Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): A Threat to Pakistan?

Muhammad Nawaz Khan[*]

Abstract

The rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as an extremist group, is not a new phenomenon for the Middle East's security architecture, rather it has deep roots in countries of the region marked by weak military structures, authoritarian political systems and deteriorated security environment. On the contrary, Pakistan is a democratic and moderate state with a vibrant society. The resilient response of the country's civil-military leadership to brutalities of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Tehreek-e-Khilafat Wa Jihad (Movement for the Caliphate and Jihad-TKJ), Jundallah and Jamaat-ul-Ahraar (Assembly of the Free-JA), etc. have shrunk the possibility of any transnational militant organisation such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) establishing its organised stronghold. The paper briefly looks at this extremist organisation and its impacts on South Asia, and provides detailed insight about why the rise of ISIS would not become an organised operational threat for Pakistan, and suggests ways to overcome its inspirational role that could become a matter of concern for the country.

Key words: Islamic State, Terrorism, Extremism, Pakistan.

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Introduction

T he Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is a Sunni extremist rebel group governing areas in Syria, Iraq (self-styled Islamic State), with operations or affiliates and loyalists in Nigeria (Boko Haram), Egypt (Ansar Bait al-Maqdis [Supporters of Jerusalem]), Libya (former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's soldiers/loyalists) respectively and other territories of West Africa, the Middle East (ME), and North Africa. Moreover, 'some traces in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh and operational footholds (Afghanistan) of the ISIS have been found in South Asia (SA).'[1] ISIS and its affiliates have gained strength in regions prone to anarchy, weak state structures and military, political instability, sectarian rifts, denial of civil rights and poor governance. These chaotic situations provide a perfect cover to militant groups to infiltrate fragile areas and also offer space to frustrated youth, as well as ambitious and misguided members of the clergy to join extremist ranks. ISIS with its resources, transnational vision, and rhetoric of the old Caliphate system has set new trends in modern terrorist iconography. In this regard, the group has the capacity to generate new difficulties for not only fragile states, which are politically unstable, institutionally weak, have an authoritarian political system and deteriorated security situation such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, it has also demonstrated (in its recently claimed attacks in Spain in August 2017 and the United Kingdom in June 2017)[2] its ability to bring chaos to and for the more developed and highly secure states as well. At the same time, however, it also appears that the group may only have the capability to play an inspirational role for attracting likeminded individuals and marginalised militant segments, but lacks the capacity to establish a more organised and robust operational apparatus through its 'franchises' in countries where societies and institutions are not only democratic, but also exhibit firm commitment to root out extremism.

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[1] Maryam Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," *Journal of Current Affairs* 1, nos.1-2 (2016): 4-11, (1-17).

[2] Alice Foster, "Terror Attacks Timeline: From Paris and Brussels Terror to Most Recent Attacks in Europe," *Express.co.uk*, August 18, 2017, http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/693421/Terror-attacks-timeline-France-Brussels-Europe-ISIS-killings-Germany-dates-terrorism.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): A Threat to Pakistan?

Pakistan is a democratic moderate state as compared to Iraq, Syria, and other Gulf countries. It has a strong army which has proved its mettle against terrorists during Operation Rah-e-Rast (2009),[3] Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009),[4] Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014-17),[5] and the ongoing Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017).[6] These operations, against militant groups that had challenged the writ of the government, have received international accolades for reasserting control and expelling terrorists from the northern belt.[7] They have reduced the chances of re-emergence of such outfits in the country and also curbed the probability of a new terrorist group establishing an organised operational network as 'it would be difficult for them to procure any physical space or control in Pakistan.'[8] In fact, there are only few disorganised traces of the ISIS outfit in some isolated places where the group is striving to show its presence or to become pertinent in Pakistan's security milieu. The ISIS outfit consists of those marginalised affiliates and individuals such as TKJ, Jundallah, Shahidullah Group and JA[9] which showed their allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi after leaving the TTP due to internal differences (such as identity issues and leadership crises, etc.).

Interestingly, like the TTP, these marginalised groups are currently operating from Afghanistan for training, planning and plotting terrorist activities in Pakistan,[10] especially after escaping from Federally

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[3] Ahmad Rashid Malik, "The Success of the Operation Rah-e-Rast," *Jakarta Post,* August 4, 2009, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/08/04/the-success-operation-raherast.html.

[4] "Achievements of Operation Rah-e-Nijat," *The People of Pakistan Blog*, January 29, 2010, https://thepeopleofpakistan.wordpress.com/2010/01/29/achievements-of-operation-rah-e-nijat/.

[5] Saima Ghazanfar, "Operation Zarb-e-Azb: Two Years of Success," *Nation*, September 6, 2016, http://nation.com.pk/national/06-Sep-2016/operation-zarb-e-azb-two-years-of-success.

[6] "Pakistan Army Launches 'Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad' across the Country," *Dawn*, February 22, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1316332.

[7] Peter Oborne , "Winning the War on Terror: From the Badlands of Pakistan where Al-Qaeda Planned their Attacks on Britain, Peter Oborne, the First Western Journalist to Visit this Epicentre of Terror Files a Riveting Dispatch," *Daily Mail Online*, March 3, 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4277056/Winning-war-terror-badlands-Pakistan.html.

[8] Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," 8.

[9] Ibid., 4.

[10] Salis bin Perwaiz, "AQIS, LeJ Sleeper Cells Targeting Cops in Karachi," *News International*, January 9, 2017, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/177704-AQIS-LeJ-

Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) during Operation Zarb-e-Azb. The presence and amassment of ISIS in Afghanistan (especially near the mountainous border regions) is a matter of concern for Pakistan given sporadic attacks in the country. For instance, the Bacha Khan University attack in January 2016 was masterminded and planned by handlers using Afghan soil and telecommunication network.[11] The Safoora bus attack in Karachi[12] was claimed by Jundallah (also based in Afghanistan) and committed by individuals like Saad Aziz, Tahir Hussain Minhas and Asad-ur-Rehman (reportedly university students) inspired by ISIS.[13]

While such extremist thinking is restricted to a limited faction of Pakistan's society; and by and large, there is no sign that ISIS central leadership has led any organised terrorist activities in the country, there remains a possibility that ISIS could exploit such segments by employing its inspirational card in seeking their loyalties.[14] To this end, the paper takes a look at the evolution of ISIS from a small terrorist group into a functional state; and discusses other elements such as its 'grand strategy', governance structure and military including weapon capabilities, factors that compel foreign fighters to join the group, its initial popularity and downward trends. Comparing the group's political vision with that of TTP, Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban, the paper attempts to get insight into the future of ISIS in South Asia (SA).

