Building a Global Network for Security

GLOBAL THREAT FORECAST 2019

The global terrorist and extremist threat is likely to persist in 2019 as the Islamic State (IS) is going through a phase of re-adaptation and decentralisation. The group has established clandestine and underground structures to survive in Iraq and Syria. Its ideology is still intact and continues to be propagated in cyber space. In the provinces, groups, networks and cells which have pledged allegiance to IS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi are radicalising Muslims and conducting attacks. Harnessing both the physical and virtual space, IS continues to present an enduring threat worldwide. Although the apex of IS leadership and many of the directing figures are on the run and might be eliminated in 2019, the penultimate leadership enabling the fight and supporting the infrastructure will continue to operate in the shadows as they become agile and more cunning. The IS and Al-Qaeda (AQ)-centric threats are likely to remain given the lack of an effective global counter terrorism plan and strategy, the continuation of superpower and geopolitical rivalry, and the failure to resolve the underlying causes of extremism and terrorism.

Introduction

The global threat landscape in 2019 will be dominated by three major developments. First, IS is entering a new phase in global expansion. With the depletion of its rank and file in Iraq and Syria from about 60,000 to 5,000-6,000 combat fighters, the IS territorial control in its main theatre has shrunk to 1%, east of the Euphrates River.[1] In any case, outside of the physical "caliphate", the groups, networks, cells, and personalities loyal to Baghdadi are growing in their ideological and operational spaces. These local entities are reinforced by IS virtual caliphate and emboldened by the dozens of IS affiliates and franchises known as wilayats or the external provinces of the caliphate. Driving the globalisation of IS is the media

operations and battle-hardened Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) returning home armed with Jihadi ideology, active combat exposure, expertise in explosive-handling and links with underground networks. Worldwide government counter-terrorism databases today list about 40,000 IS personalities in 102 countries operating in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. Presenting a pre-eminent threat, IS and AQ will continue to mount most attacks in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Similarly, radicalised personalities and cells of diaspora and migrant communities will strike in North America, Europe and Australasia.

Second, Afghanistan is emerging as an alternative theatre for foreign and local fighters in 2019. With the disruption in the flow of fighters to Syria and Iraq, and the dispersal of fighters from the IS core to the periphery, multiple centres of terrorism and extremism are emerging in the Middle East (Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt), Africa (West Africa, East Africa), Western Balkans, Caucasus and Asia. However, the IS theatre is more pronounced in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region with the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) threatening the Afghan Taliban, the Afghan government, and Pakistan. In addition to the impact on Central Asia, the threat is moving from tribal Pakistan to mainland Pakistan, Indian-held Kashmir, Xinjiang in western China and Iran. The intermittent terrorist attacks in Kashmir, Xinjiang and Iran are likely to continue. Given the ongoing geopolitical rivalry, the flow of weapons and finance to, and the training acquired by the Afghan Taliban and ISK, Afghanistan is turning into a new epicenter of regional and global terrorism. Between December 2017 and March 2018, as many as 69 members of IS core, and between 200 to 300 fighters from Iraq and Syria have relocated to Afghanistan and this trend is likely to continue through 2019 as well.[2]

---

[1] "After the caliphate: Has IS been defeated?" *BBC News,* December 20, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595.

[2] Jason Warner and Charlotte Humle, "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent," *CTC Sentinel* 11 (7), August 2018, https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/.

Third, with the rise of ultra-nationalism, ideologies have come to the forefront. Communities based on ethnicity and religion are becoming more polarised, therefore making their peripheries vulnerable to hatred, and inciting hate in their core. It is not only the jihadists but political parties, threat groups, and personalities driven by extreme interpretations of their respective religions that threaten their opponents, communities and governments. The intermittent communal clashes, riots and attacks in India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka demonstrate how Hinduism and Buddhism have been exploited by religious and political leaders and groups. Additionally, Islamophobia continues to rise in the West and even in countries with Muslim majority and minority populations. Similarly, Sunni-Shia relations are further strained especially with the growing anti-Iran and anti-Shia rhetoric in the Middle East and other parts of the Muslim world. While conflict between the Houthis and Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is likely to be mediated in 2019,[3] it is likely that reciprocal intolerance, extremism and terrorism in both physical and virtual spaces will affect global peace and security. It is therefore crucial that world leaders make a concerted effort to unite divided communities.

The Context

Since IS declared a caliphate in June 2014, multiple coalitions have been fighting IS in Iraq and Syria. While the Iraqi, Syrian and Kurdish forces bore the brunt of battle, US, European, Russian, Iranian, Turkish, and other Arab countries embarked on a sustained campaign to contain, isolate and eliminate IS. After four years of combat in theatre as well as global efforts to disrupt the flow of FTF, the threat in the IS heartland has relatively subsided. With IS combat forces receding in its battlespace of Iraq and Syria, IS intelligence services are coming to the forefront of the theatre of conflict. Amn al Dawla (State Security), Amn al Dakhili (Internal Security), Amn al Askari (Military Intelligence) and Amn al Kharji (Foreign Intelligence) are building clandestine and underground networks to survive and endure their losses in physical territories. In 2019, IS is planning a four-phased strategy -- hunting

'black birds' (killing betrayers and traitors), 'tower revolution' (surveilling, identifying, selecting and recruiting), fighting inside cities (sparrow teams targeting government and coalition forces), and 'great battle' (fighting in built-up areas and open confrontation). To mount pressure on coalition partners to withdraw, IS is directing, enabling and inspiring attacks against their own homelands.

IS considers its battlefield defeats in the Levant as temporary. To compensate for the losses in its heartland, IS seeks to expand globally both physically and virtually. IS is likely to dispatch their Iraqi veterans much like how the AQ dispatched Egyptians to key positions. This is already happening in Afghanistan and north Africa where some of IS core members have relocated. To staff the far-flung provinces, the leaders and experts will include FTFs, especially veteran Arabs. IS' internal and external wilayats are actively waging both a media and a military campaign. While the media campaign seeks to radicalise the community and generate recruits, the military campaign is providing training for combat skills, manufacturing weapons, casing targets, and enabling the operators to strike. In addition to its virtual presence instilling hatred and inciting violence, the current and emerging wilayats serve as bastions to draw from IS experience and expertise and fight back. Those with difficulties traveling to conflict zones will mount attacks in their own homelands. Unlike AQ's modus operandi where they plan for months and years, IS' style is to conduct simple and modest operations.

While IS presents a high order threat, the threat posed by AQ and its associated groups has not diminished. AQ-centric groups mount operations in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, China, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria, Puntland, Kenya, and Somalia. A breakaway group of IS, Jabhat al Nusra, which was renamed as Hay'at Tahrir al Sham works closely with AQ and its associated groups in Syria. The most battle-hardened AQ centric group, Tahrir al Sham, poses a long-term regional and global threat.[4] Determined to impose an AQ-style

[3] Billy Perrigo, "Pressure to End the Saudi-led War in Yemen is Growing," *Time,* November 15, 2018, http://time.com/5455507/saudi-war-yemen/.

[4] Sune Engel Rasmussen, "An Islamic State Fades in Syria, Another Militant Group Takes Root," *Wall Street Journal,* April 18, 2018,

rule, these groups agreed to a temporary truce. With over 30,000 fighters, including 10,000 FTF (mostly Chinese Uyghurs, Chechens and Central Asians) in Idlib, Tahrir al Sham and its associated groups present a strategic threat comparable to IS.[5] Tahrir al Sham has a global infrastructure from charities to propagation.[6] If incumbent AQ head Aymen al Zawahiri is killed, Tahrir al Sham's leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani could be the new Al Qaeda chief, considering the influence exercised by Tahrir al Sham.

In addition to Tahrir al Sham, other AQ centric groups, such as the Afghan Taliban, Al-Shabab, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) present the greatest threat. They will mount attacks in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Some of the groups will revisit targets and others will seek new targets. In November 2018, Al-Shabab attacked Sahafi Hotel adjacent to Hayat hotel in Mogadishu killing 39 and injuring 40 others.[7] In the suicide attacks on the fortified hotel, a favourite modus operandi of the terrorists, they intended to gain access and kill guests—especially officials. The same hotel was attacked earlier in 2015 killing the owner;[8] the latest attack killed his son. Both IS and AQ terrorists are likely to revisit aborted, failed or disrupted plots in 2019.

The Renewed Threat

Just as AQ endured the loss of Afghanistan and the death of Osama Bin Laden, IS organisation and ideology will survive and in fact, revive. Despite the territorial losses and the arrests and deaths of its senior commanders, operatives and supporters, IS will persist in 2019. As it expands from the core to the periphery, IS will seek to replicate its practices from stoning and beheadings to assassinations and bombing operations outside Iraq and Syria. The existing wilayats are located in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Libya, Egypt, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Caucasus, Nigeria, Somalia and the latest, in the Philippines. Following the suicide bombing in Lamitan, Basilan by a Moroccan on 31 July 2018, IS declared a wilayat in the Philippines through an operational claim.[9] With the returnees, future wilayats are likely to be declared in the Western Balkans, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Xinjiang in China, and Indonesia. Unless governments take pre-emptive and proactive measures, the threat will spread, with the physical threat manifesting in the form of attacks and the ideological narrative affecting vulnerable communities.

With the return of the motivated, resourced and skilled FTFs, IS will target symbolic, strategic and high-profile targets, including civilians (both Muslims and non-Muslims) and critical infrastructure. Off the battlefields, aviation industry (airlines and airports), tourists (cafes and hotels), international organisations (most notably the United Nations' subsidiaries and INGOs) and diplomatic missions of countries that fought against IS will be potential targets. Classic IS operations from vehicle-moving to knife attacks, bombings and armed assault, arson and even explosives-laden drone attacks are likely with the proliferation of IS methodology and technology. About 70 to 80% of the fatalities and injuries by the terrorists will be from explosives, their weapon of choice. Both IS and AQ will use the gun and the bomb, and very rarely, unconventional weapons. As demonstrated recently, with disrupted plots by lone terrorist actors and lone-actor groups to produce Thorium, Ricin, Anthrax and Botulinum, there will be growing interest in chemical, biological and radiological weapons in 2019.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-islamic-state-fades-in-syria-another-militant-group-takes-root-1524064045.

[5] Richard Hall, "Idlib's Ruling Militant Group Find Itself Alone as Regime Forces Advance," *The National,* September 2, 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/idlib-s-ruling-militant-group-finds-itself-alone-as-regime-forces-advance-1.766200.

[6] "Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)," *Center for Strategic and International Studies,* https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/hayat-tahrir-al-sham-hts.

[7] "Death Toll from Somalia Hotel Attack Rises to 39," Channel NewsAsia, November 10, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/death-toll-from-somalia-hotel-attack-rises-to-39-10916316.

[8] "Somalia: Al-Shabab Attack kills 15 in Mogadishu Hotel," *BBC Online,* November 1, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34691602.

[9] Amy Chew, "10 Die in Blast on Southern Philippines Island of Basilan," *Channel NewsAsia,* July 31, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/blast-on-southern-philippines-island-of-basilan-10-die-10577656.

Harmony within Muslim communities has suffered due to the infiltration and influence of *jihadi* (as defined by the terrorists) and *takfiri* (ex-communication from Islam) ideologies. After promoting discord between Sunni and Shia communities and conducting provocative attacks, IS has attacked Shia targets. Rivals of both IS and AQ, the Lebanese Hezbollah and other Shia threat groups are fighting in conflict zones and beyond. Hezbollah has built networks worldwide primarily to attack Israeli and Jewish targets. With IS targeting Shia groups and communities, Hezbollah may further expand its range of targets. In addition to Hezbollah, the most capable Shia militia in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere are organising themselves to defend their interests and attack their enemies. Although some plots have been disrupted, the Shia groups are becoming sharper.

Response

Within the spectrum of countering and combating terrorism, the world has focused on building kinetic and lethal capabilities. Although such capabilities are effective in the immediate term, they may not always be efficient in the long term. The use of overwhelming force breeds suspicion and prejudice, anger and resentment, animosity and hatred. Intelligence, law enforcement and militaries need to work closely to manage both the downstream and upstream threats. In addition to sharpening their combat skills especially in urban operations and in cyber space, it is vital for them to collaborate with partners in preventive and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) programs. The single most important set of capabilities that needs to be built is both in community engagement and terrorist and extremist rehabilitation (custodial and community rehabilitation).

To meet the FTF challenge, governments have not yet gained mastery of rehabilitation mechanisms. Although complex and difficult, investing in both custodial and community rehabilitation is a vital necessity. Worldwide rehabilitation capabilities differ and are uneven. Most countries have visions for developing rehabilitation, others have ad hoc programs (unstructured) and a few have structured programs. The governments and partners with robust capabilities (structured programs) to deliver rehabilitation should help to enhance others with underdeveloped programs. The end objective is to build comprehensive rehabilitation programs both to tackle returnees and more importantly home-grown extremism and terrorism. The events in Syria and Iraq, the resulting propaganda, and returnees are creating a huge home-grown threat that requires greater rehabilitation capabilities. More attention also needs to be given to the resulting rise of home-grown extremism, exclusivism and intolerance. The strategy to combat terrorism is to engage in inter-faith dialogue to counter intolerance, develop integration programs to counter segregation, and promote moderation to counter extremism.

The recently announced the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops from Syria and the possible drawdown of 7,000 troops (out of 14,000) from Afghanistan have been compared to past US military withdrawals that were exploited by terrorists. The IS had capitalised on the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 to expand its presence and influence in the Levant. Likewise, terrorists and insurgents benefitted from the drawdowns of US troops in Afghanistan. Adequate security preparations will therefore be necessary to prevent terrorists from gaining any advantage from troop withdrawals or drawdowns.

Outlook

Muslim insurgent and terrorist groups will dominate the threat landscape and mount attacks worldwide both in the battlefields and off the battlefields. The geography of the global terrorism map will not change dramatically with Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, India and Libya being the most violent theatres of conflict. Due to inter-state rivalries, the threat will persist and even grow. Similarly, the ultra-nationalistic rhetoric by politicians will polarise communities making some vulnerable to greater radicalisation and violence.

The centre of gravity of IS will be its wilayats and the fragmented cyber caliphate, the IS cyber wing re-emerging regionally. Despite government and technology firms working closely with each other, IS' virtual presence

will endure and grow, compensating for the lack of presence and operations in the physical space. A decentralised IS will present a far greater threat than a centralised IS. The group's operatives and supporters will continue to mount attacks and attempt to radicalise Muslim communities worldwide. Counter-terrorism efforts must therefore continue to include not only effective kinetic measures and P/CVE programs, but also a determined political effort to resolve underlying causes of extremism and terrorism.

Rohan Gunaratna is Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He can be reached at ISRKGunaratna@ntu.edu.sg.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore

INDONESIA

In 2018, there were increased terrorist attacks in Indonesia. While there were 12 terrorist attacks and five foiled plots in 2017[1], there were 15 attacks and 12 foiled plots in 2018. Overall, the violence killed 8 police officers, 12 civilians and 31 terrorists, and injured 14 police officers, 72 civilians and 4 terrorists.[2] The Mako Brimob siege and Surabaya bombings represented the most significant terrorist attacks in 2018. While the Mako Brimob siege resulted in the highest number of police casualties in one incident, the Surabaya bombings became the first successful attack involving women and the deadliest bombing since the 2005 Bali attack. The most active terrorist group was Jamaah Ansharud Daulah (JAD)[3], the largest Indonesian pro-Islamic State (IS) entity. Others included Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah (JAK), another Indonesian pro-IS group formerly known as Katibah al-Iman[4], and the Lion of Allah. Other indications of IS presence were seen in the form of individuals and smaller cells. Despite counter measures,

JAD and other pro-IS groups are still recruiting members and planning attacks.

Continued Violence, Common Targets and Evolving Tactics

Attack Targets: Security Forces, Religious Minorities and Symbols of Democracy

The majority of terrorist attacks in 2018 were conducted by JAD. Members of the Lion of Allah and a splinter cell of JAK attempted to conduct attacks but failed. On 21 February 2018, a lone-wolf targeted a priest and three St. Ludwina Church members in Yogyakarta.[5] Targets of this attack included law enforcement officials and religious minorities, specifically Christians. The police were targeted to avenge the arrests and killings of JAD members and other Indonesian IS supporters. Christians were targeted due to violence against Muslims in Syria by the 'Western Christians' in the international coalition. JAD members also attempted to attack regional election booths in West and East Java. [6] This represented their opposition towards democracy, which is seen as un-Islamic.

Evolution of Attack Tactics

First, compared to 2017, knife attacks remained the most preferred tactic in 2018 as they provide a low-cost alternative to bombs and guns. Knife attacks and stabbings occurred in the Probolinggo attack on 13 February, Yogyakarta attacks on 21 February and 5 July, Mako Brimob attacks on 9 May, Riau attack on 14 May, Jambi attack on 22 May, Brebes attack on 12 July and Cirebon attack on 22 July. The Mako Brimob siege

---

[1] Muh Taufiqurrohman et al, "Indonesia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 10, no. 1 (2018): 11.

[2] Desca Angelianawati, *Kumpulan Insiden Terorisme 2018* (Centre for Radicalism and Deradicalisation Studies |PAKAR, 2018).

[3] JAD was formally established in end of November 2015 in a meeting of IS supporters in Malang, East Java. In the meeting, participants agreed to form a new group to unite IS supporters in Indonesia. Hari Budiman alias Abu Musa named the group JAD based on Aman Abdurrahman's instruction. IPAC reported that the Malang meeting participants called their new group Jamaah Ansharul Khilafah (JAK); but, this contradicts JAD leaders' statements about the history of JAD given to police. Abdul Zatil alias Fauzan Mubarak stated that Aman Abdurrahman had officially used the term JAD Aman appointed him as JAD leader in Central Java in early 2015 before the meeting in Malang was held. Please see Police Interrogation Report of Zaenal Anshori, October 28, 2017; Police Interrogation Report of Abdul Zatil alias Fauzan Mubarak; and Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, *Disunity Among Indonesian Isis Supporters And The Risk Of More Violence*, February 1, 2016.

[4] JAK is currently led by Abdur Rohim bin Thoyib alias Abu Husna, former Jemaah Islamiyah member.

[5] Ganung Nugroho Adi and Arya Dipa, "Church attacker thought to be lone-wolf," *The Jakarta Post,* 14 February 2018, http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/02/14/church-attacker-thought-be-lone-wolf.html.

[6] Audrey Santoso, " Terduga Teroris di Depok Rencanakan Aksi Saat Pilkada Jabar," *Detik News*, June 23, https://news.detik.com/berita/4079713/terduga-teroris-di-depok-rencanakan-aksi-saat-pilkada-jabar.

showcased stabbings as a key tactic, and was triggered by overcrowded prison cells and a shortage of prison officers. This allowed the inmates to break their cell doors, overpower the officers and attack them using knives and broken window glasses.[7] The successful siege motivated JAD members outside the prison to attack police officers in Sumatra and Java.

Second, bombings (particularly suicide bombings) were the next preferred tactic for attacks as witnessed in the 13 May Surabaya bombings that killed 25 people and wounded 57 others[8]. This was the first successful suicide attack involving families in Indonesia. This attack highlighted that terrorists involved women and children because it allowed them to avoid police detection. It also showed that women are increasingly motivated to participate in violent attacks. Three JAD families had participated in the Surabaya bombings. On 13 May, a family of six attacked Santa Maria Catholic Church, Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church and Diponegoro Indonesian Christian Church in Surabaya. On 14 May, another family of five attacked Surabaya police headquarters. Another family of three failed to conduct the bombing due to a premature accidental explosion in their apartment.[9]

Lastly, shooting was the least preferred tactic because it is difficult to obtain guns. On 22 July, two JAD members stabbed a police officer in Cirebon to seize his gun. On 24 August, they used the gun to shoot two police officers on Kanci-Pejagan toll road near Cirebon, West Java.[10]

Securing Territorial Bases

Following the defeat of IS in Raqqa (Syria) and Marawi (the Philippines), terrorists attempted to build secure bases in Central and East Java, from where they would plan and perpetrate attacks. These bases were similar to those built by the Mujahideen of Eastern Indonesia (MIT) in Poso (Central Sulawesi). Once they succeeded in building bases in these provinces, they planned to enforce Islamic law and conduct attacks in other areas of Indonesia. The cases of Muhammad Fatwa's JAD cell in Probolinggo (East Java) and the Lion of Allah group in Kebumen (Central Java) highlight this trend.[11]

Al-Qaeda Linked Groups

Members of Al-Qaeda (AQ) linked groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jamaah Ansyarusy Syariah (JAS) did not conduct any attack in 2018. However, the groups still pose a threat in the future as they continued to engage in *idad* (jihad preparation) and paramilitary trainings. Reports revealed that close to 68 JAS and JI members conducted a joint idad on Mount Lawu in Magetan (East Java) on March 24.[12] JI members also attempted to travel to Syria join two different AQ affiliated groups, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Huras al-Din in Syria, to receive training and gain combat experience. Five of them, including young JI members from Central and West Java, failed to reach Syria and were deported to Indonesia by the Turkish government.[13]

Government Responses and Prison Reforms

On 25 May, the Indonesian parliament passed the revised 2003 anti-terrorism law (ATL), which allows police to pre-emptively detain terrorist suspects for 14 to 21 days before deciding to release or prosecute them. Previously, police were only given seven days to interrogate the suspects.[14] It also

---

[7] Conversation with a police officer familiar with the Mako Brimob siege investigation, October 2018.

[8] Abi Sarwanto, "Korban Tewas Teror Bom Surabaya 28 Orang, 57 Luka," *CNN Indonesia,* May 14, https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/2018051419 4201-12-298164/korban-tewas-teror-bom-surabaya-28-orang-57-luka.

[9] Devianti Faridz et al, "Three families were behind the ISIS-inspired bombings in Indonesia's Surabaya, police said," *CNN*, May 15, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/13/asia/indonesia-attacks-surabaya-intl/index.html.

[10] Farouk Arnaz, "Densus 88 Kills Two Terror Suspects Allegedly Involved in Attack on Traffic Police," *The Jakarta Globe*, September 3, https://jakartaglobe.id/news/densus-88-kills-two-terror-suspects-allegedly-involved-in-attack-on-traffic-police/.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Report from field observation, March 24, 2018.

[13] Court indictment of Dede Anung Somantri, case dossier number 1038/Pid.Sus/2018/PN Jkt.Tim.

[14] Fauziah Mursid and Bayu Hermawan, "UU Antiterorisme Perpanjang Masa Penahanan Terduga Teroris," *Republika*, May 25, 2018, https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/hukum/18

allows police to prosecute those who join or recruit for terrorist groups.[15] The South Jakarta District Court strengthened the revised law by legally banning JAD and criminalising its members on 31 July.[16] This enabled the police to arrest 376 suspected terrorists and 22 suspected terrorists were killed when they were hunting down JAD members responsible for the Surabaya bombings and other attacks.

The verdict by the court is not entirely effective as it does not ban all terrorist groups. Other terrorist groups such as IS, AQ and their domestic affiliates including MIT, and JAK should be criminalised as well. Consequently, JAK leaders are still able to preach IS ideology freely and leaders of AQ linked groups are still conducting recruitment and fundraising operations without being arrested. As of September 2018, the police had arrested 350 terrorists[17] and have placed 124 of them in 10 police detention centres across Indonesia.[18] This high number of arrests posed a new problem due to lack of interrogators and police-approved solicitors who provide legal assistance to the detainees. In addition, Indonesian courts do not have enough qualified prosecutors to indict terrorist suspects fairly. As of October 2018, only the prosecutors in Jakarta district courts handled terrorism cases. Consequently, prosecutors are overwhelmed and are not able to prosecute terrorist suspects effectively. They had to try 20 to 22 terrorist suspects in one day at the East Jakarta District Court on 17 October alone.[19] It is possible that as a result, the suspects

were handed sentences as low as 3.5 to 6 years.

Inadequate prison facilities pose a problem as prisons are overcrowded, leading to continued recruitment operations in prisons. For instance, female prisoners in the Polda Metro Jaya prison in Jakarta, led by Anggi Indah Kusuma, consolidated themselves and strengthened their commitment to support IS. They worked together making IS flags and bandanas, and decorating their cell wall with pro-IS motivational pamphlets.[20] In another case, a male prisoner, Muhammad Basri aka Bagong, a member of MIT, recruited non-terrorist prisoners in Permisan Prison, Nusa Kambangan Island (Central Java).

By October 2018, Detachment 88 and the Directorate General of Corrections (Dirjen Pas) placed 252 pro-IS prisoners in three maximum security prisons. This included 83 prisoners in Pasir Putih Prison, 36 prisoners in Batu Prisons (both on Nusa Kambangan Island, Central Java) and 133 in Gunung Sindur Prison (Bogor, West Java).[21] Despite being placed in solitary confinement, a security threat persists due to the shortage of prison guards. The threat of an attack from Wahyudi aka Abu Zinnirah who encouraged his prison mates to attack prison officers in Pasir Putih Prison prompted police to commit to provide a security back up for the prison.[22]

A lack of prison doctors and psychiatrists has contributed to little improvement in the health condition of the prisoners. From May to October 2018, four prisoners died and reports of two others suffering from depression and schizophrenia emerged.[23] Additionally, prisoners in non-maximum security prisons were still able to smuggle mobile phones into their cells. As a result, they were able to communicate with each other using Telegram messaging application. For instance, a prisoner in Mojokerto prison (East Java) successfully communicated with prisoners in Besi Prison (Central Java) and Cirebon prison.[24]

/05/25/p9af2t354-uu-antiterorisme-perpanjang-masa-penahanan-terduga-teroris.

