

AAKROSH

ASIAN JOURNAL ON TERRORISM AND INTERNAL
CONFLICTS

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EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Challenges of Terror

MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD.)

THE REALM OF FEAR

Now, a new dangerous threat is on the horizon, a threat of deadly attacks across the world by minions of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The brazen terror attacks across the globe, from Paris, Brussels and Turkey to Bamako and Indonesia are meant to send a chilling message to the civilised world. These attacks were not launched to cause merely material damage but were calculated to spread fear and despondency among the targeted populations. These attacks were launched to overawe and break the will of the people to resist Islamic terror. Insecurity and fear and suspicion of the ‘other’ and lurking danger in every corner provoke violent reactions in otherwise-peace-loving societies, enlarging the arc of violence. Each catastrophic terrorist attack raises the level of fear and anger and sends shock waves across the world.

The messages of terror sent out by al-Baghdadi show a motive of global domination by awe and shock. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, addressing one religious congregation in Mosul, asked all Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State ‘because hijra [migration] to the land of Islam is obligatory’. He described the Islamic State (IS) as a place where ‘the Arab and non-Arab, the white man and black man, the easterner and the westerner are all brothers, (where) their blood mixes and becomes one, under a single flag and goal.’ Such messages are an invitation for a holy war and the setting up of a global Islamic regime that will dominate the world. Most Sunnis react favourably to such sentiments expressed through social media, which has millions of followers,

South Asia, a region that contains the largest Muslim population, larger than the Muslim population in any other part of the world, is a natural destination for ISIS, which has repeatedly declared its intention to

extend its boundaries to Khorasan ISIL-K, a notional region that includes Af-Pak and parts of India. The presence of ISIS elements has already been reported in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, though their influence is still confined to a few areas. The largest penetration of ISIS is in the Maldives, where it is rapidly gathering mass support.

Pakistan is the most important destination of ISIS in South Asia, but Pakistan Army is unlikely to opt to be a part of the ISIS caliphate, Pakistan's military and intelligence services may, however, lend a supporting hand to ISIS operations in India

Determined attempts of ISIS to increase its presence in South Asia spell great danger for India as it will be able to use bases in the surrounding countries for mounting lethal terrorist attacks on India. Currently, the presence of ISIS in India is minimal, but it is very active on the social media in its attempts to lure Muslim youth into its fold. To safeguard its Muslim population from the evil ISIS propaganda, India will have to take determined multiple security and socio-economic measures.

Special measures will be required to curb the activities and plans of Islamic groups to threaten the very idea of India. Fortunately for India, its Muslim population follows a moderate Sufi version of Islam and, therefore, is not easily susceptible to ISIS propaganda or any kind of foreign religious or cultural intrusion.

ISIS operations across the world have become a bizarre combination of ideology and brutality that threaten the entire civilised society. In these circumstances, India must join hands with likeminded countries in the region without delay to ward off the scourge of terrorism and religious extremism before it takes deeper roots.

COUNTERING TERRORISM IN KASHMIR

In a recent encounter in the Kashmir Valley, we lost two young officers and a jawan of an elite force on one single day. In November last year, we lost two commanding officers. It is matter of great concern that the army is losing officers and men quite frequently fighting cowardly infiltrators. Terrorists hide in predetermined concrete buildings while our troops have to operate in the open, exposed to deadly enemy fire without heavy

covering fire of their own. In these environments, we keep on losing our noble soldiers, which in my opinion is a totally unacceptable situation.

As an army veteran, I feel the time has come to develop new techniques to decimate terrorists holed up in buildings or hiding in deep forests without any extraneous considerations. It may be necessary to blow up buildings in such situations to save the precious lives of our brave soldiers. The cowards who use common people as a shield are bound to die ultimately, but if they take a heavy toll on our troops before dying, I think they have achieved their objective.

Moreover, here are some alarming developments witnessed during recent encounters: local supporters are giving open support and encouragement to foreign terrorists and perhaps giving the exact locations of troops and the direction of their attack to the terrorists; due to our waning political influence, mobs are now openly shouting anti-India slogans, pelting stones on army personnel and putting obstacles in the path of security forces; and elaborate logistic support is being provided by well-armed indigenous terrorist groups to terrorists before and throughout their operations.

Islamic and Islamist Theology: Features That Strengthen Jihadism

SULTAN SHAHIN

A new confidential U.S. intelligence assessment indicates that as many as 30,000 foreigners from more than 100 countries have flocked to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of ISIS in the past year, double the number of recruits from the year before.¹ U.S. intelligence agencies estimate that more than 38,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Iraq and Syria since 2012. At least 5,000 of them came from Europe, including 1,700 from France, 760 from Britain, 760 from Germany and 470 from Belgium, according to official data collected by the Soufan Group, a security consulting firm. Relative to its population, Belgium spawned the largest number of these fighters.² Though no Indian had gone to Afghanistan to fight for al-Qaeda, now India too is increasingly at risk. While only 23 Indians are known to be actually fighting for ISIS, and a few have even got themselves killed, nearly 150 Indians are on the radar of intelligence agencies for actively following Islamic State propaganda and engaging on social media with pro-IS elements, according to government sources.³

These are astonishing facts and figures. Unprecedented. It is only natural for strategic thinkers to wonder what is driving this movement towards ISIS. One important factor in understanding this is how the Muslim community, particularly in India, reacted to the announcement on 29 June 2014 of the establishment of a worldwide caliphate. Al-Baghdadi was named its caliph, to be known as “Caliph Ibrahim”, and the terrorist organisation “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” (ISIS) was renamed the

Islamic State (IS). An influential Indian aalim (scholar) Maulana Salman Nadvi was ecstatic and even addressed al-Baghdadi as Ameerul Momineen (another term for Khalifa) in a letter posted on his Facebook page.⁴ Then come the editorial notes and articles of Jamaat-e-Islami India's mouthpiece the Dawat's 22 August, 2014 and 25 August 2014 editions. The first article criticises the secular, progressive Muslim intellectuals and activists participating in the press conference held in Delhi on 19th August to condemn the atrocities perpetrated by the ISIS against Muslims, particularly Shias, Christians, Kurds and Yazidis in Iraq in the name of Islam. The editorial calls all the participant stooges of the US and the Zionist forces and ignoramuses who do not understand the reality of the ISIS. It said:

'ISIS fulfils Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Abul Ala Maududi's aspirations for the Islamic caliphate.' 'Supporting IS caliphate is binding on all Muslims,' says Indian Jamaat-e-Islami. The second article published in 25 August, 2015 edition of Dawat glorifies the IS and tries to convince the Muslims to welcome its so-called Caliphate instead of condemning and criticising it. In fact, it says that supporting the IS caliphate is binding on all Muslims. It argues that the announcement of caliphate by Baghdadi is a far more powerful step than the authoritative lectures and writings of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Maulana Abul A'la Maududi who, according to the editorial board of Dawat, had aspirations for the Islamic caliphate. In their words, Abu Bakr Baghdadi is a greater Islamic personality than Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and even the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami Maulana Abul A'la Maududi because Baghdadi has given a new lease of life to the concept of Khilafat which the two Islamic scholars wanted materialized.⁵

Indian Muslim newspapers were in general quite welcoming of the "Khilafat" until ISIS started broadcasting its brutalities in gory details, thus bringing Islam itself into disrepute. Indian Muslim enthusiasm for the khilafat was not surprising as our current consensual theology calls it a religious duty for all Muslims to help establish a Khilafat. At least 18,000 Muslims had left their homes and jobs in British India in their bid to go and fight for the Khilafat-e-Osmania less than a hundred years ago. Many perished but are today revered as Shaheeds (martyrs) and ghazis (Islamic warriors).

We are living in an environment in which Muslim societies are producing armies of suicide bombers wherever and whenever required by a motivated group with necessary funding and logistics. Our madrasa children already sing songs with refrains like “zindagi shuru hoti hai qabr mein” (life begins in the grave). You can imagine what little effort is required by vested interests to turn people with such a belief system into suicide bombers. No wonder the application form for joining the so-called Islamic State army asks the potential recruits to specify their time and place of death.⁶ The ISIS knows no indoctrination is required; Islamic theological books are already doing their job for them.

Terrorist ideologues ask our youths not to wait for reaching the ISIS borders to start fighting Jihad, that has been elevated to the sixth pillar of Islam. Act as lone warriors, is the advice given to them through social media posts easily available to all. “Don’t wait to be trained in bomb-making too; don’t you have a car, just ram it into a crowd of infidels,” is another advice. Some misguided youth have already started following this advice too in different parts of the world.

A clarification is required about Jihad having been elevated to the sixth pillar of Islam. Jihad in the sense of qital (warfare) is considered an obligation for every Muslim on earth! In the Noble Quran published in Saudi Arabia by the “King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur’an, Madinah, K.S.A.” a footnote on page 39 explains surah 2:190. It says: “Al-Jihad (holy fighting) in Allah’s Cause (with full force of numbers and weaponry) is given the utmost importance in Islam and is one of its pillars. Allah’s Word is made superior, (His Word being La laha illallah which means there is no god but God), and His Religion (Islam) is propagated.” It continues: “By abandoning Jihad (may Allah protect us from that) Islam is destroyed and the Muslims fall into an inferior position; their honour is lost, their lands are stolen, their rule and authority vanish. Jihad is an obligatory duty in Islam on every Muslim, and he who tries to escape from this duty, or does not in his innermost heart wish to fulfil this duty, dies with one of the qualities of a hypocrite.”⁷

Moderate Muslims and Sufi ulema and mashaikh say repeatedly and fervently, and rightly, of course: Islam has nothing to do with terrorism; Islam is a religion of peace; even killing one innocent person in Islam

amounts to the genocide of humanity and saving one life amounts to saving humanity (Quran 5:32). They even quote an iconic Quranic verse of freedom in religion like *La ikraha fid deen* (There is no compulsion in religion: Quran 2:256) and teachings of co-existence like *lakum deenakum, waleya deen* (for you your religion and for me mine: Quran 109: 1-6).

Of course, moderates and Sufi-minded Muslims are totally correct and completely justified in making all these observations. Islam is indeed a religion of peace, compassion, pluralism, co-existence, good neighbourliness, complete human equality before God, gender justice and so on. Indeed, there are at least 124 verses that teach such humane traits. If Muslims were to follow these constitutive verses of the holy Quran, revealed in Mecca, they should have been the most peaceful, pluralistic community on earth, as they have been at various places and in different periods of history, under different rulers.

But the situation today is dire. When self-declared Khalifa Baghdadi announced recently that “Islam has never been a religion of peace, not even for a day,” not one Urdu (Muslim) newspaper in India disputed this, or expressed any outrage, though most editorial columns are now written by clerics. [One Urdu columnist did criticise Baghdadi over this remark, but most Sunni Muslims dismissed that as the rantings of a Shia.]

Scholars of the moderate Muslim mainstream as well as Deobandi, Barailvi and Sufi ulema and mashaikh, in particular, have been denouncing terrorism and declaring Islam to be a religion of peace and pluralism repeatedly since September 11, 2001 when Islamist terrorists killed nearly 3,000 innocent people in New York. This denunciation of Islamist terrorism has been going on in India much longer. For, we have been at the receiving end of Islamist terrorism since much before 9/11.

But the issue today is not that of denouncing terrorism as un-Islamic or declaring Islam as a religion of peace and pluralism. Not only Muslims but even the world at large knows that already. The question before us is the following. How come the more we denounce terrorism and the more we assert Islam’s peaceful nature, the more terrorists we create. What is the source of the terrorist ideology’s strength? Why are some of our educated, intelligent, internet-generation youth listening to the terrorist ideologues and not us, the moderate, the progressive, the Sufi. Why do

they consider us hypocrites? Are we indeed hypocrites? Is there some substance in their charge? After all, no intelligent, highly educated person of the 21st century would leave his well-paying job, beautiful wife, children, all living in a peaceful environment, and rush to join a war, with death or severe injury assured, unless he had a hundred percent surety of the correctness of his cause and total belief in his new-found faith. Where does this surety, this faith spring from?

Muslim youth gets the message of Islam supremacism from all the greatest theologians

Let us first see what are our educated youth learning Islam on the internet or in madrasas, colleges and universities, being told by some of our greatest, universally respected theologians? From Sufi Imam Ghazali, Hanbali Ibn-e-Taimiya and Hanafi Sheikh Sirhindi to Abdul Wahhab, Shah Waliullah, Abul A'la Maududi, Syed Qutb, and even an indefatigable promoter of peace and pluralism like Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, the curious Muslim youth gets the same message of Islam supremacism, exclusivism, xenophobia, intolerance and his duty of Jihad in the sense of Qital, in varying degrees. A few specimens:

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058 - 1111), considered the greatest of all Sufi theologians, and by many as next only to Prophet Mohammad in his understanding of Islam:

”... one must go on jihad at least once a year...one may use a catapult against them [non-Muslims] when they are in a fortress, even if among them are women and children. One may set fire to them and/or drown them...One must destroy their useless books. Jihadists may take as booty whatever they decide... Christians and Jews must pay...on offering up the Jizya, the Dhimmi must hang his head while the official takes hold of his beard and hits on the protuberant bone beneath his ear ... they are not permitted to ostentatiously display their wine or church bells... their houses may not be higher than a Muslim's, no matter how low that is. The dhimmi may not ride an elegant horse or mule; he may ride a donkey only if the saddle is of wood. He may not walk on the good part of the road. They have to wear an identifying

patch [on their clothing], even women, and even in the baths ... dhimmis must hold their tongue...”⁸

Imam Ibn Taymiyya (1263 - 1328) Most revered Hanbali jurist and scholar among Wahhabi-Salafi Muslims whose influence has recently grown immensely with the propagation of his creed by the Saudi monarchy:

“Since lawful warfare is essentially jihad and since its aim is that the religion is God’s entirely and God’s word is uppermost, therefore according to all Muslims, those who stand in the way of this aim must be fought... As for the People of the Book and the Zoroastrians, they are to be fought until they become Muslims or pay the tribute (Jizya) out of hand and have been humbled. With regard to the others, the jurists differ as to the lawfulness of taking tribute from them. Most of them regard it as unlawful...”⁹

Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) - Indian Islamic scholar, Hanafi jurist, considered Mujaddid alf-e-Saani, the renewer of Islam of the second millennium:

1. “...Cow-sacrifice in India is the noblest of Islamic practices.”
2. “Kufr and Islam are opposed to each other. The progress of one is possible only at the expense of the other and co-existences between these two contradictory faiths is unthinkable.
3. “The honour of Islam lies in insulting Kufr and Kafirs. One, who respects Kafirs, dishonours the Muslims.”
4. “The real purpose in levying Jizya on them is to humiliate them to such an extent that, on account of fear of Jizya, they may not be able to dress well and to live in grandeur. They should constantly remain terrified and trembling.
5. “Whenever a Jew is killed, it is for the benefit of Islam.”¹⁰

Shah Waliullah Dehlavi (1703–1762), Highly revered Indian scholar, theologian, Muhaddis and jurist.

“It is the duty of the prophet to establish the domination of Islam over all other religions and not leave anybody outside

its domination whether they accept it voluntarily or after humiliation. Thus the people will be divided into three categories. Lowly Kafir (unbelievers), have to be tasked with lowly labour works like harvesting, threshing, carrying of loads, for which animals are used. The messenger of God also imposes a law of suppression and humiliation on the Kafirs and imposes Jizya on them in order to dominate and humiliate them He does not treat them equal to Muslims in the matters of Qisas (Retaliation), Diyat (blood money), marriage and government administration so that these restrictions should ultimately force them to embrace Islam.”¹¹

Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, (1703 – 22 June 1792), the founder of Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabi-Salafi creed:

“Even if the Muslims abstain from Shirk (polytheism) and are Muwahhid (believer in oneness of God), their Faith cannot be perfect unless they have enmity and hatred in their action and speech against non-Muslims (which for him actually includes all non-Wahhabi or non-Salafi Muslims). (Majmua Al-Rasael Wal-Masael Al-Najdiah 4/291)

Abul A’la Maududi, Indian ideologue, founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, (25 September 1903 – 22 September 1979):

“Islam wishes to destroy all states and governments anywhere on the face of the earth which are opposed to the ideology and programme of Islam, regardless of the country or the nation which rules it. The purpose of Islam is to set up a state on the basis of its own ideology and programme, regardless of which nation assumes the role of the standard-bearer of Islam or the rule of which nation is undermined in the process of the establishment of an ideological Islamic State. ...

“Islam requires the earth — not just a portion, but the whole planet.... because the entire mankind should benefit from the ideology and welfare programme [of Islam] ... Towards this end, Islam wishes to press into service all forces which can bring about a revolution and a composite term for the use of all these forces is ‘Jihad’. The objective of the Islamic

‘jihad’ is to eliminate the rule of an un-Islamic system and establish in its stead an Islamic system of state rule.”¹²

A Hyderabad scholar Maulana Abdul Aleem Islahi justifies indiscriminate violence in his fatwa on the concept of power in Islam. Let me quote a few lines from the writings of this Maulana who runs a girls’ madrasa in Hyderabad and is known to have been an inspiration behind Indian Mujahedin:

“Let it be known that, according to Islamic jurisprudence, fighting the infidels (kuffar) in their countries is a duty (farz-e-Kifayah) according to the consensus of ulema. ...

“... I can say with full conviction that qital (killing, violence, armed struggle) to uphold the Kalimah (declaration of faith) has neither been called atrocity or transgression nor has it been prohibited. Rather, qital has not only been ordained for the purpose of upholding the Kalimah but also stressed and encouraged in the Book (Quran) and the Sunnah (Hadith). Muslims have indeed been encouraged and motivated to engage in qital and they have been given good tidings of rewards for this.”