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sleeper-cells-targeting-cops-in-Karachi. Also see, Mohsin Raza Malik, "Countering RAW," *Nation*, May 19, 2015, http://nation.com.pk/columns/19-May-2015/countering-raw.

[11] "Afghan Soil Used for BKU Attack, Envoy Told," *Dawn*, January 27, 2016, http://www.dawn.com/news/1235516.

[12] Imtiaz Ali, "43 Killed in Attack on Bus Carrying Ismailis in Karachi," *Dawn*, May 14, 2015, http://www.dawn.com/news/1181698.

[13] "Sabeen Mahmud, Safoora Goth Killers to be Hanged," *Dawn*, May 12, 2016, http://www.dawn.com/news/1257932.

[14] "TTP's Support for IS Disturbing for Pakistan," *News International*, October 6, 2014, https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/640902-ttp%E2%80%99s-support-for-is-disturbing-for-pakistan.

ISIS — A Brief Overview

From a Small Terrorist Group into a Functional 'State'

ISIS is not a new occurrence rather has been ingrained in the Middle East's security environment since 1999 as a small terrorist group which has now evolved into a 'functional state.'[15] Initially, the group emerged as Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (Party of Monotheism and Jihad-JTJ) in 1999, which was retitled Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (Organisation of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia-TQJBR), commonly known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) when the JTJ pledged loyalty to the ME chapter of Al-Qaeda in 2004.[16] In January 2006, the AQI joined other Sunni rebellious factions to form the Mujahideen Shura Council, which in October 2006 announced the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).[17] Furthermore, in August 2011, under the headship of al-Baghdadi, the ISI sent representatives into Syria after the Syrian Civil War had started. This group branded itself as the Al-Nusra Front and set up in Sunni majority areas of Syria.[18] In April 2013, al-Baghdadi declared fusion of his group with Front, and declared that the name of the reunified group would be the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).[19] However, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Mohammad al-Julani rebuffed this union, and after an eight-month power tussle, Al-Qaeda disengaged with ISIL on February 3, 2014.[20]

Governance and Capabilities

To establish a Caliphate system is a central focus of this group's political vision which includes 'establishing control of terrain by military conquest,

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[15] Ahmed Rashid, foreword, to Charles R. Lister, *The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), vii, https://www.brookings.edu/book/the-islamic-state-a-brief-introduction/.

[16] Richard York, *Know Thy Enemy: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (Raleigh: Lulu Press, 2015), 1.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Muhammad Munir and Muhammad Shafiq, "Global Threat: A Comparative Analysis of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS)," *IPRI Journal* XVI, no. 2, (2016): 1-16 (9).

[19] York, *Know Thy Enemy: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*, 1.

[20] Ibid.

then reinforcing this control through governance.'[21] Its governance is two-fold: administrative and service-oriented.[22] Those in the former structure are responsible for managing religious matters and enforcement, punishments, educational programming and public relations; the latter handle aid and infrastructure issues such as water and electricity.[23]

According to different assessments, the size of its army could be around 53000-258000.[24] According to Kurdish claims, it has 200,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria, whereas the Russians and America's Central Intelligence Agency estimate this number to be between 31,000 and 70,000 as of September 2014.[25]

This quasi-state has conventional military technology including explosives, anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft launchers, tactical ballistic missiles, wire-guided anti-tank missiles, infantry mobility vehicles, assault rifles, light utility vehicles, armoured personnel carriers, main battle tanks, self-propelled artillery, multiple rocket launchers, towed anti-aircraft twin auto-cannons, field guns, even interceptor/fighter aircrafts like MiG-21 or MiG-23 (the Syrian Air Force claimed to have shot down two of them), self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and grenades.[26]

Who Joins ISIS and Why?

There are numerous push and pull factors which attract foreign fighters to join this terrorist group. Some wish to animate in and protect the so-called 'Islamic state', a great many join because of poverty, others have sectarian inspirations and are searching for an 'identity'- a place where they can

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[21] Charles C. Caris and Samuel Reynolds, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, report 22 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2014), 4, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/ISIS_Governance.pdf.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] York, *Know Thy Enemy: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*, 78.
[25] Costas Ioannou, "The ISIS Militants, How Many are They?" *South Front*, November 11, 2015, https://southfront.org/the-isis-militants-how-many-are-they/.
[26] Gabi Siboni, "The Military Power of the Islamic State" (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, n.d.), accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/The%20Military%20Power%20of%20 the%20Islamic%20State%20%20Gabi%20Siboni260750900.pdf.

belong and then there are those who are hungry for power,[27] and motivated by the group's call to 'the final battle of all time between good and evil forces that would happen in Syria believing that the eventual defeat of evil forces will lead to the Day of Judgement.'[28]

In its initial years, ISIS recorded a number of successes over Syrian, Kurdish and Iraqi forces. It seized territory and declared self-claimed 'Islamic State' under a so-called Caliphate system in northern Syria and western Iraq. The main reasons behind its initial battlefield success was the inclusion of former intelligence officers and experienced field intelligence soldiers of the National Intelligence Service of Iraq,[29] rebels from the Syrian Army,[30] foreign fighters and the capture of weapons from the Iraqi and Syrian ammunition depots.[31] Not only this, ISIS was able to exploit the 'oppressive and exclusionary polices of Shia regimes against them'[32] since the Sunni Muslims of Syria and Iraq were sick and fed up of their authoritarian leaders.[33] Thus, this supposed higher 'moral ground' under a Caliphate system that would offer good governance helped the outfit in gaining popularity among the socially deprived local populace.[34] They foresaw a silver lining in their chaotic lives and believed 'that saviours were at hand to provide justice and peace.'[35]

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[27] Abdul Basit, "Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria – Why So Many?" *Journal of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research* 6, no. 9 (2014): 1-18 (4), https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CTTA-October14.pdf.

[28] Ibid., 5.

[29] Tom Wyke, "The Secret to ISIS's Success: Over 100 Former Saddam Hussein-Era Officers Run Jihadi Group's Military and Intelligence Operations in Iraq and Syria," *Daily Mail Online*, August 8, 2016, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3190314/The-secret-ISIS-s-success-100-former-Saddam-Hussein-era-officers-run-jihadi-group-s-military-intelligence-operations-Iraq-Syria.html.

[30] Mona Mahmood and Ian Black, "Free Syrian Army Rebels Defect to Islamist Group Jabhat al-Nusra," *Guardian*, May 8, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/08/free-syrian-army-rebels-defect-islamist-group.