[15] Tabita Diela, "Indonesia Toughens Up Anti-Terror Laws Days After Worst Attack In Years," *Reuters*, May 25, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-security-bill/indonesia-toughens-up-anti-terror-laws-days-after-worst-attack-in-years-idUSKCN1IQ0DQ.

[16] Kharishar Kahfi, "BREAKING: Court bans Islamic State-linked JAD," *The Jakarta Post*, July 31, 2018. http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/07/31/breaking-court-bans-islamic-state-linked-jad.html.

[17] Audrey Santoso, "350 Terduga Teroris Ditangkap Paska Kerusuhan Mako brimob," *Detik News*, November 22, https://news.detik.com/berita/4196700/350-terduga-teroris-ditangkap-pasca-kerusuhan-mako-brimob.

[18] PAKAR record of 2018 terrorist detainees.

[19] Field observation in Jakarta District Courts, October 2018.

[20] Conversation with a source familiar with Polda Metro Jaya prison, October 2018.

[21] Conversation with a Directorate General of Correction staff, October 2018.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Conversation with a source monitoring the communication between the prisoners, October 2018.

Deradicalisation Efforts

The Indonesian National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) currently has close to 500 former prisoners involved in deradicalisation programmes, including their families. It is also incorporating an economic development outlook, which aims to provide former detainees with US$350 to 700 in capital for small businesses. Unfortunately, the recipients were not given enough time to plan for their business, so most of them failed.[25] BNPT has an active deradicalisation programme in the Sentul prison in Bogor (West Java). However, inaccurate assessments of the participants had led to recidivism. Isnaini Romadhoni returned to terrorism, and trained JAD members in Probolinggo bomb making techniques upon his release. On 3 July 2018, three deradicalisation programme participants, Moch Ramuji, Sayfudin Al Fahmi and Imran aka Genda were transferred to the Pasir Putih maximum-security prison because they refused to abandon IS ideology.

Outlook

Overall, in 2018, Detachment 88, the police's counterterrorism unit, arrested close to 376 terrorist suspects. 24 others were killed in counterterrorism operations.[26] In addition, BNPT attempted to deradicalise close to 500 terrorist prisoners, former prisoners and their families.[27] By October 2018, Detachment 88 and the Directorate General of Corrections (Dirjen Pas) placed 252 pro-IS individuals in three maximum security prisons.[28] Despite this, IS-linked terrorists will continue to operate and engage in recruitment efforts. In addition, intentions to target general and presidential elections in April 2019 are rife due to three reasons. First, IS-linked terrorists oppose elections as they are regarded as un-Islamic. Second, they want to remain active and gain recognition. Third, the theme of reprisal or revenge attacks is present as the terrorists seek to avenge the arrests and killing of their group members. As

such, the Indonesian government should closely monitor the remaining 1,032 JAD members scattered in North Sumatra, Riau, South Sumatra, Lampung, Jakarta, Central Java, East Java, East Java, South Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua.[29] Although MIT appears to be inactive in Poso, the Indonesian government needs to closely monitor it. MIT has smuggled weapons from the Philippines in the past and is likely to make similar attempts to incite violence during the 2019 election.

In order to accommodate the high number of arrests, the police and Directorate General of Corrections (Dirjen Pas) need to build a large detention centre specifically for terrorist suspects who face trials in Jakarta. Dirjen Pas also needs to complete the Karanganyar prison on Nusa Kambangan Island. Ideally, both the suspects and prisoners should be categorised into solitary cells based on low-risk, medium-risk and high-risk blocks according to the degree of involvement in terrorism. This will prevent consolidation and strengthening of ideology and decrease the possibility of prison riots.

In order to prevent a network being sustained between prisoners and their supporters outside the prison, Detachment 88 and Dirjen Pas need to impose new rules for prison visitors. The visitors should only come from the prisoners' immediate family members and should carry individual visit permits. Released prisoners, especially those linked to JAD, still pose a threat due to their training in violence and determination to attack. They can possibly regroup with pro-IS extremists and attack non-Muslims and police officers. It is key for BNPT and Detachment 88 to enhance current efforts through the creation of a special deradicalisation programme accompanied by a team specialising in the deradicalisation of these prisoners and their families.

PHILIPPINES

In 2018, the archipelagic state of Southern Philippines continued to be the operational hub of Islamist terrorism in Southeast Asia. Its terrorist threat landscape is dominated by

---

[25] Conversation with BNPT deradicalization program, March 2018.

[26] Desca Angelianawati, *Kumpulan Penangkapan Teroris 2018* (Centre for Radicalism and Deradicalization Studies |PAKAR, 2018).

[27] Conversation with a BNPT staff, October 2018.

[28] Conversation with a Dirjen Pas staff, October 2018.

[29] Centre for Radicalism and Deradicalization Studies (PAKAR), *List of Indonesian ISIS and al-Qaeda Supporters*, October 2018.

Islamic State (IS) linked groups, which includes the Maute Group or IS-Lanao, Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Terrorism and insurgency in Southern Philippines will be shaped by five key developments. These are, (i) Abu Dar's alleged leadership of IS-linked groups; (ii) possible reinvigoration of the maritime domain; (iii) increased number of remotely detonated explosives; (iv) incoming foreign fighters and; (v) threats from Communist groups.

Islamic State's Leadership Change and Recuperation

Isnilon Hapilon's death gave rise to speculation among many on the identity of the next *emir* (leader) of IS-linked groups in the Philippines. One of them was Owayda Benito Marohomsar alias *Abu Dar*, who was expected to be the next leader. He served as a key commander for Isnilon Hapilon during the siege of Marawi in 2017 and escaped arrest after the siege, looting large amounts of cash from the city.[30] Abu Dar is currently leading the remnants of the Maute Group from the siege of Marawi. While currently focusing on fundraising and recruitment operations, reports have revealed that drug trading is one of the methods the group uses to raise funds.[31] Indeed, intelligence reports affirmed that drugs are sold in Manila and neighbouring countries. This signifies the group's strategic efforts to consolidate resources and prepare for a comeback with more operational prowess.

Maritime Malice: Threat in the Sulu Sea

The ASG, notorious for its kidnapping for ransom activities, had taken a 21-month hiatus from this tactic since November 2016. However, the ASG faction that has declared allegiance to IS, which is led by Hatib Sawadjan, has again resorted to kidnapping

for ransom. In September 2018, the kidnapping of two Indonesian fishermen marked a resurgence of this tactic. Reports suggested that the Indonesian fishermen were mistaken as Malaysians and were taken by ASG.[32] This kidnapping operation demonstrated the group's functional and organisational capabilities with its deployment of scouts or intelligence operators to identify kidnapping targets.[33] Nevertheless, despite the hiatus on kidnapping, the Sulu-Celebes sea remains plagued by piracy.[34] While there is no public information about the perpetrators for past pirating activities, ASG remains the prime suspect.[35]

The modus operandi for piracy operations remains consistent among the IS-linked ASG faction and the broader ASG group. Both continue to operate in small groups of one to three militants who are armed with firearms and machetes. ASG pirates travel on customised pump boats with a light wooden frame fitted with two off-the-shelf engines to permit effective manoeuvring around large ships which can also out-speed the maritime forces. The militants typically hide in the archipelagic terrain and alternate between Basilan, Jolo, and the Tawi-Tawi islands. Due to the speed of these boats, the Philippine Maritime Police does not have adequate resources to pursue them. Moreover, the distribution of resources is inefficient as the fuel for pump boats costs far less than that of the Maritime Police Boats. To overcome these problems, the police have innovated by laying ambushes that target ASG in specific islands. However,

---

[30] "Philippines: Thousands Flee as Army Hits ISIL-Linked Maute Group," *Al Jazeera*, June 20, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/philippines-thousands-flee-army-hits-isil-linked-maute-group-180620065038477.html.

[31] Amy Chew, "Drug Trade in Southern Philippines Still Bankrolling Pro-Islamic State Militants: Analyst," *Channel News Asia*, August 1, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/drug-trade-marawi-mindanao-philippines-islamic-state-maute-10574894.

[32] "Three Indonesian Fishermen Kidnapped off Sabah: Reports," *Channel News Asia*, September 11, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/three-indonesian-fishermen-kidnapped-off-sabah-malaysia-10704758.

[33] Amy Chew, "Sabah Residents Fear Illegal Immigrants Helping Kidnappers after Recent Case," *Channel News Asia*, September 18, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/sabah-residents-fear-illegal-immigrants-helping-kidnappers-after-10728486.

[34] Figure 1 in the appendix shows all reported pirating activities that have taken place in the Sulu Sea since 2014.

[35] Muguntan Vanar and David Rider, "Pirates or Abu Sayyaf?," *Maritime Security Review*, February 27, 2018, http://www.marsecreview.com/2018/02/pirates-or-abu-sayyaf/.

more steps need to be taken to improve the assets and maritime capabilities of the police and military. In 2018, there were several incidental and deliberate clashes between the Marines and ASG in the islands of the Sulu Sea.[36] These firefights witnessed the deployment of huge numbers of ASG militants in combat and once again demonstrated the combat strength of the group. Notably, the most recent clash involved 50 militants.[37]

The resurrection of kidnapping activities in September 2018 underscores the greater ambitions of the IS-linked faction of ASG. They have displayed the ability to navigate around state forces with maritime guerrilla

operations. This has reinvigorated discussions on upgrading maritime assets to combat this threat.

Procuring Explosives: The Lamitan Bombing

The Lamitan suicide bombing in July 2018 shook the state. Furuji Indama, the sub-leader of ASG, had planned the attack from hiding.[38] This was the first attack which rigged a van into a vehicle-based improvised explosive device (VBIED). IS claimed the bombing by stating that Abu Khatir Al-Maghribi, a Moroccan national, conducted the attack.[39] However, IS did not explain that the VBIED was meant to be remotely detonated at a children's parade several meters away from the suicide attack. Investigations showed that ammonium nitrate, the explosive used in the attack, was procured from local sources.[40]

Ammonium nitrate was traditionally used for road-side bombs by the ASG and the New People's Army (NPA). This is because large quantities of ammonium nitrate and petroleum mixture are required for the improvised explosive device (IED) to detonate effectively. Hence, as large containers were used to store the mixture, the bomb was very immobile and difficult to smuggle into crowded areas. This attack could have been copied from the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing in which a truck filled with ammonium nitrate was remotely detonated.[41] However, the Lamitan

[36] Jon Viktor D. Cabuenas, "Five Abu Sayyaf Bandits Killed in Sulu, Says AFP," *GMA News Online*, February 11, 2018, http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/regions/642966/five-abu-sayyaf-bandits-killed-in-sulu-says-afp/story/; Bong Garcia, "6 'Abu Sayyaf Bandits' Die in Basilan Clash," *Sunstar*, February 24, 2018, http://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/420624/6-Abu-Sayyaf-bandits-die-in-Basilan-clash; Lagatah Toyos, "Trio Linked to Terrorism Die in Tawau Shootout," *Daily Express Newspaper Online*, February 28, 2018, http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=123088; Bong Garcia, "Abu Sayyaf Suffers 2 More Deaths in Clash," *Sunstar*, March 16, 2018, http://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/423950/Abu-Sayyaf-suffers-2-more-deaths-in-clash; Roel Pareño, "2 Soldiers Killed, 12 Wounded in Clash with Abu Sayyaf in Sulu," *Philstar.Com*, May 14, 2018, https://www.philstar.com/nation/2018/05/14/1815144/2-soldiers-killed-12-wounded-clash-abu-sayyaf-sulu; Anna Felicia Bajo, "Abu Sayyaf Member Killed in Sulu Clash," *GMA News Online*, June 17, 2018, http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/regions/657177/abu-sayyaf-member-killed-in-sulu-clash/story/; Francis Wakefield, "One Soldier Killed, 10 Others Wounded in Encounter with 60 Abu Sayyaf Terrorists in Sulu," *Manila Bulletin News*, July 12, 2018, https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/12/one-soldier-killed-10-others-wounded-in-encounter-with-60-abu-sayyaf-terrorists-in-sulu; RJ Rosalado, "4 Killed in Sulu Clash between Marines, Abu Sayyaf," *ABS-CBN News*, October 26, 2018, https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/10/26/18/4-killed-in-sulu-clash-between-marines-abu-sayyaf.
[37] Richard Falcatan, "3 Marines, 1 Abu Sayyaf Killed in Sulu Clash," *Rappler*, October 26, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/215225-marines-killed-sulu-clash-abu-sayyaf-october-26-2018; Jeoffrey Maitem and Froilan Gallardo, "Philippines: 3 Marines, 7 Abu Sayyaf Killed in Jolo Clashes," *BenarNews*, October 27, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/sayyaf-clash-10272018083722.html; Rosalado, "4 Killed in Sulu Clash between Marines, Abu Sayyaf," October 26, 2018.

[38] Carmela Fonbuena, "Basilan Car Blast: Furuji Indama Unleashes Terror Even in Hiding," *Rappler*, August 1, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/208594-basilan-blast-abu-sayyaf-furuji-indama-terror-even-in-hiding.
[39] Amy Chew, "Philippine Military Dismisses Islamic State Claim It Was behind Basilan van Bombing," *Channel News Asia*, August 1, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/philippine-military-dismisses-islamic-state-basilan-van-bombing-10580686.
[40] "Traces of Fertilizer Inputs Found in Lamitan Bomb - Lorenzana," *Politiko Mindanao*, August 12, 2018, http://mindanao.politics.com.ph/traces-of-fertilizer-inputs-found-in-lamitan-bomb-lorenzana/.
[41] Boyce Rensberger, "Ammonium Nitrate Explosives Are Simple, Easily Made, Widely Used in Industry," *Washington Post*, April 21,1995, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/04/21/ammonium-nitrate-explosives-are-simple-easily-made-widely-used-in-industry/f19e2a16-a659-45a8-bdfd-7a1b9c3c0313/.

attack by ASG is an outlier. It can be compared with the ASG and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters' (BIFF) bombing attacks over the year in Mindanao.[42] Between April to September 2018, BIFF attempted to conduct six of such attacks in Cotabato, Isulan and General Santos.

Explosive materials used by terrorists in the Philippines are ammonium nitrate and gun powder, while Commercial-grade C-4 explosives are often used by BIFF bombers. Typically, these materials can be obtained in mining companies. BIFF conducts raids against mining companies to acquire these C-4 explosives. Although the government regulates the acquisition of C-4, they have little capacity to regulate the use of C-4. This results in the potential for C-4 to be sold in the black market and the Dark Web. In addition, gun powder is also easily acquired as those who possess a license for firearms can purchase it from any firearms stall. Similarly, although the government regulates the licensing of gun owners, they do not

regulate or track the use of firearms and gun powder after the purchase.[43]

Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Hijrah to the Philippines

As one of the many destinations for *hijrah* (migration), the Philippines attracts regional fighters from both Malaysia and Indonesia.[44] Given weak border controls between Sabah, North Kalimantan, and Tawi-Tawi – in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines respectively – travel to the Philippines by island hopping in the Sulu Sea from Sabah to Zamboanga is easy. Foreign fighters travelling to the Philippines are not limited to indigenous residents of the Malayan Archipelago. The Lamitan bombing brought the case of the Moroccan, Abu Khatir Al-Maghribi, to the fore. He travelled to the Philippines and eventually conducted the suicide attack. In 2018, Egyptian IS commander, Fehmi Lassoued, was also nabbed in the Philippines and was subsequently deported.[45] Similarly, a suspected Pakistani IS trainer, Naeem Hussain, who attempted to travel to the Philippines was also intercepted and banned from entering the country.[46]

On a similar note, there is an increasing trend of European foreign fighters attempting to travel to the Philippines to join IS-linked groups in 2018. This included Abdelhakim Labidi Adib from Spain[47], Lewis Ludlow from

---

[42] Agence France-Presse, "Militants' Bombs Kill Filipino Soldier, Wound Civilians," *Arab News*, January 10, 2018, http://www.arabnews.com/node/1223081/world; Jasper Acosta, "Twin Explosions Rock Maguindanao Town, None Hurt," *ABS-CBN News*, January 19, 2018, http://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/19/18/twin-explosions-rock-maguindanao-town-none-hurt; Nonoy Lacson, "Abu Sayyaf Bombs DPWH Officials' Residences in Basilan," *Manila Bulletin News*, February 2, 2018, https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/02/02/abu-sayyaf-bombs-dpwh-officials-residences-in-basilan; Edwin O. Fernandez, "Explosion Rocks Front of School in North Cotabato," May 11, 2018, http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/989622/explosion-rocks-school-premise-in-north-cotabato; John Unson, "Bomb Attack Hits Maguindanao," *Philstar Global*, July 12, 2018, https://www.philstar.com/nation/2018/07/12/1832897/bomb-attack-hits-maguindanao; Rambo Talabong, "2 Dead, 12 Injured as Another Blast Hits Sultan Kudarat," *Rappler*, September 3, 2018, http://www.rappler.com/nation/210984-sultan-kudarat-explosion-september-2-2018; Mara Cepeda, "7 Wounded in General Santos Blast; PNP Slams 'Act of Terror,'" *Rappler*, September 16, 2018, http://www.rappler.com/nation/212114-injured-general-santos-city-bomb-explosion-september-16-2018; Edwin O. Fernandez, "Blast Rocks North Cotabato Town Hours after GenSan Bombing," *Inquirer News*, September 16, 2018, https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1033090/blast-rocks-north-cotabato-town-hours-after-gensan-bombing.

[43] This is as stated by a high-ranking officer from the Philippines National Police who prefers to remain anonymous (October 31, 2018).
[44] Carmela Fonbuena, "Presence of Foreign Terrorists Remains a Challenge in PH," *Rappler*, January 10, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/193276-foreign-jihadis-remain-challenge-philippines.
[45] Raul Dancel, "Philippine Security Forces Nab Foreign ISIS 'Commander,'" *The Straits Times*, February 19, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/philippines-arrests-suspected-isis-leader-in-manila; "Philippines Deports Alleged ISIS Commander," *Rappler*, October 16, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/214432-bureau-immigration-deports-fehmi-lassoued-october-2018.
[46] Paterno Esmaquel II, "Philippines Blocks Entry of Suspected ISIS Trainer," *Rappler*, October 1, 2018, https://www.rappler.com/nation/213230-philippines-bureau-immigration-blocks-entry-naeem-hussain.
[47] Jeffrey Damicog, "Spanish National Held as Suspected Terrorist," *Manila Bulletin News*, January 24, 2018,

the United Kingdom[48], Harum M. and Emre U. from Germany[49], and a few unnamed individuals form Switzerland[50]. This trend points to the cultural legitimacy or fertile operational appeal of the Philippines as a battlefield. The Philippines continues to be a hotspot for hijrah in the post-Marawi context as regional and international foreign fighters have consistently viewed Mindanao as a legitimate fighting ground.[51]

Communist Threat: The New People's Army

The Communist-leaning NPA is an active threat to the Philippines with its large and organised fighting force. On January 2018, Chief General Rey Guerrero shared that NPA has 3,700 fighters.[52] The NPA has managed to recruit actively from those facing poverty. The NPA has a more organised fighting force than IS-linked groups.[53] The communist insurgency shares a certain commonality with Islamist extremism in the sense that both are active in Southern Philippines. Multiple studies have highlighted that insurgency and violent conflict tends to strive in countries suffering from socio-economic isolation.[54] The creation of social-structural

divergence caused by Mindanao's geographical isolation has led to the development of unique cultural structures which only makes negotiation and diplomacy difficult.[55] The way ahead for conflict resolution is to address political grievances and assist with socio-economic integration.[56] In order to mitigate terrorism and insurgency in Mindanao, the government must create conditions for socio-economic integration between the Moro people and Manila. Ultimately, an inter-agency approach is required to address the socio-economic issues of the south.

Rebuilding Marawi: Infrastructure, Education, and Economy

17 October 2018 marked the first anniversary of the end of the Marawi siege, with the government facing a real challenge to rebuild the city to prevent further susceptibility to religious extremism. The five-month battle in Marawi had led to the long-term destruction of the city, and reports have confirmed that undetonated IEDs are still scattered in parts of the city, which further delays the rebuilding process.[57] Nevertheless, efforts by both government and civil society have established a transitory site for the displaced Moro people.[58]

To win the support of the Moro people of Marawi, President Duterte recently signed the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) which made several changes to the agreement of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao

https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/01/24/spanish-national-held-as-suspected-terrorist/.

[48] Robert Postings, "The Philippines: Destination for ISIS Foreign Fighters from Europe and Beyond?," The Defense Post, September 12, 2018, https://thedefensepost.com/2018/09/12/philippines-isis-foreign-fighters-europe/.

[49] "Ziel Philippinen: Mit One-Way-Ticket zur Kampfausbildung?," Tagesschau, August 13, 2018, https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/philippinen-is-kaempfer-101.html.

[50] "Voyageurs du djihad," Département fédéral de la défense, https://www.vbs.admin.ch/fr/themes/recherche-renseignements/voyageurs-djihad.html.

[51] Al Hayat Media Center, "Marawi," Inside 3 - Dari Dalam Khilafah, 2017.

[52] Carmela Fonbuena, "AFP Vows to Reduce by Half NPA's 3,700 Fighters," Rappler, January 9, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/193261-new-peoples-army-strength.

[53] Amy Chew, "A Resurgent Communist New People's Army in Southern Philippines Raises Security Threat in Mindanao," Channel News Asia, October 18, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/communist-new-peoples-army-philippines-security-threat-mindanao-10841242.

[54] Sirimal Abeyratne, "Economic Roots of Political Conflict: The Case of Sri Lanka," World Economy 27, no. 8 (2004): 1295–1314; Tetyana Malyarenko and David J. Galbreath, "Crimea: Competing Self-

Determination Movements and the Politics at the Centre," Europe-Asia Studies 65, no. 5 (2013): 912–28; Surasit Vajirakachorn, "Social Inclusion in Southern Border Provinces of Thailand," International Journal of Social Quality 2, no. 2 (2012): 63–80.

[55] Patrick M. Malone, The Skulking Way of War: Technology and Tactics among the New England Indians (Madison Books, 2000).

[56] David Kilcullen, Counterinsurgency (Oxford University Press, 2010); Frank Kitson, Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping, vol. 165 (Faber & Faber London, 1971).

[57] Vito Barcelo, "53 Unexploded IEDs Need Recovering in Marawi City," Manila Standard, April 20, 2018, http://manilastandard.net/news/national/263711/53-unexploded-ieds-need-recovering-in-marawi-city.html.

[58] Bangon Marawi, "RMHC's Bahay Bulilit Opens in Marawi Transitory Site," October 22, 2018, http://bangonmarawi.com/2018/10/22/food-chain-bahay-bulilit-opens-in-marawi-transitory-site/.

(ARMM). These changes are: a reduction in national taxation from federal tax revenues collected in Mindanao, the allocation of at least 5% of the national budget for Mindanao, Moro representation at the Ministerial level of government, and a Bangsamoro parliament.[59]

While there have been multiple initiatives that focus on educating children and youths[60], the government and civil society must develop relevant vocational skills to integrate the people of the south. Efforts to develop vocational skills in professional services – not just fishing and carpentry – will aid the Moro people to integrate into the mainstream. This will provide opportunities for socio-economic integration, moving closer to a long-term solution for the insurgency in the Philippines.

Military and Policing in the Philippines

The Philippines is taking an active approach against terrorism in the region. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has launched active assaults against terrorists[61], sanctuaries[62] and weapons factories[63] of terrorist organisations. These operations have been successful as several members from terrorist organisations have surrendered to the government. The Duterte administration has urged terrorists to surrender by promising safety for the asylum-seekers and their families. In 2018, more than 400 NPA members, 40 Abu Sayyaf members and 20 BIFF members

surrendered.[64] This demonstrated the success of the policy for asylum-seekers and indicated the military strength of the AFP.

Beyond efforts undertaken by the Philippines, Southeast Asian countries have also collaborated at the regional level to combat terrorism. The Trilateral Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is a joint maritime policing patrol in the Sulu Sea. It aims to combat ASG kidnapping operations and monitor the porous borders between the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.[65] In 2018, Indonesia proposed to conduct a joint ground exercise to deny territorial sanctuaries to terrorist organisations in the Philippines.[66] Additionally, best practices for counter-terrorism are being shared between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia as governments of these states recognise the transnational nature of terrorism.[67] Similarly, the region also recognises that policing and military operations are insufficient. As such, ASEAN member states have cooperated against terrorism at both the diplomatic and academic level. At the diplomatic level, there is the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism and the ASEAN Comprehensive Plan on Counter Terrorism in 2007 and 2017

---

[59] Pia Ranada, "Document: Bangsamoro Organic Law," *Rappler*, July 27, 2018, http://www.rappler.com//nation/208331-document-bangsamoro-organic-law.

[60] Francis Wakefield, "Dureza Expresses Pride in Youth Peace Initiatives," Manila Bulletin News, September 16, 2018, https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/09/16/dureza-expresses-pride-in-youth-peace-initiatives.

[61] Enrico dela Cruz, "At Least 44 Militants Killed in Clash with Philippine Troops: Army," *Reuters*, March 11, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-militants/at-least-44-militants-killed-in-clash-with-philippine-troops-army-idUSKCN1GN0EF.

[62] Dempsey Reyes, "12 Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters Killed in 3-Day Maguindanao Operations," *The Manila Times*, April 11, 2018, http://www.manilatimes.net/12-bangsamoro-freedom-fighters-killed-in-3-day-maguindanao-operations/391959/.

[63] Ellie Aben, "Philippine Army Kills 20 Militants, Destroys Bomb Factory," *Arab News*, June 12, 2018, http://www.arabnews.com/node/1320346/world.

[64] Numbers are compiled from various open source information such as ABS-CNB, GMA News Online, Inquirer News, Manila Bulletin News, Manila Times, Philstar Global, Sunstar, and Zamboanga Today.