“It is the duty (of Muslims) to struggle for the domination of Islam over false religions and subdue and subjugate ahl-e-kufr-o-shirk (infidels and polytheists) in the same way as it is the duty of the Muslims to proselytise and invite people to Islam. The responsibility to testify to the Truth and pronounce the Deen God has entrusted with the Muslims cannot be fulfilled merely by preaching and proselytising. If it were so there would be no need for the battles that were fought.

”Jihad has been made obligatory to make the Deen (religion) dominate and to stop the centres of evil. Keeping in view the importance of this task, the significance of Jihad in the name of God has been stressed in the Quran and Hadith. That’s why clear ordainments have been revealed to Muslims about fighting all the Kuffar (infidels). “Unite and fight the polytheists (mushriks) just as they put up a united front against you” (Surah Tauba: 9:36)”¹³

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, (born 1 January 1925), says the following:

Efforts on the part of prophets over a period of thousands of years had proved that any struggle which was confined to intellectual or missionary field was not sufficient to extricate man from the grip of this superstition (shirk, kufr). (So) it was God's decree that he (Prophet Mohammad) be a da'i (missionary) as well as ma'hi ((eradicator). He was entrusted by God with the mission of not only proclaiming to the world that superstitious beliefs (shirk, kufr) were based on falsehood, but also of resorting to military action, if the need arose, to eliminate that system for all time.¹⁴

It is ironic that even an indefatigable promoter of peace and pluralism among Muslims has to say on the basis of commonly accepted Islamic jurisprudence that the prophet's job was to eradicate unbelief from the world, even using military means. And if this is so, what would stop Bin Laden's and Baghdadis of this world claiming that they are simply carrying forward the Prophet's unfinished mission.

The message is clear. Islam must dominate the world

The message from all these sermons is clear. Islam must dominate the world and it is the duty of every Muslim to help the process. Wherever a Muslim turns to he gets the same Islam-supremacist message. The latest among the most authoritative books on Islamic theology is a 45-volume comprehensive Encyclopaedia of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence).¹⁵ This most influential book of Islamic jurisprudence has a 23,000-word chapter on Jihad. We moderate Muslims and Sufis keep talking ad nauseum about struggle against one's own nafs (lower self, negative ego) being the real and greater Jihad and Qital (warfare) being rather insignificant, lesser Jihad. But except one sentence in the beginning, the entire chapter talks entirely about the issues related with combatting and killing enemies, i.e. infidels, polytheists or apostates, starting with the stark declaration: "Jihad means to fight against the enemy." There is no mention of real or greater Jihad. Then Ibn-e-Taimiyya is quoted to say: "... So Jihad is wajib (incumbent) as much as one's capacity". Then comes the final, definitive definition: "Terminologically, Jihad means to fight against a non-zimmi

unbeliever (kaafir) after he rejects the call towards Islam, in order to establish or raise high the words of Allah.”¹⁶

It is not difficult for an intelligent, educated Muslim to discover our hypocrisy. Clearly what is censured by us moderates as radical Islamist theology is not substantially different from the current Islamic theology accepted through a consensus by ulema of all schools of thought. Late Osama bin Laden or his ideological mentor Abdu’llâh Yûsuf ‘Azzâm, now called father of global Jihad, and his present-day successor Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi did not invent a new theology. Their use of consensual theology is what lies behind their great success in attracting thousands of Muslim youth in such a short while. They will continue to attract more and more youths until we mainstream Muslims realise our hypocrisy and change course.

What are the ingredients of this consensual theology that is leading to radicalisation of our educated youth? A few examples:

1. Following a literal reading of some allegorical verses in Quran, most Muslims now regard God as an implacable, anthropomorphic figure permanently at war with those who do not believe in His uniqueness. This is a negation of the Sufi or Vedantic concept of God as universal consciousness or universal intelligence radiating His grace from every atom in the universe. Unfortunately, Sufi madrasas themselves have abandoned, at least in the Indian sub-continent, the concept of wahdatul wujud (unity of being), for fear that this would be considered too close to the Vedantic and thus Hindu concept of God. Instead they teach Sheikh Sirhindi’s wahdatul shuhud (Apparentism, unity of appearances) in the name of wahdatul wujud. Sheikh Sirhindi had invented this concept to counter the growing influence of Sufi masters like Mohiyiddin Ibn-e-Arabi and Mansour al-Hallaj during the reign Emperor Akbar.

Most Sufi madrasas have thrown out from their curriculum mystical books like *Kashful Mahjub* by Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh Hijweri, *Awarif-ul-Ma’arif* by Shaykh Umar Shahabuddin Suhrawardi, *Fawaidul Fu’aad* by Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia,

Masnawi of Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, Gulsitan and Bostan by Shaikh Sa'adi Shirazi, Si Asl by Mulla Sadra Shirazi, Fususul Hikam by Shiakh Ibn ul Arabi, Life and teachings of great Sufis like Ghareeb Nawaz Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti Ajmeri (ra), Baba Fareed, Ameer Khusro etc.

2. Radical ideologues quote militant, xenophobic verses of Quran to support offensive Jihad. We moderates from Sufi stream of thought counter that by saying: look at the context. These verses came during war and had to inevitably order fighting, killings, offer rewards for martyrs and show intolerance towards the manifest enemy. It's not unusual in wars to make binary arguments. Thus the Muslim-Kafir binary inevitably emerged during wars. After all, most of the war-time verses of Quran revealed in Medina, first permitting and then guiding Muslims in the course of various wars, were a response to the evolving situation. But we do not take the argument of these war-time verses being contextual in nature to its logical conclusion, which is, that these verses have now become obsolete; they are no longer applicable to us today when that context does not exist.
3. Not only that we do not call contextual verses of Quran obsolete, but we also agree with the radicals that Quran is an uncreated attribute of God, with all its verses, universally and eternally applicable to Muslims, without reference to context. Every madrasa teaches that Quran is uncreated, divine, direct speech of God, as if God were an anthropomorphic being. This totally defeats our earlier argument that when dealing with Quranic exhortations, we should look at the context. What context? If Quran is an uncreated attribute of God, immutable, eternal, merely a copy of the original Quran lying in the Heavenly Vault (Lauh-e-Mahfouz), then where is the question of context? This makes it possible for militant ideologues to tell our youth that even the militant, xenophobic, intolerant exhortations of Quran that were revealed in the context of war, must be followed

and implemented, as there is no controversy about their applicability today in any school of thought.

4. There is consensus in Islamic theology that Hadith, the so-called sayings of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), are akin to revelation. These were collected up to 300 years after the demise of the prophet and rational Muslims doubt their credibility and authenticity, but even ulema opposed to ISIS, cannot bring themselves to question the Hadith-based millenarian thesis that is the primary cause of ISIS' great success in comparison to al-Qaeda which did not stress millenarianism.

As a couple of allegorical verses of Quran and predictions attributed to the Prophet have been interpreted to mean that the world is about to end, and Islam is about to be victorious following the end-time war being waged by ISIS, then what is the point of working for corporates run by infidels? Why not join the battle and become a martyr or Ghazi just before the world ends? So goes the argument.

One of the permanent bestsellers in Delhi's Urdu Bazar is a booklet called "Qeyamat ki peshingoiyan" (End-Time Predictions). I imagine a similar booklet selling on streets of Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus, Istanbul, wherever. Why should ISIS not make good use of this belief, when it has the unquestioning support of theologians of all schools of thought, including self-proclaimed moderates, who call Hadith akin to revelation. Ahadith are also used to justify the killing of innocent civilians in a war, although there are repeated and clear instructions in the Quran against that. But the moment you say Hadith is akin to revelation, you are nullifying the impact of your Quranically justified claim that in Islam killing of one innocent person amounts to killing of humanity.

5. Nearly all Muslims consider Sharia as divine and immutable, even though it was first codified on the basis of some Quranic verses and pre-Islamic Arab Bedouin customs 120 years after the demise of the Prophet and completion of the religion of

Islam as declared by God in Quran (5:3). The result is that even Muslims living in non-Muslim majority multicultural Europe demand Sharia-compliant laws. No wonder that those who want to practice what they believe in would want to migrate to the so-called Islamic State, sometimes even with their families. Radicalised youth cannot be blamed for feeling that the moderate Muslims, in India, for instance, are hypocrites. They want to use their purported belief in the divinity of Sharia only for male-supremacist privileges like instant divorce and multiple marriages, whereas the radicals migrating to the so-called Islamic State are willing to accept all the rigours of Sharia's criminal justice system, namely, cutting off hands for theft, lashes and stoning for adultery and murder, etc.

6. There is consensus in Islamic theology that helping establish and supporting a caliphate is the religious duty of Muslims, even though there is absolutely no such direction in the Quran. But those who believe in the Hadith being akin to revelation are unable to dispute ISIS' claim to legitimacy on the basis of this Hadith: "Hadhrat Huzaifa narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: "Prophethood will remain among you as long as Allah wills. Then Caliphate (Khilafah) on the lines of Prophethood shall commence, and remain as long as Allah wills. Then corrupt/erosive monarchy would take place, and it will remain as long as Allah wills. After that, despotic kingship would emerge, and it will remain as long as Allah wills. Then, the Caliphate (Khilafah) shall come once again based on the precept of Prophethood." (Musnad Ahmed inb Hanabli)
7. Hijrat (migration) to the land of Islamic Sharia from Darul Harb where Sharia is not enforced is a religious duty for Muslims. This may appear grotesque at a time when millions of Muslims are marching to the so-called European "Darul Harb" almost barefoot in a desperate effort to escape from so-called "Darul Islam" of Khalifa al-Baghdadi. The "Darul Islam" of Saudi Arabia has refused to give refuge to a single soul, while the European "Darul Harb" is accommodating millions of Muslims.

But the ulema will not allow any part of their theology to be questioned.

8. Theologians of all school believe that some early verses of Quran have been abrogated and replaced by better and more appropriate later verses. This consensual Doctrine of Abrogation is used by radical ideologues to claim all 124 foundational, constitutive, Meccan verses of peace, pluralism, co-existence with other religious communities, compassion, kindness to neighbours, etc., have been abrogated and replaced by later Medinan verses of war, xenophobia and intolerance. As long as Sufi theologians do not contest this Doctrine of Abrogation, their quoting verses from Meccan Quran has no meaning.
9. There is consensus among theologians of all school of thought that there is no freedom of religion for Muslims in Islam. Apostasy (irtidad or riddah) has to be punished by death. The only dispute is whether the apostate should be given the opportunity to seek forgiveness and revert to his earlier position. With this core aspect of theology how can Muslims confront terrorist ideologues who order death for vast numbers of Muslims on ground of their having turned apostate. In their eyes all those Muslims who are not with ISIS and other such groups are apostates, particularly all Shia, Ahmadis, Yezidis, etc. How can we prevent radicalisation of our youth unless we confront this theology?
10. The problem is there is no consensus among Muslims as to who is a Muslim? Justice Munir of the Commission of enquiry set up in Pakistan following anti-Ahmadia riots in 1954 reported that no two ulema agreed on the definition of a Muslim. Ideally, Quran should be our guide, according to which even Hazrat Moosa (AS) or Moses, who surrendered to God, much before the advent of Prophet Mohammad (saw), was also a Muslim (Quran 10:90). Allah informs us of Muslims who have converted but 'faith has not yet entered their hearts' (Quran 49:14), and yet God does not prescribe any punishment for them, nor are

they turned out of the fold of Islam. This means that anyone who claims to believe in or surrender to God is a Muslim. The least Muslims can do is to accept *irja*, the position of the *Murjias* (postponers), who said let us postpone judgement in matters of faith for the Day of Judgement. Let us allow God to judge people on matters of faith. When we humans do not know what lies in someone's heart, who are we to punish someone for what he believes in or not. A very rational position, but Muslims will need to embrace rationality or Quran first.

11. The same is true of Blasphemy. Consensual Islamic theology prescribes Death for the blasphemer, even on the flimsiest of accusation. Many Muslim countries have anti-blasphemy laws, though the one that misuses them most is Pakistan. Unfortunately, Sufi-minded Muslims are in the forefront of those who advocate killing for blasphemy and some are even among the killers for blasphemy. How can we fight ISIS ideology, if our own ideology is the same?

Deradicalisation by Default? Can it work?

Turkish Spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen's Hizmet movement calls its approach "Deradicalisation by Default." This mainly focuses on the positive features of Islam. Hizmet has vast resources and has deployed them well. It has already taken positions against widely accepted concepts like *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam*. But ISIS continues to draw a steady stream of recruits from Turkey and elsewhere. Any strategy that doesn't appear to be working well should be rethought.

Clearly, the radical Islamist theology and the current Islamic theology of consensus are by and large one and the same. Any differences are cosmetic. ISIS may vanish tomorrow. But the problem of radicalisation will remain. Islam supremacism, xenophobia, intolerance and exclusivism are inherent in the current Islamic, and not just Islamist theology.

It's time moderate, progressive Muslims understood that they just have to go beyond the usual shibboleths. Sufi approach of focussing on the positive features of Islam worked well at one time. There was no

internet then. In the internet age everyone is a scholar. In this age of instant scholarship, nothing can be hidden or bypassed.

The core Islamic theology militates against positive features of Islam

Focusing on positive features of Islam is an essential part of De-radicalisation or, more realistically, Preventing Radicalisation. But it is not bearing fruit in full measure as the core theology agreed to by nearly all Muslims militates against these positives. As briefly outlined above, this core and consensual theology nullifies the impact of all arguments made against violent extremism. It is this core theology that needs to be refuted and substituted with a new theology. Let us all try and bring the core Islamic theology in line with the actual teachings of Quran and Sunnah. Let us move away from the current theology of violence and xenophobia. Let us move towards a coherent, comprehensive theology of peace and pluralism, co-existence and gender justice.

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Islamic State in South Asia: Ramifications and Challenges for India

ALOK KUMAR GUPTA

Muslim leaders, whether Sunni or Shia, Salafi or Sufi, conservative or liberal, have almost unanimously condemned and denounced the Islamic State (IS) not merely as un-Islamic but as actively anti-Islamic. Two great powers of the world, the United States and Russia, have almost vowed to destroy it and are bombing all across its strongholds. The wholesale slaughter of prisoners by IS, although not unknown in the history of Islam, is not true to the Islamic faith. The bad and sad face of Islam has raised a strong voice within itself that has decried IS and says what it is doing and advocating is not Islam. However, the fact remains that in spite of opposition from almost all corners, IS has not only survived but is attracting youth from all over the world into its fold and cadre. This makes it imperative to understand its threat perception within South Asia as it is home to the largest groups of Muslim population in the world.

The ‘clash of civilizations’ has been a popular topic and a theory of debate in international relations in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in the United States. The theory though was there much before that. The ascendance of the theory was the direct consequence of 9/11, when most realist scholars preferred to look at the world order or the international political system from the prism of the ‘clash of civilizations’.¹ Though, the definition and categorisation of the term ‘civilization’ has been debated a lot and mostly critiqued by scholars, scholars and journalists in international media have endeavoured to look at different conflicts in terms of the ‘clash of civilizations’, treating any person pre-eminently as a member of a civilization (for example, in Huntington’s categorisation, as a member of ‘the Western world’, ‘the Islamic world’, ‘the Hindu world’,

or 'the Buddhist world'). The deficiency of the clash thesis began well before we got to the point of asking whether the desperate civilizations (among which the population of the world is neatly partitioned out) must necessarily, or even typically, clash.² However, development in the recent past has started defying Huntington's thesis.

Huntington argued that in the evolution of world history, the age of ideology has come to an end and the world has reverted to a normal state of affairs characterised by cultural conflict. He further argued that the primary axis of conflicts in the future will be along cultural and religious lines. Accordingly, he posited the concept of different civilizations as the highest rank of cultural identity and argued that this shall be useful in analysing the potential for conflict. He writes, 'It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. . . . This is not to advocate the desirability of conflicts between civilizations. It is to set forth descriptive hypothesis as to what the future may be like.'³

However, going by Huntington's categorisation of civilizations the recent developments within the civilization called Islam disproves the theory of the 'clash of civilizations' and presents a scenario for theorisation in the context of the 'clash *within* civilizations'. Within the Islamic world, not only the sub-Islamic civilizations called Shia and Sunni are standing like gladiators against each other, there is also a clash within the organisations of Sunnis for one-upmanship, as well as a power struggle to assume the leadership of the Islamic world. Then there are other smaller Islamic groups that are organising themselves against IS. The advent of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which was earlier called the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and now is also called IS,⁴ and the manner of its offensive has revealed that it has also acquired a dimension that can be defined as a 'clash within Islam'. The resumption of terrorist activities in Iraq and Syria by IS and the subsequent declaration of the

‘caliphate’, whereby Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has declared himself as the caliph and has asked for the allegiance of the Islamic people all over the world, has not only set the tone for a clear-cut ‘clash within civilizations’ but also obviously demonstrated this in its deeds and actions.

The pronouncement of the caliphate was soon subtly contested by the erstwhile al-Qaeda when its leader Ayman al-Zawahiri announced the creation of the South Asian wing of al-Qaeda and pledged renewed loyalty to the Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar. The most important development to be noted here is that both ISIS and al-Qaeda are Sunni terrorist outfits and the former is a break-away group of the latter. Even within Iraq and Syria, the turf is not wide open for ISIS as another group owing allegiance to al-Qaeda and supported by it, Jabhat al-Nushra, is active and fighting in Syria against the forces of the Syrian state. Hence, the ‘clash of civilizations’ seems to have given way to a ‘clash within civilizations’ and consequent imperatives for new theorisation. That South Asia is one of the largest homes of Islamic population makes it imperative to decipher as to which group is trying to make inroads into it and the way it is shaping up in the region to lure the youths of the region into its fold. This article also entails the sequence of events that suggests the growing ramifications of IS within India and the likely challenges in terms of the threat to India and its security.