[31] Siboni, "The Military Power of the Islamic State."

[32] Amna Ejaz Rafi, "Media Strategy for Countering the Daesh Threat," *Journal of Current Affairs* 1, nos.1&2 (2016): 18-29 (20).

[33] Rustam Shah Mohmand, "The IS has no Future in Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, February 7, 2015, http://tribune.com.pk/story/834067/the-is-has-no-future-in-pakistan/.

[34] Fawaz A. Gerges, "ISIS and the Third Wave of *Jihadism*," *Current History: A Journal of Contemporary Affairs* (2014): 339-343 (340), http://currenthistory.com/Gerges_Current_History.pdf.

[35] Mohmand, "The IS has no Future in Pakistan."

This 'popularity' has not lasted long though. The State started losing support of the people of Iraq and Syria[36] immediately after 2014 because it failed to protect them and provide better governance.[37] Moreover, the group's social control is brutal as its administrative and social service officers are generally considered cruel and kill innocent citizens.[38] In addition, the brutalities committed by its members have caused resentment and generated profound doubts in minds of the people about its credibility.[39] Besides, its atrocities, including the killings of women and children nullify the organisation's claim of defending Islam and Muslims.[40] During its peak, almost 80-100 foreign fighters joined ISIS every day. With the passage of time, this number has come down to 10-15 per day.[41] In fact, it has been estimated that the number of foreign fighters joining ISIS decreased from 1,500 during 2015 to 200 per month during 2016,[42] and has been on a downward spiral ever since.[43]

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[36] Yaroslav Trofimov, "ISIS Failure in Kirkuk Shows its Loss of Sunni Arab Support," *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2016, https://www.wsj.com/articles/isis-failure-in-kirkuk-shows-its-loss-of-sunni-arab-support-1477494191; Martin Chulov, "Losing Ground, Fighters and Morale – Is it all Over for ISIS?" *Guardian*, September 7, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/07/losing-ground-fighter-morale-is-it-all-over-for-isis-syria-turkey.

[37] Caris and Reynolds, *ISIS Governance in Syria*, 5. Also see, "Flow of Foreign ISIS Recruits Much Slower Now, US Says," *CBS News*, April 26, 2016, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/less-foreign-isis-recruits/; Frederick Forsyth, "Here's Four Reasons ISIS are Losing, says Frederick Forsyth," *Express.co.uk*, March 4, 2016, http://www.express.co.uk/comment/columnists/frederick-forsyth/649730/ISIS-losing-Syria-refugee-crisis.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Trofimov, "ISIS Failure in Kirkuk Shows its Loss of Sunni Arab Support." Also see, Chulov, "Losing Ground, Fighters and Morale – Is it all Over for ISIS?"

[40] Rafi, "Media Strategy for Countering the Daesh Threat," 26.

[41] Abdul Basit, "ISIS Growing Influence in South Asia and Regional Implications" (lecture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2015), http://www.mofa.gov.pk/documents/aghashahi/lecture.pdf.

[42] "Flow of Foreign ISIS Recruits Much Slower Now, US Says," *CBS News*.

[43] Martin Chulov , Jamie Grierson and Jon Swaine, "ISIS Faces Exodus of Foreign Fighters as its 'Caliphate' Crumbles," *Guardian*, April 26, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/26/isis-exodus-foreign-fighters-caliphate-crumbles.

ISIS and its Foothold in South Asia

In South Asia, a tussle is underway between various extremist factions including ISIS-likeminded groups, the Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the TTP, trying to establish one of the two major competing political orders – the Caliphate political order and *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful) political order.[44] Under the shadow of this tug-of-war, they have launched four different *jihads* for creating the Islamic State of Khorasan Province or Islamic State of Khorasan[45] and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan or Waziristan.[46] In the backdrop of these different *jihads* in the region, ISIS is facing serious difficulties since intense ideological rivalry is going on in Afghanistan between its empathisers and the Afghan Taliban,[47] due to which its Afghan chapter has not achieved the level of success and popularity similar to its ME chapter in Iraq and Syria. This can lead one to conclude that given its lack of strength in a relatively unstable state like Afghanistan, the future prospects of ISIS taking root in SA are likely to be limited. However, the tussle between various groups and factions is alarming and one needs to understand the political inclinations of ISIS vis-à-vis South Asia (particularly Afghanistan and Pakistan), and how more 'established' groups like Al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban and the TTP are likely to fare and react. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a self-proclaimed caliph, has declared all sultanates, *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful), and emirates to be illegal.[48]

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[44] Hasan Abdullah, "Battle for 'Ameer-ul-Momineen'," *Dawn*, December 6, 2014, http://www.dawn.com/news/1149112.

[45] Rana, "What ISIS and the 'Caliphate' Mean for Pakistan."

[46] "Pakistan Warns Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network," *News International*, April 17, 2014, https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/637370-pakistan-warns-afghan-taliban-and-haqqani-network.

[47] Ibid., 5.

[48] C. Christine Fair, "Is Pakistan in ISIS' Crosshairs?" *Boston Review*, October 16, 2014, https://issuu.com/abidoon/docs/e-paper_pdf__20-10-2014__isb.

> Employing violence and brutality to impose its will, *Wilayat Khorasan,* (the ancient name ISIL has chosen for the region made up of Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of neighbouring countries), has emerged in seven different areas and vowed to step up operations, where the veteran fighters - the Taliban - once held sway. Fighting to reconstitute the historical Khorasan into the so-called 'caliphate' of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group says it has grand plans for the region, starting with uprooting the Taliban and the government of President Ashraf Ghani.[49]

Figure 1 shows the map published by the group depicting countries for expansion of the Islamic State highlighted in black across the Middle East and into Muslim countries of Central and SA, across North Africa and into mainland Spain:

Figure-1

Source: Muhammad Amir Rana, "What ISIS and the 'Caliphate' Mean for Pakistan," *Dawn*, July 3, 2014, http://www.dawn.com/news/1116799.