[65] Prashanth Parameswaran, "New Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols Pact Nears Completion," *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/new-sulu-sea-trilateral-patrols-pact-nears-completion/; Prashanth Parameswaran, "Malaysia Spotlights Expanded Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols," *The Diplomat*, April 19, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/malaysia-spotlights-expanded-sulu-sea-trilateral-patrols/; Sumisha Naidu, "First Joint Air Patrols over Sulu Sea Launched by Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia," *Channel News Asia*, October 12, 2017, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/first-joint-air-patrols-over-sulu-sea-launched-by-malaysia-9304708.

[66] Rini Utami and Libertina W Ambari, "Indonesia Proposes Joint Exercise to Fight Terrorism," *Antara News*, September 14, 2018, https://en.antaranews.com/news/118558/indonesia-proposes-joint-exercise-to-fight-terrorism.

[67] Rini Utami and Yashinta Difa Pramudyani, "Indonesia, Malaysia Learn Strategy to Handle Terrorism from Philippines," *Antara News*, September 14, 2018, https://en.antaranews.com/news/118530/indonesia-malaysia-learn-strategy-to-handle-terrorism-from-philippines.

respectively.[68] The extensive academic dialogues through the "Track II Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions" and "ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies" also aim to foster strategic cooperation between countries.[69]

Policy Implications

Presently, the military and police forces have Abu Dar on their target list. In order to successfully implement the operation to eliminate the leader, agencies must look towards greater intelligence integration. This includes the integration of financial institutions, the narcotics bureau, and social services. Additionally, maritime operations down south must focus on shallow water operations. Blockades can be established in shoals and mangroves to force ASG pirates to the open waters. This will allow the government and transnational partners to mobilise maritime assets with greater firepower to overpower the pirates. However, blockades in the Sulu sea might be too resource-intensive. Sea-borne forces need to master the fight against pirates skilled in evasive manoeuvres. The Philippines also needs to rethink their maritime assets and procure equipment based on the operational capabilities of terrorist groups and local maritime dynamics. There is also a need to develop a mixed fleet to adequately confront the pirates in both shallow waters and the deep sea.

Terrorist groups and radicalised individuals are also likely to incorporate the use of ammonium nitrate as seen in the Lamitan bombings to create explosive devices that are more mobile and deadly. As such, regulations on weapons and bomb-making materials must be enacted. Additionally, intelligence operations in mining companies are essential to understand the use of and to track the distribution of C-4 explosives.

Even though the Philippines has invested on border control and kinetic force, the government must sever Islamist networks by engaging in a counter-narrative campaign. As foreign fighters have assessed the Philippines as an ideal location for hijrah, based on operational feasibility and cultural legitimacy, moderate religious clerics will need to do more to debunk IS misinterpretations of Islamic doctrines and practices. To effectively counter both the communist and Islamist insurgent threats, attempts to address insurgency in the country must begin with socio-economic integration. As such, creating economic opportunities for the youth in Southern Philippines is key and can be achieved through vocational training and other similar initiatives.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia faces both home-grown and external terrorist threats. The threat can be categorised into four key areas: (i) home-grown terrorism and the role of social media, (ii) foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) – including those Malaysian nationals who have travelled outside (Iraq, Syria, the Philippines) and returning fighters, (iii) non-Malaysian extremists and terrorists entering the country; (iv) and increased radicalisation among women and the youth.

Home-grown Terrorism and Social Media

Given the weakened position of IS in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State (IS) militants have urged supporters to launch attacks on their own countries, including Malaysia. Overall, social media has contributed to an increase in homegrown cells and militants, paired with linkages and communication with terrorists beyond Malaysia. For instance on 30 December 2017, Syria-based IS militant Muhammad Aqif Heusen, along with a Singaporean terrorist, Abu Uqayl Al Singapuri, encouraged fellow comrades in a video to launch domestic attacks if they are unable to join IS in Syria.[70] Since 2013, more than 450 people have been arrested in Malaysia for suspected links to terrorism

---

[68] ASEAN, "ASEAN Compreheisive Plan of Action on Counter Terrorism" (11th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime, Singapore: Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2017), https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/ACPoA-on-CT-Adopted-by-11th-AMMTC.pdf.

[69] Mathew Bukit, "ASEAN Needs to Unify Its Counter-Terrorism Strategy," *East Asia Forum*, September 22, 2018, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/09/22/asean-needs-to-unify-its-counter-terrorism-strategy/.

[70] "Malaysian Militant Tells Compatriots to Launch Jihad at Home," *Today Online,* January 2, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/world/malaysian-militant-tells-compatriots-launch-jihad-home.

which also includes non-IS related arrests. From 2013 to October 2017, 346 suspects affiliated with IS were arrested.[71] While there has not been an attack since the 2016 Movida nightclub attack in Kuala Lumpur, there have been a number of plans to launch attacks within Malaysia that were subsequently foiled by the authorities.

Many of these foiled attacks were planned by lone-wolf actors or small cells that were trying to evade the authorities. These hard-to-detect networks and cells are able to plan attacks while communicating with IS members on social media and encrypted messaging applications. In December 2017, one foiled plan involved a 25-year-old Malaysian teacher at a private religious school who was planning to target entertainment outlets and rob, kidnap or kill non-Muslims.[72] Police reports revealed that the suspect maintained contact with former members of known terrorist groups and promoted IS ideology on his Facebook account to recruit new members.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters

According to the Soufan Group, a strategic security intelligence firm, 91 terrorists from Malaysia were found to have travelled to Iraq or Syria to join IS between 2014 and October 2017.[73] As of October 2017, eight Malaysia fighters had returned to the country while 56 fighters remained in Syria. IS-linked militants in Malaysia have faced a leadership gap after Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi, one of the most important Malaysian militants who travelled to Syria, was killed in a drone strike in Raqqa in April 2017. Wanndy was a prominent IS recruiter who used his social

media accounts to connect with supporters and potential recruits in Indonesia and Malaysia. Since his death, Wan Mohd Aquil Wan Zainal Abidin alias Akel Zainal has stepped in as the new IS leader of Malaysians in Syria.

The major security threat from FTFs relates to their domestic links and ability to inspire the creation of smaller cells while providing them with the expertise to conduct attacks. Reports from July 2018 revealed that Bahrum Naim, an Indonesian IS-linked online recruiter and bomb-making instructor killed in June, was in touch with 26 Malaysians. The now deceased Bahrun Naim was known to have created and circulated bomb-making manuals on encrypted Telegram channels. According to the Royal Malaysian Police Special Branch, the 26 men belonged to an IS-affiliated cell called Malhama Qubra.[74] These Malaysians then went on to plot a series terror attacks on churches, temples and entertainment spots in Johor, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur that were to be carried out at the end of 2015.[75]

FTFs have also attempted to recruit extremists within Malaysia to go for training in the region – usually Southern Philippines – and send them back to conduct attacks. IS militants have been taking advantage of the weak border controls in the tri-border area between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia in the Sulu and Celebes seas. In February 2018, Malaysian police arrested 10 people – seven Filipinos and three Malaysians – for smuggling militants into the Southern Philippines via Sabah to join IS groups there. The suspects included Furuji Indama who succeeded Isnilon Hapilon as the leader of the IS faction based in Basilan. They had recruited six Malaysians and Indonesians to join ASG, undergo military training by bringing them from Sandakan (Sabah) to Basilan via transit on Taganak Island and then encouraging them to conduct attacks in Sabah. After IS was pushed out of Marawi in October 2016, FTFs continued to

[71] Parliamentary Documents, *"Oral Questions – 2018-08-01 Parliamentary Replies,"* https://pardocs.sinarproject.org/documents/2017-july-august-parliamentary-session/oral-questions-soalan-lisan/2017-08-01-parliamentary-replies/soalan-97.pdf/view.

[72] "Malaysia Arrests Two Men Over Planned Attacks On Police Stations and Buddhist Monks," *The Straits Times,* January 22, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-arrests-two-men-over-planned-attacks-on-police-stations-and-buddhist-monks.

[73] Richard Barrett, "Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees," *The Soufan Center,* October 2017, http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Amy Chew, "Slain Indonesian IS leader Bahrun Naim Recruited Malaysians To Launch Terror Attacks In Country," *Channel Newsasia,* July 13, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/indonesian-islamic-state-leader-bahrum-naim-recruited-malaysians-10528876.

travel to Mindanao to join IS-affiliated groups. It was reported in November 2018 that several terrorists have entered Mindanao since the end of the battle of Marawi in October 2017. Most of these militants are from Malaysia and Indonesia, with others from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Morocco, Spain, France, Tunisia, Iraq, Egypt and Yemen.[76] It is therefore necessary to consider the implications of a strengthened terrorist network in Mindanao (as a result of experienced fighters training fresh recruits) on Malaysia's security. It is likely that ASG's IS-linked faction will attempt to set up a cell in the eastern state of Sabah – to further efforts in smuggling IS fighters from the region into Southern Philippines. This cell may also launch attacks in Malaysia itself.

Foreign Extremists in Malaysia

According to Malaysian security agencies, the largest group of foreign extremists arrested in the country since 2013, includes those from the Philippines, followed by Indonesia.[77] There have been multiple cases of foreign extremists entering Malaysia from the Middle East and South Asia.[78] The arrest of an Egyptian national and former AQ member[79] in October 2018 has raised concerns among Malaysian authorities of a possible resurgence of AQ. Using fake travel documents to enter Malaysia, the suspect

was previously jailed in Canada and Egypt for his involvement in terrorist activities and was said to have met Osama bin Laden. Another individual, a Pakistani national who has links with Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was also arrested in Perak as he had threatened to kill a foreign diplomat.[80] In addition, recent reports mentioned that a Yemen-based terrorist group was planning to set up a learning centre in Southeast Asia to promote Salafi-Jihadi extremist teachings, an ideology espoused by IS and AQ.[81] Eight men linked to this centre were arrested in September 2018. This movement of foreign terrorists highlights the possible radicalisation pathway amongst locals through the promotion of extremist teachings.[82]

Increased Radicalisation of Women and the Youth

Recent reports indicate that more women and youth (particularly undergraduates) are increasingly susceptible to being radicalised. According to the head of the Special Branch Counterterrorism Division in July 2018, more women are being radicalised by IS militants to carry out attacks in Malaysia.[83] Female IS suspects have also begun to recruit and encourage others to carry out attacks in the country. [84] As such, the authorities are now recognising that women are no longer playing the secondary role of supporters to male terrorists. During the general elections in May 2018, a 51-year-old housewife was arrested for planning to load gas cylinders in her car, and then ram her vehicle into voters at a polling station in Puchong. She joined IS-affiliated chat groups in 2014 and had

[76] Zam Yusa, "Philippines: 100 Foreign Fighters Joined ISIS In Mindanao Since The Marawi Battle," *The Defense Post,* November 5, 2018, https://thedefensepost.com/2018/11/05/100-foreign-fighters-join-isis-mindanao-philippines-marawi/.
[77] Amy Chew, "'Easy for them to blend in': Foreign terror suspects pose security challenges for Malaysian authorities*," Channel News Asia,* November 21, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-foreign-terror-suspects-al-qaeda-militants-10915678.
[78] Amy Chew, "Easy For Them To Blend In': Foreign Terror Suspects Pose Security Challenges For Malaysian Authorities," *Channel Newsasia,* November 21, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysia-foreign-terror-suspects-al-qaeda-militants-10915678.
[79] The suspect was a former Al-Qaeda member in Afghanistan from 1988 to 1993.
Shannon Teoh, "Former Al-Qaeda man among five terror suspects nabbed by Malaysian police," *The Straits Times,* October 31, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/former-al-qaeda-man-among-five-terror-suspects-nabbed-by-malaysian-police.

[80] Amy Chew, "Malaysia Arrests 5 Terror Suspects, Including Man Who Threatened To Kill Foreign Diplomat," *Channel Newsasia,* October 31, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/malaysian-arrest-5-terror-suspects-man-threaten-kill-diplomat-10884136.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Farik Zolkepli, "Special Branch Detains 7 Foreigners, 1 M'sian With Salafi Jihadi Links," *The Star Online,* October 6, 2018, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/10/06/special-branch-detain-7-foreigners-1-msian-with-salafi-jihadi-links/.
[83] Melissa Goh, "More Women Radicalized By ISIS to Conduct Attacks in Malaysia: Counterterror Chief," *Channel Newsasia,* July 24, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/more-women-radicalised-by-isis-to-conduct-attacks-in-malaysia-10557808.
[84] Ibid.

planned to head to Syria if her attack was successful.[85]

The increased radicalisation of undergraduates is also a cause for concern. A recent survey found that 21% of Malaysian university students felt that terrorism is an effective strategy to achieve an objective, and slightly more than half of those surveyed felt that it was possible for them to develop violent radical ideas that could then evolve into violent acts.[86] Groups like IS have viewed universities as an ideal platform to recruit students and police agencies are concerned that their ideology is gaining traction among universities and school students.[87] *Usrah* (religious discussion groups) are also taking the form of online groups that students join to develop their religious understanding and seek guidance. However, some of these groups have been used by terrorist groups to spread extremism.

Counter-Terrorism Efforts

The Malaysian authorities have taken strong counter-terrorism measures as evidenced by the arrest of over 450 terrorist suspects since 2013, with some 120 of them foreigners, mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines. Underground terrorist networks and cells have been busted and most significantly, at least 23 terror plots have been foiled. The series of counter-terrorist actions have also included thwarting attempts to smuggle militants to strongholds of IS-linked groups in Southern Philippines, and uncovering foreign extremists trying to set up a Salafi-Jihadi learning centre in Southeast Asia. 2019 is set to be another challenging year on the counter terrorism front in Malaysia given the porosity of borders, ease of travel in the region, and

vulnerability to radicalisation from heightened terrorist propaganda via social media. As such, stepped-up counter-terrorism measures will have to be not only country-specific but also regional.

MYANMAR

The security situation in parts of Myanmar remains precarious as the Rohingya refugee crisis with ongoing clashes between ethnic armed groups and the military, and widening intercommunal and religious cleavages perpetuated by the influence of Buddhist ultranationalist groups. Rakhine state, an isolated region in western Myanmar, which is home to the Rohingya, remains perilous amid the inter-religious violence that has culminated in the expulsion of much of the Rohingya population from the area. The long drawn-out refugee crisis, which has played out along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border, has also brought a spike in transnational criminal and terrorist activities.

Buddhist Extremism

Rohingya Muslims make up just over a million of the four percent of Muslims in Myanmar, a country that has 53 million people. The Rohingya remain concentrated in Rakhine State, which is the location of armed conflict that has fueled nationwide existential angst. The crisis in the Rakhine state, triggered by the August 2017 attacks by Harakat al-Yaqin or Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)[88], has been exploited by radical Buddhist nationalists throughout Myanmar to promote their exclusivist agenda.[89]

The upsurge in Buddhist nationalism since the end of military rule in 2011 saw anti-Muslim rhetoric and communal violence increase across the country. One of the prominent movements is Ma Ba Tha (Association for the Protection of Race and Religion), which has wielded significant

---

[85] "Housewife in Malaysia Gave ISIS the Polling Day Attack Plan: Source," *The Straits Times,* June 4, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/housewife-in-malaysia-gave-isis-the-polling-day-attack-plan-source.
[86] Rashvinjeet S. Bedi, "One in five Malaysian undergrads feel terrorism an effective tool for achieving objectives, say survey," *The Star Online,* July 27, 2018, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/07/27/one-in-five-msian-undergrads-feel-terrorism-effective-tool-for-achieving-objectives/.
[87] Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam, "Dealing With Radicalization in Malaysian Universities," *Today Online,* April 14, 2017, https://www.todayonline.com/world/dealing-radicalisation-malaysian-universities.

[88] On 25 August 2017, the Anti-Terrorism Central Committee in Myanmar designated ARSA as a terrorist organisation.
[89] "Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar," *International Crisis Croup*, September 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/290-buddhism-and-state-power-myanmar.

political clout in recent years. Ma Ba Tha has successfully lobbied for the passing of laws that international observers say discriminate against Muslims.[90] The group has also rebranded itself as the 'Buddha Dhamma Charity Foundation' after it was banned in 2017 but the group's worldview remains the same.[91] One of its leaders is Ashin Wirathu, a radical monk who once called himself 'Myanmar's Bin Laden' and was barred from preaching for a year in 2017. After the end of his ban in 2018, Wirathu appeared at an October 2018 rally in Yangon in support of Myanmar's military generals who had been globally condemned for alleged human rights violations against the Rohingya.[92] The fact that hundreds of Wirathu's supporters came out to back the military shows the traction of his intolerant and exclusivist narrative. Observers are concerned that Ma Ba Tha's ideology and narratives is actually taking root and will continue to affect Myanmar's social fabric. However, Myanmar authorities appear to be passively 'waiting for Ma Ba Tha to fade away'.

The violence in Rakhine has complicated efforts by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's government to curtail Ma Ba Tha and other nationalist groups. International critics have condemned their perceived inaction against the Rohingya oppression, while Buddhist nationalists accuse the government of going soft on Muslim agitators in Rakhine. According to analysts, the emergence of armed groups and prominent Buddhist nationalist groups, introduces a disturbing new dynamic to Myanmar's religious-political conflicts that is likely to worsen, despite official efforts to curb the Ma Ba Tha and its hate campaign.[93]

Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and the Arakan Army

The ARSA militant group has significant networks of members and supporters in camps that house Rohingya refugees, and is determined to exert and extend its influence as an insurgent group and political force. However, ARSA's broader support and acceptability among Rohingya community at large remains questionable.[94] On 5 January 2018, ARSA claimed responsibility for an ambush attack in the Northern Maungdaw Township, where six government soldiers were injured. Even though this incident highlights the capability of ARSA to conduct isolated and small-scale attacks, it has been weakened considerably since the height of its operational capabilities in 2016 and 2017.[95]

ARSA's social media propaganda continues to be focused on portraying itself as a defender of the Rohingya people while criticising the Myanmar Army for its brutal military operations.[96] The inaccessible and mountainous terrain around the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India border triangle has allowed remnants of ARSA to set up operational bases and recuperate, although according to estimates by a source in Bangladesh, ARSA is reportedly left with less than a hundred fighters. The longer the Rohingya remain cramped in inadequately-appointed camps in Bangladesh or countenance ongoing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, it remains probable that ARSA will bend towards Islamism or that Islamist militant groups will conduct violence on their behalf.[97]

The Rakhine state also faces a significant threat from the Arakan Army — a group

---

[90] Matthew J. Walton and Susan Hayward, *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism and Communal Violence in Myanmar*, Policy Studies: 71, 2014, (Washington: East-West Center).

[91] "Ma Ba Tha Changes Name, Still Officially Illegal," *The Irrawaddy*, September 3, 2018, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/ma-ba-tha-changes-name-still-officially-illegal.html.

[92] "Rohingya Crisis: Myanmar's 'Buddhist Bin Laden' Wirathu Blasts International Community," *South China Morning Post*, October 14, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/2168526/rohingya-crisis-myanmars-buddhist-bin-laden-wirathu-blasts.

[93] "Buddhist Extremism, Despite A Clampdown, Spreads In Myanmar," *Asia Times*, August 13, 2017,

http://www.atimes.com/article/buddhist-extremism-despite-clampdown-spreads-myanmar/.

[94] "The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar's Rohingya Refugee Crisis," *International Crisis Group*, May 16, 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/296-long-haul-ahead-myanmars-rohingya-refugee-crisis.

[95] From 2016 to 2017, ARSA had orchestrated a wave of attacks on police and army posts in the Rakhine state.

[96] "Press Statement," *Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army*, August 25, 2018, https://twitter.com/ARSA_Official.

[97] C. Christine Fair, "Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army: Not the Jihadis You Might Expect," *Lawfare*, December 9, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/arakan-rohingya-salvation-army-not-jihadis-you-might-expect.

claims to fight for the Rakhine Buddhist ethnic group. 2018 saw an escalation of violence in areas of the northern Rakhine state further from the Bangladesh border, which displaced more than 700 people.[98] In December 2018, the Myanmar's military called a rare ceasefire against ethnic armed groups in the northeast of the country although Rakhine state was not included. Analysts have stated that the military left Rakhine out because it does not want the Arakan Army to gain a foothold in the state, and has lingering concerns over ARSA.[99]

Transnational Terrorism

The transnational element of terrorism is visible in Myanmar through four key developments. They are: (i) the country's use as a transit point for Al-Qaeda (AQ) linked terrorists, (ii) AQ's exploitation of the Rohingya issue, (iii) presence of militant charities raising funds by exploiting the Rohingya narrative, and (iv) recruitment of Rohingya refugees by terrorist groups in Bangladesh.

First, in April 2018, Indian authorities arrested a British-Bangladeshi for recruiting and mobilising youth to carry out attacks against Myanmar and its interests abroad. Saimun Rahman, 28, was allegedly planning to make his way into Myanmar through Mizoram and then onto Chittagong in Bangladesh. India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) found 536 chats retrieved from Telegram and other protected messaging applications that Rahman used to stay in touch with alleged Al-Qaeda associates in India, Bangladesh, Syria and other countries. Rahman was allegedly assigned to guard an AQ base in Syria previously, where he fought different groups for two weeks. He was later sent to Bangladesh due to his knowledge of the local language, and was assigned the task of establishing its base in the Indian subcontinent.[100] It is noteworthy that Saimun

was arrested in Bangladesh but got bail and escaped to India where AQ has developed substantial contacts over the last few years.

Second, AQ is known to have tried to exploit the Rohingya issue in the past and it remains likely that it will do so in the future as well. In one of its key publications in June 2017, AQ identified Myanmar as part of its theatre of operations and specifically labelled the Myanmar military as one of its key targets. The group has clearly laid out its three objectives in Myanmar: (i) 'helping and defending' Muslims in Myanmar, (ii) 'avenging' the oppression of Muslims by the military, (iii) and 'retaking' the Islamic Arakan from the 'occupying' military.[101]   AQ has expressed its interest to work with jihadist groups in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar to this end. It is noteworthy that Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has urged the AQIS leadership to physically support Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. On 12 September 2017, AQ Central released a statement calling for revenge attacks to punish the Myanmar government for the persecution of the Muslim-minority Rohingya population. The group urged Muslims around the world and specifically those in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines to support Rohingya financially and physically. In 2017 AQ's Bengali language magazine also published a special issue covering the Rohingya.[102] In 2018, several audio messages in Rohingya dialect were posted in Bengali pro-AQ forums that called for Rohingya not to reject *jihad* and *qital* (waging war/taking up arms) as a solution to their plight.[103] Another audio message emphasised that Rohingya clerics should control their greed for leadership positions and instead follow the AQ Shura's decision.[104]

Third, militant-linked charities have also emerged across the border in Bangladesh. In November 2018, Bangladesh authorities

---

[98] "Myanmar Says Policeman Found Dead Near Border With Bangladesh," *The Irrawaddy*, December 24, 2018, https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmar-says-policeman-found-dead-near-border-bangladesh.html.
[99] Ibid.
[100] "Rohingya Terror Suspect Reveals Al-Qaeda's India Plan," *India Today*, April 12, 2018, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rohingya-terror-suspect-reveals-al-qaeda-s-india-plan-1210255-2018-04-12.

[101] 'Code of Conduct: Al Qaeda in the Subcontinent," *As-Sahab Media Subcontinent*, June 2017.
[102] Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, *Al Balagh*, 2017.
[103] "Musolmano Ki Zawal Awr Suqut Ki Asbab - Arakan Ka Mimber," *Dawahilallah Forum*, September 22, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7DhHiFmVn4.
[104] "Arakan Ka Mimbar," *Dawahilallah Forum*, September 22, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOeFgmxvptQ.

detained five members of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) named 'Small Kindness Bangladesh' in the capital Dhaka.[105] Members of the NGO had allegedly exploited the persecution of Rohingya Muslims to raise funds from Pakistan, Turkey, Philippines, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, among other countries.[106] Earlier in August 2018, the Bangladesh authorities banned the same NGO from access to Rohingya camps, alleging that their followers had links to Ansar al-Islam, the Bangladeshi wing of AQIS. [107]

Lastly, a segment of the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), the most active Islamist militant group operating in Bangladesh has also attempted to radicalise and recruit Rohingya Muslims in refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar. In December 2018, Bangladesh's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit arrested three JMB militants and recovered 30 commando knives, 1.5 kilogrammes of gun powder, and 30 Improvised Explosive Devises (IEDs) in an operation. Preliminary investigations revealed that the militants had smuggled in these weapons from Myanmar and had been funded by two Bangladeshis living in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia respectively.[108] The financier from Saudi Arabia, a relative of JMB's founder Abdur Rahman, had reportedly provided US$125,000.[109]

Outlook

In December 2018, the US House of Representatives approved a resolution declaring Myanmar's military campaign against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority a genocide.[110] The resolution ratchets pressure on the Myanmar authorities to reach a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis. Earlier in June 2018, the Myanmar government had signed a UN-sponsored framework for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. However, there has been no tangible progress made on improving conditions in the Rakhine state for the Rohingya refugees to return.[111] On the contrary, the area remains highly militarised amid a state-imposed media blackout on reporting from the ground. According to international observers, several senior military officials have also been accused of publically stoking ethnic tensions against the Rohingya. In 2018, in an unprecedented move, Facebook and Instagram removed several accounts belonging to military and political leaders who had reportedly used the platforms to spread 'hate and misinformation'.[112]

The Myanmar government's inability to facilitate conflict resolution suggests the Rohingya issue will continue to simmer in the year ahead. The repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar remains uncertain as the government has not been able to ensure their safe and secure passage and continues to deny them citizenship. International organisations have also voiced concern that the situation in Rakhine state remains unconducive for the repatriation of the refugees. A viable solution is inextricably linked to Myanmar's domestic political situation. There is a dire need to counter the ultra-nationalist and extremist rhetoric from radical Buddhist elements, which continues to fuel and aggravate violence and discrimination against the Rohingya.