AN ASCENDING ISLAMIC STATE WITH A WEARY AL-QAEDA

Al-Qaeda’s announcement of the creation of a South Asian wing, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIA), provided headlines around the world and raised an alarm in India.⁵ In the 55-minute video posted online, Ayman al-Zawahiri pledged renewed loyalty to the Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Omar. This stated allegiance has been understood the world over by the observers as an apparent snub to Islamic State militants. It appeared that Zawahiri was eager to regain some of the limelight lost after the liquidation of his leader Osama. He claimed that al-Qaeda was formed to promulgate the call of the reviving imam, Sheikh Osama bin Laden. He also urged the ‘*umma*’, or Muslim nation, to wage a jihad against its enemies, to liberate

its land, to restore its sovereignty and to revive its caliphate. On the other hand, the success of IS in Iraq and Syria since 2014 seems to be throwing a great challenge to al-Qaeda after the elimination of its leader Osama bin Laden by the United States in 2011. IS has been challenging al-Qaeda's supremacy in leading the worldwide Islamist militancy and this has fast turned into a fact and is obvious on the ground. Al-Qaeda looks sluggish, stale and irrelevant in the contemporary world.

IS, with its global appeal, low-cost, high-impact tactics and swelling ranks, is turning out to be the deadliest terrorist organisation of modern times, outranking groups such as al-Qaeda.⁶ It has carried out a number of terror attacks outside Syria and Iraq, the core of its influence. It bombed Ankara and Beirut, downed a Russian airliner over Sinai, carried out coordinated strikes across Paris and killed a provincial governor in Yemen. These attacks were also a message to radicalised IS supporters elsewhere to carry out lone-wolf attacks, like the one in San Bernardino, California, where a couple, reportedly inspired by IS ideology, shot dead 14 people and injured over 20 others. The group has vowed to organise more such attacks in the West and elsewhere in an apparent admission of its changing strategy, which so far was focussed on the ground battles in Syria and Iraq.⁷

Unlike al-Qaeda, IS has never been a hit-and-run jihadist group. The political ambitions of the organisation are expanding since 2013, when it fought for territories in Syria and Iraq, capitalising on the power vacuum created in these two countries by the wars led and sponsored by the West and their regional allies. ISIS, according to several sources, controlled territories as large as Great Britain, comprising some 10 million people, but under counter-attacks from different militia groups, such as the Peshmerga, Hezbollah and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), its expansionary project has come under enormous pressure.⁸ US and Russian interventions have checked its expansionary project or maybe have kept it on hold for now. Through its offensives, the objectives of ISIS have largely been made clear. A dominant view across the South Asian region and India remains that IS needs territory, money, arms and new recruits from across the Islamic youth population in different parts of the world. This makes South Asia, particularly India, a vulnerable region as it is home to the largest

population of Muslims in the world. Even though the Indian agencies are ruling out any immediate threat to India, it is clear that a new version of IS style of attacks is fast becoming a high possibility in the country.

ISLAMIC STATE: THREAT PERCEPTIONS TO INDIA

IS has caught the attention of many in India and in its neighbourhood, for instance, IS flags and pro-IS graffiti have been popping up in Kashmir. There is acclivity of IS as an outfit, as a violent movement and as a brutal army out for territorial grab. IS as a threat perception to India may have several dimensions, which are as follows:

- Influencing the Indian population for recruitment of the youths by luring them to its ranks for reinforcing its fighters in Syria and Iraq and other territorial objectives.
- Influencing Indian Muslim youths to carry out lone-wolf attacks on the Indian territory with an objective of destabilising its polity and society.
- Entering into alliances with local or regional terrorist outfits and strengthening them to increase turbulence in Kashmir and looking for a violence-ridden solution for the protracted dispute.
- Raising the possibility of local grievances finding a global echo and refuge in IS propaganda. This is more probable as the new political environment dominated by divisive and regressive discussions has led to the flourishing of fringe elements.
- And last but not the least, creating turbulence across South Asia with a view to extend and consolidate the ‘caliphate’ of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in the region as it is home to a substantial number of Muslims.

AMBITIONS OF A CALIPHATE ALONG SOUTH ASIA

Prima facie, it may seem that apart from concerns over the fate of the Indian nationals in Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Muslim states, India does not face any immediate threat from ISIS. The group only seems keen on carving out a caliphate along the Iraqi-Syrian border and in the Middle East. According to some experts, a closer glance reveals that the threat

is a more imminent one. ISIS has global ambitions, which include carving out an Islamic world dominion. India will then be a prime threat in the achievement of these ambitions, given the vulnerability of its Muslim population. After the declaration of the caliphate, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi addressed jihadists the world over and said:

‘Muslims’ rights are forcibly seized in China, India, Palestine, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, Iran, Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, in the East and in the West. Prisoners are moaning and crying for help. Orphans and widows are complaining of their plight. Women who have lost their children are weeping. Masajid (plural of masjid) are desecrated and sanctities are violated. . . . Terrify the enemies of Allah and seek death in the places where you expect to find it. Your brothers, on every piece of this earth, are waiting for you to rescue them.’⁹

The address explicitly mentions India as one of the prime targets of ISIS. In the world map of the planned dominion released by IS, it also marks out parts of north-west India. The outfit plans to include many north-western provinces of India, including parts of Gujarat, in the planned Islamic caliphate of Khorasan.¹⁰ Therefore, what comes of the pronouncements is that once IS tastes success in Syria and Iraq and consolidates in the region where it is carrying out its offensive, it may then turn its legs and head towards South Asia and India. IS seems not to be chasing grand attacks the way al-Qaeda did and is focussed on the immediate objectives – to establish a caliphate and to take on enemies such as Shias, Kurds and other minorities within Islam. It has become obvious that while al-Qaeda may have scripted the most stunning terror attack in modern times with 9/11 in the US, in the long term, it turned out to be an abstract terrorist organisation bent upon targeting Western interests alone. Osama bin Laden and his key aides never looked at establishing a caliphate as a key towards spreading the violent ideology. In contrast, IS has shown that it was about establishing a caliphate, a geographically defined state.¹¹ Therefore, it is this territorial ambition of Baghdadi that may be a cause of concern for India as it poses a threat of socio-political turbulence on its territory in the long term. India has already faced the painful consequences of terrorist attacks by Lashkar-e-Taiba, South Asia’s most active terrorist outfit that shares ISIS’s ambitions of establishing an

Islamic state. India's threat could be greatest from the Indian jihadists fighting alongside ISIS.

IMPERATIVES FOR A BASE ON THE INDIAN TERRITORY

ISIS is fast transforming itself from a terrorist group to a terrorist army. It seems to be preparing also to challenge the US dominance, at least militarily, as it well understands that it cannot achieve its objectives without either neutralising the US or defeating the same. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIS, warned the US, 'Soon we'll be in direct confrontation, watch out for us, for we are with you, watching.'¹² This clearly reveals the avowed intentions of ISIS, for which it requires recruits and supports of different sorts from all over the Islamic world. South Asia in general and India in particular would be of great help to Baghdadi, with a substantial Muslim population.

According to an undated document titled 'A Brief History of the Islamic State Caliphate: The Caliphate According to the Prophet', IS seeks to unite dozens of factions of the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban into a single army of terror.¹³ The 32-page document, translated by a Harvard researcher, suggested that the next big Islamic State target in the region would be India. It suggested that the objective of the group was not merely to undertake an occasional terrorist strike in the country but to wage a full-fledged attack against India by uniting all jihadi groups in the region under its leadership.¹⁴

There are also reports in the newspapers that Pakistani militants linked to IS have been distributing pamphlets in the north-western city of Peshawar, calling on people to support their idea of creating an Islamic caliphate.¹⁵ The BBC has reported that graffiti and car stickers supporting IS have also started appearing in the city and its outskirts. The material published in Pashto and Dari languages urges people to support IS in its fight for a grand Islamic rule.

It is quite apparent that India does not suffer from any of the vulnerabilities that ISIS has been able to exploit elsewhere to make inroads and capture territory. However, it does not suggest that the group cannot sustain a terror campaign, which, unlike their modus operandi in Iraq, need not focus on seizing and controlling territory. Its strategy against India

could be based on a different set of principles: making allies with different terrorist organisations in the region, garnering support from Pakistan's ISI and its intelligence and logistic network, campaigning on social media and luring the alienated members of the society. Values like liberalism, secularism and democracy may help IS to radicalise the targets. IS may have visualised US support to India in its fight against terrorism and hence has a pretext to organise attacks on Indian installations.¹⁶

GROWING TENTACLES OF ISIS ON THE INDIAN SOIL

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) detained 20 men across the country in January 2016 for planning to carry out attacks in the country on behalf of IS on the Republic Day. Three youths were deported from Dubai for working as recruiters for the IS. Shafi Armar, head of the Ansarut Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind (AuT), was the handler of all these arrested men.¹⁷ This reveals the underlying threat that the organisation could pose to India in the future. AuT is the first Indian jihadist group based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area and is often linked to a split in the Pakistan-based cadres of the Indian Mujahideen (IM) that took place in 2012 after an internal rift. Shafi Armar was part of the *usaba* (congregation) formed in Bhatkal (Karnataka, India) to collect likeminded individuals to wage a jihad in India. He desired that India also become unstable and violence-prone like Iraq and Syria.¹⁸ In October 2013, the AuT, via its media wing, the *al-Isabah* media, released a video titled 'In the Land of Hind: Usood ul Hind (Lions of India)', calling Indian Muslims to participate in the global jihad. Subsequently, a video titled 'From Kandahar to Delhi' attempted to incite Indian Muslims to take revenge for anti-Muslim incidents in different parts of the country. Another video, released in 2014, called prominent jihadi leaders of the world to come forward and attack Indian targets worldwide. Allegedly, all these videos were produced by Shafi.¹⁹ The pan-India terror module that was busted by the NIA was in constant touch with people perceived to be close to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, receiving instructions for carrying out explosions at important places ahead of the Republic Day in January 2016.²⁰

AuT is an opportunist organisation and had not developed any affiliations with any major groups till mid-2014. However, it later encouraged

Indian Muslims to fly to Syria or Afghanistan, primarily to get trained for an eventual insurgency in India; and material related to IS's ideology and military campaign translated into several Indian languages was recovered from its hideouts.²¹ Consequently, in May 2014, four young men from Thane had become the first Indian jihadists to reach the Islamic State. The two men, according to the NIA, continued to contact through encrypted chat clients, with Shafi Armar taking over the communication after his brother was killed. The Indian inside IS had a concrete proposal for their online recruit in India, to set up an organisation called Jund al-Khilafa al-Hind, or the Army of the Caliph in India. Investigators claimed Shaikh would soon discover that he was just a part of a very wide online circle, none of whose members knew, as yet, the others.²² Muddabir Sheikh was the self-styled ameer (leader) of Junud-ul-Khailafa-e-Hind, a pro-IS outfit floated by the 14 arrested by the NIA and the local police from different states.²³ The idea behind setting up the terror group in India was to extend Baghdadi's fearsome 'Caliphate'. This becomes obvious from the short span within which the group established a complete chain of command, with Shaikh being the ameer; Rizawan Ali, a resident of Kushi Nagar in Uttar Pradesh, was its naib-ameer (deputy chief); Mangalore resident Najmul Huda was appointed ameer-e-askari (battalion commander), and Mohammed Nafees Khan of Bihar, who was arrested from Hyderabad, was the group's ameer-e-wyulat (head of finance).²⁴

ROLE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORK IN ITS EXPANSION

Social media is an important parameter to ascertain the mindset of the youth, who express themselves more freely hiding behind their desktops. Apart from the 'Online Hindutvavadis' and 'Digital Dalits', there is also a section of Muslim youth (though it may be miniscule) which is apologetic towards global jihad and also attempts to rationalise the inhuman activities.²⁵ *Dabiq*, the online propaganda magazine of ISIS, is growing its reach in the Asian subcontinent. Netizens of India and Bangladesh are among the top 15 downloaders of the extremist indoctrination material.²⁶ The tech-savvy Muslim youths of the country thus are more vulnerable targets who could be easily entrapped through allurements.

A total of 150 social media users in India have been identified by the intelligence who are supporting ISIS and spreading its ideology on the Internet. According to different reports, a huge number of people in India are in contact with ISIS. Three are 30,000 recruits who are ready to work for ISIS to wage war against their own country, i.e., India.²⁷ ISIS is using these people to hack secret data of the Indian government; the terror outfit wanted to use the data to forge a strategy to harm India. ISIS contacted these people online. Cyber officials have been keeping an eye on social media to curb such activities, and the ATS officials in Maharashtra claimed that they have blocked 94 websites so far which contained content related to ISIS.²⁸ Therefore, Indian agencies are already on their job to nip the articulating crisis at the bud stage itself.

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF IS SYMPATHISERS

It is true that the Muslims in India are assimilated into the mainstream to an extent; there is also a considerable section within the Muslims who have turned hostile towards the state due to ‘politics of victimhood’ as well as ‘politics of vote-bank’. A new generation of the aggrieved section is also getting attracted towards the fundamentalist version of Islam sponsored by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, having no connection with the mystical form of Sufi Islam which prevails in India. This deadly combination of victimhood and fundamentalism is providing the most fertile grounds for terror indoctrination.²⁹ However, it may also be looked at in terms of its spatial distribution. ‘ISIS’ is the most searched keyword in Mumbai and Hyderabad. Startling revelations were made by the *Indian Express* that the Telangana police is dipping into its Naxalite-era experience in surveillance and methods of deterrence to keep a watch on youths who are susceptible to online radicalisation and recruitment by IS. According to the report, 21 youths, the highest number in any state, have been prevented from leaving for Syria in 2015.³⁰

Kashmir is a state where resentment against India is growing day by day, especially after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the centre. Local youths have been found flogging ISIS banners every Friday in areas of south Kashmir, including the capital, Srinagar.³¹ Overseas, Indians have also showed aspirations towards joining

the caliphate as the list so far has revealed an Australia-based Kashmiri and Oman-based and Singapore-based Indians. Among the seven Indians deported by the UAE for acting as online recruiters, six were from Kerala and one, Afsha Jabeen, was from Hyderabad.³² Later, out of 33 ISIS aspirants intercepted by security agencies, 17 were from Telangana; one person was also from Bihar. Therefore, it makes it obvious that the virus of the terror outfit IS has been unleashed among Indian Muslims across the length and breadth of the Indian territory.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

India is a vast country, with an equally vast Muslim population spread over the whole of India, and only in certain areas are they localised. It has its own social, political and economic compulsions which further complicate the problem. Moreover, an ever-growing population and shrinking resources make the Muslim population increasingly vulnerable. Undoubtedly, therefore, it is a difficult proposition for any government and its security agencies to tighten the belt to an extent that the vulnerable youths are deterred from joining such outfits. Under such circumstances, the government has been working on a multi-pronged strategy of containing the damage being inflicted and checking the growth of IS influence on its territory by first setting its own house in order.

The strategy adopted so far has been not to employ arrest as the first option. Instead, measures such as increased vigilance and counselling are used for deterrence; and help is enlisted from parents, relatives and community elders. Therefore, the first attempt is being made to win hearts and minds of the population, for which 'population-centric' measures are being adopted and social media and mass media have also been roped in.

Military tactics and the Greyhound commandoes are extremely harsh measures to contain sub-national conflicts. Ancillary development and alternative methods of resolving conflicts are often overlooked by the government and its agencies, which is not appreciable. Accordingly, it is a wise strategy given the 'victimhood' mind-set of the vulnerable Muslim youths belonging to minority communities. Counselling is always a preferable method over knee-jerk arrests of radicalised individuals as it

would provide opportunities to de-radicalise such probable recruits to IS. The strategy of advising, organising ‘counselling melas’ and conduction street plays for rural youth and militant cadres to wrest them away from the IS fold is the need of the hour. Involving families will also help curb and counter the propensity of isolation from developing within such population. Building a community-centric or collaborative approach to policing truly generates a sentiment of ‘Police for You’ as a way forward and also helps towards winning the confidence of the alienated youth. Such policies often sound soft and dangerous owing to probabilities of recidivism, but such problems could be addressed through constant monitoring, strong networks for implementation and rehabilitation on a long-term basis. Therefore, the government has adopted the right kind of policy, which requires taking forward and implementing in right earnest.

THREAT PERCEPTIONS TO INDIA: NEITHER IMMEDIATE NOR LONG TERM

India probably has often overreacted to imminent threats to its security, rather than thinking over it with increased maturity. Countrywide alert and relevant intelligence organisations are put on task on most such occasions, which is a right policy choice in given circumstances. A thorough analysis of the dynamics of the entire episode reveals a number of startling facts which are suggestive of a situation which is otherwise. It also helps understand the threat perceptions and imperatives for the Indian foreign policy and strategic thinking to articulate security policies. Therefore, a strategic analysis of the development relating to ISIS ramifications in India reveals the following:

1. The Muslims in India are not a vulnerable group. Even in Kashmir, several reports and literature have revealed in the past that the terrorism in Kashmir has external dimensions. It is being waged from across the border by Pakistan on account of its own domestic vulnerability, and the same motivates Pakistan to sustain it. The local Muslim population in Kashmir is more oriented towards development and sustainable livelihood and has reposed greater faith and trust in Indian polity, economy and society.