The map shows states which are or once were under Muslim rule. It presents both Pakistan and Afghanistan as parts of the Khorasan province, which ISIS now considers its campground of international *jihad* to extend

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[49] "ISIL and the Taliban," *Al Jazeera,* November 1, 2015,
http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2015/11/islamic-state-isil-taliban-afghanistan-151101074041755.html.

its frontiers into other parts of the world, including India. This map, depicting territory that the group aims to have under its domain in the next five years, has been extensively distributed on social media.[50]

Al-Qaeda, on the other hand, seeks to establish the Islamic State of Khorasan because it believes:

> …that the struggle for the creation of the Islamic state of Khorasan would arise from the area comprising of Malakand in Pakistan and Nuristan and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan.[51]

To fulfil its objective, on September 2014, al-Zawahiri proclaimed the establishment of Qaidat al-Jihad fi'shibhi al-qarrat al-Hindiya or Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), also commonly known as Al-Qaeda in SA.[52] The creation of this new regional group followed soon after the formal split between al-Zawahiri and al-Baghdadi as a 'reaction to the declaration of Caliphate system by the latter.'[53] Al-Qaeda did not release any map showing countries for establishing such a state. Although the group claims to be 'allied and loyal to Afghan Taliban's *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful)',[54] it has not given any statement that so-called Islamic State of Khorasan will be ruled by the latter.

TTP are out to establish an Islamic Emirate of Waziristan or Notion of Khorasan Movement. Initially, this was not part of TTP's aims and objectives. In fact, its declared aims have been to:

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent," *GlobalSecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/aqis.htm.

[53] Alastair Reed, "Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent: A New Frontline in the Global *Jihadist* Movement?" (brief, International Centre for Counterterrorism, The Hague, 2015), 3, https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ICCT-Reed-Al-Qaeda-in-the-Indian-Subcontinent-May2016.pdf.

[54] Ibid.

> …fight against the Pakistani state, implementation of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) as interpreted by the TTP and a strategy to amalgamate against the US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan.[55]

After its leader Baitullah Mehsud was killed in August 2009, news began to circulate that he had wanted to establish an Islamic Emirate of Waziristan in the tribal areas of Pakistan;[56] and the present leader of the TTP Mullah Fazlullah of Swat considers himself to be 'the founder of the Khorasan movement.'[57]

There is no statement given by the TTP that this so-called Islamic Emirate of Waziristan will be ruled by the Afghan Taliban's *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful). Rather, the TTP operates separately from the Afghan Taliban, and is only loosely aligned with the latter.[58] In fact, the TTP has rejected the ISIS Caliphate:

> Baghdadi is not caliph because in Islam, caliph means a command over the entire Muslim world, while Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has no such command except over a specific people and territory.[59]

The Afghan Taliban have also not only rejected ISIS' political inclination of establishing Khorasan Province under the Caliphate, but also actively fighting against the latter in Afghanistan.[60] The eventual goal of the Afghan Taliban is the resurgence 'of the lost Islamic Emirate of

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[55] Muhammad Imtiaz Zafar, "Pakistan, Terrorism and Islam," *Jihāt al-Islām* 8, no.2 (2015): 27-40, (29), http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/jihat-ul-islam/PDF/18% 20Terrarism%20in%20Pakistan%20by%20Imtiaz%20Zafar.pdf.

[56] "Pakistan Warns Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network," *News International,* April 17, 2014, https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/637370-pakistan-warns-afghan-taliban-and-haqqani-network.

[57] "What ISIS and the 'Caliphate' Mean for Pakistan."

[58] "Pakistan Taliban Reject ISIS Leader's Claim to be 'Caliph'," *Alarabiya English*, December 19, 2016, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2015/12/19/Pakistan-Taliban-reject-ISIS-leader-s-claim-to-be-caliph-.html.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Akhilesh Pillalamarri, "Taliban vs. ISIS: The Islamic State is Doomed in Afghanistan," *National Interest*, June 21, 2015, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/taliban-vs-isis-the-islamic-state-doomed-afghanistan-13153.

Afghanistan'[61] under their *amir* (leader) Haibatullah Akhundzada as *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful). Their war is confined to the territory of Afghanistan with no regional or international ambitions of establishing any Islamic state, unlike ISIS and Al-Qaeda.

ISIS Presence in Pakistan: Fact or Fiction?

The people of Pakistan reject extremist ideologies and brutality evident from the country's National Action Plan 2014 which appeared as a powerful national narrative after the barbaric attack on a school in Peshawar by TTP on December 16, 2014 that brought the nation to a watershed moment in its long fight against terrorism.[62] Despite this, there still exist extremist tendencies within a few echelons of Pakistani society. In 2016 alone, nearly 309 men of Afghan and ME origin who were part of the organisation were arrested.[63] ISIS can capitalise on such numbers and slowly gain inroads into Pakistan, just as it has gained the allegiance of marginalised *jihadi* groups and TTP's splinter individuals from Afghanistan. The later joined ISIS searching for identity that had been denied to them by TTP leadership because of internal rifts. Consequently, the ISIS platform provided them the opportunity to become part of the so-called Islamic State-Khorasan[64] Province (ISIL-KP), especially after the defeat of the TTP by the Pakistan Army and its loss of territorial control in FATA. However, one needs to remain wary of the fact that the motivation for people to join violent extremist groups whether in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan remains more personal than political. According to media reports, the following marginalised *jihadi* groups have pledged allegiance to the ISIS so far:

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[61] "Pakistan Warns Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network," *News International*.
[62] Muhammad Nawaz Khan, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism and Extremism Strategy," *London Post*, April 23, 2016, http://thelondonpost.net/pakistans-counter-terrorism-and-extremism-strategy.
[63] Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," 6.
[64] The old name for Iranian, Central Asia, Afghan and Pakistani territories.

- Tehreek-e-Khilafat Wa Jihad (Movement for the Caliphate and Jihad-TKJ)[65]
- Jundallah[66]
- Jamaat-ul-Ahraar (Assembly of the Free-JA).[67]

The breakaway faction of TTP led by its former central spokesperson Shahidullah Shahid[68] (killed in an American drone strike in July 2015), along with eight splinter individuals have become part of this network since 2014:

- Gul Bali (Bajaur)
- Former chief of TTP Bajaur Maulana Abu Bakar
- Qari Zahid (Bajaur)[69]
- Gul Zaman Fatih (Khyber Agency)
- Khalid Mansoor (Hangu)
- Mufti Hassan (Peshawar)[70]
- Ghulam Rasool (Waziristan)[71]
- Hafiz Dawlat (Kurram Agency) and
- Huzaifa (Dir).[72]

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[65] Tufail Ahmad, *Pakistani Jihadi Groups Swear Oath Of Fealty to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, The Rise of Tehreek-e-Khilafat Wa Jihad (TKJ)*, Inquiry & Analysis Series no. 1103 (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Media Research Institute, 2014), https://www.memri.org/reports/pakistani-jihadi-groups-swear-oath-fealty-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-rise-tahreek-e-khilafat-wa.