With terrorist and insurgent groups actively exploiting the Rohingya crisis, the Myanmar-

---

[105] "Police Arrest Eight NGO Workers In Mirpur With Ties To Terror Financing," *Bdnews24.com*, November 8, 2018, https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2018/11/08/police-arrest-eight-ngo-workers-in-mirpur-with-ties-to-terror-financing.
[106] Ibid.
[107] "8 Arrested For Spreading Extremism," *The Bangladesh Pratidin*, November 9, 2018, http://www.bd-pratidin.com/city/2018/11/09/374670.
[108] "Plot To Attack At Cox's Bazar Beach With Cold Arms," *The Shamakal*, December 13, 2018, https://bit.ly/2SkMRSh.
[109] "Militants Buying Arms And Explosives With Relief Fund," *Prothom Alo*. December 12, 2018, https://bit.ly/2Lxqy9n.
[110] "US House Designates Myanmar Campaign Against Rohingya Minority "Genocide," *VOA News*,

December 13, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/a/us-house-designates-myanmar-campaign-against-rohingya-minority-genocide-/4699642.html.
[111] "UNHCR And UNDP Urge Tangible Progress To Improve Conditions In Myanmar's Rakhine State," *United Nations Development Programme*, August 8, 2018, http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/news-centre/news/2018/UNHCR_UNDP_urge_tangible_progress_Myanmar.html.
[112] "Facebook Bans Myanmar Army Chief, Others In Unprecedented Move," *Reuters*, August 27, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-facebook/facebook-bans-myanmar-army-chief-others-in-unprecedented-move-idUSKCN1LC0R7.

Bangladesh border is likely to see a new resurgence of violent extremism, with implications for regional security. There are four areas where bilateral, regional and international cooperation and collaboration are needed. First, ensuring safe and voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas to the Rakhine state. This includes recognition of their identity as well as granting them citizenship of Myanmar. Second, socio-economic development in Rakhine state, with a particular focus on basic human rights and intercommunal harmony especially by engaging both the Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders. Third, sharing of intelligence regarding all groups that poses a security threat. Finally, a better management of border remains key to countering ARSA.

THAILAND

The southern provinces of Thailand, namely Pattani, Yala, Songkhla and Narathiwat, have faced attacks by separatist groups[113] since the annexation of the southern states under the former sultanate of Pattani in 1902.[114] The Malay-Muslim insurgency is largely distinguished by its parochialism[115] as it seeks independence for the Islamic historical region of Patani. As such, Patani-Malay militant groups have shown limited interest in forming links with Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda (AQ) or other Islamist terrorist groups in Southeast Asia.[116] While some of the variables to the Patani conflict have remained constant over the years – elusive identities of the insurgents, continuation of

the crime-terror nexus with drugs and weapons trafficking – other variables have evolved. Against the backdrop of growing Buddhist assertiveness coupled with the gradual process of 'Thaification', the situation in the Patani region requires close monitoring for signs of growing unrest and vulnerability to IS online radicalisation. Despite lowered levels of violence observed in 2018, IS activism still remains a possibility with the facilitation of online and offline radicalisation.

Continued Secrecy of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional

As the organisation that controls the majority of the insurgent forces in Southern Thailand, the compartmentalised structure of Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) has allowed it to maintain secrecy by granting members autonomy and flexibility to conduct attacks depending on their security environment.[117] The BRN, whose governing council is known as *Dewan Pimpinan Parti [118],* has close to 10,000 members, ranging from trained fighters, informers to supporters and sympathisers.[119] In January 2017, after the death of its spiritual leader, Sapae-ing Basor,[120] Doonloh Wae-mano became the leader of the group.[121] Doonloh was previously the secretary-general and is now living in exile in Malaysia.[122]

Signing a General Consensus on Peace Dialogue Process, the BRN has set five

---

[113] Madeleine Bowen, "Thailand: Little Prospect of Change in Deep South Violence," *Future Directions International*, September 27, 2017, http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/thailand-little-prospect-change-deep-south-violence/.
[114] Jayshree Bajoria and Carin Zissis, "The Muslim Insurgency in Southern Thailand," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 10, 2008, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/musliminsurgency-southern-thailand.
[115] "Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace," *The International Crisis Group,* November 8, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/291-jihadism-southern-thailand-phantom-menace.
[116] Amy Chew, "Terror Suspect Planning Islamic State Presence In Southern Thailand," *Channel Newsasia,* April 18, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/terror-suspect-planning-islamic-state-presence-in-thailand-10144370.

[117] Sofia Diogo Mateus, "More Guns to Increase 'Tit-For-Tat Violence' in Southern Thailand," *Dw,* 5 November 2014, https://www.dw.com/en/more-guns-to-increase-tit-for-tat-violence-in-southern-thailand/a-18039994.
[118] Wassana Nanuam and Waedao Harai, "Military Braces For Southern Flare-up," *The Bangkok Post,* https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1236182/military-braces-for-southern-flare-up.
[119] Marwaan Macan-Markar, "Thai Junta's Rush to End Southern Insurgency Leaves Villages Smoldering," *Nikkei Asian Review,* February 12, 2018, https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Thai-junta-s-rush-to-end-southern-insurgency-leaves-villages-smoldering.
[120] According to Thai officials, he was the former headmaster of a private Islamic Bakong Piittaya School.
[121] Chew, "Terror Suspect Planning Islamic State Presence in Southern Thailand," April 18, 2018.
[122] Mariyam Ahmad, "Thailand: Police Link Deep South Islamic Schools to Rebels," *Bernar News,* February 22, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/school-charges-02222018153046.html.

conditions for the continuation of talks with the Thai government. Some of the conditions included the involvement of ASEAN and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to be observers at the discussions, which was refused by the Thai government. In March 2015, representatives of five rebel groups set up the Majlis Syura Patani (MARA Patani)[123] to participate in talks with the Thai government. However, BRN was excluded from the talks, although a few of its suspended leaders joined it in their personal capacities. As a result, peace talks are still in a state of deadlock.

Traces of Islamic State in Southern Thailand?

The Thai government has refuted claims that link the separatist insurgency to IS. Likewise, many experts have also stated that there are limited prospects for an IS presence. However, from 2014 to 2016, multiple cases of IS imagery and propaganda in the possession of some insurgents were uncovered.[124] In April 2018, Awae Wae-Eya was arrested in the Cho Airong district for supporting IS ideology[125] and pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[126] However, the authorities refuted these claims.[127] Some reports even mentioned that Wae-Eya wanted to establish an IS presence in Southern Thailand to secure funds for attacking non-Muslim worship sites in Malaysia. Wae-Eya had allegedly recruited nine Malaysian men through Facebook and Telegram to carry out the attacks. However, he was dismissed as an 'internet troll',

'armchair commando'[128] and later released by the Thai authorities.

Ideologically, the Thai insurgents do not share similarities with IS[129] as they are committed to establishing a homeland for themselves, and not a transnational caliphate. However, the arrest of Wae-Eya has once again raised questions on the prospect of IS making inroads in the Deep South. Notably, Thai separatist insurgents have not engaged in suicide attacks, indiscriminate targeting and mass-casualty attacks, for fear of losing local support and legitimacy.[130] However, that does not mean that IS has not tried to reach out to prospective sympathisers in Thailand.[131] Although the nature of the conflict in Southern Thailand is still broadly ethno-nationalist, two factors might make IS attractive to the region. These include a new generation of militants who are increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress in the peace talks and the growing potential of online radicalisation.

Frustration Over Lack of Progress

A younger generation of militants may find themselves seeking alternative paths to progress that the current leadership may not support.[132] As frustration grows at the lack of progress in the peace talks, this generation may reach out to transnational groups for operational funds. As such, the insurgency could be exploited by IS as an 'alternative to Thai-Malay ethno-nationalism'.[133] However,

---

[123] The others in Mara Patani are from the Barisan Islam Pembebesan Patani (Islamic Liberation Front of Patani, BIPP), two factions of the Patani United Liberation Organisation (Pulo) and Gerakan Mujahidin Islam Patani (Patani Islamic Mujahidin Movement, GMIP).
[124] Chew, "Terror Suspect Planning Islamic State Presence in Southern Thailand," April 18, 2018; "Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace", November 8, 2017.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.

[128] An armchair commando is a local slang term for an individual who is enthusiastic about military operations but has never been in gun battles. See Matahari Ismail, "Thai Military Questions Suspected Militant Wanted by Malaysian Authorities," *Benar News,* April 18, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/Thailand-militants-04182018152909.html.
[129] Chew, "Terror Suspect Planning Islamic State Presence in Southern Thailand," April 18, 2018; Don Pathan, "Thailand's Muslim Insurgency Roars Back To Life," *Asia Times,* August 29, 2018, http://www.atimes.com/article/thailands-muslim-insurgency-roars-back-to-life/.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ismail, "Thai Military Questions Suspected Militant Wanted by Malaysian Authorities," April 18, 2018.
[132] Bodetti, "How The Thai Conflict Is Boosting Islamic State In Malaysia," October 17, 2018.
[133] "Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace," November 8, 2017

such individuals alone cannot be the basis to ascertain a changing insurgent landscape as they are not organised into a network that could challenge BRN.[134] Fears of jihadist influence based primarily on the argument that 'things can change' must be weighed against evidence that there is no appetite among the leadership of existing militant groups for affiliation with IS or like-minded groups.[135]

Online Platforms: The Next Virtual Ummah?

It is possible for YouTube to become a fertile ground for youth radicalisation in Patani.[136] According to Andre's research in 'Neojihadism and YouTube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalisation', the online propaganda aimed at Patani youths on YouTube contained almost all the 'tenets of radical Islam', with a heavier usage of Islamic and jihadist symbols than the nationalism narrative.[137] In contrast, , Telegram channels in Thailand do not contain much content about IS.[138] Existing legislation such as the Computer Crime Law could limit the propaganda materials available online. This would complement the current ban on several sites related to Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO) which has been implemented since the 2000s. Even though there have not been any confirmed and verified cases of self-radicalisation online, the door to radicalisation through YouTube among Patani youth could become a 'real danger'.[139]

---

[134] Eugene Mark, "Insurgents in Southern Thailand Aren't Jihadist," *East Asia Forum,* June 6, 2018, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/06/06/insurgents-in-southern-thailand-arent-jihadists/.
[135] "Jihadism in Southern Thailand: A Phantom Menace,"*The International Crisis Group,* November 8, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/291-jihadism-southern-thailand-phantom-menace.
[136] Virginie Andre, " 'Neojihadism' and Youtube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalization," *Asian Security* 8, no. 1 (2012): 27-53. doi:10.1080/14799855.2012.669207.
[137] Ibid.
[138] "Countering Extremism: ISIS and Its Afterlives," *RSIS,* September 28, 2017, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/RSIS_CounteringExtremism_160418-002.pdf.
[139] Andre, "'Neojihadism' And Youtube: Patani Militant Propaganda Dissemination and Radicalization," 29-36

Grand Strategy Remains Despite Tactical Shifts: Declining Violence, Not Declined Motivation

In 2018, there was a reduction in violence with a decrease in the total number of violent incidents, number of deaths and injuries. Similar to 2017, the number of incidents spiked during the Ramadan period in May 2018, reaching a height of 110 incidents[140].

The general decline in violence could partly be attributed to a major leadership transition within the BRN rebel group in early 2017, after its two founders died in May 2016 and January 2017 respectively.[141] The group's new leader, Doonloh Wae-mano alias Abdullah Wan Mat Noor was a former principal at the private Islamic Bakong Piittaya School.[142] Doonloh is known as a hardliner[143] and his leadership could have influenced change in the direction of the peace talks. Since assuming leadership, the insurgents have been ordered "to make their hits count".[144] As a result, the attacks in 2018 have shown that they are well-planned, with strong coordination through simultaneous bombings and represent growing confidence. While the general decline in violence could have stemmed from the increased checkpoints and security presence, the decline should not be mistaken as BRN's operational weakness. BRN insists that the decline in violence is not due to counterinsurgency efforts or peace talks, but depends on their discretion.

The attacks were consistent in targeting security forces, including army rangers, patrol units, camps and police posts. The civilian targets included those in key provincial leadership positions such as village chiefs. There were at least three

---

[140] Refer to the appendix for the list of total and average number of deaths and injured.
[141] Ibid.
[142] He was a former principal of headmaster of a private Islamic Bakong Piittaya School and is now living in exile in Malaysia. See Ahmad, "Thailand: Police Link Deep South Islamic Schools To Rebels," February 22, 2018.
[143] Zachary Abuza, "No End in Sight for Thailand's Deadly Southern Insurgency," *The Diplomat,* July 18, 2017, https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/no-end-in-sight-for-thailands-deadly-southern-insurgency/.
[144] Don Pathan, "Thailand's Muslim Insurgency Roars Back To Life," *Asia Times,* August 29, 2018, http://www.atimes.com/article/thailands-muslim-insurgency-roars-back-to-life/.

attacks on these individuals in leadership positions between January and February 2018. However, they subsequently declined to one to two attacks monthly. Roadside bombings and shootings remain one of the more regular tactics to target security forces and civilians. Gas tanks and explosive devices such as steel pipe bombs, M.79 grenade launchers, and M.16 rifles were used in the attacks. Aside from the roadside bombings, public places such as markets, food stalls, ATM machines, bank branches, schools, personal cars and trucks were increasingly targeted in 2018. There were also five cases of simultaneous low-impact attacks comprising of bombings and shootings in 2018.

One of the most significant bombing attacks occurred on 21 May 2018, when 16 out of 24 small-improvised explosive devices (IEDs) exploded within a 50-minute window in the provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla. The rest of the IEDs were either diffused or were deemed as hoaxes. The perpetrators were suspected to be from the Runda Kampalan Kecil (RKK), a militant squad under the control of BRN.[145] RKK, led by Bukhoree Kamso, is known to be active in the districts of Chana, Thepha, Na Thawee and Saba.[146] This was a departure from the last major simultaneous attack in April 2017 that was aimed at security officials, when 19 bombs simultaneously detonated in Narathiwat, Pattani and Songkhla.

A private Islamic school in Pattani province, the Bakong Pittaya School was found to possess anti-government paraphernalia, bomb-making materials and road-drilling equipment. Fears of using schools to spread the ideology of fighting against the Thai state and siphoning funds to finance politically-motivated violence were raised by the authorities. According to Major General Jatuporn Kalumpasutr, commander of the Pattani 46 Task Force, some of the school executives and teachers of the Bakong

Pittaya School were linked to prominent militant leaders involved in the twin bomb attack at Big C Supermarket in May 2017.[147]

Macro-analysis using data from the Deep South Database indicate a general outward shift of attacks to areas beyond the three provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani.[148] These provinces include Thepa, Than To, Chana and Na Thawi. Attacks started to venture out of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani from February to July, and September onwards.[149] The implication of the gradual expansion to the upper northwest regions of the Deep South relates to BRN's capability to hit areas beyond the 'hotspots' and show resistance against the security forces. If the gradual expansion north-westwards can be sustained, the confidence of security forces may be undermined in the long run.

Continued Crime-Terror Nexus

Flow of Weapons to pro-IS Malaysian Cells

Southern Thailand has become a haven of weapons for Malaysian militants. BRN's need for weapons has led to a flood of firearms in the black market. Sources indicate that these arms have also flowed to pro-IS Malaysians across the border.[150] Although the Malaysian police has conducted raids against local terrorist cells more frequently, the flow of arms has not been eradicated due to the number of existing Malaysia-Thai cross-border smuggling routes and the relatively porous border.[151] Detection remains tough when the firearms are dismantled and hidden in various secret compartments when being transported across the Thai-Malaysian border. The continued trend in arms smuggling is not surprising as some sources state that these weapons are sold for

---

[145] Matahari Ismail and Mariyam Ahmad, "Thai Officials: Deep South Bombings Aimed to Disrupt Ramadan, Peace Talks," *Benar News,* May 21, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/Deep-South-bombs-05212018124236.html.
[146] "Deep South Hit By Bomb Blast Blitz," *Bangkok Post,* May 22, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/report/thailand/deep-south-hit-bomb-blast-blitz.

[147] Ahmad, "Thailand: Police Link Deep South Islamic Schools to Rebels," February 22, 2018.
[148] Compiled from the monthly reports from the Deep South Watch Database, which are available on https://deepsouthwatch.org/th/dsid.
[149] Refer to Figure 3 in the appendix for a visual representation of the southern insurgency.
[150] Bodetti, "How The Thai Conflict Is Boosting Islamic State In Malaysia," October 17, 2018.
[151] Nadirah H.Rodzi, "ISIS Links Fire Up Worries About Arms Smuggling," *The Straits Times*, November 20, 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/isis-links-fire-up-worries-about-arms-smuggling.

US$710 to US$2160.[152] As weapons smuggling continues, the possibility of arms falling into the hands of IS-linked militants cannot be discounted.[153]

Drugs and Insurgency: Long-Term Symbiotic Relationship

Drug trafficking in Southern Thailand cannot be viewed in silo as it adds another layer of complexity to weapons trafficking. In June 2018, two victims were stabbed and shot by unidentified assailants. Later, the authorities revealed that the attackers were Kratom (ketum) and Methamphetamine dealers.[154] In July 2018, General Jatuporn, head of the Pattani Task Force, reported that there is evidence linking drug traffickers to insurgents as far back as 2013. By providing drug traffickers a safe passage through the Deep South in exchange for 'protection money', it is likely that drug trafficking funds the insurgents' operations and resources in a direct and indirect manner. In July 2018, arrested drug traffickers bound for Malaysia were linked to insurgents in Southern Thailand.[155] The spike in drug-related arrests from October 2017 to July 2018 concurs with General Jatuporn's suggestion of an existing 'long-term reciprocal and symbiotic relationship' between drug traffickers and insurgents. The relative ease of getting fake passports and travel documents have permitted the black market to flourish, facilitating their travel across the Thai-Malaysian border and beyond. Members of the IS-linked Santoso group arrested in Poso, Indonesia in 2014 revealed that they had also obtained their fake passports from Thailand.[156]

Rising Buddhist Extremism and Growing Marginalisation

Anti-Muslim sentiments in Thailand emanate from both domestic and external sources. Internally, changes in the new constitution in 2017 have raised concerns about the growing dominance of Buddhism in the country. This is reflected in the assistance provided to the Theravada school of Buddhism and the vow to guard Buddhism 'against all forms of desecration'.[157] The adoption of the Thai language as the main medium of instruction in Southern Thailand has side-lined Islamic education, leading to an on-going process of 'Thaification'.[158] Externally, Thailand has been hit by a wave of Buddhist extremism currently sweeping across Myanmar and Cambodia, led by the Mandalay monk Wirathu, leader of the Ma Ba Tha movement. This could result in a gradual development of an 'us-versus-them-thinking'[159] whereby the Malay-Muslim population in Southern Thailand may feel that their 'group tent' is being marginalised and in danger.

Thai Military Adopts a Mixture of Hard and Soft Measures

At the domestic level, the Thai government has adopted a mixture of several hard and soft measures to manage the separatist insurgency. The deployment of 60,000 troops with the assistance of paramilitary ranger units has allowed the army to expand its control to remote areas[160] as they are more mobile and flexible in smaller units.

The troop deployment is complemented with the enforcement of Martial Law (ML), Emergency Decree (ED) and the Internal Security Act (ISA) in the conflict areas. This

[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] "Drug Trade Adds Problems In Restive Southern Thailand," *Borneo Bulletin,* June 22, 2018, https://borneobulletin.com.bn/drug-trade-adds-to-problems-in-restive-southern-thailand/.
[155] Wilawan Watcharasakwet and Mariyam Ahmad, "Thai Police: Drug Truffickers Have Links With Southern Insurgents," *Benar News,* July 24, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/drugs-07242018140934.html.
[156] "4 Uighur Jihadists Linked to ISIS Flew to West Java Via KL, Say Indonesian Police," *The Straits Times,* September 16, 2014, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/4-uighur-jihadists-linked-to-isis-flew-to-west-java-via-kl-say-indonesian-police.

[157] Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang, "Thailand's Constitution Capitulates of Buddhist Domineering," *East Asia Forum,* January 24, 2018, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/01/24/thailands-constitution-capitulates-to-buddhist-domineering/.
[158] Joseph Liow, *Islam, Education and Reform In Southern Thailand*. Singapore, 2009.
[159] Vamilk D. Volkan, "Large Group Identity and Post Traumatic Flocking," *Psychology Tomorrow,* April 22, 2013, http://psychologytomorrowmagazine.com/large-group-identity-and-post-traumatic-flocking/.
[160] Macan-Markar, "Thai Junta's Rush to End Southern Insurgency Leaves Villages Smouldering," February 12, 2018.

provides security forces with the option of detaining 'suspicious' individuals for seven days at any location or 30 days with a court-issued warrant. For most cases, local Malay/Muslims were first detained under ML with detentions further extended by the ED while authorities prepared the warrant in the first seven days of detention.

These legislations could bolster the operations of Thai authorities in responding swiftly to identified threats and reduce or even prevent the occurrence of bombings and shootings. However, it is important for the authorities to ensure that the legitimacy and trust of the security forces are not eroded by its security operations.[161] For example, constant night raids and the disappearances of men for questioning have angered villagers in Sai Buri and Nong Chik, Pattani Province. The disappearance of at least 500 men in an attempt to escape the questioning has also raised the possibility of their links to BRN.[162]

One of the 'soft measures' includes the US$3 million rehabilitation programme - 'Bring People Home Project', which aims to encourage southern insurgents to surrender and return to their civilian life. There are currently 288 former insurgents in the programme. However, the project has yet to gain traction among villagers. Close to 500 protestors were against the plan to resettle 105 former insurgents who have recently returned from Malaysia in Tambon Sukirin, Narathiwat province.[163] Similarly, the Safety Zone initiative declared in Cho Airong in April 2018 seen limited success for Thai forces and the insurgents.[164] Although the initiative has only been agreed upon in principle, BRN has agreed to comply and refrain from conducting attacks in this 'safety zone' in order to reduce violence levels to a minimum.

At the regional level, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) could be a viable platform for Thailand and its members to participate in counter-terrorism drills. Set up in 1997, the members include India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In September 2018, a military drill that aimed to tackle terrorism in semi-urban areas was carried out in India and involved the participation of all member countries except for Thailand and Nepal.[165] Their reluctance to participate in this 'anti-China' and 'anti-Pakistan' exercise would impede future cooperation and reduce the effectiveness of this multilateral institution. However, Thailand has also participated in regional counter-terrorism efforts through the newly inaugurated initiative, Our Eyes, which was launched in January 2018. The initiative focuses on cooperation and intelligence-sharing between militaries and police forces in 6 other ASEAN nations namely - Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Brunei.[166]

Changing Dynamics?

The separatist insurgency might witness several changes in the years ahead. During the Bangkok Summit in October 2018, both the Malaysians and Thais discussed new prospects such as the inclusion of new groups and the return of Pulo-4P to the peace talks. [167] However, further progress also remains contingent on Thailand's long-awaited elections in February 2019. Regardless of the changing variables to solve the Patani equation, both sides need to show flexibility, respect and sincerity towards authentic negotiations. There is also a need for active cooperation in tackling the illicit weapon trade between the two borders. As such, moving the focus from peace talks

[161] Shinhatro, 2018.

[162] Macan-Markar, "Thai Junta's Rush to End Southern Insurgency Leaves Villages Smouldering," February 12, 2018.

[163] Mariyam Ahmad, "Thai Deep South Villagers Reject Military's Project to Resettle Former Insurgents," Benar News, May 1, 2018, https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/Thailand-militants-05012018161510.html

[164] Wassana Nanuam, "Joint Panel to Oversee Safety Zone Plan," The Bangkok Post, April 30, 2018, https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/1454846/joint-panel-to-oversee-safety-zone-plan.

[165] They chose to play the observers instead.

[166] James Massola, "Christopher Pyne Backs Australia Joining Asia's 'Our Eyes' Intelligence Group," The Sydney Morning Herald, October 11, 2018, https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/christopher-pyne-backs-australia-joining-asia-s-our-eyes-intelligence-group-20181011-p5092t.html.

[167] M.Veera Pandiyan, "Lets Give Peace Another Chance," The Star Online, October 31, 2018, https://www.thestar.com.my/opinion/columnists/along-the-watchtower/2018/10/31/lets-give-peace-another-chance-the-prospects-of-ending-the-violence-in-thailands-deep-south-remain-b/.

towards cooperation between Malaysian and Thailand's security forces is an equally vital for a solution to the Patani equation.

SINGAPORE

In 2018, the Southeast Asian region witnessed several terrorist attacks and related developments that remained a cause of concern for Singapore due to geographical proximity. While there has not yet been a terrorist attack in Singapore, there remains an active threat of self-radicalisation from online propaganda, recruiters and cells. In 2018, multiple cases of self-radicalisation of both local nationals and foreigners were witnessed. Even though the country has strong social harmony and community resilience, there is a need for further policies governing online radicalisation to prevent any disruptions to the social fabric.