2. The Muslim populations in Gujarat, Ahmadabad, Hyderabad, Telangana, Kerala, Bihar and elsewhere on the Indian territory have demonstrated more loyalty towards the Indian state and system than animosity towards the same. The isolated instances of communal riots cannot be a pretext for declaring them vulnerable. India is a land of tremendous diversity, and all such diversities are also the fault lines along which the clashes keep happening, the way there are clashes within families. Therefore, the same cannot be exploited to further the interests by organisations like IS and its ilk. The allurements of a few Muslims to terrorist and anti-state activities and their participation in such activities may be aberrations and consequences of other problems. The same cannot be articulated as an evolving threat perception with long-term potentials for causing damages.
3. According to PEW Research Report, within the Indian subcontinent, the Muslim population as a percentage of the total population of the Muslims in the world is Bangladesh 9.2%, Burma 0.1%, India 10.9%, Maldives less than 0.1%, Nepal 0.1%, Pakistan 11%, Sri Lanka 0.1%, Afghanistan 1.8%, and Bhutan less than 0.1%. This clearly reveals that in each country of the Indian subcontinent, a Muslim population is there, but not in such majority that it can cause any serious damage to the state and its identity.³³ The Muslims could well be a source of cleavage within society, with some susceptibility towards getting exploited in isolated cases, but do not have any substantial potential for a considerable offensive against the state itself on the lines of Arab world. Moreover, the Muslims in the Indian subcontinent have been largely assimilated with the local population culturally and religiously, thereby minimising the frequency of clashes in the aftermath of their independence.
4. Muslims both in India as well as in the Indian subcontinent are stakeholders in politics, economics and society rather than being mere recipients. Accordingly, the way the misguided youths within other religious groups fall to different kinds of allurements, so may some misguided Muslim youths fall to such temptations.

- India being a large country has an in-built mechanism for shock absorptions and is competent enough to manage such happenings.
5. Four countries, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and India, have a considerable size of Shia population among its Muslims, which could be the reason for in-fight and vulnerability. This does not hold as never in the past has at least India been witness to Shia versus Sunni clashes. The fact remains that Indian Muslims are more prone to Hindu versus Muslim conflict, which occasionally takes place, rather than Shia versus Sunni clashes.³⁴ The post-independence India has demonstrated a greater urge for assimilation of both religions rather than widening of the religious division. Even a few clashes that occasionally take place are owing to political reasons. The British followed the policy of ‘divide and rule’, and the same is sometimes practiced by Indian indigenous politicians to achieve political mileage or polarisation of votes. This again is getting mitigated at a faster rate with the spread of education and technology, and Muslims are now conscious enough of not being a ‘vote bank’ to be exploited by the political leaders and parties. Therefore, it is wrong to presume that the Muslim population in India is vulnerable and the same could be articulated to find recruits.
 6. The way violence is being used by ISIS in different parts of the Islamic world, especially in Iraq and Syria, has also led to a kind of ‘hate campaign’ within the Muslim population, and the same has been demonstrated on different occasions. It has been found that the Muslims have disowned such youths who have been caught by the police on charges of their linkages with terrorist organisations. This reveals the growing maturity among the Muslims and their love for peace and tranquillity, as well as the strengthening of a ‘sense of belongingness’ in their mindset.
 7. Indian Muslims may have been vulnerable 20 years ago and also when Kashmir was at its nadir and when India had to face Gujarat riots, but this vulnerability seems to have receded. Muslims of contemporary India are far more educated and mature and are not vulnerable to getting provoked at slights by motivated political

leaders. There is also increasing assimilation between Hindus and Muslims in India, which off and on is projected as ‘love jihad’ by vested interests. Marriage failures and divorce are a phenomenon both within Muslims and Hindus. Therefore, the same cannot be exploited in the name of love jihad for polarisation of votes and to deepen the fault line between Muslims and Hindus.

8. From the above discussion, it becomes quite obvious that IS at best is a kind of phenomenon that is more oriented towards the Islamic world and is thus vulnerable within. There are greater probabilities that the inherent internal contradictions will lead to their demise sooner or later. The United States, in cooperation with other Western powers, will act as a catalyst in its demise, with the tacit consent of many of the Islamic rulers. Therefore, it has no significant meaning for India.

CONCLUSIONS

From the stories revealed thus far of the fast-spreading tentacles of IS on Indian soil, it is becoming obvious that the outfit is working with a multi-pronged strategy to achieve a number of objectives: (1) to collect recruits through the use of social networking sites or online network with the help of local agents, (2) to carry out attacks on big targets in India to try and destabilise it, (3) to develop well-knit linkages with regional terrorist outfits on a long-term basis with long-term objectives, and (4) to establish the caliphate. The degradation and boycott of Sufism and the unprecedented popularity of the Salafist version of Islam point out that the new generation within the minority community could turn victims of terror propaganda, especially in the communally polarised atmosphere prevailing in the nation.

The interrogation of suspects and arrested culprits and other reports have also revealed that the affiliates had plans to collect a huge cache of weapons to carry out terror activities in the country and they were in touch with ISIS groups through various apps. Therefore, given IS’s interest in expanding into South Asia and the worrisome interest generated in sections of Indian citizenry, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs has termed ISIS threat as a significant ‘long-term national security concern’.

This is good that there is concern on a long-term basis within the Indian leadership as it would prompt the leadership to be on its toes and be watchful.

However, after a careful analysis of old and new facts and the historical emerging behavioural pattern of Indian Muslims and its intelligentsia, it is quite apparent that India does not suffer from any of the vulnerabilities that ISIS has been able to exploit elsewhere to make inroads and capture territory. However, this does not suggest that the group cannot sustain a terror campaign, which unlike its modus operandi in Iraq, need not focus on seizing and controlling territory. Its strategy against India could be based on a different set of principles: make allies with different terrorist organisations in the region, garner support from Pakistan's ISI and its intelligence and logistic network, campaign on the social media and lure the alienated members of the society. Values like liberalism, secularism and democracy may favour IS in radicalising the targets. IS may have visualised US support to India in its fight against terrorism and hence has got a pretext to attack. Given the circumstances, India, therefore, should treat it as a routine security tighten-up exercise rather than an imminent threat to its security and any vital interests. The population-centric strategy adopted by India is a well-thought-out policy and hence should be carried on.

Notes and References

1. For detailed theory, refer to Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Originally, the theory was proposed by Huntington in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute and subsequently appeared in a 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs Journal*. However, the phrase was earlier used by Bernard Lewis in an article titled 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' in the September 1990 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Prior to that, Basil Mathews used it in his 1926 book titled *Young Islam on Trek: A Study of the Clash of Civilizations* (p. 196).
2. Amartya Sen. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. UK: Allen Lane, 2006, p. 41.
3. Samuel P. Huntington. 'The Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

4. It is also called 'Dawlah-al Islamiyah fil-Iraq wa-sh Sham', or DAISH.
5. Shashank Joshi. 'A Welcome Record of Failure.' Hindu, 10 September 2014. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has announced in a video message the creation of an Indian branch of his militant group to 'raise the flag of jihad' across South Asia. See BBC News Asia, 4 September 2014.
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12. Robin Simcox. 'ISIS' Western Ambitions: Why Europe and the United States Could Be the Militant Group's Next Target.' Foreign Affairs, 30 June 2014.
13. Vivek Chadha. 'ISIS Attack Threat: Why India Should Be Afraid.' 2 August 2015. <www.dailyo.in>.
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16. Op cit, n. 13.
17. Husanjot Chahal. 'Ansar, Ul-Tawhid: Evolution and Operational Dynamics.' Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article No. 5006. 23 March 2016. <www.ipcs.org>. The NIA arrested Mudabbir Mushtaq Shaikh on charges of heading a new Islamic state cell determined to wage war on India. He was recruited online by the then Syria-based Indian Shafi Armar, who patiently trawled Facebook, Twitter and dozens of blogs in search of potential recruits. IB officials estimated that Shafi Armar has engaged more than 700 people in conversation and raised more than 20 identified volunteers. For details, refer to Praveen Swami, 'For ISIS, Virtual Is the Real as It Scouts for India Recruits,' Indian Express, 22 March 2016.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

20. Indian Express. 'IS-Linked Pan-India Module Was in Touch with Men Close to Bhagdadi.' 24 January 2016.
21. Op cit, n. 17.
22. Praveen Swami. 'For ISIS, Virtual Is the Real as It Scouts for India Recruits.' Indian Express, 22 March 2016. According to Indian Intelligence agencies, a total of 23 Indians joined ISIS, of whom 6 were killed in different incidents in Iraq-Syria. As many as 17 Indians are believed to be in different conflict zones of the ISIS-held areas. See PTI-IBN Live, 'Four Indians Killed by ISIS in Syria,' 1 February 2016.
23. Sagnik Chowdhury. 'Pro-IS Outfit Leader Turned to Jihadi Literature After Losing Job.' Indian Express, 30 January 2016.
24. Op cit, n. 24.
25. Mohammed Uzair Shaikh. 'Apart from the "Online Hindutvavadis" and "Digital Dalits", There Is Also a Section of Muslim Youth (Though It May Be Miniscule) Which Is Apologetic Towards Global Jihad and Also Attempts to Rationalize the Inhuman Activities.' 22 January 2016. <www.india.com>.
26. Op cit, n. 25.
27. PTI-IBN Live. 'Alarming! 30,000 People in India Ready to Work for ISIS to Wage War Against Their Own Nation.' 28 January 2016.
28. Op cit, n.27
29. Op cit, n.25
30. Husanjot Chahal. 'India and the IS: Lessons from Telangana's LWE Experience.' Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Article No. 4980. 1 February 2016. <www.ipcs.org>.
31. Op cit, n.25
32. Ibid.
33. South Asia does have a considerable Muslim population and thus has theological resonance. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, in his high-sounding announcement, explicitly invoked the concept of Ghazwa-e-Hind, an apocalyptic battle for India and a clutch of surrounding territory. But there's nothing novel about this. Pakistan-based jihadists have been talking about it long before al-Qaeda came out with such claims. For details, refer to Shashank Joshi, 'A Welcome Record of Failure,' Hindu, 10 September 2014. Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has announced in a video message the creation of an Indian branch

of his militant group to 'raise the flag of jihad' across South Asia. See BBC News Asia, 4 September 2014.

34. Al-Qaeda must have understood that India is a ripe opportunity – both as a source of recruits and as a target in its own right. India has a large and marginalised Muslim population, a history of periodic communal violence and a weak state along its periphery. Refer to Shashank Joshi, 'A Welcome Record of Failure,' Hindu, 10 September 2014.

Maintenance of Terrorists: Long-Term Effects for Pakistan

RAMTANU MAITRA

For decades now, Pakistan has been recognised worldwide as a virtual warehouse of terrorists and insurgents who pose a threat to that country's neighbours as well as to its own domestic order. Armed with various agendas, these terrorists have set up their bases across the country.

The most active terrorist groups are those along Pakistan's eastern border with India and along its western border with Afghanistan. The groups in the east were organised to commit and assist terrorism within India; some of those that are active along the western border serve Islamabad's interest by carrying out raids inside Afghanistan to weaken the Afghan government. There are also a number of insurgent groups operating in Balochistan province, close to Pakistan's border with Afghanistan and Iran, whose particular agenda is to secede from Pakistan. There is yet another pool of Islamic extremists, based mostly in Punjab, whose agenda is to make Pakistan a part of a Sunni Islamic caliphate.

To date, the territories of these various groups of terrorists have remained reasonably well defined, even though they do not always operate within these self-defined boundaries. Recent reports point to collusion between terrorists operating in Punjab and a number of groups that have assembled under the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) umbrella and set up bases of operation along Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan, along the disputed Durand Line. They challenge Islamabad, routinely carry out terrorist operations inside Pakistan and are a serious domestic threat. The Pakistani military has absolute authority in dealing with the TTP and occasionally bears down on them with tanks and guns in an attempt to wipe them out. But those military responses, like the ongoing Operation

Zarb-e-Azb in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), have failed to produce any result.

Islamabad's failure to eliminate the FATA militants stems from the fact that dozens of tribal groups – all of them Pashtuns, who abhor the Punjabi-dominated Pakistani military – have undergone religious radicalisation over the past several decades. Also, these FATA militants identify much more with the Pashtuns of Afghanistan, residing on the other side of the Durand Line, than with the non-Pashtun Pakistanis. They have much more in common with the Afghan Pashtuns and move freely across the non-demarcated border whenever Pakistan's military puts pressure on them.

FATA is also the abode of a group of multinational terrorists who operate from Pakistan and carry out terrorist acts in Afghanistan, central Asia and China. Their presence goes back to the 1980s, when the Western nations funded and armed various militant groups, known as the mujahideen, to fight the invading Soviet Army in Afghanistan. Most were Afghans, but many also came from central Asia, the Caucasus, Arabia and North Africa to Pakistan to join that fight. Wearing the garb of Islamists and organised by the Pakistani military, they helped push back the godless Soviet Army. The process began in the early 1980s and took almost a decade to complete. After the Soviets left in 1989, the various mujahideen fighters created a catastrophic level of instability within Afghanistan. At that point in time, Islamabad, having served the West's interests and having developed control over most of the mujahideen leaders, perceived the chaotic situation as an opportunity to bring Kabul under its influence. That gave rise to the Taliban and their seizure of Kabul in 1996 with Pakistan Army's help.

Following the 9/11 attacks in the United States and Washington's invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, Pakistan, under pressure from its ally the United States, became engaged in Afghanistan to hunt down al-Qaeda terrorists. While allowing Washington a free hand, Islamabad, under Gen. Pervez Musharraf, managed to protect its terrorist assets and prevent the emergence of an independent and nationalist Afghan leadership. Islamabad feared that such an independent Afghan leadership would oppose Pakistan's control over Kabul, would continue rejecting the Durand Line as the international boundary and would develop closer relations with India – perceived by the Pakistan military as its mortal enemy.

While the *growth* of terrorism inside Pakistan during the 1980s was largely circumstantial and must be attributed to Western-orchestrated instability within Afghanistan to hurt the Russians and keep Russian and Iranian influence out of Afghanistan, a significant cadre of terrorists was already in existence in Pakistan. They had been spawned, developed and deployed by the Pakistani military since 1947 to deny India its control over the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in Pakistan's north-east.

The princely state of J&K, among many other such states not under direct British rule during the Raj, had to decide whether to join India or Pakistan or to remain independent when the British left the subcontinent in August 1947. In October of that year, the Pakistan military, dressed as tribals, invaded J&K with the aim of militarily occupying the princely state. Indian forces prevented a Pakistani occupation, but the subsequent inadequate response from New Delhi left the state divided. Both India and Pakistan have since occupied parts of J&K and claim to be the rightful owner of the entire state. While India possesses a letter of annexation sent by the then maharaja of the princely state to join the Indian Union, Pakistan rests its claim on the argument that since J&K is a Muslim-majority state and India was divided up by the British on the basis of Muslim- and Hindu-majority provinces, J&K belongs to Pakistan.

While New Delhi, because of inconsistent and gutless policies, could never stabilise the Indian part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan proceeded to unleash its home-grown terrorists to rev up pro-Pakistan and pro-independence Kashmiris. Serious threats, however, did not emerge until the 1980s. Badly mauled by the Indian military in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the early 1970s – having surrendered and left behind more than 90,000 prisoners of war (POWs) – the Pakistan military sought ways to get even. Aided by a military ruler, Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan set about to create, nurture and maintain Islamist terrorist groups dedicated to undermining the not-so-stable Indian part of J&K. Pakistan set up training camps close to the Indian border, and its military intelligence arm, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), developed close working relations with these terrorist groups. Subsequently, those terrorists began infiltrating in large numbers the Indian-held part of J&K, committing terrorist acts and inciting Kashmiris against India. The Pakistan military

institutionalised this policy as its 'Bleed India' campaign. Those terrorists groups still exist to carry out assigned tasks.

Although the terrorist-led 'Bleed India' operation has become virtually irrelevant now because security within the Indian-held part of J&K has been strengthened significantly, Islamabad has shown little inclination to dismantle these terrorist outfits, whether for lack of interest or, perhaps, courage. It is likely that dismantling the Kashmir-bound terrorist groups is difficult, at least in part because they have infiltrated Pakistan's intelligence and military institution over the years. Moreover, Islamabad may consider such measures unnecessary. It is fair to say that being in contact with these terrorists on an almost daily basis, Pakistan's military does not perceive them as a threat to Pakistan itself. And one might even assume that this lot of anti-India terrorists has become a part of the country's security architecture.

In Pakistan's west, by contrast, the insurgency operation in Balochistan and the pure form of terrorism carried out by the TTP, which has developed capabilities to operate in the FATA-adjacent Pakistani province of Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa, are considered threats. Baloch insurgents, who do not leave Balochistan to commit violence elsewhere, have enough capabilities to harass and undermine all of Islamabad's efforts to pacify the province with the use of force.

Both of these groups, along with a few others (described later), have the ability to seriously undermine Pakistan's hope of pacifying its western and southwestern parts. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), one of the projects Beijing has proposed under its One Belt, One Road connectivity policy, is scheduled to run through Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and Balochistan. If and when it is built, Islamabad claims CPEC will help eradicate militancy in both Balochistan and the Pashtun-dominated areas in the west.

In addition to the threats the Baloch insurgents and the TTP pose to Pakistan's social fabric and future economic well-being, a myriad of other disruptive elements reside within Pakistan. These militants and terrorist groupings often join hands with radical factions of Pakistan's various political groups, Islamic militants and the drug-trafficking and smuggling groups.

TERRORISTS: TO ‘BLEED INDIA’ AND SOME OTHER PAKISTAN-FRIENDLY NATIONS

Much is known about the terrorist groups tasked by Pakistani authorities ‘to liberate fellow Muslims’ in the Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir. These groups are well trained and well knit. Nonetheless, like all terrorists, they have shown their willingness from time to time to warm their hands in the fires lit within the country by other Islamist extremists who want to change Pakistan from a sovereign nation state to become part of an Islamic caliphate.

The most powerful of the groups that organise and carry out terrorist actions within India is the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). When LeT was banned in Pakistan in 2002, its political arm, Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), took over the group’s activities. Following the attack on Mumbai in November 2008, where JuD (aka LeT) played a major role, the United Nations Security Council identified it as an LeT front. Islamabad has banned media coverage of JuD. However, these formal actions have not changed the reality: JuD functions freely within Pakistan and remains a beneficiary of the Pakistani authorities’ largesse.