[66] Farhan Zahid and Muhammad Ismail Khan, "Prospects of the Islamic State in Pakistan" (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2016), http://www.hudson.org/research/12453-prospects-of-the-islamic-state-in-pakistan.

[67] Josh Meyer, "Lahore Bombing Fuels Fears of ISIS Foothold in Pakistan," *NBC News*, March 29, 2016, http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/lahore-bombing-fuels-fears-isis-foothold-pakistan-n547411.

[68] Tahir Khan, "TTP Spokesperson, Five Other Leaders Declare Allegiance to Islamic State," *Express Tribune*, October 14, 2014, http://tribune.com.pk/story/775152/ttp-spokesperson-five-other-leaders-declare-allegiance-to-islamic-state/.

[69] Tahir Khan, "TTP Bajaur Declares Allegiance to Islamic State," *Express Tribune*, April 9, 2015, http://tribune.com.pk/story/867113/ttp-bajaur-declares-allegiance-to-islamic-state/.

[70] Khan, "TTP Spokesperson, Five Other Leaders Declare Allegiance to Islamic State."

[71] "Pakistani Taliban Splinter Group again Pledges Allegiance to Islamic State," *Long War Journal*, January 13, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/01/video_pakistani_tali_2.php.

The Khorasan *Shura* (Council) in Afghanistan was also born out of these splinter individuals and groups. Initially, the *Shura* appointed former TTP leader Hafiz Saeed Khan from Orakzai Agency as its *Wali* or governor, but he was killed by a drone strike in August 2016. The current *Wali* of Khorasan chapter is unknown.

While there have been reports that a few students of Jamia Hafsa (a religious school in Islamabad) uploaded a video expressing their support for the group,[73] and ISIS flags, graffiti[74] and pamphlets have been found in the outskirts of Peshawar, FATA, Afghan refugee camps[75] and Balochistan, to date, most of the *Shura's* activities remain concentrated in Afghanistan,[76] and there is no solid evidence that ISIS has made significant inroads into Pakistan

Assessing Terrorism in Pakistan: Can ISIS become a Potent Threat?

The chances of the ISIS making inroads into Pakistan as an organised terrorist outfit are likely be difficult due to a variety of reasons:

Fighting for Survival

ISIS is fighting for its survival in the Middle East with Syrian, Iraqi, Russian and US-led coalition forces. Its founding leader al-Baghdadi was

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[72] Amir Mir, "Pakistan Now has a Native Daesh Amir," *News International*, January 13, 2015, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/18141-pakistan-now-has-a-native-daish-ameer.

[73] "Female Students of Jamia Hafsa Issued Video Expressing their Support for ISIS (Daesh)," *U News TV*, December 19, 2014, http://www.unewstv.com/33483/female-students-of-jamia-hafsa-issued-video-expressing-their-support-for-isis-daish.

[74] Ashraf Javed, "ISIS Appears in Lahore," *Nation*, November 11, 2014, http://nation.com.pk/national/11-Nov-2014/isis-appears-in-lahore; Also see, "Pro-ISIS Wall-Chalking Appears in Multan," *Nation*, May 17, 2015, http://nation.com.pk/national/17-May-2015/pro-isis-wall-chalking-appears-in-multan, and "ISIS Performs Wall Chalking in Karachi," *Nation*, October 16, 2014, http://nation.com.pk/national/16-Oct-2014/isis-performs-wall-chalking-in-karachi.

[75] "Spillover Effect: ISIS Makes Inroads into Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, September 3, 2014, http://tribune.com.pk/story/757200/spillover-effect-isis-makes-inroads-into-pakistan/.

[76] Tariq Parvez, "The Islamic State in Pakistan" (Zurich: Center for Security Studies, 2016), http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/bdef6fac-a60b-4fa9-8b1f-b22195aa1247.

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reportedly also injured in 2016.[77] Its business model is collapsing financially since the group's annual revenue has more than halved from USD 1.9 billion in 2014 to USD 870 million in 2016, and by early 2017, it had lost 62 per cent of its mid-2014 peak territory in Iraq and 30 per cent in Syria, with six billion people freed from its control. While a recent 45-minute long audio message by al-Baghdadi[78] is an attempt to show that they are still a viral powerful organisation, it is unlikely to lead to the establishment of a well-organised network or 'franchises' in distant regions.

Sharp Sectarian Divide in Syria and Iraq

One of the factors behind ISIS' success in Iraq and Syria has been the sharp sectarian divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims. The majority of Iraqi Muslims are Shia and Sunnis are in minority, whereas in Syria, the Shias are in minority and Sunni Muslims are in majority. ISIS is a Sunni militant force originating from the Sunni minority of Iraq and Sunni majority of Syria. It is an organisation that has directed its malevolence at fellow Muslims, especially the Shia population. While Al-Qaeda also regards Shias as heretics, they rarely target them for slaughter like ISIS. During the Iraq war, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi sowed the seeds of this group by building alliances with Sunni leadership after the fall of Saddam Hussain. He sent dozens of suicide bombers into Shia mosques and markets, forced veils on women and even prominent figures in the community were executed on his order. However, his reign of terror was cut short in 2006 followed by a surge of American troops in Iraq. Unfortunately though, while Zarqawi's death and US victory in Baghdad weakened his group's cadres, it did not repair the Shia-Sunni rift that he had opened. The then-Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki was unable to make lasting peace because the Shia-led governing coalition was more keen on retaliation and revenge than reconciliation. Sunni hatred reared its

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[77] "ISIS Leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi Injured in Air Strike, Say Reports," *Indian Express*, June 10, 2016, http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-islamic-state-leader-us-iraqi-officials-cant-confirm-report/.

[78] Nadine Awadalla and Eric Knecht, "Islamic State's Baghdadi, in Undated Audio, Urges Militants to Keep Fighting," *Reuters*, September 28, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-baghdadi/islamic-states-baghdadi-in-undated-audio-urges-militants-to-keep-fighting-idUSKCN1C32C4.

head again, and with US troop withdrawal in 2011 complete, al-Baghdadi and his group rebranded themselves as ISI, once again targeting Shias and even civilians with the help of former commanders and soldiers of Saddam's military. With his ranks swelling, Baghdadi went on to target Shias in Syria where there was secular uprising against President Bashar Assad.[79]

In the case of Pakistan, although sectarian fault lines do exist, they are not so deep which can be exploited through 'subversive plots by any transnational militant organisation. Rather, it would not be enough for ISIS to gain physical control in the country.'[80] Syria and Iraq are besieged by civil war whereas under Pakistan's law the rights of all Muslims are 'constitutionally protected including those of the 'non-Muslim Pakistanis such as Christian, Bahais, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Kalasha, Parsis and Sikhs:

> The Constitution of 1973 recognises the rights of every citizen irrespective of religion, colour, race or creed and that the constitution expressly advocates safety of other religions, beliefs and faiths in Pakistan.[81]

Pakistan's Shia Muslims are well integrated and there is no systemic discrimination against them at the state level. Hence, the socio-cultural and political make-up in Pakistan is different from the Gulf region 'thereby reducing the chances of a definitive ISIS penetration.'[82]

Moderate and Vibrant Civil Society

Civil society has played a fundamental role in the campaigns for democratic culture and tradition in Pakistan:

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[79] Bobby Gosh, "A Short Political History of the Terrorists who Call Themselves the 'Islamic States'," *Quartz,* August 13, 2014, https://qz.com/248787/a-short-political-history-of-the-barbaric-terrorists-who-call-themselves-the-islamic-state/.