Self-Radicalisation: Threat of Online Extremist Propaganda

The battle of hearts and minds has become more rigorous as an increasing number of individuals are self-radicalised. According to Minster of Home Affairs, K Shanmugam,11 Singaporeans were arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) from 2007 to 2014. However, from 2015 to August 2018, 20 individuals were dealt with under the Internal Security Act. The internet played an integral role in their radicalization. This typology of extremists presents 'complex psychological and social issues' with governments and scholars still in the process of developing the right tools to rehabilitate them. The issue of combatting ideology came to the fore in Singapore after members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) were detained in 2001. Since 2007, close to 90% of JI detainees have been released as compared to only a quarter of non-JI detainees who were released. In 2018, Singapore continued to experience the threat of online and self-radicalisation on two fronts: (i) locals and (ii) foreigners.

Self-radicalised individuals are often those who turn to the internet for answers, develop friendships with like-minded individuals and then, in some cases, propagate the extremist narrative in hopes of recruiting others. Some find themselves in 'a twisted turn from well-

meaning intentions' as they stumble upon materials and are then misguided by foreign extremist preachers. According to an exclusive media interview with three Internal Security Act (ISA) detainees, the extremist narratives resonated with them, especially as it related to oppression and persecution of Muslims in the Middle East.[168] Topics that the foreign extremist preachers commonly discuss include the Yemeni-American Anwar Al-Awlaki, who had links to AQ and was killed in an airstrike in 2011.

On the first front, self-radicalisation by online extremist propaganda has been gaining traction among local nationals. In April 2018, authorities detained 27-year-old parking warden, Mohamed Faishal Mohd Razali, after he was radicalised online as early as 2017.[169] His initial intention was to build his religious knowledge, but came across foreign preachers like Awlaki during the process, which spurred his radicalisation. The constant indoctrination convinced Faishal that waging armed violence was religiously justified and he began to see it as an act of penitence.[170] Despite not receiving any support from his family and friends, he believed that fighting in Syria to defend Sunni Muslims was justified. In another case, 33-year-old information technology engineer, Ahmed Hussein Abdul Kadir, turned to the internet to seek religious knowledge in 2013.[171] An echo-chamber of extreme religious content online led him to believe that the use of violence in the name of religion was his duty. By late 2016, he was

---

[168] Faris Mokhtar, "Confused, Misguided and Troubled: 3 Former ISA Detainees Reveal How They Became Radicalised," *Today Online*, August 06, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/confused-misguided-and-troubled-3-former-isd-detainees-reveal-how-they-became-radicalised.

[169] "Radicalised Singaporean Parking Warden Detained under Internal Security Act: MHA," *Channel Newsasia*, May 11, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/radicalised-singaporean-parking-warden-detained-under-isa-10224912.

[170] Seow Bei Yi, "Self-radicalised Parking Warden Detained under ISA," *The Straits Times*, May 12, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/self-radicalised-parking-warden-detained-under-isa. .

[171] "Radicalised Singaporean IT Engineer Detained under Internal Security Act: MHA," *Channel Newsasia*, September 12, 2018, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/radicalised-singaporean-it-engineer-detained-isa-islamic-state-10708614.

prepared to fight for IS in Syria and Iraq and die as a martyr. Ahmed made regular contact with foreign pro-IS individuals on social media and persuaded his foreign online contacts to follow the same radical ideologues in hopes that they would become IS supporters too.

On the second front, Singapore faces the threat of online radicalisation of foreigners employed in the country. In January 2018, 33-year-old Malaysian, Muhammad Nur Hanief bin Abdul Jalil who worked as a driver with a local airfreight center was arrested under ISA. He was repatriated to Malaysia in February 2018.[172] Hanief had access to the Changi Airfreight Centre that provides airfreight services to Changi Airport. His process of radicalisation started when he read extremist propaganda progressively from 2008 onwards. Sustained exposure led him to believe that he should travel to Syria or Palestine to fight. In late 2017, a series of setbacks in his professional and personal life led him to decide to act on his plan. Other than IS, he was prepared to join other groups, such as the Free Syrian Army and HTS, as he believed that all these groups would ultimately unite at the 'end-of-times'.

Counter-Terrorism Measures

Today, cyberspace has become a battlefield for hearts and minds. The threat of online extremist propaganda is further compounded with the issue of deliberate online falsehoods. While concrete measures to curb the proliferation of fake news are still underway, there is a need to focus on counter-narratives in order to safeguard society from online radicalisation.

Drawing lessons from countries such as Myanmar, India and Sri Lanka, online falsehoods have become an apparatus to sow discord and extremism, leading to communal riots[173]. The proliferation of

disinformation has converted the cyberspace to a 'fertile ground for hate-mongering'. According to Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen, "a fake news campaign can stir unrest and incite Singaporeans to distrust one another. Physical attacks can occur too, from terrorists bent on killing and injuring as many innocent civilians as they can."[174] In January 2018, a Select Committee was set up to tackle the issue of deliberate online falsehoods, and later in September, the Committee put up a 279-page report that detailed its recommendations.[175] While the outcome of the proposals are still pending, the government has been working closely with the technology companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter to curb the spread of 'fake news'. To this end, the public has been informed to discern real news and information to prevent misinformation that could breed unnecessary racial or religious tensions.

The threat of self-radicalisation in the online space calls for stringent preventive and counter-measures – both hard and soft approaches. Community resilience is continuously enhanced by the government as one of the key solutions to mitigate this phenomenon. In March 2018, the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a volunteer group of Muslim clerics and religious scholars, launched the Youth Awareness Program – a series of lectures that cover topics such as Islamic values, appreciating diversity in Islam, Muslims in a plural society and how to resist the influence of radical and extremist ideologies. The initiative, targeted those aged 16 to 25, and seeks to revive the traditional culture of learning where a teacher and student meet to impart knowledge. In combating online radicalisation, the RRG

---

[172] Seow Bei Yi, "Self-radicalised Malaysian Man with Access to Changi Airfreight Centre Arrested and Repatriated: MHA," *The Straits Times*, February 9, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/self-radicalised-msian-man-with-access-to-changi-airfreight-centre-arrested-and.
[173] Nur Asyiqin Mohamad Salleh, "Journalists Describe How Fake News Sparked Violence and Suspicion," *The Straits Times*. June 26, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/journalists-

describe-how-fake-news-sparked-violence-and-suspicion.
[174] "Be It Fighting Terrorism or Curbing Fake News, Everyone Has a Part to Play: Defence Minister," *Today Online*, February 14, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/be-fighting-terrorism-or-curbing-fake-news-everyone-has-part-play-defence-minister.
[175] Faris Mokhtar, "Select Committee Proposes Wide-ranging Measures to Counter Online Falsehoods, including New Laws and Criminal Sanctions, " *Today Online*, September 20, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/select-committee-proposes-wide-ranging-measures-counter-online-falsehoods-including-new.

continues to focus on current content so that the youths who search for religious knowledge on the internet are able to find credible sources instead of being channelled to extremist sites.[176]

While constant and rigorous efforts are being made to further strengthen community resilience, the authorities have also stepped up physical measures to address the terrorist threat. In May 2018, Parliament passed the Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act, granting special powers to the police, which can be used only with the authorisation of the Home Affairs Minister. These powers allow the disabling of drones, withdrawal of telecommunication services, and mandates building owners and civilians to cooperate with the Singapore Police Force.[177] The Act also includes the Communication Stop Order, whereby members of the public are prohibited to make or disseminate videos, audios, pictures or text messages regarding ongoing security operations.[178] Putting it into effect prevents any leakage of sensitive or tactical information that can endanger lives of security officers and people on site.[179] Singapore's security measures are continuously improved and buttressed as the threat looms closer to home.

Muh Nahdohdin is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Radicalism and Deradicalisation Studies, an NGO based in Indonesia. He contributed on Indonesia and can be reached at jayaningurip@gmail.com.

Desca Angelianawati is a Research Assistant at the Center for Radicalism and Deradicalisation Studies, an NGO based in Indonesia. She contributed on Indonesia and can be reached at descaang@gmail.com. Ardi Putra Prasetya is a Postgraduate Student at the University of Indonesia. He contributed on Indonesia and can be reached at ardi.putra.prasetya@gmail.com.

Kenneth Yeo Yaoren is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He contributed on the Philippines and can be reached at kyeo026@e.ntu.edu.sg.

Jennifer Dhanaraj is a Research Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. She contributed on Malaysia and can be reached at jenn0027@e.ntu.edu.sg.

Iftekharul Bashar is an Associate Research Fellow with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He contributed on Myanmar and can be reached at isiftekharul@ntu.edu.sg.

Sylvene See is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. She contributed on Thailand and can be reached at sylvene001@e.ntu.edu.sg.

Amalina Abdul Nasir is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. She contributed on Singapore and can be reached at isamalina@ntu.edu.sg.

---

[176] Toh Ee Ming, "Youth Self-radicalisation a Concern: Shanmugam," *Today Online*, March 13, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/youth-self-radicalisation-concern-shanmugam.

[177] Jose Hong, "Act That Expands Police Powers Comes into Force on May 16," *The Straits Times*, May 15, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/act-that-expands-police-powers-comes-into-force-on-may-16.

[178] Kelly Ng, "What You Need to Know about the Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Bill," *Today Online*, February 27, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/what-you-need-know-about-public-order-and-safety-special-powers-bill.

[179] "Singapore Proposes Measure to Bar Communications from Terror Attack Sites, Sixteen Schools Do Away with Primary 1 Exams," *Asia One,* February 27, 2018, http://www.asiaone.com/singapore/singapore-proposes-measure-bar-communications-terror-attack-sites.
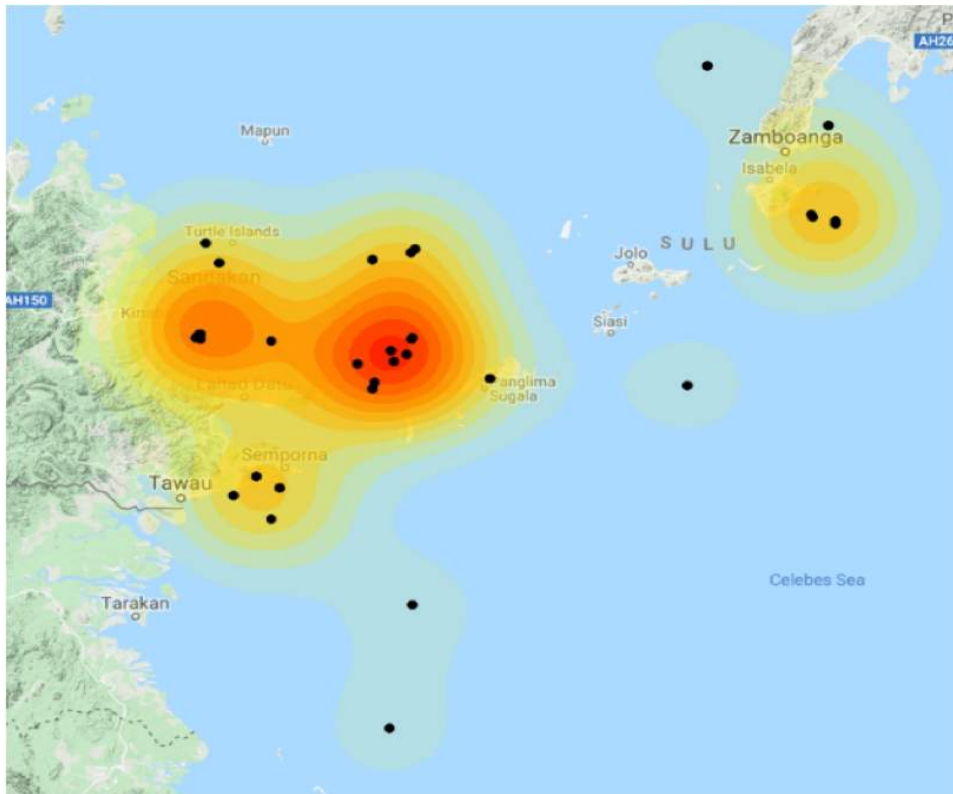
.

Appendix (Philippines)

Figure 1: Heat-Density Map of Piracy Activities at the Sulu Sea since 2014[1]

Appendix (Thailand)

Year	Total no of incidents	Average number of incidents/month	Total number of death	Average no of death/month	Total number who were injured	Average no of injured/month
2016 [2]	506	**50.6**	184	**18.4**	396	**39.6**
2017	588	**58.8**	250	**25.5**	374	**37.4**
2018	449	**44.9**	174	**17.4**	232	**23.2**

Figure 2: Total and average number of deaths and injured in southern Thailand[3]

---

[1] ReCAAP, "Interactive Incident Report" (ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre),
https://portal.recaap.org/OpenMap; David Kahle and Hadley Wickham, *R - Package "Ggmap,"* R Studio, *CRAN*.
[2] Only data for 7 months in 2016 is available. Figures for 2018 are only from January to October.
[3] Compiled from the monthly reports from the Deep South Watch Database which are available on
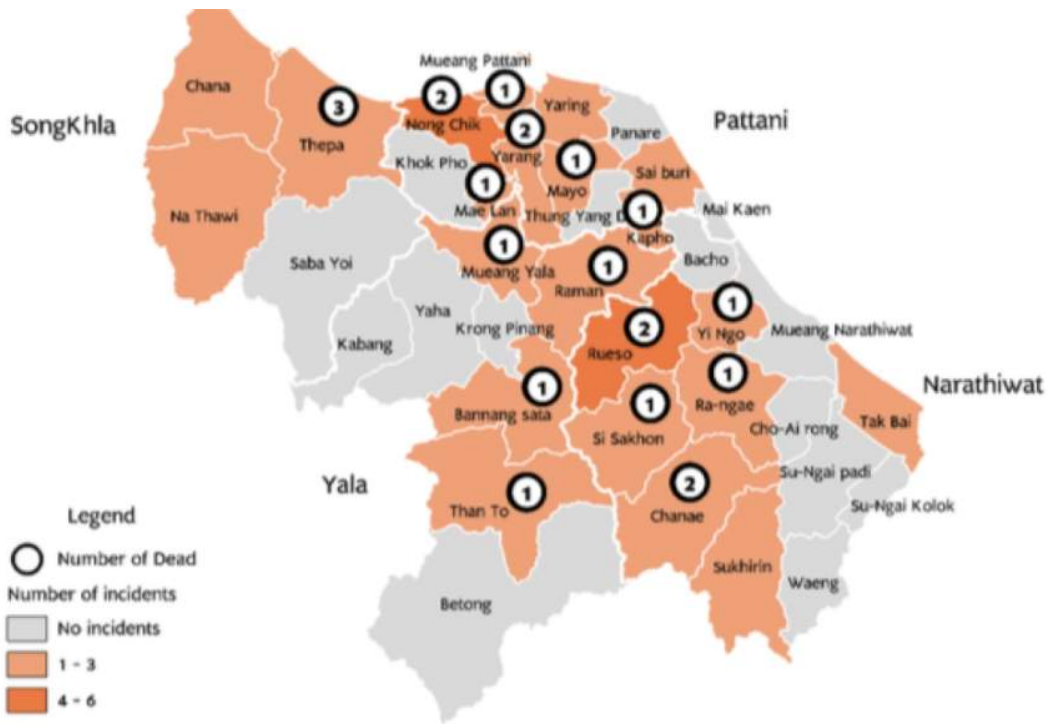https://deepsouthwatch.org/th/dsid.

Figure 3: A detailed map of the southern insurgency[4]

---

[4] "Summary of Incidents in Southern Thailand in September 2018," *Deep South Watch,* October 5, 2018, https://deepsouthwatch.org/sites/default/files/blogs/attachment/datasheet-092018-en.pdf

SOUTH ASIA
Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

AFGHANISTAN

2018 marked seventeen years of the US war in Afghanistan and one year of US President Donald Trump's Afghanistan and South Asia policy that envisaged a condition-driven military approach to push the Taliban to the negotiation table. However, Trump's announcement to drawdown 7,000 troops from Afghanistan and the subsequent retraction from the White House indicates Washington's growing frustration with the lack of progress in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the three-day Eid ceasefire agreement in June and the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US chief negotiator in September to politically engage the Taliban have enthused a new life in the on-off reconciliation process. This year, the trajectory of peace talks has changed from an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process to direct US-Taliban negotiations. In the face of the Taliban's battlefield successes and territorial gains, and shrinking control of the National Unity Government (NUG), a politically negotiated settlement is the only way out of the war. But the process remains challenging. In 2019, the outcome of the presidential elections and the US decision to stay or pull out from Afghanistan will determine the direction of the peace process, political stability and the future of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Security

After spending US $1.07 trillion and losing 2,372 soldiers, the longest and the most costly war in America's history has gone from bad to worst.[1] The Vietnam War that claimed 58,200 American military lives was the deadliest in American history.[2] The surge of 4,000 troops announced in August 2017 took the total number of US soldiers stationed in Afghanistan to 14,000 along with 27,000 contractors, of which 10,000 are American citizens.[3] Currently, the US maintains military presence "primarily at bases in Kabul and Bagram with regional outstations in Nangarhar Province in the east, Kandahar Province in the south, Herat Province in the west, and Balkh Province in the north." [4]

Under the new strategy, the US carried out as many as 1,064 airstrikes in Afghanistan to reverse the momentum of the Taliban's battlefield victories and territorial gains. The strategy also aimed to deny them a military victory so as to push them to the negotiation table.[5]

In 2018[6], according to Pajhwok, as many as 16,000 people were killed and 11,000 were wounded in 2,400 attacks, registering a rise of 7% compared to 2017. This means 73 people were killed daily in Afghanistan in 2018. Around 14,600 people lost their lives and 16,010 were injured in 2,390 attacks in 2017. Faryab was the most affected province in Afghanistan with 258 attacks, followed by Nangarhar (242), Helmand (152), Ghazni (112), Farah (112), Kandahar (111) and Kabul (100), respectively. The remaining

---

[1] Simon Tisdall, "The US And Afghanistan: Can't Win The War, Can't Stop It, Can't Leave," *The Guardian,* May 1, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/01/the-us-and-afghanistan-cant-win-the-war-cant-stop-it-cant-leave.
[2] Jeff Stein, "Donald Trump' Desire to Get the Hell Out of Afghanistan Amid Taliban Gains Could Lead to Catastrophe," *Newsweek*, September 21, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/2018/10/26/donald-trump-get-hell-out-afghanistan-amid-taliban-gains-catastrophe-1132203.html.
[3] Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy," *Congressional Research Service,* November 1, 2018, p.10.
[4] "Enhancing The Security And Stability In Afghanistan," *US Department of Defense*, December 2018, p.3, https://media.defense.gov/2018/Dec/20/2002075158/-1/-1/1/1225-REPORT-DECEMBER-2018.PDF.
[5] "Afghanistan Report: Reported US Covert Actions 2018," *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/drone-war/data/afghanistan-reported-us-covert-actions-2018.
[6] Refer to Figure 1 in the appendix for the number of causalities resulting from terrorist attacks in Afghanistan in 2018.

1,257 attacks were reported in other provinces, barring Bamyan.[7]

The Taliban have exerted pressure on the Afghan government by expanding in the rural areas, capturing abandoned check posts, hitting urban centres with high profile attacks and briefly capturing two provincial capitals in Ghazni and Farah.[8] In the first nine months of 2018, a 38 per cent rise in suicide attacks was witnessed in Afghanistan, compared to the same period last year. Around 28,529 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSFs) have been killed since 2015 in Afghanistan. In 2018, the average casualty rate of the Afghan soldier was 30-40 killings per day, or 175 a week, or more than 9,000 a year.[9] This figure was 5,000 in 2015 and 6,700 in 2016 and 10,000 in 2017. The ANDSFs are also suffering recruitment shortfalls, desertions and gaps in military capabilities.[10]

In August, Afghanistan's Defence Minister Tariq Shah Barhami, Interior Minister Wais Barmak, the Spy Chief Masoom Stanakzai and Security Adviser Hanfi Atmar resigned from their posts due to the worsening security situation.[11] This year, the most devastating blow to the NUG came in October when a Taliban infiltrator killed the most influential anti-Taliban commander and Kandahar police chief General Raziq along with the local intelligence chief in the governor's compound, during a high-level meeting. The commander of the US forces in Afghanistan General Scott Miller was also present in the meeting and escaped unhurt but another US general was wounded.[12] The Afghan military and police are fighting a 'static war,' guarding check posts, government offices, highways and military bases, while the Taliban have been more dynamic and free to pick their targets.[13]

Non-state Violent Actors

I. Taliban

Since the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan in 2014, the war in Afghanistan has been in a "stalemate." However, an indefinite stalemate is very difficult to sustain for a foreign power, and it is financially and politically draining. According to a Pew Research survey, almost half (49%) of the American public believes that the US has failed to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan.[14]

From the insurgent's perspective, a strategic stalemate is a victory of sorts.[15] The Taliban believe they have weathered Trump's strategy of bombing them into negotiations.[16] It has emboldened them to keep fighting until they convince or compel the US to withdraw from Afghanistan.[17] Moreover, the stalemate has allowed the Taliban to swell their numbers from 25,000 to 75,000—including passive supporters, regulars and auxiliary fighters—along with attaining control in 59 districts (14.5%) and having influence in 119 districts (29.2%).[18] As per the estimates of

[7] Ahmad Shah Erfanyar, "2018 Casualties Indicate 7 Percent Surge," *Pajhwok,* January 3, 2018, https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/01/03/2018-casualties-indicate-7-percent-surge.
[8] Pamela Constable, "The Taliban Has Successfully Built A Parallel State In Many Parts Of Afghanistan, Report Says," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/06/21/the-taliban-has-successfully-built-a-parallel-state-in-many-parts-of-afghanistan-report-says/?utm_term=.2e0262d5bfd7.
[9] Rod Nordland, "The Death Toll For Afghan Forces Is Secret. Here Is Why?" *New York Times*, September 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/21/world/asia/afghanistansecurity-casualties-taliban.html
[10] "Afghan Forces Shrink Sharply-US Watchdog," *BBC News*, May 1, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-43961408.
[11] Rupam Jain, "Afghanistan's Four Top Security Officials Resign—Government Sources," *Reuters,* August 26, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-politics-security-idUSKCN1LA0R6

[12] "The Afghan Commander Raizq Killed In Kandahar Gun Attack," *BBC*, October 19, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45899845.
[13] Ryan Browne,"17 Years In, Afghan War At Stalemate," *CNN,* November 28, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/27/politics/us-afghan-war-stalemate/index.html.
[14] "About Half Of The Public Says The U.S. Has 'Mostly Failed' In Afghanistan," *Strategic Research*, October 4, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/05/after-17-years-of-war-in-afghanistan-more-say-u-s-has-failed-than-succeeded-in-achieving-its-goals/ft_18-10-05_afghanistan_abouthalfofthepublic/.
[15] Stein, "Donald Trump' Desire to Get the Hell Out of Afghanistan Amid Taliban Gains Could Lead to Catastrophe," September 21, 2018.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Michael Sample, "The Taliban's Battle Plan," *Foreign Affairs*, November 28, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2018-11-28/talibans-battle-plan.
[18] Saeed Shah, Craig Nelson and Sami Yousafzai, "U.S. Faces Newly Muscular Taliban in Peace-Talk

the US government, the Taliban number has increased from 20,000 to 60,000 in 2018.[19] According to the veteran Afghan watcher and visiting professor at King's College London, Antonio Giustozzi, the Taliban's numerical strength is around 60,000 to 150,000—including full-time fighters, part-time militias, support personnel involved in intelligence, logistics, propaganda, justice and other aspects of civilian administration.[20] The movement has broadened beyond its ethnic base to include Uzbeks and Tajiks in its 30-member *Rahbari Shura* (Leadership Council).