The second most prolific Kashmir-focused terrorist group nurtured in Pakistan is the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM). Established in September 1989 and headquartered at Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), HM is allegedly one of the largest terrorist outfits, with a cadre base that is drawn from indigenous and foreign sources. Ostensibly, HM stands for the integration of J&K with Pakistan. Since its inception, the group has also campaigned for the Islamisation of Kashmir.¹

The third most important terrorist group, from Islamabad’s point of view, is the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM). JeM is a relatively new terrorist outfit compared to other major groups active in J&K. Like LeT, JeM is an organisation formed, controlled and manned by Pakistan. The outfit was launched by Maulana Masood Azhar in Karachi on 31 January 2000, when he was released from an Indian jail in the terrorists-for-hostages swap of 31 December 1999, following the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC814. JeM was held responsible for the 31 December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi. JeM is also reported to have links with

Sunni terrorist outfits operating in Pakistan, such as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ).

Another Pakistan-based terrorist group, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), was formed in 1985 to fight the Soviet troops in Afghanistan under the name Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI). In 1989, as the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, HuJI splintered and, with Pakistani intelligence's blessings, a new terrorist outfit, Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA), was born to carry out terrorist operations in the Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir. Later, when the United States banned the HuA, it turned itself into the HuM.²

In addition to these big four, there are many other terrorist outfits operating within the Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir, albeit less effectively and securing fewer 'goodies' from Islamabad.

Many observers, including some Pakistani journalists, have pointed out that although not all could manage to survive being exposed, these terrorist groups move around freely within Pakistan because many of their sympathisers wear a uniform. Consider the case of Captain Khurram Ashiq and his elder brother Major Haroon Ashiq.

Exposed by Saleem Shahzad – whose body was later fished out of a canal, allegedly dumped there by some disgruntled ISI assassin – both of these officers were working on behalf of al-Qaeda. Because of his Salafi background, Khurram was shaped into a warrior by LeT. He wrote to Saleem Shahzad about his brother, too. 'Major Haroon Ashiq hung up his boots right after 9/11. On his release from service, he joined LeT. One of my unit officers Major Abdul Rahman also followed suit. I joined the outfit soon after, without caring for the consequences.'³ In his book, Shahzad also noted that while on a UN mission in Sierra Leone, Khurram clearly demonstrated his Islamic radicalisation: 'Khurram built a mosque and a madrassah in Sierra Leone, despite the opposition of his commander, Brigadier Ahmad Shuja Pasha, later chief of the ISI.'⁴ 'Both brothers had joined the LeT, but had soon "realized" that the LeT was just an extension of Pakistan's armed forces.'⁵

It is accepted widely, if not universally, within Pakistan, that the adoption of terrorism to 'unshackle' fellow Muslims residing in the Indian part of Jammu and Kashmir is a mission worth pursuing. But many Pakistani citizens do not like other terrorists who have set up their bases within

Pakistan, possibly because these groups disrupt their daily lives. Some of these terrorists use Pakistani soil to launch attacks against foreign regimes friendly to Pakistan – for instance, China.

A major benefactor of Islamabad, with its eyes focused on getting to the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf through Pakistan, China is also a victim of Pakistan-based terrorists who disturb its western province of Xinjiang. The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China, contiguous with the Northern Areas of Pakistan and having historical, cultural and trade links with the country, is an extremely important area in the context of Sino-Pak relations. Ethnic Uighurs who belong to the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a terrorist group, have set up their camps within Pakistan at a location that provides them access to Xinjiang.

In the wake of a major terrorist attack in the Xinjiang city of Kashgar that killed 197 people and left about 1,700 others injured in 2009, China began expressing its concerns. In 2011, Chinese authorities invited the then ISI chief Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha to Beijing and told him the militants menacing Xinjiang had allegedly been trained in Pakistan's tribal areas. Months later, in a statement on 5 April 2012, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security published a list of six terrorists identified as 'core members' of the ETIM – Nurmemet Memetmin, Abdulkyum Kurban, Paruh Tursun, Tursunjan Ebibla, Nurmemet Raxit and Mamat Imin Nurmamat, all Uighurs – and asked Pakistan to hand them over. The ministry's statement stopped short of stating directly their links to terror camps in Pakistan. According to the Chinese list, Nurmemet Memetmin, who was described as the 'commander of the ETIM', had been sentenced to 10 years in prison in a 'South Asian country' but escaped in 2006 and had been planning new attacks against China, including the late July 2009 attacks on civilians in Kashgar.⁶

As the *Friday Times* also points out: 'Experts on militancy confirm the presence of militants of the ETIM in Pakistan's North and South Waziristan regions where several other foreign and international militant groups, such as al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Army of Great Britain and Ittehad-e-Jihad Islami also operate. "There are dozens of Central Asian militants living in the tribal region," said a militant associated with Hafiz Gul Bahadur. "But

it is very difficult for us to distinguish between the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Uighurs because of similar facial features.”⁷⁷ Hafiz Gul Bahadur, supreme commander of the North Waziristani Taliban, known for hosting foreign militants, mainly al-Qaeda and other Arab groups, and Maulana Jalaluddin Haqqani of the cross-border Haqqani network, were allegedly killed by a US-directed drone attack in December 2014.

It is to be noted that neither the ISI nor the TTP is directly responsible for the violence in Xinjiang. However, TTP *is* responsible for aiding the Uighur terrorists in the tribal areas in Xinjiang. ETIM initially got its support in Afghanistan, but as the war on terror expanded into Pakistan, given the porous Afghan-Pakistan border, certain ETIM militants crossed into Pakistani tribal areas with the help of the TTP. It is a difficult border to control; and, as a result, ETIM has been able to generate support from the Pakistani tribal areas, Afghanistan and some countries in central Asia, as well as Turkey.

EXTREMISTS DEFYING ISLAMABAD AND OTHER AUTHORITIES

In this category, terrorists from two areas stand out. First are the militants in Pakistan’s south-western province of Balochistan, through which the China-proposed CPEC is to wind its way down from the north to the Arabian Sea. Baloch insurgents do not have control over the entire province, but they have a network that routinely blows up gas wells and other infrastructure, loudly trumpeting their strength. Pakistan has accused Indian intelligence, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), of aiding these terrorist acts but has never provided any evidence to substantiate its claims.

Whether or not RAW, or any other foreign intelligence agency, is involved in Balochistan, the fact is that the Baloch have maintained their independence-through-insurgency movement fairly intact for more than a decade. The province’s geographical location has helped: 13 million Baloch live in a vast territory the size of France – with enormous reserves of gas, gold and copper, as well as untapped sources of oil and uranium – and bordering Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Islamabad’s exploitation of natural

resources in the area, combined with repressive state-run policies, has led to five armed uprisings in the region since the territory was annexed by Pakistan in 1948.⁸

In the recent period, the emergence of Lashkar-e-Balochistan, strategically deployed in central Balochistan, has Islamabad worried. The armed movement is reportedly linked to the Mengal tribe. Silent for the past several years, they last attacked with two bomb blasts in Lahore and Karachi in 2012. Very little is still known about the Baloch Republican Guard, one of the last groups to appear on stage.

Islamabad responded to the earlier Baloch uprisings brutally – at least on two occasions. In 1973, following his visit to Iran, the then Pakistan president Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the elected provincial government of Balochistan. The pretext was that a cache of 350 Soviet submachine guns and 100,000 rounds of ammunition had supposedly been discovered in the Iraqi attaché's house and were destined for Balochistan. The ensuing protest against the dismissal of the duly-elected government brought in another wave of Pakistan Army – 78,000 men – supported by Iranian Cobra helicopters. The troops were resisted by some 50,000 Baloch. The conflict took the lives of 3,300 Pakistani troops, 5,300 Baloch insurgents and thousands of civilians.

Then again, between December 2005 and June 2006, more than 900 Baloch were killed, about 140,000 were displaced, some 450 political activists (mainly from the Baloch National Party) disappeared and 4,000 activists were arrested, according to reports. There have also been reports that the Frontier Corps (FC) – a creation of the British Raj that had been kept intact in Balochistan, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP, now Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa) and the FATA – has been responsible for indiscriminate rocket, artillery and helicopter gunship attacks, causing significant destruction of civilian areas.⁹

THE TERRORIST COBRA IN FATA

Another hydra-headed terrorist cobra that lunges at Pakistan from time to time is based in FATA, where 3 million tribals, all ethnic Pashtuns, reside. According to Muhammad Amir Rana, a security and political analyst and

the director of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), an independent Islamabad-based think tank, more than 60 local Taliban groups emerged in the region between 2002 and 2010. More than 40 of these groups are part of the TTP alliance.

Before 9/11, many militant sectarian groups operated within Pakistan, all of them having come into existence during the 1980s and 1990s, thanks to the General Zia-initiated state policy favouring the Sunnis over the Shias. Although the number of these militant sectarian groups has reportedly reduced over the years, TTP militancy is now firmly dominated by the Deobandi-Salafi groups.

As Rana explained in a 2014 study, ‘Pakistani Deobandis joined Afghans in the war against the Soviet Union mainly through fatwas (religious edicts) in favor of the Afghan jihad, issued by leaders such as Maulana Mufti Mehmood, head of the largest Deobandi religious political party in Pakistan; Maulana Abdul Haq of the Darul Uloom Haqqania madrassah at Akora Khattak, and Maulana Yousaf Binori, principal of the Darul Uloom Islamia Binori Town madrassah in Karachi. These orders were pivotal in encouraging Deobandi madrassah students in Pakistan to join the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan.’¹⁰

The emergence of fatwa-issuing maulvis broke down the tribal architecture. In FATA, governance had been decidedly in the hands of the maliks historically; the maulvis were way down the totem pole in the power structure. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, however, Islamabad’s push to mobilise Islamists against the Russians effectively undermined the maliks and gave political muscle to the maulvis and their radical religious ideology. So, although the emergence of the TTP has now put Islamabad on its back foot, the making of these terrorists in FATA was clearly its own doing.

In the past two years, TTP has committed a series of serious anti-state terrorist acts outside its territory, among them the high-profile massacre in December 2014 in an elite army school in Peshawar. The 20 January 2016 attack at Bacha Khan University in Charsadda in the Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa province, adjacent to FATA and inhabited mostly by Pashtuns, was also the handiwork of TTP gunmen, who killed at least 22 people. According to one Pakistani Taliban spokesman, Umar Mansoor, the attack was in

retaliation for military operations against the group. However, one of the most significant aspects of TTP's attacks on traditional educational centres is their stated anger that these institutions provide non-Islamic education.

The 7 March 2016 TTP attack on a courthouse in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa clearly indicates that the TTP has the capability to carry out terrorist operations at will not only within FATA but also beyond, and even where Pakistani security has a strong presence. Some Pakistanis argue that the reason the Pakistan military does not take on the TTP is its fear that any attack on the militants could trigger savage reprisals. Imran Khan, a populist politician perhaps most responsible for discouraging military action, has countless times predicted a big 'blowback' in the cities.¹¹

There are, however, many reports that suggest the TTP is fragmented due to the absence of a unifying leader and, as a result, a lesser threat than it was years ago. That analysis does not hold in light of the fact that the TTP has continued to hit major targets. There are also reports that some among the TTP groups have begun to align with the so-called Islamic State (IS) group, also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Daish. Although there is no visible presence of the IS in Pakistan, these are worrying signs.

A *Newsweek* article in 2014 reported that pamphlets praising ISIS were seen in Peshawar and in Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas where TTP is based. Reports of graffiti supporting ISIS are coming from across the country, including Rawalpindi and Lahore.¹²

In an article in November 2014, *Pakistan Today* reported that the Balochistan government had conveyed a confidential report to the federal government and law enforcement agencies warning of increased footprints of the IS. 'The secret information report is dated October 31, and states that IS has claimed to have recruited a massive 10,000 to 12,000 followers from the Hangu and Kurram Agency tribal areas. "It has been reliably learnt that Daish has offered some elements of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) to join hands in Pakistan. Daish has also formed a 10-member Strategic Planning Wing," the report from the Home and Tribal Affairs Department of Balochistan says.'¹³ The report said that the IS plans to attack military installations and government

buildings in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa in retaliation for the army-led Zarb-e-Azb operation in North Waziristan and that the group also plans to target members of the minority Shia community.

LATENT THREATS

THE CASE OF LAL MASJID

In addition to all of these well-known groups, there are zealots who are hardening their muscles but have so far remained mostly underground. These are the latent threats. For instance, Islamabad's decision to allow Islamists to garner street power and the military's use of same pose a long-term threat to the country's future. During Gen. Pervez Musharraf's rule (as a military ruler via a coup d'état from 1999 to 2002 and as president of a democratic government from 2002 to 2008), the takeover of Lal Masjid by Islamists in 2007 is a case in point, which shows, in addition, how Musharraf's decision to break the siege created a whole new bunch of organised militants.

The power exhibited by the Islamists at Lal Masjid, located in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, cannot be overestimated. While they were aided by an indecisive President Musharraf, who was afraid to take them on, the Islamist zealots demonstrated clearly the threat they can pose to the seat of power if they choose to do so. Beside the fact that the TTP was born after Musharraf launched the military operation code named 'Operation Silence' to deal with the takeover, Lal Masjid had become known to the outer world as a centre of radical Islamic learning, housing several thousand male and female students in adjacent seminaries.¹⁴ It was later revealed that the hard-core terrorists, many created and harboured by the Pakistani military and the ISI, inside the mosque campus consisted of members of militants groups like the LeT, the LeJ, the JeM and the HuJI. In other words, those under the watchful eyes of Pakistan's protectors had already made an alliance with the Islamists who were ready to challenge the Pakistani authorities.

Zahid Hussain, a well-known journalist with the *Times of London* and *Newsweek*, wrote about Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid, who ran the

Lal Masjid seminary aggressively, targeting elements they thought were flouting the sharia and attacking the Shia community. Hussain said:

Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid had learned their militancy from their father, Abdullah Ghazi, who was the head cleric of Lal Masjid during the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and who had developed strong ties with the Islamist groups that joined in the fight. He had received funding and guidance from the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies for recruiting militants to the cause, and Lal Masjid had become a citadel of militancy. After the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, Abdullah Ghazi became closely associated with al-Qaeda.

In 1998 Ghazi travelled to Kandahar to pay homage to Mullah Omar, whom Pakistani radical Islamists regarded as their spiritual leader, and he took his younger son, Abdul Rashid, with him. During this visit Abdul Rashid became radicalized. He met with bin Laden alone for an hour and discussed with him issues that had troubled him for a long time. At the end of the meeting, he recounted, he picked up bin Laden's glass of water and drank from it. An amused bin Laden asked him the reason for his action, to which Abdul Rashid replied, 'I drank from your glass so that Allah would make me a warrior like you.'¹⁵

Hussain further said:

Rashid's elder brother condemned Pakistan's Army's decision to fight the terrorists. In 2001, he declared to a packed gathering, 'Allah has punished America for its anti-Islam policies and the sinful life of its population.' When Musharraf sent troops to Waziristan in 2004, Abdul Rashid led a campaign against the military operation and issued a fatwa together with a number of leading clerics declaring the military action in Waziristan un-Islamic and proclaiming, 'Those killed in the battle against Pakistani forces are martyrs.'¹⁶

MADRASSAS: NURSERIES FOR CREATING FUTURE TERRORISTS

While this Islamist leadership was gaining strength by forming alliances with other terrorist groups within Pakistan and paying homage to Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, Musharraf and his military watched and in the process, allowed the threat to grow. The underpinnings for this latent threat had emerged much earlier, however, with the radicalisation of the more than 20,000 madrassas that teach the students Islamic theology. Not at all a natural process, the radicalisation was deliberately carried out by Pakistani authorities for a purpose.

Soon after the US invasion of Afghanistan, the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted in a July 29 report that two types of madrassas took an active part in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. The first included those created specifically to produce jihadi literature, mobilise public opinion and recruit and train jihadi forces, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami's Rabita madrassas. As the ICG report stated:

The second consisted of independent chains of madrasas, including those of the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI), which opposed Zia [Gen. Zia-ul-Haq who had institutionalised the radicalisation of Islam in Pakistan in the 1980s] politically but were a partner in the Afghan jihad. The Pakistani military, especially the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, funnelled American and Arab money and was responsible for training the jihadis at camps inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Located in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan, which have close cultural, linguistic and sectarian affinity with Afghan Pashtuns, the schools of these predominantly Deobandi chains quickly espoused jihad. Their numbers increased rapidly with the influx of Afghan refugees, patronage of the Pakistani military and Arab financial aid.

These madrasas did not necessarily conduct military training or provide arms to students, but encouraged them to join the Mujahideen inside Afghanistan. Madrasas affiliated with the Haqqaniya chain and the JUI faction led by Fazlur Rahman also established networks for jihad in Pakistan's major urban centers.

Jihadi seminaries with Afghan and Arab volunteers spread to Karachi and later to the Punjab. Central Asian, North African and Caucasian Muslims also arrived to participate in the Afghan war. Since many schools, such as the Haqqaniya madrasa at Akora Khattak, have old ties with the University of Medina and Saudi Arabia had a deep interest in promoting jihad, Middle Eastern money poured into these madrasas.

The jihadis of these madrasas also look inwards, fighting a jihad against sectarian rivals in Pakistan. Splinter Deobandi groups, such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba, emerged during the Afghan jihad. With the spread of jihadi madrasas throughout Pakistan and a massive increase in their students, sectarian strife has become endemic and increasingly violent.

Jihadi madrasas have served a dual purpose for the Pakistani military: as a tool in domestic politics and a strong, active support base for its defense policy, especially against India.¹⁷

Since that ICG report was published, many things in and around Pakistan have changed. Pakistan had a number of years of semi-democratic rule, US and NATO concerns about the growth of terrorism in Afghanistan eased and Pakistan made an effort to clean up its household terrorists in order to receive benefits from China's economic growth. Yet one may wonder whether, in fact, any effort has been made to deradicalise the madrassas churning out militant Islamists who want to demolish Pakistan's sovereign nation status.