[80] Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," 14.

[81] PILDAT, *Status of Religious Minorities in Pakistan*, report (Islamabad: Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, 2015), http://yp2014.youthparliament.pk/downloads/CR/lawjusticeandhumanrightsstandingcommitteereport.pdf.

[82] Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," 14.

It compelled the ruling class to enact the Objectives Resolution (1949) and the first constitution of Pakistan (1956). Civil society compelled General Ayub Khan to resign from power. When the sugar prices increased, the civil society could not tolerate it and came forward in open protest and agitations.[83]

While Pakistan's civil society may still be under-developed:

Civil society's organisations and groups criticise government policies openly without any fear and favour, take the lawyer's movement against Musharaf government. Today's human rights groups often reprimand government actions and are considered the vibrant voice of civil society. Therefore, they mobilise huge gatherings in such times, whenever required. The role of civil society is enhancing day-by-day in Pakistan.[84]

CSOs in this country have been traditionally focused on the rights of minorities and women, and on social development in rural areas, their new focus is rule of law, representative government and democracy as a universal social value.[85] It believes in 'Moderate Islam' and 'Sufi Traditions' founded in tolerance:

In the subcontinent, Islam was spread through Sufism. Shrines still play an important spiritual and economic role in the lives of a majority of Pakistanis.[86]

It is due to these reasons as well that outfits like TTP could not (and ISIS cannot) become a nationwide movement and force in Pakistan.

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[83] Fakhr-ul-Islam and Farmanullah, "Civil Society and Democracy in Pakistan," *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan* 52, no. 1 (2015), http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/15-%20PC%20Farman%20Ullah_52-1-15.pdf.

[84] Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Ahmed Qadri, "Growing Role of Civil Society and Mass Mobilisation in Pakistan," *Public Policy and Administration Research* 6, no.2 (2016): 1-7.

[85] Islam and Farmanullah, "Civil Society and Democracy in Pakistan."

[86] Rafi, "Media Strategy for Countering the Daesh Threat," 27; Nadeem F. Paracha, "Upsetting Sufis," *Dawn*, October 25, 2012, http://www.dawn.com/news/759390.

Constitutional Democracy

There is an established 'Political Tradition' in Pakistan which means that socio-political issues are solved through political means and legal orders. This strengthens institutions under the constitutional framework that believes in federalism and decentralisation of power. Moreover, despite military interventions, Pakistan has not become a centralised dictatorial state:

> The movement for democracy in Pakistan may have its weaknesses but it cannot be easily derailed or destroyed. It has succeeded in making democracy a political issue and it does represent popular ethos.[87]

In contrast to Pakistan's democratic system, there is political suffocation in Middle Eastern governance which has not addressed the grievances of the local population.[88] In Pakistan, there are many conflict mediation ways such as the Parliament, All Parties Conferences, an independent judiciary, media, a strong political party system and civil society platforms to vent public grievances. But such mediums are not available in the ME political system that is why 'prolonged suppression of socio-economic, civil and political freedoms have made the Middle Eastern societies prone to political revolt leading to instability and insecurity.'[89] Constitutional democracy is a major factor which protects the Pakistani state from any revolt.

Ethos of Pakistan's Army and Bureaucracy

The ethos of Pakistan's Army and bureaucracy are also based on 'Quaid-i-Azam's vision, principles and belief in a democratic Pakistani state.'[90]

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[87] Islam and Farmanullah, "Civil Society and Democracy in Pakistan."
[88] Amir Madani, "Stabilising the Middle East," *HuffPost*, June 1, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amir-madani/stabilizing-the-middle-ea_b_7474432.html.
[89] M. Umar Abbasi, "The Changing Nature of Threat Perception in GCC States: A Domestic Level Analysis," *IPRI Journal* XVI, no. 2 (2016): 89-104 (90).
[90] Safdar Mahmood, "Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan," *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture* XXIII, no.1 (2002): 39-56, http://www.nihcr.edu.pk/Latest_English_Journal/Pjhc%2023-1%202002/2-Jinnah's%20vision%20of%20pakistan.pdf.

These institutions are considered subservient to the people and state, whereas in the Middle East, regimes are built by cultivating a solid legal basis for suppression of opposition, and by using an extensive system of patronage to maintain elite support for continued state control under democratic façades to protect authoritarian rulers,[91] and for maintaining the stability of authoritarian dynastic regimes,[92] which turned the Arab Spring into civil wars, especially in countries like Syria. Failing to address grievances of the local masses provides space to transnational revolutionary ideologues.[93]

Foreign Intervention

Some analysts believe that if there was no US-led intervention in Syria and Iraq, there would be no ISIS[94] since it is believed that the US is weakening centralised regimes to maintain Israeli hegemony in the ME by tilting the balance of power in its favour.

Pakistan's Counterterrorism Efforts

Since 9/11, Pakistan has been sincerely making efforts to eliminate terrorism from its soil. In this regard, the Government of Pakistan has taken several measures not only against militants like the TTP who had established their sanctuaries in FATA, but it has also taken measures against likely transnational extremism before the latter can further militancy in the country.[95] The measures include deradicalisation

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[91] Andrea M. Perkins, "Mubarak's Machine: The Durability of the Authoritarian Regime in Egypt" (Masters diss., Graduate School at Scholar Commons, University of South Florida, Tampa, 2010),
http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2736&context=etd.

[92] Abbasi, "The Changing Nature of Threat Perception in GCC States: A Domestic Level Analysis," 89.

[93] Ibid., 104.

[94] Martin Chulov, "Tony Blair is Right: Without the Iraq War there would be no Islamic State," *Guardian*, October 25, 2015,
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/25/tony-blair-is-right-without-the-iraq-war-there-would-be-no-isis.