The above-mentioned situation has forced the US to reassess its military strategy in Afghanistan.[21] The lack of progress and failure to reverse the momentum of the Taliban's military victories has frustrated President Trump who was inclined to revert to his pre-election position of withdrawing from Afghanistan.[22] After assuming power, he was convinced that staying the course in Afghanistan with a moderate troop surge and a tough line against Pakistan to destroy Taliban sanctuaries will force the insurgents to rethink their strategy and they may engage in political reconciliation.[23]

Al-Khandaq Summer Offensive

In 2018, the Taliban launched Operation *Al-Khandaq* (the Battle of Trenches)—named after Prophet Muhammad's historical battle of Medina in 627 AD in which Arab and Jewish forces outnumbered the Muslims but still they prevailed.[24] The Taliban announced that they

aimed to target the US and Afghan force while avoiding civilians. In the *Al-Khandaq* offensive, the Taliban made steady gains in the central and northern provinces, once under Kabul's firm control.[25] They further solidified their grip in southern Afghanistan, which is considered the insurgency's stronghold. In November, they made inroads into the Shiite populated areas of Ghazni, an anti-Taliban stronghold south of Kabul, triggering panic and demonstrations in Kabul.[26]

These territorial gains have given the Taliban enough confidence that their key leaders Mullah Yaqoob, son of the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Omar, and the deputy of present Taliban chief Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, finance chief Gul Agha Ishaqzai and military chief Khalifa Ibrahim Haqqani spend most of their time in Afghanistan, particularly in southern Helmand province.[27]

In the *Al-Khandaq* offensive, the Taliban have rejigged their operational and tactical strategies. Instead of assaulting provincial capitals in which they lost large numbers of fighters and failed to retain control, the Taliban have focused on expanding in rural areas as a way to encircle the urban centres.[28] The Taliban offensive has forced the ANDSFs to abandon isolated check-posts in rural areas and retreat to provincial capitals to fortify defence of key areas and cut down the high casualty rate.[29] At the

---

Efforts," *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-faces-newly-muscular-taliban-in-peace-talk-efforts-1541413803.
[19] Rupert Stone, "The US is Greatly Downplaying The Size of the Afghan Taliban," *TRT World*, January 7, 2019, https://www.trtworld.com/asia/the-us-is-greatly-downplaying-the-size-of-the-afghan-taliban-23152.
[20] Antonio Giustozzi, "Afghanistan" Taliban's Organization and Future," *Land Info*, August 23, 2017, https://landinfo.no/asset/3589/1/3589_1.pdf.
[21] Idrees Ali and Jonathan Landay, "Trump Frustrated With Stalemate In Afghanistan," *Dawn*, July 12, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1419523.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Bill Roggio, "Taliban Announces Onset Of Al Khandaq Jihadi Operations," *Long War Journal*, April 25, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/04/tali

ban-announces-onset-of-al-khandaq-jihadi-operations.php.
[25] "Why Is Afghanistan More Dangerous Than Ever?" *BBC News*, September 14, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45507560.
[26] Sample, "The Taliban's Battle Plan," November 28, 2018.
[27] Shah, Nelson and Yousafzai, "U.S. Faces Newly Muscular Taliban in Peace-Talk Efforts," November 5, 2018.
[28] Thomas, "Afghanistan: Background and US Policy," November 1, 2018, p.7.
[29] Instead of deploying troops to man check posts or facilities in the far-flung rural areas, the US has urged the Afghan troops to concentrate their numbers in the provincial capitals and urban centres to avoid high casualty rate and minimize losses. Moreover, it is difficult to send reinforcements and ammunitions in far-off areas once the Taliban attack a particular neighbourhood in large numbers. The Kabul government is now following ink spot strategy to keep control of the district centres and provide services which will increase the government control

same time, the Taliban also retain the capability of carrying out high-profile attacks in urban centres at will. The Taliban demonstrated this in early 2018 when Kabul was rocked by devastating attacks daily.[30]

The Taliban have also become adept at using social media platforms and messenger-apps to communicate, recruit new fighters and disseminate their propaganda swiftly.[31] The videos and pictures of Taliban offensives capturing new areas and forcing government forces to surrender are widely circulated to boost the morale of the fighters. These well-choreographed images and videos create an impression that victory is near and thus fuels new recruitment and funding.[32]

Eroding the NUG's Control Through Governance and Diplomacy

The Taliban are also working to weaken the control of the NUG through non-militaristic means. In a way, they are preparing for a life beyond war and insurgency by focusing on governance. Former Taliban chief, the late Akhtar Mansoor, introduced these changes in the insurgent movement.[33] The strategy is to out-govern the NUG and show off their administrative and political skills as well. It is part of their propaganda effort to win 'the heart and minds' of the masses.[34]

For instance, ahead of any offensive, the Taliban forewarn the ANDSFs deployed at different check-posts to abandon their posts

to save their lives.[35] Similarly, in 2018, the Taliban have reached out to powerful Soviet-era jihadists such Ismail Khan in Herat and Atta Muhammad Nur in Balkh to cut deals in exchange for protection and a place in the coming Islamic Emirate.[36]

Moreover, the Taliban have co-opted aid-projects and government institutions to promote governance and earn the loyalty of the local population. Once their influence grows in a particular town, they impose their rules and recruit a force of civilian servants.[37] In areas under their control or influence, the Taliban are managing schools, hospitals, courts and collecting taxes and utility bills.[38] The frustration of common Afghans with the NUG's bad governance and dysfunctionality has made the process easier for the Taliban. Instead of attacking state symbols and resources, the Taliban are recapturing and redirecting them to meet their objectives and people's needs.[39]

At the same time, the Taliban are also using their political office in Qatar to gain international legitimacy and increase their diplomatic relations. The Taliban are positioning themselves as Afghanistan's rightful rulers.[40] Now, the Taliban have working relationships with Russia, Iran, China, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Central Asian Republics (CARs), not to mention Pakistan.[41] At the Moscow summit on Afghan

outwards to connect to other government-controlled areas.

[30] "Kabul Residents In Shock After Deadly Wave Of Violence," *DW,* January 31, 2018, https://www.dw.com/en/kabul-residents-in-shock-after-wave-of-violence/a-42392793.

[31] "Propaganda War between Taliban and Afghan Government," *Al-Jazeera*, March 2, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/propaganda-war-taliban-afghan-government-180302121010435.html.

[32] Austin Bodetti, "Taliban's Massive Social Media Presence That's Being Ignored," *Al-Arabay*, November 20, 2017, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/11/22/the-talibans-massive-social-media-presence-thats-being-ignored.

[33] Ashley Jackson, "Life Under The Taliban And Shadow Government," *Overseas Development Institute*, June 21, 2018, p.8, https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12269.pdf.

[34] Ibid, p.14.

[35] Michael Sample, "Afghanistan's Islamic Emirate Returns: Life Under the a Resurgent Taliban," *World Politics Review*, September 18, 2018, https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/25970/afghanistan-s-islamic-emirate-returns-life-under-a-resurgent-taliban.

[36] Sample, "The Taliban's Battle Plan," November 28, 2018.

[37] Jackson, "Life Under the Taliban And Shadow Government," June 21, 2018, p.8.

[38] Abdul Qadir Sediqi, "Taliban Tax-Collectors Help Tighten Insurgents' Grip In Afghanistan," *Reuters*, November 6, 2018, https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKCN1NB1AG.

[39] Mujib Mashal And Najim Rahim, "Taliban Collecting Bills For Afghan Utilities, Tap New Resources," *New York Times,* January 28, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/28/world/asia/taliban-collecting-electricity-bills-afghan.html.

[40] Sample, "The Taliban's Battle Plan," November 28, 2018.

[41] "China, Russia, Pakistan Joining Hands On Afghan Problem: Report," *Economic Times*, July 12, 2018, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/

Peace, India—a long-time nemesis of the Taliban—shared a table with them (unofficially) indicating widespread acceptance of the insurgent movement.[42]

II. Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK)

ISK, the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group's formal franchise in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area is the most brutal iteration of the terror group. In a few years, ISK has earned the reputation of a formidable terrorist group in Afghanistan's competitive militant landscape. ISK has carried out terrorist attacks in Afghanistan's urban centres, particularly targeting the Shiite population, the government and foreign-affiliated targets. Since its emergence, ISK has carried out as many as 211 terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, including 119 in Nangarhar and 52 in Kabul and 20 in Jawzjan—leaving 1,511 people dead and 3,220 others wounded.[43]

Presently, ISK is headquartered in the strategically-located eastern Nangarhar province, the transit route of the lucrative drug trade, near Pakistan's border. ISK has two main factions: (a) the Pakistani faction primarily comprising former TTP militants residing in eastern and north-eastern Afghanistan, and (b) the Uzbek faction based in northern Afghanistan, particularly Jawzjan province.

As of 2018, ISK has 4,000 to 6,000 members present in small clusters and cells in 30 different districts of Afghanistan. Of these, 3,500 to 4,000 are in the east and 1,500 to 2,000 are in the north.[44] The military defeats and territorial losses of IS in Iraq and Syria have strengthened ISK. The group has benefited from the inflows of returning fighters from the Middle East. According to a report of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), around 67 members from the IS-core have relocated to eastern Afghanistan between December 2017 and March 2018.[45] Meanwhile, the total number of IS foreign fighters who previously fought in Iraq and Syria and have moved to Afghanistan is between 300 and 400.[46] In March, a pro-ISK group, Al-Qastantiyyah Foundation, launched a recruitment campaign on the Telegram messaging app showcasing ISK's mobilisation in Nangarhar and Jawzjan.

ISK's alliances with like-minded militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Almi (LJA), Jandullah, Lashkar-e-Islam (LI), dissident TTP factions such as Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have also strengthened ISK's footprint and geographical outreach in Afghanistan. The geographical distribution of ISK attacks from Kabul to Jalalabad in Afghanistan and Quetta to Peshawar in Pakistan is an indication of the extent of the group's geographical outreach through these alliances.[47]

The Nangarhar faction of ISK primarily comprises Pashtun fighters from Pakistan and Afghanistan and is led by a former Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) commander, Sheikh Aslam Farooqi. Despite losing three *emirs* (chiefs) in 2017 and territorial footholds in the US and Afghan forces' operations and turf wars with the Afghan Taliban, ISK has proved resilient with tremendous regenerative capacity.[48] The rise of Farooqi has been a stabilising factor for ISK. He has not only evaded the US drone attacks unlike his predecessors but managed to plan and execute high profile attacks as well.[49]

sign-of-worry-for-india-china-russia-pakistan-joining-hands-on-afghan-problem-says-report/articleshow/57985232.cms.

[42] Zeenat Saberin And Shereena Qazi, "Afghan Peace Conference: India Shares Table With Taliban," *Al-Jazeera*, November 9, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/afghan-peace-conference-india-shares-table-taliban-181109092419577.html.

[43] Amira Jadoon, "Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *CTC West Point*, December 2018, p.11, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/12/Allied-Lethal.pdf.

[44] "Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," *United Nations Security Council,* May 30, 2018, p.13.

[45] "Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," May 30, 2018, p.15.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Interview with Farhan Zahid, an independent researcher tacking different militant and insurgent groups in South Asia, October 16, 2018; In Afghanistan, ISK has carried out attacks in Kabul, Nangarhar, Jawzjan, Herat, Paktia, Ghor, Sar-i-Pul, Baghlan, Balkh, Feroz Koh, Ghazni, Helmand, Kunar, Logar, Nuristan and Zabul.

[48] The first emir of IKS Hafiz Saeed Khan Orakzai was killed in a drone attack in July 2016, his successor Maulvi Abdul Hasib Logari in April 2017, and Abu Sayed Al-Bajauri was killed in July 2017.

[49] "Pakistan's ISI Behind The Appointment Of New ISIS Chief In Afghanistan: Uzbekistani," *Khama*

This faction frequently shuttles between Kunar and Nangrhar to evade security operations. In the east and northeast, it is present in Nangarhar, Kunar, Paktika, Paktia, Logar and Khost.[50] ISK command and control remains within the southern belt of Nangarhar. The group has not only received recruits from other militant groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan but also attracted self-radicalised youths through different social media platforms.[51] This year, ISK benefited from the inclusion of two defecting factions of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jasih-e-Muhamamd (JeM).[52] In 2018, the ISK Farooqi faction and the Afghan Taliban adopted a conciliatory approach towards each other which has allowed the former to stage some spectacular attacks in Afghanistan's urban centres and hold its ground.[53]

However, Farooqi's appointment created a split between the Pakistani and Uzbek militants of ISK. Following his appointment, an IMU commander Moawiya Uzbekistani relocated to northern Afghanistan with most of the Central Asia militants. In the north, ISK has a varied footprint in Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-i Pul, Samangan, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan.[54] ISK's sanctuaries in northern Afghanistan have served as conduits to attract foreign militants from Central Asia and North Caucus into Afghanistan. According to Afghan Vice-President Rashid Dostum, "there are nearly 7,500 foreign IS fighters, including Chechens, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese and Libyans who are waiting to enter into northern Afghanistan." [55]

The Moawaiya faction was strengthened when a dissident Taliban commander Qari Hekmatullah—an ethnic Uzbek, from Jawzjan's Darzab district, joined the group with his 350 fighters. The Moawiya faction has engaged in fierce clashes with the Afghan security forces and the Taliban.[56] Hekmatullah was killed in April 2018 in Faryab province and Maulvi Habib-ur-Rehman replaced him and continued to support ISK. In August, Rehman and his deputy, Mufti Nematullah, along with 150 fighters surrendered to Afghan security forces in Drazab.[57]

III.   Al-Qaeda Central (AQC)

In 2018, Al-Qaeda Central (AQC) continued to lie low focusing on reorganisation and reorientation of its jihadist approach. Currently, the group is in the re-adaptation phase, particularly after the defeat of its jihadist nemesis, the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria. AQC leaders are deemphasising global jihad and are focusing on a "glocalisation" of jihad.[58] The group lends ideological support to local militant groups in South Asia from its bases in Afghanistan. In a way, AQC is trying to reunify the global jihadist movement and control the damage since the split of the movement in June 2014.[59]

Press, June 7, 2017, https://www.khaama.com/pakistans-isi-behind-appointment-of-new-isis-chief-in-afghanistan-uzbekistani-02884/.

[50] Farhan Zahid, "Islamic State Emboldened in Afghanistan," *James Town Foundation* 16, no.12 (2018), https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-emboldened-in-afghanistan/.

[51] Sudha Ratan, "The Trump Administration's New Afghan Problem: The Islamic State," *The Diplomat,* April 3, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/the-trump-administrations-new-afghan-problem-the-islamic-state/.

[52] "Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," May 30, 2018, p.16-17.

[53] Antonio Giustozzi, "Taliban and Islamic State: Enemies or Brother in Jihad?" *Centre for Research and Policy Analysis*, December 15, 2017, https://www.crpaweb.org/single-post/2017/12/15/Enemies-or-Jihad-Brothers-Relations-Between-Taliban-and-Islamic-State; Naimatullah Ibrahimi and Sharam Akbarzadeh, "Intra-Jihadist Conflict and Cooperation: Islamic State-Khorasan Province and the Taliban in Afghanistan," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, No. 6, (2019), pp. 2-22.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Animesh Roul, "Foreign Fighters and Sectarian Attacks: Islamic State Makes Gain in Af-Pak Region," *James Town Foundation* 14, no. 24 (2016), https://jamestown.org/program/foreign-fighters-sectarian-strikes-islamic-state-makes-gains-af-pak-region/.

[56] "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Internal Peace and Stability*," General Assembly Security Council*, February 27, 2018, p.5.

[57] "Senior Daesh Commander Surrenders to Security Forces," *Tolo News*, August 1, 2018, https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/senior-daesh-commander-surrenders-security-forces-jawzjan.

[58] Anne Stenersen, "Al-Qaida's Comeback in Afghanistan and Its Implications," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 9 (2016) , https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaidas-comeback-in-afghanistan-and-its-implications/.

[59] Ali Soufan, "Bin Laden's Son Is Poised To Unify Terrorists Worldwide," *The Daily Beast*, September

As per the US estimates, AQC has 100 to 300 fighters in ranks, while the Afghan estimates suggest that the group has around 500 fighters in its ranks in Afghanistan. This figure does not include AQC affiliates, such as Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) or the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM).[60] The AQC members are based in Kunar, Nuristan, Badakhshan and Nangarhar. In the south, AQC is reported to have a presence in Helmand, Kandahar, Urzugan, and Zabul provinces. The Khak-e-Afghan and Day Chopan districts of Zabul are AQC's safe havens where the group has training centres as well.[61]

Various local militant outfits allied or affiliated with AQC are still loyal to it. Of the core group that masterminded the 9/11 attacks only the present chief Dr Ayman Al-Zawahiri and Saif Al-Adal, who heads Al-Qaeda's Iran cell, have survived.[62] The rest have been killed or captured in the US drone attacks or Special Forces' operations. In recent years, a new generation of Pakistani leaders have risen steadily in Al-Qaeda's hierarchy such as AQIS chief Maulana Asim Umar.

Contrary to the general assumption that AQC is more of an ideological movement that is keeping the ideological flame of global jihadism alight and operating through its various franchises, the group maintains an organisational presence. AQC is still recruiting people and trying to expand its network silently without engaging in violence. AQC's success in staying off the radar of the intelligence community and away from the glare of the media makes it more dangerous and a long-term threat in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.[63]

Presently, AQC is helping the Taliban to win the war and force the US out of Afghanistan.[64] Zawahiri has twice renewed his oath of allegiance to two Taliban chiefs Akhtar Mansoor and Haibatullah Akhundzada, indicating how closely the two groups are allied.[65] In the *Al-Khandaq* spring offensive, Al-Qaeda fighters were spotted fighting alongside the Taliban fighters under their command.

On the whole however, AQC is more interested in monitoring the situation in the Levant and directing their leaders from Afghanistan instead of carrying out independent attacks in the name of AQC. The group through its South Asian franchise, AQIS, has silently spread its network of operatives in South Asia as well.[66]

As the Afghan conflict is moving from politics of militarisation to politics of conflict management and resolution, it is safe to assume that AQC has weathered the war on terror as well as the challenge mounted by its jihadist arch-foe, IS. The group might start to reassert itself operationally from Afghanistan once US forces withdraw from Afghanistan, if at all.

Responses

Peace Talks

In 2018, a series of political developments signalled greater urgency to kick-start the on-off peace process. Since 2010, including the current push for reconciliation, six attempts have been made to end the conflict through talks.[67] In 2018, the scope of peace process has expanded from Afghan-owned and

---

13, 2017, https://www.thedailybeast.com/bin-ladens-son-is-poised-to-unify-terrorists-worldwide.

[60] "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Internal Peace and Stability," February 27, 2018, p.8.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Anne Stenersen, "Thirty Years after its Foundation—Where is al-Qaida Going?" *Perspectives on* Terrorism 11, no.6 (2017):8, https://www.ffi.no/no/Publikasjoner/Documents/Thirty_Years_after_Stenersen.pdf.

[63] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "How Al-Qaeda Works: The Jihadist Group's Evolving Organizational Design," *The Hudson Institute,* June 1, 2008, https://www.hudson.org/research/14365-how-al-

qaeda-works-the-jihadist-group-s-evolving-organizational-design.

[64] Thomas Joscelyn, "Foreign Fighters Involved in Assault on Ghazni, Afghan Defense Minister Says," *Long War Journal*, August 31, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/08/foreign-fighters-involved-in-assault-on-ghazni-afghan-defense-minister-says.php.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Lauren McNally, "A Resilient Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Middle East Institute*, August 2016, https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF18_Weinbaum_AQinAFPAK_web_1.pdf.

[67] Refer to Table 1 in the appendix for a list of Peace Talk Efforts from 2010 to 2018.

Afghan-led to direct US-Taliban talks. [68] There is a disconnect between Washington and Kabul over the peace talks, the NUG feels left out of the process given Taliban's refusal to engage Kabul in talks.[69]

(i) Ghani's Reconciliation Efforts

The efforts to end the conflict through peace talks gained momentum in February 2018 when the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani extended an unconditional ceasefire to the Taliban and offered to accept them as a recognised political party, allow them a place in the power structure and release Taliban prisoners.[70] However, the Taliban rejected his offer.

Ghani renewed his offer in June around *Eid-ul-Fitr*, the Muslim religious festival marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, which the Taliban accepted, resulting in a three-day truce. The Eid ceasefire generated a lot of hope and enthusiasm for peace.[71] The Taliban fighters and ANDSFs personnel socialised, prayed and ate together, visited the others' controlled areas and took photographs which went viral on the internet.[72] Simultaneously, a series of grassroots peace marches and rallies demonstrated popular support for peace.[73] However, the Taliban rejected a second conditional ceasefire offer by Ghani in

August.[74] Instead, they insisted on holding direct talks with the US. At the United Nations (UN) Conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, President Ghani announced a peace-plan with a five-year time frame. Ghani also announced the formation of a 12-member team, mostly government officials, to hold talks with the Taliban.[75]

Clearly, Ghani is not following Washington's timeline for peace talks. He has conveniently tied peace talks to next presidential term. His most pressing concern is re-election rather than peace. In a way, Kabul is moving away from the US-Taliban talks. Moreover, he has appointed two staunch anti-Taliban figures, Amrullah Saleh as the acting interior minister and Asadullah Khalid as acting defense minister.[76] They support an open-ended war with the Taliban. In other words, for being neglected by Washington in negotiations, Kabul is toughening its stance towards peace talks.

(ii) Zalmay Khalilzad's Peace Efforts

In September, the Afghan peace process got a shot in the arm when the US State Department appointed Zalmay Khalilzad, former US Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq, as its Special Representative for Afghanistan.[77] Khalilzad had been tasked to

---

[68] Peace talks remain marred by intra-government divisions, ethnic tensions, political rivalries and unshelled military situation.

[69] Jibran Ahmed, "Taliban Dismiss Afghanistan's Peace Talks Offer," *Reuters*, December 30, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban/taliban-dismiss-afghanistans-peace-talks-offer-idUSKCN1OT051.

[70] Hamid Shirazi And James Mackenzie, "Afghanistan's Ghani Offers Talks With Taliban Without Precondition," *Reuters*, February 28, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban/afghanistans-ghani-offers-talks-with-taliban-without-preconditions-idUSKCN1GC0J0.

[71] "Taliban Agree To Unprecedented Eid Ceasefire," *Dawn*, June 10, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1413191.

[72] "Hugs And Selfies As Afghan Soldiers And Taliban Celebrate Eid Ceasefire," *Al-Arabiya*, June 16, 2018, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2018/06/16/Hugs-and-selfies-as-Afghan-soldiers-and-Taliban-celebrate-Eid-ceasefire.html.

[73] "Afghan Peace Marchers Arrive In Kabul After 700-Km-Long Trek As Taliban End Ceasefire," *Express Tribune*, June 18, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1736816/3-afghan-peace-marchers-arrive-kabul-taliban-end-ceasefire/.

[74] "Taliban Has Reportedly Rejected The Call For Ceasefire During Eid Al-Adha," *Khama Press,* August 20, 2018, https://www.khaama.com/taliban-has-reportedly-rejected-the-call-for-ceasefire-during-eid-al-adha-05800/.

[75] Shereena Qazi, "Afghan President Announces Team To Hold Talks With Taliban," *Al-Jazeera*, November 29, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/afghan-president-announces-team-hold-peace-talks-taliban-181128100114901.html; "Remarks By Spokesman Of Islamic Emirate Regarding Comments By Head Of Kabul Administration Ashraf Ghani," *Al-marah,* November 28, 2018, https://alemarah-english.com/?p=38076.

[76] "Afghan President Names Two Former Spy Chiefs To Key Posts," *Reuters*, December 23, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-security/afghan-president-names-two-former-spy-chiefs-to-key-posts-idUSKCN1OM0DT.

[77] "Ex-Ambassador Khalilzad to Become U.S. Adviser on Afghanistan," *Reuters,* September 5, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan/former-ambassador-zalmay-khalilzad-to-be-appointed-us-adviser-on-afghanistan-idUSKCN1LK2RC.

hold meetings with various stakeholders and explore possible options to bring the conflict in Afghanistan to a negotiated settlement, ideally by April 2019.[78] More importantly, the US dropped its objection to not directly talking with the Taliban, moving away from its longstanding stance of supporting an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process.[79] Since then, there have been three meetings between the Taliban's Qatar office with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Alice G. Wells in June, and Zalmay Khalilzad in October and December.[80]

After meeting Khalilzad in Qatar, the Taliban appointed a five-member committee to join their Qatar office.[81] Ex-Taliban commanders, Mullah Ghani Bradar, the former deputy of Mullah Umar, Mohammed Fazl, the former Taliban army chief, Khairullah Khairkhwa, former governor of Herat province, deputy intelligence chief Mullah Norullah Nori and Nabi Omari, a governor and telecommunications chief, have been included in the Qatar office to assist in peace talks.[82]

The most encouraging meeting between the US and the Taliban was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in December.[83]

Though no breakthrough was achieved, the US freed more Taliban prisoners, including important commander of the Haqqani Network, Anas Haqqani.[84] The Taliban are sticking to their demand of complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan to end the war. Following the UAE meeting, President Trump hinted at withdrawing 7,000 US troops from Afghanistan. Some people have termed the decision part of the ongoing confidence building measures between the two sides. Further, to persuade the Taliban to join the peace process, the Pentagon (in its recent report submitted to Congress) has outlined a plan which guarantees safety to the Taliban fighters and their families and job securities.[85]

As a result of the Taliban-US talks in Qatar, Abu Dhabi and the time frame of reaching a deal by April, the following four broad scenarios emerge[86]:

i. To postpone the Afghan presidential election due in April 2019, if peace talks show promise.[87] Given the contentious nature of elections in Afghanistan and the difficulties that could arise from the post-election scenario, any election dispute among the political opponents can negatively impact the peace process.[88]

ii. To hold elections with the understanding that the coming government would serve as an interim setup, while the warring

[78] "US Envoy Hopes For Afghan Peace Deal Before April," *Dawn*, November 19, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1446475.
[79] Mujib Mashal and Eric Schimitt, "White House Orders Direct Taliban-Talks To Jump-Start Afghan Negotiations," *New York Times*, July 15, 2018,https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/15/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-direct-negotiations.html.
[80] "Taliban Confirm Qatar Meeting With Senior US Diplomat," *BBC News*, July 30, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45006643; "Khalilzad Meets Taliban in Qatar," *Tolo News,* October 13, 2018, https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/khalilzad-meets-taliban-qatar.
[81] Kim Sengupta, "Taliban Appoint Five Former Guantanamo Inmates To Qatar Office To Take Part In Afghanistan Peace Talks," *Independent*, October 31, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/taliban-five-guantanamo-afghanistan-peace-talks-qatar-a8611096.html.
[82] Jibran Ahmed, "Pakistan Releases Two Senior Taliban Commanders: Sources," *Reuters*, October 25, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-pakistan-taliban/pakistan-releases-two-senior-taliban-commanders-sources-idUSKCN1MZ1YV.
[83] "Afghan Taliban Meet US Officials, As Peace Efforts Intensify," *Chanel News Asia*, December 17, 2018,

https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/afghan-taliban-meet-us-officials--as-peace-efforts-intensify-11039852.
[84] Mushtaq Yousafzai, "Haqqani Network leader, aides released," *The News,* December 21, 2018, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/408637-haqqani-network-leader-aides-released.
[85] Anwar Iqbal, "US Offers Safety And Jobs To Taliban," *Dawn*, December 27, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1453824.
[86] See Table 2 for the list of different options to approach Afghan Peace Talks.
[87] Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) has postponed the presidential elections due in April by three months (expected to take place in July or August) to fix the technical glitches (problems with biometric verification system, delays in elections results etc.) encountered in October's parliamentary elections.
[88] Anisa Shaheed, "Political Parties Welcome US Proposal To Postpone Elections," *Khama Press,* November 13, 2018, https://www.tolonews.com/elections-2018/political-parties-welcome-us-proposal-postpone-elections.

parties negotiate and create a governing coalition that would include the Taliban.[89]

iii. Create a special assembly of Afghan elders, Loya Jirga, which would choose a new interim government to run the country until a peace deal has been reached.[90]

iv. Convene a Bonn-like conference that decided the post-Taliban administrative structure of Afghanistan in 2001. Such a conference would have Taliban representation and decide the way forward and out of the war.[91]

(iii) Moscow Summit on Afghan Reconciliation

The Taliban have also engaged in other peace initiatives such as the Moscow Summit, which was also attended by Afghanistan, China, Iran, Russia and India, among others. The summit is an effort to promote inter-Afghan reconciliation, create a consensus against the growing footprint of ISK in Afghanistan and come up with a regional consensus on non-interference when the talks get underway.[92] The engagement of regional countries with the Taliban is an indication of their acceptance as stakeholders in the effort to politically terminate the conflict in Afghanistan.