It is evident that the Pakistani authorities have not succeeded in dismantling this hornet's nest, nor have they tried. Following the killing on 2 December 2015 of 14 Americans in San Bernardino, California, by Tashfeen Malik, a former student of Pakistan's Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation's Multan branch, the *Washington Post* pointed out that with Islamic study, a key characteristic of Pakistani society, government officials say they are struggling to differentiate legitimate faith-based teachings from those that spew intolerance or actively recruit militants.

The *Washington Post* cited Muhammad Amir Rana, a terrorism expert who helped draft the government's response to the December 2014 Peshawar

school attack, as saying that madrassas pose a ‘very serious threat’ because they set their own criteria for who or what should be considered ‘enemies’ of Islam. ‘Terrorism has different shades,’ Rana said, ‘but madrassahs have been the nursery.’¹⁸

‘QADRI LIVES! FROM YOUR BLOOD, THE REVOLUTION WILL COME!’

The power of latent Islamic militant forces was also exhibited recently, when tens of thousands of Islamists identified Mumtaz Qadri as a religious martyr at his funeral on 1 March 2016, the day after he was executed for murder. Qadri had been convicted of murdering Punjab governor Salman Taseer in 2011. A bodyguard of the governor, Qadri killed Salman Taseer for criticising the blasphemy laws that mandate the death penalty for insulting Islam or the Prophet Mohammad.

The Islamists celebrating Qadri were expressing their determination to uphold Pakistan’s blasphemy law. The roots of that law relate to offences against Islam as a religion. First codified by India’s British Raj in 1860, the law was used arbitrarily to put anyone who got in the Raj’s way behind bars. Pakistan inherited those laws when it came into existence with the partition of India in 1947.

Following Gen. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq’s 1977 military takeover under the banner ‘Pakistan’s salvation lies in Islam,’ new clauses were added to the blasphemy law, primarily to separate the Ahmadiyya community, declared non-Muslim in 1973 by the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government, from the main body of Pakistan’s Muslim population. According to Pakistan’s National Commission for Justice and Peace – formed in 1985 by the Pakistan Catholic Bishops’ Conference – between 1987 and 2014, more than 1,300 individuals (including both Sunni and Shia Muslims, Ahmadiyyas, Christians and Hindus) have been accused under various clauses of the blasphemy law. Often, as allegations that have emerged show, the law has been used to settle personal scores.

The law has created Islamic ‘soldiers’, like those who were in full view in Rawalpindi when tens of thousands threw flowers at the casket of Mumtaz Qadri. As they threw flowers, the supporters chanted: ‘He lives! Qadri lives! From your blood, the revolution will come!’ While the

execution of Qadri indicates the authorities in Islamabad are willing to take on the hard-line supporters of the blasphemy law, it also shows the existence of a large population that can turn violent over the issue, potentially disrupting the social order.

ANTI-SHIA POLICIES: BOOSTING THE SUNNI MILITANTS

During Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime in the mid-1970s, Islamabad encouraged the resettlement of Sunnis in the Shia-dominated Gilgit-Baltistan area sandwiched between China, the erstwhile Soviet Union and India, sparking tensions. However, following the 1979 Khomeini-led revolution in Iran, and its stated objective of exporting Iranian revolution, Islamabad, under Gen. Zia-ul-Haq – an orthodox Deobandi Sunni, if not an outright Salafist – instituted a conscious policy to bring about a change in the demographic composition of the area to counter the growing sectarian consciousness of the Shias and their demand for political and economic rights on par with the Sunnis.

'Zia not only encouraged and facilitated the migration of people from the other areas of Pakistan to the Northern Areas, but also assisted the anti-Shi'a Sunni extremist organization Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), then known as the Anjuman Sipah-e-Sahaba, to set up its presence in the area and start a large number of madrassahs to impart religious education to the local Sunnis in the Deobandi-Wahabi ideology and military training through the ex-servicemen in order to resist Shi'a militancy.'¹⁹

Bereft of any political skill, and imbued with plotting and the use of force, General Zia helped create the radical Sunni LeJ, in addition to the SSP, which now goes by the name Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ). These two groups, in collaboration with many other Deobandi-Salafi affiliates, such as the Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam (JUI), unleashed a reign of terror against the Shias while Pakistani authorities looked away. Throughout the 1990s, sectarian attacks continued and the anti-Sunni Shia militias were destroyed. During the mid-1990s, groups such as LeJ and SSP also fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan, illustrating their utility to the Pakistani state.

That utility status allows the LeJ to carry out Shia killings even today, long after the anti-Sunni Shia militants have been wiped out. LeJ is reported to have links with the TTP and al-Qaeda. In a 2014 report, the

ICG had this to say, ‘Criminality has thrived for decades in the urban centers, but the convergence of criminal and militant networks has raised the stakes. Kidnappings for ransom and bank robberies have become integral to militant fundraising. Sectarian extremists such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) operate in all four major Pakistani cities, threatening religious and sectarian minorities, state institutions and citizens. Simultaneous militant attacks on 10 October 2013 in all four provincial capitals symbolize the national scale of the problem. While the spread of jihadi militancy is a common threat, each city also faces a unique set of challenges.’²⁰

Since 2011, LeJ has targeted the approximately 500,000-member Shia Hazara community of Balochistan. From July to October 2011, at least 90 Hazaras were gunned down in and around Quetta. In October 2011, 13 people were killed when gunmen stormed a bus carrying Shias and opened fire. LeJ claimed responsibility for all of the attacks. In June 2012, it also claimed responsibility for an attack on a bus carrying Shia pilgrims returning from Iran to Quetta, killing 14 and injuring more than 30 (Islamopedia Online).

... A CONGENIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR TERRORISTS

There are other factors that make up a nurturing atmosphere for latent terrorist threats. One is the transformation of Pakistan’s largest city, its commercial hub and its main port, Karachi into a nest of criminals where a number of terrorist outfits function. In recent years, militant groups have taken advantage of the city’s lawlessness to establish a foothold, effectively taking control of certain areas. Now, suicide bombings and violent attacks on state targets have been added to the regular gun battles between rival criminal gangs and the steady stream of targeted killings of political party activists there.²¹

In September 2013, Islamabad initiated an ongoing clean-up operation by the Pakistan Rangers, a merger of two paramilitary organisations, the Punjab Rangers and the Sindh Rangers. The targets of this operation were criminals already identified by federal military and civilian agencies for their alleged involvement in targeted killings, kidnappings for ransom, extortion and terrorism in Karachi.

In February 2016, at a press conference in Karachi, Pakistan's chief military spokesman Lt. Gen. Asim Bajwa said the Pakistan Rangers had conducted more than 7,000 raids in the city during the more than two-year-long operation and arrested more than 12,000 people, of whom 6,000 had been handed over to the police for legal action. He said the city was infested with street crime, targeted killings and kidnappings for ransom.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and LeJ, Bajwa said, were the biggest terrorist groups that had conducted attacks in the city in collusion with the banned terror outfit TTP Pakistan. All the terrorist organisations, he added, were trying to consolidate their presence in the city. A pool of terrorists used by all the militant groups, including 94 hard-core terrorists, was arrested. About 26 of them carried a reward for their capture or slaying, said Bajwa. The same group, he said, had planned and executed the attack on the Minhas airbase at Kamra, the attack on an ISI base in Sukkur, the attack on the Karachi airport, the Karachi jailbreak attempt and the assassination of top Karachi policeman Chaudhry Aslam.²²

Besides the kidnappers, extortionists and hard-core terrorists that operate within the city of 16 million people where anyone can come and live and where outsiders do not get noticed, Karachi is also a haven for drug traffickers. Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's heroin, with almost half of its production channelled through Pakistan to Europe or Asia, hidden in containers shipped from Karachi. In recent years, a new crossover between the Afghan heroin destined for Europe and Asia and imported South American cocaine was observed in Karachi, fuelling speculation of collaboration between Latin American cartels and Pakistani drug lords or the Taliban, who are partly funded by the traffic.²³

These criminals have been allowed to thrive in Karachi by various administrations and contesting political groups who use their services from time to time. They are on hire to carry out terrorist operations for one group against another. These are the scorpions that live in the cracks.

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Pathankot and Beyond – The Devil’s Alternative

LT. GEN. VINOD BHATIA (RETD.)*

What I am saying is basically that history tells you that those who damage you, if they don’t realise what pain they inflict, then they don’t change.

—Shri Manohar Parrikar
Raksha Mantri
11 Jan. 2016

Is the Pakistan-perpetrated terror attack on the Pathankot air force base the ‘tipping point’?

India’s dilemma has been to hit back at Pakistan after a terror attack perpetrated from across the borders or to continue to suffer such attacks in near perpetuity. Hitting back has the possibility of escalation and retarding India’s growth trajectory and development, and not hitting back emboldens Pakistan to continue with its low-cost high-affect proxy war on India, including high-profile terror strikes such as those on the Indian parliament, in Mumbai (1993 and 2006 serial blasts and 26/11), in Delhi, in Pune, on Akshardham and many others. There has been a spate of terrorist attacks in the last few months, from Pathankot to Pampore, and these are likely to continue. Subtle changes can be discerned in these attacks, with the Pathankot airbase being a game changer in many ways and hence the need for an analysis in some detail to chart out our future response options.

It will be incorrect to state that the terrorist attack on the Pathankot air force base in the early hours of 2 January was a return gift from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in reply to Prime Minister Modi’s bold and statesman like visit to Lahore, an initiative to further the engagement and set in

motion a peace process. It will also be incorrect to state that the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists who executed the attack did so without orders and active support of Pakistan Army/ISI. The Pathankot terrorist strike is the continuation of Pakistan Army's operational philosophy of bleeding India with a 'thousand cuts' and ensuring that both powers that be in India and Pakistan well comprehend that the army drives Pakistan's India policy.

The Pathankot terrorist attack presents India with a 'devil's alternative'. If India now cancels or temporarily suspends all engagements, it plays into the hands of the terrorists and their masters, and if it does not, then it should be prepared for similar terrorist attacks in perpetuity, as has been the practice till now. Another viable alternative is to respond in a befitting military manner; the 'jus ad bellum' is with India, and an equitable and proportional response is in order. However, any response has its own ramifications as Pakistan talks either from the sub-conventional domain or from the nuclear domain of the conflict spectrum, well knowing that it cannot match India in a conventional conflict. Pakistan will continue to operate in the sub-conventional domain while threatening in the nuclear domain, knowing well that it cannot counter India's conventional superiority. In the event of the terrorist attacks continuing, India will be left with no option but to respond militarily, as tolerance levels and the patience of 125 crore people have run out of steam.

Fortunately, for the two nuclear-armed nations and the people, the Pathankot terrorist strike did not or could not destroy the air assets. Had that happened, it would have been a near-certain initiation of war. The ultimate aim of the terrorists, or rather their masters, is open to debate. It is fair to presume that as Pathankot is a front-line airbase, the air assets were the obvious target. However, an analysis of the terrorist strike and the sequence and time of infiltration, movement and attack leads to the conclusion that the air assets were never the target. The aim was straight and simple: to execute a high-visibility attack to derail the engagement. The attack is as per an established pattern and was expected. There is a discernible pattern – a direct correlation between talks and terror. India's stated position is that talks and terror cannot go together; on the other hand, Pakistan has demonstrated direct linkages between talks and terror.

The Ufa meeting between the two prime ministers on 10 July 2015 was followed by the terrorist attack at Dinanagar (Gurdaspur) on 27 July, effectively derailing the scheduled national security adviser (NSA) talks. The terrorist attack at an army camp in Samba on 26 September 2013 preceded the meeting between the two prime ministers scheduled on 29 September in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. As payback for the historic bus yatra to Lahore by Prime Minister Vajpayee in February 1999, large-scale intrusions were made by Pakistan Army in Kargil, leading to a war. Again, the July 2001 Agra summit between the prime ministers was followed by deadly October 2001 attack on the J&K assembly and, thereafter, the 13/12 attack on the Indian parliament, which led to an year-long mobilisation for war in the form of Operation Parakram and the formulation of the much-discussed and -debated 'Cold Start Doctrine' of India. The 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the mother of all terrorist strikes, followed the then Pakistan's newly elected civilian president Zardari saying that India is not a threat. All these attacks emanated from Pakistan, duly orchestrated, engineered and executed by Pakistan Army, and effectively set back any attempts to further the peace process and improved relations.

Much has already been written and spoken on the Pathankot terror attack, and much more will continue to engage the government, army, air force and the defence analyst. The army and air force, as also the National Security Guard (NSG), will certainly carry out an in-depth study while preparing the after-action report and arrive at remedial measures to address the causative factors of a prolonged and not so effectively executed operation, as also revamp the security of defence installations. A quick recapitulation of the modus operandi is a must to highlight some important shifts and arrive at India's response options to identify additional capabilities and capacities to meet similar challenges in the future.

It is believed that JeM terrorists infiltrated from Bamiyal, which is reportedly a known route for smuggling and drug running. The terrorists who carried out the Dinanagar attack too had reportedly infiltrated in the same general area. The infiltration is feasible only with the active assistance of the Pakistan Rangers, who are under the operational command and control of Pakistan Army. Having infiltrated on the new year eve wearing

Indian Army combat uniforms, the terrorists travelled 31 km, from Bamiyal to Tajpur village (periphery of the Pathankot airbase) after commandeering Superintendent of Police Salwinder Singh's SUV, which of course had all the trappings of a VIP vehicle, including the blue beacon, which gave them the authority to move without being challenged. The terrorists, well known for fighting without remorse or pity, were magnanimous enough to spare the occupants of the SUV, including the SP. After having safely reached the village on the periphery of the airbase in the early hours of 1 January 2016, the terrorists decided to wait and lie doggo for the next 24 hours and attack the airbase on 2 January morning at around 0330 hours. Had the air assets been the target, the terrorists would never have waited for 24 hours to initiate the attack, well knowing that the MIG 21s and the MI 35 can be relocated to any other base in no time. Another aspect which defies logic is the fact that the terrorists could lie doggo for 24 hours. It is a well-known fact that given the very high density of ex-servicemen and serving soldiers and the unmatched Punjabi hospitality and the respect for the army, someone or the other will approach the men in uniform, offering milk, food, shelter and more so the small talk of the regiment and the army. As to how these well-armed JeM terrorists in Indian Army combat uniforms went unnoticed needs to be scrutinised, as some sort of collusive support by one or more persons is likely; the nexus between narcotics smuggling and terror will provide the answers.

Even before the Pathankot attack was successfully terminated, the Pakistan-controlled Taliban Afghanistan targeted the Indian consulate at Mazar-e-Sharif on 6 January 2016. In February, the Lashkar-e-Taiba carried out another high-visibility terror attack on the outskirts of Srinagar, at Pampore, wherein unfortunately three Special Forces personnel were martyred, including two officers, Captains Pawan Kumar and Tushar Mahajan, in addition to two CRPF jawans.

The Pathankot terror attack and those preceding and succeeding it, when analysed, lead to certain important inferences, which will provide critical inputs to Pakistan's intent and India's response options:

- Pakistan calibrated the attack to ensure that it does not cross India's 'perceived' redline, keeping the damage below the terror threshold. Accordingly, future terror attacks perpetrated from

across the borders are likely to be high-visibility and not high-profile attacks, like Mumbai (26/11).

- An established pattern of linkages of high-visibility terror attacks and talks will continue. Engagements at the political-diplomatic level are likely to be either preceded or succeeded by terror attacks by Pakistan's state proxy.
- Pakistan will continue to operate in the sub-conventional domain while talking/threatening in the nuclear domain, flouting the newly acquired tactical nuclear missile *Nasr* and a first-use doctrine.
- Tactical actions will have strategic ramifications.
- Pakistan's proxy war is expanding in scope to include North Punjab.
- It is for the first time that a joint investigation team (JIT) from Pakistan has visited India and the site of the Pathankot attack.
- India will need to define, propagate and pursue an effective doctrine to raise the costs and deter Pakistan from perpetuating terror attacks on India and Indian nationals and assets abroad with impunity.

Over the last quarter of a century, since Pakistan started the low-cost high-affect terror war, nearly 2,000 Indians have been killed in over 50 incidents. Except for the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2002, which led to a year-long deployment of the armed forces in Op Parakram, all other attacks have elicited no response at the military level. The Indian outrage and anguish has generally been short lived, and with time, it has been business as usual. Pakistan's controlled terror organisations have succeeded in engineering and perpetuating terror strikes with impunity on the Indian people, taking shelter of the twin strategy of deniability and escalation to the nuclear domain. These so called non-state actors have been exploited to create trouble and ensure the Indian security forces remain engaged in low-intensity-conflict operations. The tolerance level of the Indian public has now run the course, and with a hyper television media, which has literally brought the terror strikes to the bedrooms and drawing rooms, questions are being asked as to why India should suffer such attacks in perpetuity. In this context, Pathankot and Pampore may be a game changer. Much is expected from a strong Modi-

led government. Shri Manohar Parrikar, raksha mantri, while addressing a military gathering, stated ‘that any individual or organization harming the country should also receive the pain of such activities and how, when and where should be our choice’. This statement itself should be a warning to Pakistan, and hence there is an imperative to prepare a range of responses at the political, diplomatic, economic and, above all, military level to deter Pakistan from carrying terror strikes in India by the ‘deep state’.

India, on its part, also needs to synergise its response. After the Pathankot attack and similarly earlier, after Gurdaspur in July 2015 and Samba in September 2013, while all acknowledged that the terrorists infiltrated from Pakistan and carried out these attacks, the Border Security Force (BSF), which is mandated for border guarding and anti-infiltration operations along the international border, went public saying that ‘no infiltration had taken place’. Coming from the institution of the government, it only causes embarrassment to India and strengthens the adversaries’ claims in the international community. Another major concern is that these terrorist, and their organisations are loosely and without thought termed as ‘non-state actors’ by Indians. This being a Pakistani narrative, and by terming them as such, it absolves the Pakistani government, who continues to wage this war. It is an established fact that all terrorist organisations are funded, supported, sponsored, housed, trained and controlled by the ISI, which is an integral part of Pakistan Army, and hence these are state proxies and not non-state actors.