[95] "Pakistan Arrests Local Islamic State Commander: Sources," *Reuters*, January 21, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-is-idUSKBN0KU1E720150121. In response to the isolated cases where the ISIS are struggling to display their presence, the

programmes like the Swat Programme 2009[96] and Punjab Programme 2011[97] and initiating counter-radicalisation policies like the National Internal Security Policy 2014, National Action Plan 2014, and Pakistan Protection Act 2014.[98] The Swat Programme had rehabilitated 2500 militants till 2015[99] and after the re-launch of Punjab Programme in 2015, 1132 extremists were selected for the programme.[100] The Sindh Counter-Terrorism Department 'is planning to initiate a deradicalisation programme for an estimated 300 militants,'[101] when it successfully deradicalised two youngsters who were on their way to Syria to fight for the ISIS.[102]

As discussed earlier, the Pakistan Army has successfully launched major operations against the miscreants such as Operations Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan and Rah-e-Rast in Swat during 2009 and Operation Zarb-e-Azb that indiscriminately started in mid-2014 in North Waziristan against all the Taliban. In this Operation, the Army killed more than 3500 terrorists in the tribal zone, with more than 400 soldiers losing their lives from 2014 to August 2016.[103] Most recently security forces started

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Pakistani security forces arrested Yousaf al Salafi (Pakistani Syrian), who was involved in recruiting and sending Pakistani fighters to Syria.

[96] Abdul Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalisation and Deradicalisation Initiatives," *IPRI Journal* XV, no. 2 (2015): 44-68 (53). *Sabaoon* for kids between 12-18 years, *Rastoon* for youth between 19-25 years and *Mishal* centres for militants' families to create awareness to look after the rehabilitated individuals.

[97] Ibid., 54. The programme focuses on ex-militants of the Kashmiri *Jihadi* groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan.

[98] Basit, "Countering Violent Extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's Counter-Radicalisation and Deradicalisation Initiatives," 52.

[99] Ibid., 53.

[100] Jawad R. Awan, "Punjab Launches Deradicalisation Programme," *Nation*, March 30, 2015, http://nation.com.pk/national/30-Mar-2015/punjab-launches-deradicalisation-programme.

[101] Imtiaz Ali, "CTD Plans to Deradicalise around 300 Militants Held in Sindh's Prisons," *Dawn*, January 2, 2017, http://www.dawn.com/news/1305848/ctd-plans-to-deradicalise-around-300-militants-held-in-sindhs-prisons.

[102] "Deradicalisation Efforts," editorial, *Dawn*, January 3, 2017, http://www.dawn.com/news/1305987.

[103] "Operation Zarb-e-Azb Successfully Completes Two Years," *Dunya News*, June 15, 2016, http://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/341177-Operation-ZarbeAzb-successfully-completes-two-ye.

combing operations in May 2016 aimed at locating terrorists, their facilitators and sleeper cells.[104]

The NAP is also designed to eradicate extremism and militancy from Pakistan, which 'includes *Madrassah* reforms, banning of sectarian organisations under new names, countering hate speech and dissemination of extremist material, ban on glorification of terrorism and terrorist organisations through print and electronic media and punishment on the wrong usage of loudspeakers, etc.'[105]

Consequently, a significant decline in terrorist incidents and improvement in law and order has been seen in Pakistan. There has been a 70 per cent reduction in terror attacks since 2014.[106] The ongoing military operations, the NAP and deradicalisation programmes reduce the chances of ISIS in procuring a strong operational space. Both the civil-military leadership also dismiss the existence and organised presence of ISIS in Pakistan.[107]

Possible Implications for Pakistan

Despite the above analysis, Pakistan does have more than 200 small, medium, large violent groups[108] and non-violent religious cadres functioning at the national and sub-national level.[109] Some of these

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[104] Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Army Approves Operational Details of 'Combing Operations'," *Dawn*, May 3, 2016, http://www.dawn.com/news/1255900.

[105] Khan, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism and Extremism Strategy."

[106] Zahid Gishkori, "Record 70pc Reduction in Terror Attacks in Pakistan after 2014," *News International*, August 17, 2016, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/143089-Record-70pc-reduction-in-terror-attacksin-Pakistan-after-2014.

[107] "No Organised Presence of ISIS in Pakistan: Foreign Office," *Times of Islamabad*, February 12, 2016, https://timesofislamabad.com/no-organized-presence-of-isis-in-pakistan-foreign-office/2016/02/12/; Mohammad Jamil, "ISIS: No Threat to Pakistan," *Daily Times*, November 18, 2014, http://dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/19-Nov-14/isis-no-threat-to-pakistan; "No ISIS in Pakistan but Local Militant Groups are Using the Name: Ch. Nisar," *Times of Islamabad*, February 13, 2016, https://timesofislamabad.com/no-isis-in-pakistan-but-local-militant-groups-are-using-the-name-ch-nisar/.

[108] Like the Afghan Taliban, TTP, East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Lashkar-e-Omar, Tehreek-e-Jaferia Pakistan, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen Al-alami, Jamaat-ul-Fuqra, Ummah Tamir-e-Nau, Al-Rashid Trust, etc.

[109] Muhammad Amir Rana, "The Impact of the Islamic State on Pakistan" (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2015), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/186949/049ee274000481e510fd0414ba61d63b.pdf.

militant religious organisations which share an agenda relatively similar to ISIS such as the implementation of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law), establishment of Caliphate system and have sectarian motivations, may seek inspiration from its achievements and try to acquire territory. In this regard, a few may restrain themselves from active participation by offering only emotional or moral support, but others might actively offer monetary support and donations to ISIS.[110] It should also be noted that with ISIS losing territory abroad and its fighters abandoning the cause and returning home,[111] they could join terrorist organisations like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (renamed Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat), Jundullah, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and other possible marginalised militant groups and provoke sectarian strife in Pakistan by capturing the imagination[112] of proscribed militant organisations.

The ISIS media strategy is pivotal to the group's propaganda and recruitment tactics.[113] Online radicalisation is a major tool through which frustrated youth can become motivated as seen in the Ismaili bus attack in Karachi (May 2015) in which university students were involved after getting influenced by ISIS ideology. Unlike Al-Qaeda and the TTP, ISIS is more professional and innovative in its online operations and radicalisation by using social media like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. It has been reported that there are 4.570 million videos of ISIS on YouTube.[114] However, while,

> Twitter remains a conducive space for Islamic State (IS) accounts and communities to flourish….IS and other *jihadists'* online activity is not solely restricted to Twitter. Twitter is just one node in a wider *jihadist* social media ecology.[115]

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[110] Kristina Wong, "Five Ways ISIS, Al Qaeda Differ," *Hill*, September 20, 2014, http://thehill.com/policy/defense/218387-five-ways-isis-is-different-than-al-qaeda.