India's participation, in a non-official capacity—in the summit was a significant development.[93] Now that the US is openly pursuing talks with the Taliban, India has also recalibrated its older position of not engaging with the insurgent group as long as it does not denounce violence and accept the Afghan constitution. India's old allies in

Afghanistan, Iran and Russia, have also developed ties with the Taliban.[94] In January 2019, the Indian Army chief Gen Bipin Rawat supported the notion of peace talks with the Taliban provided the talks were without strings and led to peace.[95]

Outlook

2019 will be an important year for Afghanistan, both in-terms of peace and conflict. The outcome of presidential elections will determine the future direction of the peace process, political stability and conflict in Afghanistan. At the same time, the US decision to withdraw or keep its troops in Afghanistan will be equally significant. If the US withdraws in a phased manner by politically terminating the conflict that ensures a stable political order, then violence will subside. While peace is important, however, working out the details can prove challenging given the conflicting demands and interests of the contending parties and their backers. Some trade-offs by all parties will be necessary if peace is to be achieved. On the contrary, if the US withdraws in undue haste as it did from Iraq in 2011 through quick fix solution, then the situation in Afghanistan is likely to worsen.

BANGLADESH

In 2018, the main threat to Bangladesh's internal security emanated from Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS) and their affiliated groups. Despite continued counter-terrorism operations, Bangladesh faces a sustained threat from the militant groups who have proved to be resilient and hard to eliminate. This is evident from the continued adaptation of the Bangladeshi terrorist groups to the security environment, the formation of formal and informal alliances, as well as the use of new and innovative ways of terrorism financing.

---

[89] Jessica Donati, Craig Nelson and Dion Nissenbaum, "US Considers Asking Afghanistan to Suspend Presidential Election," *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-considers-asking-afghanistan-to-suspend-presidential-election-1542054459.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] James Schwemlein, "The US and Afghan Government Must Re-engage With the Peace Process," *Carnegie Endowment,* November 19, 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/11/19/u.s.-and-afghan-government-must-re-engage-with-peace-process-pub-77752.
[93] "India to Attend Moscow Meeting At Non-Official Level," *Tolo News*, November 9, 2018, https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/india-attend-moscow-meeting-'non-official-level.

[94] Seema Guha, "India's Silent Tango with Taliban," *News Click*, November 10, 2018, https://www.newsclick.in/indias-silent-tango-taliban.
[95] "Peace Talks With Taliban Welcome As Long As There Are No Preconditions: Indian Army Chief," *Dawn.com,* January 9, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1456441/peace-talks-with-taliban-welcome-as-long-as-there-are-no-preconditions-indian-army-chief

Neo-Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh/ Islamic State: Weak Yet Relevant

The IS is represented by a splinter group of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), which is locally known as the Neo-JMB. Since the Dhaka Café attack in 2016, Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies have scaled up their operations across the country. According to the Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies, around 906 Neo-JMB operatives were arrested whereas close to 100 killed during the operations conducted since 2016. This initially created a temporary leadership crisis within the group and drastically reduced the group's capability to raise funds and carry out attacks.

As 2018 drew to a close, Neo-JMB has been significantly weakened, but not fully contained. The recruitment for Neo-JMB members is continuing. The group often recruits members from the same family for terrorist attacks. For example, on 22 February 2018, a 22-year-old female Neo-JMB member stabbed a police officer in Dhaka. Earlier on 9 February, her sister stabbed a policeman in Melbourne, Australia.[96]

However, the most significant threat from the Neo-JMB in Bangladesh would be the spread of its ideology online via various social media platforms. There has been a ten-fold rise in online radicalisation in Bangladesh since July 2016.[97] As such, due to the circulation of a large volume of pro-IS propaganda materials in Bengali online, the possibility of single actor attacks cannot be ruled out. In addition, the "Neo JMB" members are now focusing on the districts near Dhaka such as Narayanganj, Narsingdi and Gazipur to set up their hideouts, as security is lax in these districts.[98]

JMB: Re-emergence and Regional Expansion

According to Bangladeshi authorities, Old-JMB and Ansar al Islam (Bangladeshi wing of AQ in the Indian Subcontinent) are cooperating with each other, or at least, share similar targets. The killing of Shahjahan Bachchu, a writer-publisher and a former left-wing politician on 11 July 2018 is a case in point. For his secular blogs, Bachchu came under the radar of both terrorist groups who worked in tandem to kill him. For this attack, Ansar al Islam conducted the recce while JMB eliminated him. Therefore, the synergy between the two groups has serious implications for the threat landscape in Bangladesh.

In mid-2018, JMB officially opened a new wing in India - Jama'atul Mujahideen India (JMI). The central Shura committee of the JMB renamed itself as Jama'atul Mujahideen (JM).[99] The group believes in using *Qital* (armed struggle) to "uproot polytheism and to establish Islam."[100] It claims that the Indian subcontinent is a future battlefield to establish the future Caliphate.[101] Though JMB is mostly involved in targeted killings of liberals in Bangladesh, its Indian operatives targeted a Buddhist shrine in Bodh Gaya, India with a bomb blast in 2018.[102] JMB is currently amassing funding through criminal activities such as bank (including ATM) robberies as well as production and distribution of fake currencies.[103] The group also receives donations from its supporters and sympathisers in Bangladesh.[104]

---

[96] "Sister Of The Muslim Radical Bangladeshi Student Who Carried Out An ISIS-Inspired Attack On A Melbourne Father Is Arrested After Stabbing An Anti-Terror Policeman At Her Family Home," *The Mail Online*, February 13, 2018, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5387657/Sister-Bangladeshi-student-Momena-Shoma-arrested.html.
[97] Author's interview with a Bangladeshi counter-terrorism official in September 2018.
[98] Ibid.

---

[99] Although the central committee of the group calls itself JM, it is still led by JMB. Therefore, the term JMB has been used throughout this assessment.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Sahm al Hind Media, Interview of Salahuddin, the Amir of Jamaatul Mujahidin, (in Bengali), 24 January 2018.
[102] "NIA Arrests Mastermind Of Bodhgaya Blasts Conspiracy," *The Times of India*, August 7, 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/nia-arrests-mastermind-of-bodhgaya-blasts-conspiracy/articleshow/65311680.cms.
[103] Interview with Monirul Islam, Chief of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC), Dhaka Metropolitan Police in Dhaka, July 2018.
[104] The author has come across at least two cases where some JMB members have been given money to run legitimate business such as mango plantation and poultry farm. These members not only serve as a cover for the organization but also run safe

The remote areas of Northwestern Bangladesh remain as key support bases for recruitment and training for JMB.[105] It is also active along the Bangladesh-India border. The revival of old-JMB highlights the possibility of a potential new wave of terrorism in Bangladesh. The re-emergence of JMB highlights the growing threat of AQ-centric groups in Bangladesh and India. Although Bangladesh and India have been conducting a series of joint operations (approximately one hundred) to dismantle JMB[106], the success of the campaign would likely remain limited unless there is a long-term strategy to check Islamist militancy in both the physical and online domains.

Several hundred incarcerated JMB leaders are formulating their strategies and organising their activities from jails. JMB has several improvised explosive device (IED) experts including a few who have been trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At present, the group largely depends on weapons such as machetes and handmade bombs.[107]

With regards to its key partners, JMB is closely linked with Ansar al Islam, the Bangladeshi wing of AQ and the Ahle Hadis Andolon Bangladesh (AHAB - *Salafi movement of Bangladesh*). JMB also has ties with the Afghan Taliban and it was the key organisation that sent fighters to Afghanistan in the 1980s. JMB also receives support from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries and has penetrated into a section of the Bangladeshi diaspora overseas. Regionally, JMB has established links with the Indian Mujahideen (IM) and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).[108]

Ansar al-Islam/Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

Ansar al-Islam is the local partner of AQIS in Bangladesh. Although Ansar al-Islam did not carry out any terrorist attack in Bangladesh in 2018, its online propaganda activities continued throughout the year, which has largely focused on the Rohingya issue. Bangladesh currently hosts more than one million Rohingya refugees of which 700,000 arrived after Myanmar's military crackdown on the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). Two of its key leaders are Major (Retd) Zia, who is at large since his dismissal from the Bangladesh Army in 2011, and Maulana Osman Gani, a former teacher of Faridabad Madrassa. The organisation is in the process of being reorganised and some of its key organisers are hiding in India. The group is recruiting youths from Dhaka, as well as from among the Rohingya refugees.[109]

In November 2018, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit busted a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Small Kindness Bangladesh (SKB), affiliated with Ansar Al Islam. Under the guise of humanitarian activities, the SKB was spreading militant propaganda among the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar.[110] The NGO has eight directors and all of them are followers of Ansar Al Islam.[111] However, the chairman of the NGO is believed to be hiding in the Philippines.

Since its registration in 2016, the SKB has been involved in terrorist financing and has provided funds to Ansar al Islam. It also collected from different Islamic organisations in Pakistan, Turkey, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the Philippines. In fact, Pakistan-based Al-Khidmat Foundation, linked with AQ and LeT, was carrying out militant activities in Rohingya camps through the SKB. Despite being banned by the Affairs Bureau of Bangladesh in August 2018 for its alleged involvement in terrorist financing and anti-state activities, SKB activities were not fully disrupted.

---

houses. Interviews conducted in Dhaka in 2016 and 2017.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] From an interview with a Bangladeshi Counter-terrorism expert in Dhaka, June 2018.
[108] Ibid.

[109] "Ansar Al-Islam's Operational Trainer Arrested In Dhaka," *The Dhaka Tribune*, November 26, 2018, https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2018/11/26/ansar-al-islam-s-operational-trainer-arrested-in-dhaka.
[110] "In The Name Of Serving People," *Daily Star,* November 9, 2018, https://www.thedailystar.net/city/eight-ansar-al-islam-members-arrested-in-dhaka-1657819.
[111] Ibid.

Crime-Terror Nexus

Bangladesh is witnessing the rapid development of a transnational crime-terror nexus, especially along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. As the border cuts through hills, forests, rivers and canals, border management is difficult for Bangladesh and it remains conducive for transnational crime. These trafficking networks are also connected to various militant groups in the region. Dependent on transnational crime syndicates for their procurement of weapons, these militant groups allegedly "provide security" and tax the traffickers in return. Because of their dire need for a livelihood, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh also often get involved in various forms of transnational crimes such as human trafficking, drugs trafficking and arms trafficking.[112]

Responses

Since the Holey Artisan café attack, at least 84 pro-IS militants have been killed in encounters with law enforcement agencies.[113] In terms of community engagement strategies, the government has been engaging Muslim clerics on madrassa education reforms to create greater awareness against extremism and terrorism. For example, Bangladeshi authorities continue to organise community engagement programs and inter-faith dialogues at different levels. Bangladesh has yet to have a well-structured strategy that Prevents and Counters Violent Extremism (P/CVE) to rehabilitate terrorists, extremist detainees and inmates. However, some agencies are currently working with local academics to gain an in-depth understanding of P/CVE.

In the cyber realm, Bangladesh has recognised the importance of utilising cyber platforms to foster moderation. Bangladeshi authorities have also scaled up monitoring of social media and are on the lookout for cyber-radicalisation and possible mobilisation by militant groups.[114] Moreover, law enforcement agencies are using mobile-apps such as 'Hello CT' (Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit) and 'Report to RAB' (Rapid Action Battalion) to collect human intelligence and feedback from the community. These mobile-apps are known to be effective and useful. In terms of legislative responses, Bangladesh has set up an Anti-Terrorism Tribunal (ATT) in 2018 to allow for more efficient trials of terrorists under the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Act. The ATT will be in charge of the trial of the Dhaka Café attackers.

Outlook

Notwithstanding a decline in attacks, the terrorist threat to Bangladesh is real and the country's fight against terrorism will continue. Despite sustained operational responses, these terrorist groups have been able to survive, re-organise and expand. This underscores the need for Bangladesh to recalibrate its responses to terrorism. While the police and other law enforcement agencies are doing their part in the operational realm, there is a need to ensure its continuity along with a rethinking of the strategic options under the rubric of P/CVE.

INDIA

In 2018, India faced threats from the Kashmiri militant, Jihadists and Hindu extremists.[115] The Kashmiri militant landscape was characterised by a massive rise in ceasefire violations, increased participation by educated youth in militancy and the neutralisation of various top leaders. While transnational terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda (AQ) have grown marginally in Kashmir, they still remain weak in mainland India alongside newly formed groups like the Jamaat ul Mujahideen India (JMI). Separately, the arrests of Hindu terrorists, mob lynching and the propagation of online narratives by right wing extremists that demonise minorities indicate the growing entrenchment of Hindu extremists in India.

---

[112] For details see, Iftekharul Bashar, "Impact of the Rohingya Crisis on the Threat Landscape at the Myanmar-Bangladesh Border" in *Combating Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe: From Cooperation to Collaboration*, ed. Christian Echle et al (Singapore: RSIS and KAS, 2018), 29-42.
[113] From an interview with a Bangladeshi Counter-Terrorism officer in November 2018.

[114] "Police Look Into Dark Web For Militants," *The Dhaka Tribune*, September 6, 2018, https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2018/09/06/police-look-into-dark-web-for-militants.
[115] Due to limitations, this article will not discuss the Naxalite and the North East Insurgencies.

Kashmir [116]

In 2018, as many as 1,432 ceasefire violations were witnessed at the Line of Control (LOC), the UN demarcated line between Indian and Pakistani parts of Kashmir. This is almost double the number recorded in 2017.[117] According to Jaffrelot, this is a result of a hardened stance towards Pakistan by the Indian government and the unrest in Jammu and Kashmir witnessed in recent years.[118] The ceasefire violations are linked to the insurgency in Kashmir due to cross border infiltrations by Pakistan-based Kashmiri militant groups. In 2018, Indian security forces neutralised as many as 200 militant infiltrators trying to cross into Indian Kashmir.[119]

Another notable trend in Kashmir has been the killings and kidnappings of police personnel by Hizb ul Mujahideen (HM) cadres, a Pakistan-supported insurgent group. The HM militants have also threatened families of police personnel with physical harm.[120] Consequently, more than 40 Special Police Officers (SPOs) have resigned to protect their families.[121]

In 2018, around 40-80 educated Kashmiri youth joined different Kashmiri insurgent groups. However, youths joining insurgencies in Kashmir is not a new trend. Indeed, the first major insurgency that began in 1988 also comprised educated youth.[122] It underscores the heavy-handed government repression, which has alienated educated youth and shrunk the space for political dissent so much so that a small fringe has taken to militancy.[123]

More worryingly, IS and AQ have carved out a niche with the alienated Kashmiri youth through social media platforms where the attitudes of Kashmiri youth oscillate between IS and AQ narratives. In 2018, 10 IS members, including its chief Dawood, were killed in Kashmir.[124] Notwithstanding police denials, AQ's local branch Ansar Ghazwat al Hind is steadily growing in numbers in Kashmir.[125] The general frustration of the youth with the political parties and the existing insurgent groups necessitates a stronger movement that is more in line with Islamist rather than nationalist ambitions.[126] As such, while the number of people joining these groups is still not that high, their online footprint is steadily increasing and would likely translate into ground action, if not checked.[127]

The police claims to have neutralised more than 90% of LeT, including its commander Naveed Jutt, and HM's leadership, which has

---

[116] While groups in Kashmir continue to use Islamist/Jihadist narratives, this article distinguishes between the Kashmiri insurgency and Jihadist activities in India primarily because the Kashmiri insurgency is separatist in nature.

[117] Amir Karim Tantray, "2018 Sees Highest Ceasefire Violations By Pak In 8 Years," *Tribune India*, August 13, 2018, https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/jammu-kashmir/2018-sees-highest-ceasefire-violations-by-pak-in-8-years/636411.html.

[118] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Ceasefire Violations in Kashmir: A War by Other Means?" *Carnegie Endowment,* October 24, 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/24/ceasefire-violations-in-kashmir-war-by-other-means-pub-77573.

[119] Manjeet Singh Neji, "200 Terrorists Eliminated In Jammu & Kashmir In 2018," *India Today,* November 13, 2018, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/200-terrorists-eliminated-in-jammu-kashmir-in-2018-1387948-2018-11-13.

[120] Mir Ehsan, "On Facebook and WhatsApp, More Resignation Videos Of J-K Policemen; Police Say Rumours," *Hindustan Times,* September 25, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/on-facebook-and-whatsapp-jammu-and-kashmir-s-special-police-officers-announce-resignations/story-FIWxRJwmZai89Aehr0UBfO.html.

[121] Nazir Masoodi, "40 Kashmir Cops Quit In 4 Days Amid Hizbul's "Resign Or Die" Threat," *NDTV,* September 25, 2018, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/40-kashmir-cops-resign-in-4-days-amid-hizbuls-resign-or-die-threat-1922161.

[122] Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in the Crossfire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996).

[123] Mudasir Ahmed, "Why Educated Kashmiri Youth Continue to Join Militancy," *The Wire,* October 16, 2018, https://thewire.in/politics/why-educated-kashmiri-youth-continue-to-join-militancy.

[124] Peerzada Ashiq and Vijaita Singh, "Belying Police Claims, Islamic State Shadow Lengthens Over Kashmir Valley," *The Hindu,* September 15, 2018, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/belying-police-claims-islamic-state-shadow-lengthens-over-kashmir-valley/article24956847.ece.

[125] "Local Militants Highest Since 2010, Many Joining Zakir Musa Led Group," *The Kashmir Walla,* August 26, 2018, https://thekashmirwalla.com/2018/08/local-militants-highest-since-2010-many-joining-zakir-musa-led-group/.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Victoria Elms, "Is IS Really A Threat In Kashmir?" *ORF,* September 28, 2018, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/is-is-really-a-threat-in-kashmir-44547/.

resulted in lower recruitment.[128] However, decapitation (targeting terrorist group leaders) as a strategy has historically not been effective in dissolving insurgent or terrorist groups. This is especially so for the insurgent and terrorist groups which are sufficiently entrenched in the local landscape, are separatist in nature and have more than 500 members.[129] In the context of LeT and HM, while the security operations may have lessened terrorist attacks in the short-term, they may fuel militant recruitment in the long term. [130]

Jihadist Threat

In 2018, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) neutralised a 10-member pro-IS cell, Harkat-ul-Harbe-Islam (Movement for the War of Islam), in New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Ahead of 2019 elections, the cell was planning attacks on political personalities, security installations and public places in the National Capital Region (NCR).[131] Separately, as many 10 people who went missing from Kerala in November have joined IS in Afghanistan. According to police, they were migrant workers from Dubai where they were radicalised by IS ideology. They travelled to Afghanistan from Kerala using Dubai and Tehran as transit points.[132]

It seems that IS' has upgraded its operational capabilities and outreach in India although, compared to other terrorist groups, it remains a low to medium level threat. With the upcoming elections in 2019, IS supporters may try to ramp up their activities to gain publicity. In any case, IS still lacks the operational strength to conduct ambitious attacks in India.[133]

In the future, IS may try to grow by recruiting from or entering into alliances with other militant groups such as the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad Al-Islami (HUJI) which have a presence in the old networks in the region, including India.

In recent years, JMB has relocated in small numbers to Indian West Bengal after facing crackdowns by the Bangladeshi authorities. This has allowed the group some breathing space to rejuvenate, allowing it to make inroads into some parts of the country. For instance, in January, JMB plotted the killing of the Dalai Lama in the city of Bodh Gaya, in retaliation for the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.[134] In February, those JMB elements who moved to India subsequently renamed themselves as the so-called Jamaat ul Mujahideen India (JMI).[135] The JMB propagandists and ideologues are trying to exploit the Rohingya issue by fomenting terror in Indian areas where Buddhism is observed.[136] In October, there were intelligence alerts of potential JMB attacks on Dusshera celebrations, a Hindu

[128] Sameer Yasir, "Kashmir Militancy: Huge Setback For Hizbul Mujahideen And Lashkar-E-Taiba As Forces Almost Wipe Out Their Top Brass In Valley," *First Post*, November 26, 2018, https://www.firstpost.com/india/kashmir-militancy-huge-setback-for-hizbul-mujahideen-and-lashkar-e-taiba-as-forces-almost-wipe-out-their-top-brass-in-valley-5617511.html.
[129] Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,*" Security Studies* 18, no.4 (2009): 719-744.
[130] Naseer Ganai, "2 Years Since Burhan Wani's Death: How Hizbul Commander Changed the Discourse On Militancy in Kashmir," *Outlook India,* July 8, 2018, https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/how-burhan-wani-changed-the-definition-of-militancy-in-kashmir/313209.
[131] "ISIS Module Case: NIA Conducts Fresh Searches In Amroha," *Times of India*, January 1, 2019, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/isis-module-case-nia-conducts-fresh-searches-in-amroha/articleshow/67333367.cms.
[132] Sneha Mary Koshy, "10 people From Kerala Suspected to Have Joined ISIS: Police Sources," *NDTV,* December 13, 2018, https://www.ndtv.com/kerala-news/10-people-from-kerala-suspected-to-have-joined-isis-police-sources-1962126.

[133] Initially, it tried to establish two branches *Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind* (Soldiers of the Caliph in India) and *Ansar-ut Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind* (Supporters of Monotheism in the Land of India), but it failed. Both of the abovementioned group were decimated and remained inactive; See Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "The Islamic State in India: Exploring its Footprints," *Counter Terrorism Trends and Analysis* 9, no.5 (2017): 23-27, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CTTA-May-2017.pdf.
[134] "Bodh Gaya Attack Was To Avenge 'Atrocities' Against Rohingyas: NIA," *New Indian Express,* August 8, 2018, http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2018/aug/09/bodh-gaya-attack-was-to-avenge-atrocitiesagainst-rohingyas-nia-1855346.html.
[135] Animesh Roul, "Fugitive Bangladeshi Militants Bring Jamaat ul Mujahideen to India," *Jamestown Foundation,* June 29, 2018, https://jamestown.org/program/fugitive-bangladeshi-militants-bring-jamaat-ul-mujahideen-to-india/.
[136] Ibid.

festival that celebrates the victory of good over evil.[137]

On the other hand, Al Qaeda Central (AQC) and its formal franchise for South Asia, AQ in the Subcontinent (AQIS), have remained relatively inactive with no major activity beyond some failed recruitment attempts. A recent UN report on the group concluded that although the group is ideologically motivated to attack India, it does not possess the operational strength to do so.[138]

Hindu Extremism

According to Hate Crime Watch, 2018 witnessed the highest number of hate crimes in a decade in India with 93 attacks resulting in 30 deaths and 305 injuries.[139] Most of these hate crimes are linked to the growth of Hindu extremism and has continued with tacit government support in different parts of India. This process has been further facilitated by social media and dissemination of fake news which amplifies hate speech, conspiracy theories and rumours.

Hindu extremists have contributed to a rise in Islamophobia in India given their overt anti-Muslim discourse. This emanates from the concept of *Hindutva*, an ideology proposed by the 20th century figure Damodar Savarkar, who defined Hindus as those who consider India as both the motherland and the holy land. In *Hindutva's* conception, Muslims and Christian are excluded given that their sacred sites are located outside of India. The issue of 'Hindu weakness,' also discussed in the *Hindutva* discourse, attributes the cause to the historical advances of outsiders - both Muslim kings and the British Empire (Christians).[140]

Over the years, these narratives have caused riots and communal tensions in India. Most recently, Hindu extremists have killed Muslims on suspicions of eating beef,[141] and changing (or are in the process of) names of cities and historical monuments named after Muslims.[142] Furthermore, these Hindu extremists frequently accuse Muslims of forcibly converting Hindu women to Islam - termed as *'Love Jihad'*, a phenomenon now refuted by the National Investigation Agency of India (NIA).[143]

The growth of Hindu extremism in India can be attributed in part to the growing perception of the Hindu identity being under threat despite the fact that Hindus constitute almost 80% of the Indian population. The online groups and media channels have also been abuzz with discussions of the shrinking identity and influence of Hinduism, which according to them, is a product of western secularism, rise of militant Islamism as well as capitalist ventures in India.[144] Scholars such as Rafiie have noted that such perceptions, imaginary or not can lead to predatory identities that evolve into violent movements over time.[145]

Examples of this are also seen in terror incidents. In July, Indian authorities arrested five members of a group called Sanathan Sanstha. The five Sanathan Sanstha members were planning to attack a musical

---

[137] "North Bengal: Intel Wings Warn Of 'Terrorist Infiltration," *The Stateman,* October 2, 2018, https://www.thestatesman.com/india/north-bengal-intel-wings-warn-terrorist-infiltration-1502700121.html.

[138] "AQIS 'Ideologically Inclined' To Carry Out Attacks In India Says UN Report," *Economic Times,* August 14, 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/al-qaeda-ideologically-inclined-to-carry-out-attacks-in-india-un-report/articleshow/65396199.cms.

