conditions that are conducive to the spread of violent extremism,

CALL for the promotion of religious tolerance, mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue to build integrated and inclusive societies,

CONTINUE to work with the United Nations and other international and regional institutions, including the UN's Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation and the Global Movement of Moderates Foundation to counter terrorism and violent extremism.

Adopted at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, this Twenty-Second Day of November in the Year Two Thousand and Fifteen at the 10th East Asia Summit.

APPENDIX 2

East Asia Summit Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates

WE, the Heads of State/Government of the Member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Australia, the People's Republic of China, Republic of India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and the United States of America on the occasion of the 10th East Asia Summit (EAS) held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia,

UNDERLINING our common vision of the EAS as a Leaders-led forum for dialogue and cooperation on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and prosperity,

WELCOMING the ASEAN Leaders' adoption of the Langkawi Declaration on the Global Movement of Moderates at the 26th ASEAN Summit in April 2015, further reinforcing moderation as an ASEAN value,

RECALLING the 2011 Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations which calls for the recognition and respect for the diversity of ethnic, religious, cultural traditions and values as well as diversity of views and positions, including by promoting the voices of moderation,

RECALLING FURTHER that during the 7th East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2012 the Leaders welcomed the progress made in the Global Movement of Moderates (GMM),

RECOGNISING that ancient wisdom described *the middle way* and the *golden mean* as a path of moderation,

RECOGNISING FURTHER that moderation guides action which emphasises tolerance, understanding, dialogue, mutual respect and inclusiveness and is a tool to bridge differences and disputes,

COGNISANT that the EAS Member States are ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse and welcoming efforts at the community, national, regional and international levels in promoting cohesion of the multi-racial, multi-religious

and multi-cultural community, whose diversity is a source of strength in promoting moderation,

EMPHASISING the important role that the EAS can play in furthering the moderation agenda, which promotes a culture of peace and complements other initiatives, including the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations,

ACKNOWLEDGING that moderation, as a means to promote tolerance and mutual understanding, includes engaging in dialogues on political, economic and socio-cultural issues,

RECOGNISING that moderation is an all-encompassing approach not only in resolving differences and conflicts peacefully but also for ensuring sustainable and inclusive

development and equitable growth as well as promoting social harmony and mutual understanding within the country and region,

FURTHER RECOGNISING that moderation is a core value in the pursuit of long-lasting peace and a tool to diffuse tensions and counter violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations,

EMPHASISING that violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, should not be associated with any culture, civilisation or religion and should be neither tolerated nor condoned,

ENCOURAGED that the Global Movement of Moderates has received widespread support from the international community, academic institutions and civil society organisations,

Do hereby decide to:

1. Promote moderation as a universal value that promotes peace, security, development and social justice;
2. Further promote the approach of moderation and uphold the rule of law in the conduct of relations among states, including in the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law;
3. Elaborate a common agenda for peace and prosperity, which promotes political and social stability and inclusive political processes; sustainable growth which provides opportunities for all and upholds dignity; and social justice with emphasis on mutual respect, balance and moderation;
4. Reaffirm our commitment to democratic values, good governance, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, equitable and inclusive economic growth, tolerance and mutual respect as well as adherence to social justice, which are vital to countering terrorism and violent extremism and addressing their root causes;

5. Empower civil society, community and religious leaders as well as encourage the business sector and the media to promote and strengthen the voices of moderation through inclusive dialogue and awareness raising;
6. Work with regional and international institutions to counter the voices of extremism and encourage academic discourse and exchanges to amplify the voices of moderates;
7. Reaffirm our commitment to promote education as an effective means of instilling respect for life, for diversity and the values of moderation, tolerance, non-violence and mutual understanding towards preventing the spread of violent extremism and addressing its root causes;
8. Organise outreach programmes, inter-faith and cross-cultural dialogues as well as the sharing of best practices on moderation in various formats at the national, regional and international levels, including supporting the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and the ASEAN Foundation to conduct seminars, workshops and training programmes in promoting the voices of moderation; and
9. Endorse the observance of a Year of Moderation at the United Nations to underscore the importance of moderation.

ADOPTED in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on the 22nd Day of November in the Year Two Thousand and Fifteen.

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