After the Pathankot attack, Shri Manohar Parrikar, raksha mantri, expressed his concern, echoing the nation’s anguish, saying, ‘The country’s capacity for tolerance is over. As defence minister, my tolerance capacity is over, we will do something,’ adding that the government knows what was required to be done. He went on to say ‘that any individual or organisation harming the country should also receive the pain of such activities, how, when and where should be our choice’. This clear and categorical statement should set the strategic and diplomatic community and the military top brass thinking of the many effective options available that deter Pakistan from waging this terror war and at the same time are in concert with India’s growth story. India is a risen and responsible regional power. The more India rises and grows, the more Pakistan will

endeavour to retard this growth by increasing the net cost of security. Equally important is the hyphenation or equivalence which Pakistan wants with India to ensure prominence in the world community and dominance in the region. Though Pakistan is seen by the world as a fountainhead of terror, exploiting its geostrategic location, its proclaimed nuclear power status with an ever-increasing arsenal and the consequences to the world as a failed state, Pakistan continues to draw support from the US, China and the Islamic nations.

The key question is, what are the plausible response options for India? The Indian strategic community is divided on the response options to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Most propagate 'talking to Pakistan in the same language' and 'talking to Pakistan in the language it understands'. The options for India are limited. One option is to suffer the Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks in perpetuity and keep the nation focused on the path of development and economic growth – an option which is perceived by the intellectual community as the only natural and plausible option. The more hawkish of the community openly propagate teaching Pakistan a lesson, and some go to the extent of seeking the balkanisation of Pakistan. Fortunately, they are just a handful who talk of the two extremes. A more pragmatic approach may be somewhere in taking the middle path, a mix of talk, tact and threat.

Prime Minister Modi has reached out to Mr Nawaz Sharif in a bid to normalise relations, by first inviting him for the swearing-in ceremony in May 2014 and then conducting his statesman-like Lahore visit on 24 December 2015. The two prime ministers have met on five occasions in the last twenty months, with a likelihood of meeting again in end March on the sidelines of the nuclear summit in Washington DC. There have been engagements at the political and diplomatic level between the foreign ministers, the NSAs and foreign secretaries. These engagements, of course, have not been without attendant controversies and rigid positions taken mainly by Pakistan in refusing to talk terror. Prime Minister Modi's Pakistan policy has been much debated. In essence, it has been a two-pronged policy of a 'conciliatory' approach and a 'retaliatory' approach. It is important to engage with Pakistan at the political and diplomatic level despite knowing well that the India policy is dictated by Pakistan Army

and without the express directions of Pakistan Army, no move forward is possible. Given the dynamics and power play in Pakistan establishment and its success with the state proxy's as an instrument of waging a continuous war on India in the sub-conventional domain, India will need to prepare and execute a set of responses synergising all elements of national power, mainly diplomatic, economic, military and informational. India maintains the second-largest army, the fourth-largest air force and a blue-water navy. The armed forces are professional, committed and capable of defending India. Many among the strategic community tend to believe the Pakistani narrative that any military initiative by India will escalate to a nuclear war and India will be solely responsible for it. Pakistan, by openly propagating its so called irrationality, first-use doctrine and tactical nuclear weapons (TNW), has balanced Indian conventional war superiority by operating in the sub-conventional domain and threatening to escalate to the nuclear domain in the event of any Indian military response. At the smallest of incidents, the Pakistani establishment and commentators take to the nuclear rhetoric. In the event of a terror strike from Pakistan, the 'jus ad bellum' is with India. India at some point of time will need to give an equitable and proportional response.

On 9 June 2015, India successfully launched punitive operations against the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K) in Myanmar, demonstrating a politico-military will to effectively retaliate against terrorists groups waging a war against India. Punitive and pre-emptive operations should be an integral part of the military sub-conventional doctrine. The terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan, especially across the Line of Control (LC), is intact, with 42 terrorist camps which house and train terrorist. These terrorist camps can be targeted and destroyed either by surgical strikes by the Special Forces or by long-range vectors carrying out precision strikes. Punitive strikes against terrorist camps of organisations perpetuating attacks on Indian soil are a viable and effective option. The retaliation, of course, should be at a place and time of India's own choosing. This will have a deterrent effect as it will raise the costs for Pakistan of maintaining these camps so close to the LC and the border. These attacks will also destroy the terrorist assets and assuage the public sentiments in India as also signal to the Pakistan

establishment that India will no longer tolerate terror. An effective retaliation will need accurate and actionable intelligence and should be well calibrated, coordinated and executed. Punitive operations should factor in an equitable and proportional response, with the armed forces fully prepared for any escalation by Pakistan. It should be understood that operational preparedness and readiness guarantee peace and deter the adversary from escalating and upping the ante. Military retaliation, of course, will need to be fully supported by political and diplomatic initiatives.

Many experts propagate 'talking to Pakistan in the same language' by creating covert capabilities and carrying out deniable operations inside Pakistan. This, of course, apparently seems the best and most plausible option as India raises the costs for Pakistan and hits where it hurts. The covert pay-back option, though attractive, comes with attendant issues. For one, India as a responsible nation (unlike Pakistan) does not support or propagate terrorists anywhere in the world. By supporting and sponsoring terror, India puts itself in the same league as Pakistan, which is not desirable. The principle and fundamental of covert operations is wrong, though it is another matter that even if supported, these will have little or no impact on Pakistan, given the number and intensity of such attacks already taking place inside Pakistan. The violence levels are very high due to an unstable internal security situation, in spite of the much touted success of operation Zab e Azb. Over 50,000 people have been killed in violent terrorist and sectarian incidents in Pakistan since 2001. Covert operations are not a preferred option as they are against India's policy and standing in the world as a peaceful and responsible nation state. India should, however, create covert capabilities and build requisite strategic assets to take out and neutralise individuals who openly perpetuate violence and hatred against India. The likes of Hafeez Saeed, Dawood Ibrahim, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, Masood Azhar and Syed Salahuddin are fair targets and need to be taken out as a response to demonstrate India's resolve to counterterrorism emanating from Pakistani soil.

Pakistan Army is concerned and apprehensive on account of India's superiority in conventional warfare, in particular the Cold Start Doctrine. Though India denies having a cold start doctrine, calling it a proactive strategy, the fact is that Pakistan is concerned. From Pakistan's point of

view, the doctrine has been specifically developed as an aggressive way of war fighting aimed to destroy it, wherein the Indian military conducts offensive operations as a unified battle group inside Pakistan territory at the earliest after an incident. Pakistan Army's new concept of war fighting is indeed designed to counter the Cold Start Doctrine. The Indian Army should relocate some of its combat power and logistics units to further operationalise and strengthen its war fighting capabilities and fine-tune the proactive strategy in the event of a conventional retaliation to a high-profile attack perpetrated by Pakistan, like Mumbai 26/11 or the attack on the parliament. Had the terrorists in Pathankot succeeded in destroying the strategic assets of the fighter and rotary wing aircraft, India may have been driven to respond in an appropriate, equitable and effective measure. A credible military threat of a conventional war will force Pakistan to realign its proxy war strategy to ensure that it does not cross the Indian redlines and the tolerance threshold. In the event of a conventional war consequent to escalation by Pakistan, India should be prepared to degrade the adversary's military capability in a swift, short war.

As a subset of military coercion, another effective retaliation and response mechanism could be to punish the Pakistan Rangers or Army posts which facilitate infiltrators. As in the case of the Pathankot attack, it is well established that the terrorists belonging to Jaish infiltrated from opposite Bamiyal. The Indian Army could inflict a severe punishment by a fire assault on any post abetting infiltration. Though ceasefire was unilaterally declared by Pakistan on 26 November 2003, Pakistan Army and the Pakistan Rangers deliberately violate the ceasefire to facilitate and assist infiltration. The number and intensity of ceasefire violations spiked in 2014–2015, but an effective and immediate retaliation ordered by the BJP government and the chief of the army staff Gen. Dalbir Singh, forced Pakistan Army to abide by the ceasefire. Effective retaliation along the LC and parts of the international border (IB) has ensured relative peace. Similarly, an immediate and effective retaliation on posts facilitating infiltration is a good response option.

The political and diplomatic engagement should continue. There is no alternative to that, and India can hope that the dialogue will be carried forward and contribute to normalising relations to an extent even if these

are temporary. Sports, cultural and people-to-people contact should be calibrated to deter Pakistan from constantly needling India. There have been positive shifts in the last year and half, which need to be consolidated. The Ufa agreement was positive, though it did not give dividends as expected. The major shift has been the appointment of Lt. Gen. Naser Khan Janjua as Pakistan's NSA. As he is purportedly a nominee of the Pakistan Army chief, he will be in a better position to ensure a positive atmosphere and move ahead in conjunction with the Indian NSA, Mr. Ajit Doval. While we keep Pakistan engaged at the political-diplomatic level, it is also important to engage Pakistan at the military level, as Pakistan Army drives the India policy. A direct channel (a hotline) exists between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs). The DGMOs have scheduled telephonic conversation once a week and can call up each other as and when warranted. The DGMO hotline has proved effective many times in controlling a crisis situation and lowering temperatures. 2013 also saw a large number of ceasefires, and a DGMO meeting at Wagah was held at the invitation of the Pakistan DGMO Maj. Gen. Amir Riaz with the Indian DGMO Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia in December 2013. The meeting conducted in a cordial atmosphere resulted in a constructive dialogue and better understanding, leading to sustained ceasefire for the next seven months. The meeting between the DGMOs should be formalised and could be held every six months, each side hosting it alternatively.

The numerous options and initiatives at the diplomatic and economic levels have deliberately not been detailed as these are already being perused and are calibrated on the basis of the prevalent situation. These engagements and initiatives should continue unabated, and India's strengths should be leveraged in the international community to restrain Pakistan. The economic and political isolation of Pakistan is not a feasible option as it enjoys the support of both the US and China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is central to China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project, and access to Gwadar is critical to Chinese economic, energy and military needs. The US, too, continues to support Pakistan. Despite its sheltering Osama bin Laden, the US has given it an unprecedented 18 billion dollar aid, mostly military, which allows Pakistan to narrow the conventional gap with India. The six F-16s are only an addition to the long

list of military hardware supplied by the US to strengthen the Pakistan military.

Pathankot has possibly been a game changer, wherein Pakistan did not cross the perceived redline and India on its part has realised that there is a limit to tolerance as stated by the raksha mantri. Pakistan will do well to realise that Prime Minister Modi is earnest in improving relations and has invested considerable political capital in reaching out to Nawaz Sharif. It is now up to the dispensation in Pakistan, including the army, to carry forward the peace process and control the proxy terrorist, failing which, they should be prepared for an appropriate response from India.

To conclude that Pakistan will not perpetuate more terrorist attacks will be a mistake. India needs to be prepared for such attacks. What India needs is to build capabilities, enhance capacities and demonstrate a politico-military will to deter Pakistan by raising the costs of this low-cost high-affect proxy war. The national security structure will need a synergised approach and a well-orchestrated and coordinated response mechanism in the political, diplomatic, economic, informational and military domains.

* The Views of the Author are personal.

Taliban's Attack on Kunduz: Implications for Central Asian Security

MANABHANJAN MEHER

The recent upsurge in Taliban operations in Kunduz proves that the counterterrorist coalition led by US-NATO-ANSF has so far failed to achieve peace in Afghanistan. For over two decades now, Afghanistan has remained a divided country. The nature of the threat in Afghanistan has now become primarily nontraditional, where the forces to be met are non-state actors of a transnational character. Lack of social security, bad governance and corruption have made the people frustrated and annoyed with the government's unfulfilled promises to deliver essential public services. The security of Central Asia was inextricably linked to the prospects of the peace process in Afghanistan. The threats that are present in Afghanistan are connected with the export of radical ideas and support to the Islamic opposition in the central Asian region.

KEYWORDS

Kunduz, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Taliban, Northern Alliance, US, NATO, ANSF and SCO

INTRODUCTION

The security and stability in Central Asia are closely linked to the peace and stability in Afghanistan. To ensure this, it is essential that Afghanistan doesn't fall back in the hands of radical Islamic forces. The recent upsurge in Taliban operations in Kunduz shows that the counterterrorist coalition led by US-NATO alliance and then the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) has, so far, failed to achieve its original aims. The result is the new situation in Afghanistan, which has been created due to the resurgence

of the Taliban and the proclaimed presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) forces in that country as well as in Central Asia. The military-political crisis in Afghanistan is echoing across Central and South Asia and is having a negative ripple effect across the world. At the same time, certain intellectual circles have noted that due to the high degree of instability in Tajikistan as a result of the government's recent ban on the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and in view of the 'shaky stability' in Uzbekistan, which has been brought about through the suppression of Islamist groups, there exist fertile grounds for the spillover of unrest from the northern part of Afghanistan to Central Asia, in which the region might become a focus of insecurity close to the borders of both China and the Russian Federation.

THE KUNDUZ INCIDENT AND AFGHAN STABILITY

On 28 September 2015, several hundred Taliban militants seized Kunduz city in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province. This was the first successful attempt made by the Taliban in seizing and holding territory since 2001. The fall of Kunduz, 140 miles north of Kabul, represents the biggest setback for new Afghan president Ashraf Ghani's unity government. Kunduz is one of the largest and wealthiest cities in Afghanistan. Situated in the province of Kunduz, it is one of the country's major agricultural regions and has rich mining assets. It lies on a strategic crossroads connecting Afghanistan to Pakistan, China and Central Asia. Kunduz also controls one of the most important drug smuggling routes in the region (Daly 2015a).

During the operation, hundreds of armed Taliban insurgents stormed government facilities in Kunduz, including the prison, freeing about 600 inmates, including 110 belonging to the Taliban, looting government offices and banks. US aircraft conducted airstrikes against the militants, and US Special Forces advisers, along with British Special Boat Service (SBS) commandos, were deployed on the front lines. The attack on Kunduz is the fruition of the prolonged planning that stemmed from the long-held desire of the Taliban to control the city with the intent to seize and control an urban centre, a departure from previous hit-and-run tactics. The 7,000-

strong ANSF fled the city, leaving its weaponry behind. One of the first things the Taliban did was to empty the city's two prisons. Civilians were forced to leave Kunduz, fearing for their safety.

It is the only city in the northern part of the country that has a majority Pashtun population. The Taliban generally derives most of its support from the Pashtun community, which constitutes more than 40% of the country's population. There is a fear that the government forces, comprising of mainly non-Pashtun conscripts, may lay blame on and exact revenge from the Pashtun population for their military debacle. The Taliban announced on 13 October that it was withdrawing from Kunduz, stating that holding on to the city was 'an unnecessary waste of ammunition'. Thousands of Taliban fighters died in the fight; many of them were captured by militias under the control of Afghan warlords such as Rashid Dostum (Cherian 2015). Most of the civilian casualties during the fight for Kunduz were the result of the American attack on the hospital run by the organisation *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF), or Doctors without Borders. Some 22 staff members and patients were killed when the hospital was specifically targeted by a US AC-130 Gunship. The main hospital building was completely destroyed. Later on, US president Barack Obama had to give an unprecedented apology for the unprovoked attack on the hospital.

Subsequently, on 18 October 2015, Taliban militants overran the strategic Ghormach district in Afghanistan's northern Faryab province on the border with Turkmenistan after clashing with Afghan security forces in a multi-pronged assault from different directions. It was claimed that militants captured the district's administrative centre and all government buildings and in a four-hour assault, overran three checkpoints, killing 8 soldiers and capturing 13 others. For Turkmenistan, previous events along its 460-mile-long, largely desert border with Afghanistan were largely involved with drug smuggling, but in 2014, members of Turkmenistan's State Border Service and three soldiers were killed in clashes with militants who crossed into Turkmenistan from Afghanistan (Daly 2015b). It has been expected that rising Taliban activity may lead Turkmenistan president Gurbanguly Berdimukammedov to revise or even abandon the country's 20-year-old nuanced neutrality foreign policy. The neutrality policy influenced Turkmenistan's relations with its restive neighbour and Ashgabat

has previously offered to mediate among the warring parties involved in the Afghan conflict while also providing economic assistance to its neighbour, supplying electricity, oil and natural gas. Despite the turmoil currently in Afghanistan, Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov sees Afghanistan as a potential land of opportunity – a trading partner, a market for electricity exports and a transit nation for the long-proposed but interminably delayed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. On 30 October, Turkmenistan's state gas company Turkmengaz announced plans to start construction on its section of the TAPI pipeline in December. Turkmengaz, Afghan Gas Enterprise, Inter State Gas Systems (Pakistan) and GAIL (India) are all equal shareholders in the pipeline company, which will build, own and operate the network (Daly 2015c).

The Turkmen regime is more concerned about the economic importance of its energy pipelines than combating extremist activities. However, on many occasions in the past, the conflict became uncontrollable and spread beyond the border of Afghanistan to threaten its neighbours. This paper argues that there are several factors responsible for the resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan, including its geopolitical importance as well as the failure of policies dictated by the West and pursued by subsequent governments in the country since 2001. It would also highlight the impact of the resurgent Taliban on central Asian security.

GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF US PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

After the events of 11 September 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan, and in late 2001, the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) authorised the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help the war-battered Afghanistan in recovering its socio-political conditions. Billions of US dollars have also been provided by the international community for the reconstruction of the country. The US and its allies tried to legitimise their military occupation of Afghanistan under the banner of 'bringing freedom and democracy to the people and particularly women' (Rawi 2009: 38). The American troops arrived in Afghanistan in 2001, mainly for

geopolitical reasons: historically, the country was, and remains, the 'nerve plexus' of inner Eurasia, intimately associated with much of what was going on in Central and South Asia, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf (Makhmudov 2010: 60–69).