[111] Ashley Kirk, "Iraq and Syria: How many Foreign Fighters are fighting for ISIL?" *Telegraph*, March 24, 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/.

[112] Fair, "Is Pakistan in ISIS' Crosshairs?"

[113] Rafi, "Media Strategy for Countering the Daesh Threat," 22-23.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Maura Conway, Moign Khawaja, Suraj Lakhani, Jeremy Reffin, Andrew Robertson and David Weir, *Disrupting Daesh Measuring Takedown of Online Terrorist Material and its Impacts*, report (Dublin: VOX-Pol Network of Excellence, 2017).

The reality is that the group's ideology is based on atrocities, brutality and killing of innocent people while justifying its *jihad* for establishing a self-styled Caliphate system. The Government of Pakistan needs to prepare a comprehensive media and social media strategy not only to counter online radicalisation but also to:

> …expose the lies and the destructive consequences such extremist ideologies reinforce. It ought to be pointed out that *jihad* is a holy struggle against evil and the conquest of self, whereas targeting of civilian population and the use of violence are cowardly acts; that terrorists involved in such heinous crimes are inhumane fanatics.[116]

There is also the likely possibility that hostile intelligence agencies like India's Research and Analysis Wing could penetrate ISIS-inspired militant groups[117] and further its objective of creating divisions and anarchy in Pakistan. RAW already has active, dormant and sleeper cells[118] that would likely support the creation of ISIS cells to destabilise Pakistan. Furthermore, other intelligence agencies might also have vested interests in weakening Pakistan, and ISIS may serve their strategic interests through its affiliates.[119]

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[116] Ibid., 26.

[117] Mateen Haider, "RAW Involved in Terrorist Activities across Pakistan: Foreign Secretary," *Dawn*, May 14, 2015, http://www.dawn.com/news/1181908.

[118] Faraz Khan, "200 Sleeper Cells in Karachi: Four 'RAW Agents' Held in Counter-Terror Swoop," *Express Tribune*, August 28, 2015, https://tribune.com.pk/story/946308/200-sleeper-cells-in-karachi-four-raw-agents-held-in-counter-terror-swoop/. Sindh investigation unit of the Counter-Terrorism Department and a secret agency in a joint venture arrested four terrorists in August 2015 belonging to Indian spy agency RAW in Karachi. The culprits were identified as Abdul Jabbar alias Zafar Tension; Muhammad Mohsin Khan alias Kashif alias Zeeshan alias Hassan; Muhammad Shafiq Khan alias Pappu and Khalid Aman alias Dad who revealed during interrogation that more than 200 sleeper cells of RAW funding are present in Karachi.

[119] Barak Ravid, "Israeli Mossad Agents Posed as CIA Spies to Recruit Terrorists to Fight Against Iran," *Haaretz.com*, January 13, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israeli-mossad-agents-posed-as-cia-spies-to-recruit-terrorists-to-fight-against-iran-1.407224. According to Foreign Policy magazine, CIA memos from 2007-08 show that the Mossad recruited members of Jundallah terror group for terrorism.

As reviewed earlier, Operation Zarb-e-Azb was an endeavour to destroy terrorist operational bases, while many were killed, some escaped and assembled in Khost, Nuristan and Kunar regions of Afghanistan.[120] This clustering of TTP and Al-Qaeda bent on the creation of their own self-styled states and emirates could remain a security irritant in inspiring radical minds in the region**.**[121] In fact, some analysts claim that it may be likely that such militant organisations operating in two different regions may find common ground in the '*Takfiri*[122] ideologies they believe in.'[123] Although, these militant groups have different plans for establishing the 'Islamic State of Khorasan', 'Islamic State of Khorasan Province' or Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan/Waziristan', however, if they are able to overcome their differences over a model of caliphate or *Amir-ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful) in the future, it could become a new security challenge for Pakistan security and the region.

Conclusion

The ISIS ideology considers democracy to be insufficient for political transformation and upholds that the democratic process opposes the Islamic philosophy of governance. The quasi-state struggles to replace the existing political processes with its own form of *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) through forceful means. While it is facing likely defeat in its host grounds, South Asia has become its next potential target for establishing a foothold and regrouping. While the paper has extensively looked at the extremist networks at play and noted that ISIS' success is unlikely in the region as a whole and in Pakistan, great vigilance is the need of the hour.

Since Pakistan's National Action Plan received extraordinary support across political parties and people, it should be continued and implemented in true letter and spirit to eradicate terrorism and extremism from the country. The Federal Investigation Agency's immigration

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[120] M. Saleem Butt, "Making the Same Mistake as America," *New Pakistan*, July 6, 2016, http://new-pakistan.com/2015/07/06/making-the-same-mistake-as-america/.

[121] Rana, "What ISIS and the 'Caliphate' Mean for Pakistan."

[122] See, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, s.v. "Takfir," http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2319.
The term *Takfir* is used in the modern era for sanctioning violence against leaders of Islamic states who are deemed insufficiently religious.

[123] Rana, "What ISIS and the 'Caliphate' Mean for Pakistan."

department needs to be vigilant in investigating people who visit Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran to stop new recruits flowing into Syria and Iraq via Turkey and Iran and also to stop miscreants from entering Pakistan. There are new actors and new agendas that should be considered as extra-regional inspirational forces, which should be incorporated in counterterrorism policies, the NAP and the Protection of Pakistan Act (POPA). Adoption of an all-inclusive economic approach to root out terrorism is necessary by alleviating the sufferings of tribal areas under sustainable improvements in psycho-political, cultural and socio-economic spheres of life. [124]

It is important to secure the Pak-Afghan border from militant incursions from Afghanistan by running round-the-clock border monitoring through camera-mounted drones, and for the Afghan government to take action against the militant sanctuaries in Khost, Nuristan and Kunar regions for regional peace and stability. It is also important to conduct awareness programmes about the distorted version of Islam being propagated by ISIS through conferences, electronic, print and social media campaigns. While inter-faith harmony should be promoted to bridge sectarian divides, monitoring the use of cyber-technology by non-state actors for recruitment is also critical.■

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[124] Muhammad Nawaz Khan, "Security and Development in Balochistan" (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2014), http://www.ipripak.org/security-and-development-in-balochistan/.