The United States acted unilaterally according to its own geopolitical needs. It did not give Iran and Russia any major role in developing the war strategy. The US allowed NATO to negotiate with Russia for transit route facilities. The US has tried to temper its overtly unilateral policy by a divide-and-rule policy. It has tried to engage with Russia and central Asian states bilaterally to secure military bases and supply routes. To a certain extent, it can be said that the US gained an advantage by engaging regional powers bilaterally, which resulted in a setback to the collective strength expressed through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) (Mishra 2012: 6–8). In other words, it can be said that such a drive is motivated by the containment of China and Iran and extraction of central Asian oil and gas for the world markets, in addition to putting NATO right at the doorstep of Russia. American strategists believe that it would be convenient for them to deal with unruly China and Iran while based in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia (Bhadauria 2011: 81–86; Meher 2009: 317–330).

The main reason the Central Asian Republics (CARs) agreed to provide the US military action with transit flight, night refuelling and base leasing was that the allied attack on the Taliban regime met the central Asian nations' security interest. For the central Asian nations, the destruction of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the weakening influence of the Taliban Islamic clerical ideology helped to improve their own security environments. However, the stagnating Afghanistan situation and increasing rampancy of the drug traffic activities passing through the central Asian nations put them in a more complicated situation instead of improving their external security environments (Tian 2009: 99–102). The security of central Asian nations directly depends on the Afghan development; from the very beginning of the counterterrorist operation, they have remained heavily involved in the stabilisation effort. Security, however, is not the only problem: Washington's plans and development

in Afghanistan go to the very roots of central Asian geo-politics (Makhmudov 2010: 60–69).

Once the Northern Alliance was reinstalled in power, all hopes for freedom and democracy that were held by the people of Afghanistan were shattered (Rawi 2009: 38). The international community not only failed in bringing security and stabilisation but also failed in political and economic grounds because it could not achieve what it had anticipated earlier. The government is too weak, and the democracy that the international community wanted to transplant in Afghanistan has had a setback in the worsening political situation after the elections with a breakdown of the rule of law (Tasal 2012: 185). The defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the presence of the US forces to counterterrorism have only temporarily helped the region to control the activities of various Islamic groups but do nothing to eliminate the root cause of religious extremism. The nature of threat in Afghanistan has now become primarily nontraditional, where the forces to be met are non-state actors of a transnational character.

US president Barack Obama, in his speech to the West Point Military Cadets in December 2009, declared the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan by July 2011. Subsequently, in a meeting held on 19–20 November 2010 at Lisbon, the time limit for the final withdrawal of US-NATO troops from Afghanistan was fixed as not later than 2014. Nine years after Western countries launched a military intervention in Afghanistan, the leaders of the NATO alliance met in Lisbon, Portugal, to discuss the future of what had become a troubled mission. Although foreign troops deployed to improve the security situation in the country had grown to a peak of 1, 38,000, it was hard to believe that Afghans were feeling safer. Conflict-related civilian casualties increased by 15% in 2010, as did the number of bomb explosions and suicide attacks carried out by the Taliban insurgents. At their November 2010 meeting in Lisbon, they decided that the responsibility for security would be handed to Afghan forces by the end of 2014, with transition due to begin in 2011. The difficulties of 2011 were not at all what had been expected after the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001 (Nicoll 2011: 21–23).

An important aspect of the US exit plan for Afghanistan was the transfer of responsibility to the ANSF. At the Kabul International Conference

in July 2010, the Afghan government and NATO endorsed *Intequal*, a plan for transition under which the government in Kabul would gradually take the full responsibility for security, governance and development across the whole country. NATO and the US have repeatedly stated that they are committed to supporting and assisting Afghanistan even after 2014 (Barry 2011: 130–133). It has also been predicted that irrespective of how fast the US military drawdown happens, the expectation is that the US will retain sufficient forces in Afghanistan to continue intelligence-led operation against terrorist group located in the region (Inkster 2011: 164). The Obama administration has negotiated a long-term bilateral strategic agreement with Afghanistan that promised indefinite US security, economic, cultural and developmental support. The agreement also endorsed establishing permanent military bases in Afghanistan, enabling its troops to stay in the country beyond the 2014 deadline. The US-Afghan accord was separated from the NATO-Afghan deal, which was intended to guarantee continued training and equipment for the Afghan security forces after 2014 (Meher 2012: 101–102). The US interests to stay in Afghanistan and Central Asia for a long time became clear after the Lisbon summit between NATO and Afghanistan (Mishra 2012: 6–8).

In the face of high security risks, both the United States and Afghanistan circulated a draft of a bilateral security agreement (BSA) that allows the presence of US forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014. The document of the agreement resolves the dilemma of immunity of American troops from being prosecuted by the Afghan government. The United States will have exclusive legal jurisdiction over the American law enforcement personnel working in Afghanistan and the Afghan government will have no power over the American troops. The document of the BSA also determines the size of the residual force in Afghanistan and is greatly concerned with the security agreement concluded between the two countries. It has been told that the Obama administration would have 5,000 to 10,000 residual forces in Afghanistan after 2014 with the sole purpose of providing training and advice to the local forces of Afghanistan. Former president Hamid Karzai refused to sign the document of the BSA, whereas it was signed by the new president Ashraf Ghani on September 2014, just one day after the oath-taking ceremony (Tariq, Marwat & Ayaz 2015: 21).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF AFGHANISTAN AFTER 2001

Since the rout of the Taliban in late 2001, the United States and NATO have pursued a process of state building along with the Afghan government, led by former president Hamid Karzai. From the very beginning, Afghanistan's government structure was weak and threatened by numerous rivals at the national and sub-national levels, including warlords, insurgents, traffickers in narcotics and other illicit goods, tribal and religious elites and outside actors and their proxies (Fair 2010: 185, 198). Warlords and their influence are often identified as a key problem in building Afghanistan. For over two decades now, Afghanistan has remained a divided country. The divide is too yawning for any political effort to tackle it easily. While the president rules from Kabul, the warlords rule from four major power centres, spread evenly across the country: Rashid Dostum from Mazar-e-Sharif, Gul Agha Sherazi from Kandhar, Ismail Khan from Herat, Mohammed Fahim from Panjshir valley and others. The warlords also feel that there is far too much American intervention in Afghan affairs (Dash 2004: 148).

The situation has relatively improved in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, but most of the rural parts of the country, where the majority of Afghans live, remain beyond the president's control. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan can be attributed to two fundamental causes. The first is the failure of the United States, the Karzai government and the international community as a whole to take advantage of the lull in the conflict that followed the collapse of the Taliban to project their combined authority and provide public services, including security, to the population beyond Kabul. The second cause is the fragmentation of the international coalition that the United States put together in late 2001 to stabilise and reconstruct Afghanistan. The situation can be gauged from the fact that the president is secure only inside his own compound and doesn't trust his own defence ministry troops to act as his bodyguards (Bhadauria 2009: 184–185).

After the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Bonn Agreement was inked hastily, without all parties being properly consulted to ensure a comprehensive solution for social, political and economic aspects. Even though the Bonn Agreement was not a comprehensive peace agreement,

most Afghans accepted it in the hope that it would provide a starting point for peace and stability. The Bonn Process did not prevent the return of warlords and criminal networks linked to the international drug mafia, the very same people who had been defeated by the Taliban and hated by the Afghan regime for their criminality and disregard for the rule of the law. In this context, warlords refer to not only those well-known figures whose names are found in the newspapers but also all warlords or illegal armed groups, whether they operate locally or nationally. Allowing these warlords to return to power is a big source of disappointment for a majority of Afghans (Miakhel 2011: 21–25).

The public anger is palpable over the government's unfulfilled promises to deliver essential public services. An overwhelming majority of the people do not have access to clean drinking water; clinics and hospitals are in bad shape, lacking trained medical staff, equipment and medicine. Patients have to wait for days in order to be admitted to hospitals and have to bribe officials to receive medical treatment. People continue to labour from dawn to dusk to try to feed their families. Children who have lost their parents and are supposed to be in schools are in the markets or on the streets, selling small items and earning between 10 and 20 Afghanis (25 cents) a day. The inability of former president Karzai to implement any kind of economic relief, along with his failure to reverse or even stem corruption, caused people to lose any remaining faith in his government. The public has also become disillusioned with the National Assembly, because soon after it resumed official business, instead of supporting policies to improve the lives of the poor or the dispossessed, the representatives awarded themselves higher salaries and privileges, including security guards, expensive vehicles and other facilities (Emadi 2010: 234–235).

Afghan people played a key role in helping the coalition forces to overthrow the Taliban in less than two months. More than a decade after the overthrow of the Taliban regime by the US military forces, Afghanistan still remains a country mired in armed conflict. The increasing levels of violence in the countryside and the near complete encirclement of the capital have completely destroyed the illusion that Afghanistan is on its way to peace and prosperity. The increasing civilian casualties in military

operation, unemployment, warlordism, lack of social security and social identity, bad governance and corruption have made people frustrated and annoyed with the government and the coalition forces (Tasal 2011: 67–68). Operations resulting in the deaths of innocent Afghan civilians have become extremely difficult for the counter-insurgency and have sparked protests against the presence of foreign troops and calls for the Afghanistan president's resignation. It is increasingly argued that mounting civilian casualties from US and NATO air strikes against the Taliban are undermining Kabul's mission and, in turn, helping the insurgents recruit more fighters (Johnson 2007: 123).

The modern history of Afghanistan shows a repetition of local resistance against foreign occupying forces. The resistance has always forced the occupiers to formulate withdrawal strategies. There have been three instances of exit scenarios in Afghanistan by foreign forces: British troops' withdrawal in 1842 was the first such instance; the USSR's decision to exit Afghanistan in 1989 was the second; and the United States' Afghan exit strategy, with a time frame of July 2011–2014, is the third instance in which the invading troops have opted for a withdrawal strategy, considering the increase in domestic, regional and international pressure on the US in the form of human and financial turmoil faced by the Obama administration. For this reason, former president Karzai showed his full support for Obama's plan to limit US presence in the country and transfer security responsibilities from the US and allied forces to the Afghan National Army (Hussain & Farani 2012: 33).

The lessons from Afghanistan and the development of the present global fight against terrorism have raised a whole lot of new political and legal questions before the world community. In other words, Afghanistan has turned into a refuge for the terrorists and has become a source of threat to international security, probably because it has lost all the attributes of statehood and its socio-political system. Further, it has turned into a victim of the geopolitical rivalry of global and regional powers in South Asia. The 'Pak-Taliban' established in Afghanistan, the traits of which have appeared in some areas of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, had become a favourite medium for the growth of terrorism as an ideology and as an action programme (Tolipov 2004: 27).

The war in Afghanistan has an essential impact on the military-political situation in Asia. The upsurge in Taliban operations shows that the counterterrorist coalition has so far failed to achieve its original aims. Subversion and terrorism have worsened the situation across the country, where central power is limited only to the capital and a few of the provinces. In the last few years, the Taliban has stepped up its activities: whereas in 2007, it controlled 54% of the country's territory, in December 2009, its presence was felt in a much more vast area (which covered 72% of the territory). In 2007–2010, the Taliban captured several local centres in the south and remains in control there. It set up an alternative administrative structure, controls the local traffic, collects taxes, regulates trade, controls morality and applies the sharia laws. The ISAF could not weaken the Taliban's influence; its presence is especially obvious in the fighting zones (Dubovtsev & Galymzhanuly 2011: 40–41).

Armed conflict in Afghanistan has been on the rise since 2007. Taliban has constricted the effectiveness of the Afghan government in the southern and eastern provinces, where Pashtuns live in great numbers. In addition, the Taliban has carried out intense armed attacks against the international forces. The local effects of the Taliban, tribal leaders and warlords are much more pronounced than those of the central government. At present, it seems that the Taliban has founded an alternative administration and judicial system in many provinces in eastern and southern Afghanistan. These actions serve both ways; on the one hand, they try to gain public approval, and on the other hand, they scare the people (Karaca 2011: 51).

IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL ASIAN SECURITY

Since the 1990s, CARs have witnessed the direct threat of international terrorism and religious fundamentalism to their security because of continuing conflict in Afghanistan. The importance of Central Asia in the global politics and its security dynamics will depend a great deal on the process taking place in Afghanistan. In the declaration on the conclusion of the meeting of the heads of states of the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), held in Almaty on 5–6 July 2003, it was noted that

the consolidation of peace and stability in Afghanistan and establishment of good neighbourly relations with this country will serve the basic interests of the central Asian countries (Chanachev 2004: 317). For the central Asian countries, the continuation of military and political instability in Afghanistan carries, as before, threats connected with the export of radical ideas and support to the Islamic opposition in many countries of the region, the problem of refugees, the increase in inter-ethnic and -state tensions and trafficking of narcotics and arms (Dmitriyenko 2004: 86). There are conflicting interpretations among central Asian and Russian scholars regarding the rise and resurgence of the Taliban (occupation of Kunduz) in Afghanistan. The Afghan factor has been, for many years, crucial in a series security threats in Central Asia. Alexei Malashenko, a scholar at Moscow's Carnegie Center, argues that danger is being exaggerated. He says, 'I think it is no threat to Russia. Moreover, it is no threat to Tajikistan as well; its real challenges are coming from within the country. I do not envisage the Taliban attacking Tajikistan; they do not have the force to do it. The Taliban is preoccupied with its own, domestic, Afghan affairs' (as cited in Sergey & Mikheev 2015). In contrast, Gen. Vyacheslav Trubnikov, former first deputy minister of foreign affairs, former director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and former ambassador to Afghanistan, claims, 'My personal opinion is that the situation in Afghanistan has never been calm or stable. Russia and its allies under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) are well aware of these dangerous developments inside Afghanistan. The recent CSTO summit paid due attention to these developments. It is essential for all the CSTO member states to be always on the alert' (as cited in Sergey & Mikheev 2015).

The international religious extremist centres are concentrating their main efforts on organising and conducting propaganda and sabotage, not excluding the armed method of struggle. The possibility of exploitation of the Afghan territory by the radical opposition of the neighbouring countries cannot be excluded. According to the information provided by the Anti-Terrorist Centre of the Organisation of Collective Security located in the city of Bishkek, the leadership of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is making efforts to take out its soldiers from Afghanistan.

Simultaneously, their regrouping and increase in numerical strength is taking place. There are records of attempts to renew the financing of extremist activities (Chanachev 2004: 320–321).

Transnational terrorism – often by non-state actors with material or political support from some countries of the region – continues to pose a serious threat to regional security. The absence of shared threat perceptions among different actors of the region makes the threat of transnational terrorism quite difficult to counter. Specifically threatening to Afghanistan are the Taliban and groups allied with it – such as al-Qaeda and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The Taliban and LeT are also believed to be utilising as well as assisting extremist forces from the Eurasian region, including Uzbek, Chechen and Uighur. It is unlikely that China and the UK share the same threat perception as Afghanistan, India and the US do in regard to terrorists harboured in Pakistan. China, a long-time ally of the Pakistan military, also does not seem to share the same perception about the seriousness of the threat posed by Pakistan-based terrorist outlets (Humayoon 2010: 28–30).

The conflict in Afghanistan is indeed multidimensional, and the regional dimension of it has always been dominant. Due to its geographical position, the country is an integral part of South and Central Asia and thus belongs to the security complex of this combined region. In addition to Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, such as Pakistan, Iran, CARs and China, a number of regional powers, such as India, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have interests in Afghanistan, for both security and economic reasons (Mir 2012: 133–134). These regional powers have been involved in conflict for the last three decades, either directly or indirectly. By engaging regional stakeholders, Afghanistan might reach a negotiated settlement.

The SCO member states believed that the security of Central Asia was inextricably linked to the prospects of the peace process in Afghanistan. They repeatedly stated their support for the efforts of the international coalition conducting antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan. As is well known, some SCO member states provided their ground infrastructure for the temporary deployment of military contingents from the coalition countries and their territory and air space for military transit in the interests of the antiterrorist operations (Rozanov 2013: 39). The

SCO granted observer status to Afghanistan on the occasion of the 11th summit held in Beijing on 8 June 2012. By granting observer status to Afghanistan, the SCO (which includes Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) consolidated ties with the war-torn country. Afghanistan is regarded as the main source of external threats to the SCO member states as well as its own neighbourhood. In this context, its active involvement in the Afghan peace process is one of SCO's major successes.

CONCLUSION

The return of the Taliban in a dominant role in the foreseeable future, the probability of which cannot be ruled out, will have negative consequences for the whole region. International terrorism still remains one of the serious threats to the South and Central Asia. The present situation in Afghanistan is an outcome of the foreign policy course pursued by the US administrations, which created serious problems for the entire world, especially for its neighbours. From the moment of the April Revolution of 1978 till today, Afghanistan is the basic source of instability for the Eurasian continent. After the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan in December 1979, the US immediately strengthened its support to opposition parties in Afghanistan. Taking Pakistan as a base, the US supplied abundant financial, military and staff assistance as a guarantee for the final military success of Afghanistan's opposition powers. After the events of 11 September 2001, the US-NATO alliance invaded Afghanistan. The United States acted unilaterally according to its own geopolitical needs. It did not give Iran and Russia any major role in developing the war strategy.

Apart from this, the failure of subsequent governments, both of former president Karzai and current president Ghani, to implement any kind of socio-economic relief for the Afghan people resulted in the loss of any faith that might have remained in the government.

However, Afghanistan's neighbours are all stakeholders in regional stability. The SCO has also intensified its focus on Afghanistan. Individual SCO member states have already contributed to the reconstruction of Afghanistan through the building of national armed forces and energy infrastructure development.

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