[139] "2018 Saw Most Religious Hate Crime, Most Deaths in Decade," *The Wire*, December 27, 2018, https://thewire.in/communalism/2018-saw-most-religious-hate-crimes-against-religions.

[140] Veer Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*? (New Delhi: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969).

[141] Rana Ayyub, "Mobs Are Killing Muslims In India. Why Is No One Stopping Them?" *The Guardian,* July 20, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/jul/20/mobs-killing-muslims-india-narendra-modi-bjp.

[142] "What's In A Name? Indian City Changes Name From Muslim To Hindu To Fix 'Mistake' Of Occupiers," *RT,* October 17, 2017, https://www.rt.com/news/441533-allahabad-name-change-prayagraj/.

[143] Rajesh Ahuja, "NIA Ends Kerala Probe, Says There's Love But No Jihad," *Hindustan Times,* October 18, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nia-ends-kerala-probe-says-there-s-love-but-no-jihad/story-wlpWR7BMNcdJHkb1MUso4J.html.

[144] Republic World, "Hot Debate After Cracker Ban – Hindus Targeted? Sunday Debate With Arnab Goswami," YouTube Video, 1:46:45*,* October 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4ghRtOQOo4.

[145] Dina Al Raffie, "Social Identity Theory For Investigating Islamic Extremism In The Diaspora," *Journal Of Strategic Security* 6, no.4 (2013): 67–91.

concert in Pune in 2017.[146] These detainees were also involved in the throwing of petrol bombs at the 2017 screening of a controversial movie entitled *Padmavat* in Kalyan (Maharashtra) and Belgaum (Karnataka) in India.[147] Although the group has distanced itself from the detainees, some of its members have also been implicated in the death of various secular journalists such as Gauri Lankesh (killed in 2017), and social activists (vocal critics of *Hindutva*) in the past few years.[148]

Responses

India's responses to terrorist and extremist issues are varied. For instance, two major political developments affected the level of militancy and violence in Kashmir. The first involves the split between the local Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the central Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in June 2018. Previously, the BJP was more aggressive in its approach to separatist militants, whereas the PDP was more willing to negotiate, leading to friction between the two parties. This friction in the coalition government also led to confusion within the security apparatus, resulting in a lack of clarity on dealing with militants.[149] With the split and the consequent imposition of governor's rule in the valley, some amount of discretion was accorded to the security forces – which have now become more hawkish in their approach.[150]

The second major development is the petition of a Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) -backed non-governmental organisation (NGO) to annul Section 35 A of the constitution, a provision that offers land and investment rights to Kashmiris exclusively.[151] This has already caused a few shutdowns since Kashmiris believe that this is a ploy by the central government to allow outsiders into Kashmir and change the religious demographics of the state.

The response of the Indian government to the Islamist extremism has been measured over the years. Various state governments like Maharashtra and Telangana have worked with Muslim community members and clerics to stop youths from engaging in violent activities. Instead of arresting potentially radicalised youths, the states are counselling them.[152] This approach has been effective as it eliminates the stigma of arrests that can imperil an individual's future and alienate the larger Muslim community. It has also reduced arrests on frivolous grounds significantly - which was a major factor in alienating the Muslim communities and much of their grievances.[153] The policy of delayed arrests has led to an upsurge of community engagement, leading to more effective prevention of terrorist activities by aspirants' families.

---

[146] "Padmavat" was a movie which was initially believed to portray love between a Hindu Rajput princess and a Muslim king who invaded the Rajput territory in the 1200s. Members of the Rajput community took offense at what they thought was a dishonorable way of portraying a Rajput princess and thus threatened the movie maker with protests and physical harm. For more on this, see: "Same Group Behind Killings Of Dabholkar, Kalburgi, Gauri Lankesh; Members Linked To Sanatan Sanstha: Police," *Hindustan Times*, September 17, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/same-group-behind-killings-of-dabholkar-kalburgi-gauri-lankes-members-linked-to-sanatan-sanstha-police/story-HOIJ0FGHOoxDjaESM6lZkJ.html.
[147] "Hindu Right Wing Group Sanatan Sanstha Planned Blast At Pune Sunburn Festival: Cops," *Hindustan Times*, August 29, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/hindu-right-wing-group-sanatan-sanstha-planned-blast-at-pune-sunburn-festival-cops/story-67nsqrsoA6ESLB299fNMVK.html.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ahmed Ali Fayyaz, "As BJP-PDP Split, Security Forces Hope to Bring Peace to J&K Soon," *The Quint,* June 25, 2018, https://www.thequint.com/news/india/bjp-pdp-split-army-restore-peace-in-jammu-and-kashmir-six-months.

[150] Rajesh Ahuja and Kumar Uttam, "Centre To Scale Up Ops Against Kashmir Militants As Governor's Rule Imposed After BJP, PDP Split," *Hindustan Times,* June 20, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/under-governor-s-rule-centre-plans-return-to-a-hardline-security-policy-in-jammu-and-kashmir/story-xqTCjnDSvbqAmM2LGZvXzN.html.
[151] "Kashmir Up In Arms Against The Annulment Of Art 35A Even By SC," *Northlines,* July 31, 2018, http://www.thenorthlines.com/kashmir-up-in-arms-against-the-annulment-of-art-35a-even-by-sc/.
[152] "Government Plans Several Strategies To Counter ISIS Threat To India," *DNAIndia*, August 1, 2015, http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-government-plans-several-strategies-to-counter-isis-threat-to-india-2110252.
[153] Irfan Ahmed, "The (In)Visible In Indian Terrorism," *Al Jazeera,* September 17, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/09/2011912104910716820.html.

The above-mentioned approach also comes under the larger category of wide-ranging deradicalisation initiatives. The state of Maharashtra's deradicalisation programme, for instance, includes socio-economic and educational steps as well as efforts to empower the Muslim community.[154] The challenges associated with this approach are the lack of information sharing capacities between different states, and the suspicions accorded by Muslim communities to such initiatives.[155]

The challenge of information sharing and non-cooperation also exists in other aspects of counter-terrorism. The state government of West Bengal for example, has opposed the central government's proposal to create a central intelligence agency under the Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) on the grounds of interference in the federal structure of the state.[156] While these contestations by the state government are valid, they also slow down counter-terrorism operations in the state, making it slightly more difficult to target groups like the JMB and JMI.

The Indian government's response to Hindu extremists has been inadequate. Various individuals involved in attacks against Muslims have not only been released from detention but also welcomed by some government officials.[157] The government's inaction and weak political will has therefore

allowed Hindu extremism to grow.[158] According to analysts, this is because the ruling government fears alienating some of its political supporters and vote banks by speaking against those indulging in such activities.[159] The government's silence and negligence in taking action against Hindu extremists operating under such conditions often embolden these groups to increase their violent activities against minorities.[160]

Outlook

In 2018, India's response in tackling the transnational Jihadist groups - IS and AQ – has confined them to the margins of its threat landscape. However, India deployed harsher counter insurgency steps in Kashmir and remained lax in its efforts to curb Hindu extremism in the nation. Both of these developments may fuel further unrest in the country including inter-religious communal violence as well as continued insurgency in Kashmir in 2019. Overall, the authorities should improve coordination between various security agencies and government ministries, and have greater political will to implement smarter approaches to tame the serious threats it faces.

PAKISTAN

Since 2003, Pakistan has lost more than 50,000 civilians and 6,000 security personnel in the war against terrorism. In addition, the

---

[154] Sharad Vyas, "IS Threat: Maharashtra Rolls Out Deradicalisation Plan," *The Hindu,* February 4, 2016, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/islamic-state-threat-maharashtra-rolls-out-deradicalisation-plan/article8189391.ece.

[155] Poor coordination between police forces of the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has led to weakened information sharing, leading to a loss of understanding of best practices. Discussions held with Kabir Taneja, *Observer Researcg Foundation,* July 2018.

[156] Vinay Kaura, "National Counter Terrorism Centre Is Trapped In A Political Quagmire," *Livemint,* April 18, 2018, https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/ajVfsxGmQnEFCQHJARhhCJ/National-Counter-Terrorism-Centre-is-trapped-in-a-political.html.

[157] Udhay Singh Rana, "Shambhulal Regar, Who Hacked Muslim Man on Camera, May Contest Lok Sabha Polls From Agra," *News18,* September 17, 2018, https://www.news18.com/news/india/shambhulal-regar-who-hacked-muslim-man-on-camera-may-contest-lok-sabha-polls-from-agra-1880263.html.

[158] At the time of this writing, the government-backed right wing groups are demanding the government to bypass the Supreme Court's verdict on the Babri Masjid case and construct the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. In 1992, the destruction of the Babri Masjid in the same location spurred Hindu-Muslim clashes. Currently, this has created tensions across India with at least one instance of Hindu Muslim riot being reported and more can be expected. For details, see: Saurabh Trivedi and Vijaita Singh, 'Intelligence agencies alert Centre, police on VHP event,' *The Hindu*, December 07, 2018, https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/intelligence-agencies-alert-centre-police-on-vhp-event/article25683884.ece.

[159] D.K. Singh, "M.J. Akbar to Kathua: Decoding The Silence Of Teflon-Coated Narendra Modi," *The Print,* October 15, 2018, https://theprint.in/opinion/m-j-akbar-to-kathua-decoding-the-silence-of-teflon-coated-narendra-modi/134574/.

[160] Guy Elcheroth and Stephen Reicher, *Identity, Violence and Power: Mobilising Hatred, Demobilising Dissent* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 132-155.

Global Terrorism Index (GTI) has ranked Pakistan as fifth in the list of countries most strongly affected by terrorism.[161] The same report highlighted that in 2017, Pakistan recorded the lowest number of terrorism related deaths since 2006. Counter-terrorism gains made since the tragic Army Public School attack in 2014 have reduced violence, terrorist recruitment and neutralised sleeper cells and smaller militant networks in the urban centres. Yet in 2018, the country continued to face more mainstream and pronounced threats in the form of neo-religious groups (Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan), a diverse and competitive terrorism landscape (including older and established local groups, transnational terrorist groups, coupled with smaller and recently formed independent cells and networks) and the emergence of China as a key target for these groups.

Rise of Neo-Religious Groups

Since 2017, Pakistan has witnessed the rise of neo-religious groups, specifically radical Barelvism (followers of Sufism, a branch of the Sunni Hanafist School of Thought) that represents a new wave of extremism. The Tehrik-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), most notorious of these groups, emerged as the fifth largest political party in the 2018 parliamentary elections at national level and third largest in Punjab province, bagging 2.2 million votes.[162] In comparison other Barelvi parties, including Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP) and Sunni Tehreek (ST) have not experienced similar electoral success in the past three decades.[163]

The TLP had reached its political height in November 2017 when 2,000 of its supporters staged a 21-day sit-in at the Faizabad interchange, an intersection that connects Rawalpindi with Islamabad, demanding a

reversal to semantic changes in the Election Act 2017.[164] According to the original Conduct of Election Rules of 1977, oath taking for all elected parliamentarians required them to 'solemnly swear' on the 'absolute and unqualified' Finality of Prophethood.[165] The Election Act 2017 changed the language used in the undertaking from 'I solemnly swear' to 'I believe.' In the events that followed, six people were killed in clashes between the security forces and protesters.[166] These protests eventually led to the resignation of then Law Minister Zahid Hamid on grounds of blasphemy.[167]

Later in November 2018, the TLP engaged in a nationwide protest against the Supreme Court's decision to acquit a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, accused of blasphemy, who was on death row for more than eight years. The TLP demanded the public execution of Bibi, called for an overthrow of the local government and encouraged its followers to kill the Supreme Court judges that had acquitted her.[168] The protests ended after the government gave into TLP's demand of filing a review petition against Asia Bibi's acquittal by the Supreme Court and put her name on the Exit Control List (ECL), a roster of people banned from leaving Pakistan, among others. On 25 November, the TLP's top leadership had intended to launch a new wave of nation-wide protests, as it believed the government had not honoured their agreement, while allowing Asia Bibi to fly out of Pakistan. However, just before the TLP leadership

[161] "Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," *Institute for Economics and Peace*, December 2018, http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf.
[162] "General Elections 2018," *Gallup Pakistan,* July 31, 2018, http://gallup.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Gallup-Pakistan-Exit-Poll-2018-Who-did-TLP-voters-vote-in-2013-GE-1.pdf.
[163] "Moosa Kaleem, "The Emergence Of Tehreek-E-Labbaik Pakistan On Karachi's Political Map," *Herald*, September 20, 2018, https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398669.

[164] Fawad Hasan, "Faizabad Sit-In: The Trail Of 21 Days," *Express Tribune*, November 27, 2017, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1569778/1-faizabad-sit-trail-21-days/.
[165] Tariq Butt and Waseem Abbasi, "Slight Changes In Candidate Declaration Under New Law," *The News*, October 4, 2017, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/234386-Slight-changes-in-candidate-declaration-under-new-law.
[166] Aamir Yasin, "Islamabad Operation: 6 Killed In Clashes Between Leas, Agitators On Saturday," *Dawn*, November 26, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1372986.
[167] Sophia Saifi, "Pakistan Law Minister Resigns; Blasphemy Protests Disperse," *CNN*, November 27, 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/26/asia/pakistan-law-minister-resigns/index.html.
[168] "Pakistan Arrests TLP Leader Behind Blasphemy Protests," *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/pakistan-arrests-tlp-leader-blasphemy-protests-181123190633780.html.

managed to mobilise protestors, the authorities arrested the leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi from his *madrassa* (religious seminary) in Lahore under Maintenance of Public Order (MPO). Later, Rizvi was charged with sedition and terrorism cases were filed against other TLP leaders as well.[169]

In a broader context, two key factors explain the TLP's rapid rise and electoral success: (i) weaponisation of the Khatam-e-Naboowat (Finality of Prophethood) narrative; and (ii) strategic use of social media. By exploiting the highly emotive and sensitive issue of the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, central to the Barelvi belief system, the TLP has widened the intra-Sunni schisms (Barelvi-Deobandi fault line) in Pakistani society. Pakistan has had a complicated relationship with the blasphemy laws, where the punishment for disrespecting Islam, the Quran and the Prophet is death or lifetime imprisonment. More often than not, blasphemy allegations have led to mob violence and are a means to settle personal scores under the pretext of false accusations. The TLP has legitimised this vigilante justice as the self-appointed custodian of the Prophet Muhammad's honour (*Hurmat-e-Rasool*) narrative and glorifying Mumtaz Qadri, the self-confessed assassin of the former Punjab governor, the late Salman Taseer, as a hero for defending the blasphemy laws. It has frequently shamed followers, who are shying away from 'their religious duty' to defend the Prophet's honour, and thereby inciting violence against and dehumanising religious minorities (Ahmadis and Christians in particular). The TLP and its followers have strategically used social media to leverage public opinion in their favor through hundreds of lectures by Rizvi, who has amassed a cult following of sorts. Using social media to harness supporters has also allowed the TLP to put its message across to the educated demographic and not just to madrassa students.

Recent incidents highlight the consequences of the TLP's ideological leanings and the potential for radical Barelvis to mobilise followers and incite violence at will. The mainstream radicalisation of the Barelvis could lead to further clashes and violence between opposing Sunni groups in Pakistan, such as the Deobandis or Salafis. This is dangerous because of the sheer size of the Barelvi population, who make up approximately 50 to 60% of the Muslims in Pakistan.[170] In comparison, the Deobandis make up around 15%, followed by the Shias representing 15 to 20% and Ahl-e-Hadith or Salafis, at 5%. The TLP's mob violence, vigilante justice towards religious minorities, and its attempted targeted killings of prominent leaders will only increase in the long term, while Barelvi groups vie for control and influence in the country competing against other Muslim subsects.

Diverse and Competitive Terrorist Landscape

One of the key characteristics of Pakistan's terrorist landscape is that it is not static and evolves in the short-term – with shifting allegiances, emergence of decentralised networks and cells. Broadly, the terrorism landscape has evolved from battle-hardened fighters in the tribal belt who had participated in the Afghan war and later joined other terrorist groups to self-initiated and self-radicalised young, educated and inexperienced recruits in the urban areas.[171] Since 2014, this shift coupled with the military operations have downgraded the operational strength and lethality of attacks conducted by Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Islamic State's (IS) Af-Pak franchise, Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami (LeJ-A). While these groups have been dismantled from their operational bases in Pakistan, they are continuously evolving and reviving in a changing security environment. They are trying to consolidate their operational strengths, as they compete with

---

[169] "TLP Leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi Booked Under Sedition, Terrorism Charges: Information Minister," *Dawn*, December 1, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1448807.

[170] Jawad Syed, "Barelvi Militnacy and Salman Taseer's Murder," *Faith Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan.* e.d. Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran and Abbas Zaidi (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 231-271.

[171] Huma Yusuf, University Radicalisation: Pakistan's Next Counter-Terrorism Challenge, *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 9, no.2 (2016), https://ctc.usma.edu/university-radicalization-pakistans-next-counterterrorism-challenge/.

each other, and face counter-terrorism operations.

Revival of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The death of TTP's chief, Mullah Fazlullah, in a June 2018 drone attack in Kunar province, Afghanistan[172] represented progress in counterterrorism efforts against the groups. Under Fazlullah's leadership, the group conducted brutal attacks targeting the Army Public School (2014)[173] and Bacha Khan University (2016).[174] However, Fazlullah's death does not represent the demise of the group as TTP's operational clout had been declining in the country progressively since 2014. According to the Global Terrorism Database, compared to the year 2014 in which TTP claimed 163 attacks, the group's total attacks in 2015 fell by 33% and by almost 42% in 2016 and 2017.[175]

On 23 June 2018, TTP's Shura (executive council) appointed Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud as the new leader of the group less than a month after Fazlullah's death. Wali hails from South Waziristan and prior to being named as the new leader; he was in-charge of TTP's operations in Karachi and the group's publications department. He is a religious scholar and author with jihadism and is known for his staunch opposition to polio vaccination campaigns, endorsing violence against health workers in Pakistan. Wali also authored a 690-page book released in November 2017, entitled "The Mehsud Revolution in South Waziristan: From British

Raj to Oppressive America," in which he claims that TTP was responsible for the Benazir Bhutto assassination in 2007.[176] Wali's book also focuses on TTP's internal power struggles in Karachi, highlighting disputes within the movement. In 2014, Fazlullah's appointment as the leader marked the first time the emir was chosen from outside the Mehsud tribe, leading to several internal rifts. The Shura's decision to bring the leadership back to the Mehsud tribe after more than five years reflects a strategic step to unify the movement.

In September 2018, TTP also released a redefined code of conduct to crystallise and standardise internal procedures, targets, and policies on defections, clearly indicating efforts to seek unification after Wali's appointment.[177] After Wali's appointment TTP claimed two key attacks in July 2018. First, a suicide bombing at an Awami National Party (ANP) rally in Peshawar, targeting the leader Haroon Bilour killed 22 and injured 75 others.[178] Second, TTP claimed responsibility for another suicide bombing, three days before the general elections, targeting Ikramullah Gandapur former Minister of Agriculture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), killing three and injuring the same number.[179] These two successful attacks targeting high-profile individuals indicate TTP's resolve to rise and become operationally active again. TTP's future trajectory depends partially on Wali's leadership, who faces pressures to keep the group unified, regain and project its operational prowess and rise in competition with other militant groups.

---

[172] William Branigan, "Pakistani Taliban Leader Mullah Fazlullah Killed in U.S. Airstrike in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistan-taliban-leader-mullah-fazlullah-is-killed-in-a-us-airstrike-in-afghanistan/2018/06/15/9ea6cc56-70ab-11e8-b4d8-eaf78d4c544c_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.030ecae19f29.
[173] Sophia Saifi and Greg Botelho, "In Pakistan School Attack, Taliban Terrorist Kill 145, Mostly Children," *CNN*, December 17, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/16/world/asia/pakistan-peshawar-school-attack/index.html.
[174] Jason Burke, "Bacha Khan University Attack: What is Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan?" *Guardian*, January 20, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/20/bacha-khan-university-attack-what-is-tehreek-e-taliban-pakistan-ttp.
[175] Global Terrorism Database, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2018.

[176] Farhan Zahid, "Pakistani Taliban: Mullah Fazlullah's Death Revives Mehsud Clan Fortunes," *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 13, 2018, https://jamestown.org/program/pakistani-taliban-mullah-fazlullahs-death-revives-mehsud-clan-fortunes/.
[177] Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: Strategy (Code of Conduct)," *Umar Media*, September 16, 2018.
[178] Sohail Khattak, "TTP Claims Responsibility For Peshawar Attack On ANP Leader As Death Toll Rises To 20," *Express Tribune*, July 11, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1754896/1-anps-haroon-bilour-19-others-martyred-peshawar-blast/.
[179] Ramzan Seemab, "PTI's Ikramullah Khan Gandapur Martyred In DI Khan Suicide Blast," *Express Tribune*, July 22, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1763994/1-ptis-ikramullah-khan-gandapur-injured-di-khan-blast/.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar

Since the launch of military operations Zarb-e-Azb (Prophet's Sword) and Rad-ul-Fasad (Elimination of Discord) in the tribal areas, JuA operatives have relocated to border areas of Afghanistan. JuA has been one of the more active terrorist groups in Pakistan that has experienced reduced operational strength since 2017. However, it has branched out through a smaller network called Hizbul Ahrar, also based in Afghanistan, specifically within Nangarhar province.[180] In 2017, Mukarram Khan, led the creation of Hizbul Ahrar, due to differences with the leader of JuA. Since its formation, Hizbul Ahrar has claimed responsibility for multiple attacks, specifically the target killing of a police officer in Karachi on 3 October 2018.[181]

Earlier in September 2018, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) claimed that it had neutralised the Hizbul Ahar network, by arresting five terrorists and one aspiring suicide bomber in Rawalpindi.[182] The group initially came under the radar of security forces after a suicide attack in May 2018 that targeted engineers of the National Defence Complex (NDC) in Attock. The authorities had identified Imran Khurasan alias Tahir, as another important leader of Hizbul Ahrar, who was operating from Afghanistan. Even though Hizbul Ahrar is neutralised, JuA members and fighters with physical sanctuary in Afghanistan are likely to reassert their presence within Pakistan. In 2014, JuA expressed support for IS and has since then conducted multiple attacks on the group's behest.[183] This trend will possibly continue as JuA prepares for a comeback and could consider stronger ties with ISK to remain visible and relevant.

Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK)

IS had emerged in Pakistan in 2014, shortly after the formation of the group, and gained traction through its intelligent use of social media and defections and allegiances from parts of TTP, strong operational support from LeJ-A and links with JuA. In both Pakistan and Afghanistan, IS operates through its formal affiliate, ISK. It is more active in Afghanistan, where most of its sanctuaries are located. In 2018, defections and allegiances to ISK have remained stagnant and to a certain extent visibly declined. This is partly because local militant groups, specifically TTP, have released statements and propaganda opposing IS in the country. Despite this, periodic defections from militant groups to ISK are occurring. In May 2017, ISK appointed Aslam Faruqi, a former Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) commander as its chief.[184] However, pro-IS cells of self-radicalised supporters and sympathisers through social media continue to emerge sporadically. For example in April 2017, Noreen Leghari, a medical student from Hyderabad who had been radicalised online by IS propaganda and was arrested before conducting a suicide bombing targeting Christians at Easter in Lahore.[185]

ISK intermittently targets Shias, Sufis and government representatives in parts of Pakistan, specifically Balochistan and Sindh provinces. The group has conducted mass-casualty attacks targeting high-profile individuals, religious gatherings and public protests. In July 2018, a suicide bombing in Mastung, Balochistan killed more than 128 people and injured 180 others. Those killed included Nawabzada Mir Siraj Khan Raisani, a member of the Baloch Awami Party (BAP). This attack was later claimed by IS through

[180] "Three Jamaatul Ahrar Militants Killed In Afghanistan: Reports," *Pakistan Today*, February 22, 2018, https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/02/22/three-jamaatul-ahrar-militants-killed-in-afghanistan-reports/.

[181] Zia-Ur-Rehman, "The TTP: Cornered And Desperate," *GEO*, October 16, 2018, https://www.geo.tv/latest/214854-the-ttp-cornered-and-desperate?fbclid=IwAR2NwcL0wkDl6MbdggTIPB2LzCCVZfgcU18nwl-gfKruK0tK7-u-qncm8_8.

[182] Asif Chaudhry, "CTD Punjab 'Breaks' TTP, Hizbul Ahrar Network," *Dawn*, September 18, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1433538?fbclid=IwAR33p_Jmd9AjQKZ-F9glPuaxVbaAqeMqsvUs-GOgL-CkME2DNB8mVxbCLbM.

[183] Amira Jadoon, "Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organisational Capacity in

Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Combating Terrorism Center*, December 2018, https://ctc.usma.edu/allied-lethal-islamic-state-khorasans-network-organizational-capacity-afghanistan-pakistan/.

[184] Antonio Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan: Afghanistan, Pakistan and the New Central Asian Jihad* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018)

[185] "Noreen Leghari Confession Video," *YouTube*, April 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRe7mA2zOow.

the Amaq media agency.[186] This was the third deadliest terrorist attack in Pakistan's history, next to the Karsaz bombing that killed former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007 and the Army Public School attack in 2014 (both claimed by the TTP).[187]

Most recently, in November 2018, IS claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in the Orakzai region of the tribal areas that killed 33 people and targeted the minority Shia community.[188] Through Amaq news agency, IS stated that 57 Shias were killed, while 75 were injured in the attack. ISK will continue to conduct periodic attacks, specifically due to the porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, easy movement of terrorists and presence of local affiliate LeJ-A. This has led to resentment from TTP, which sees itself as the dominant actor in the local terrorist landscape in Pakistan. The fact that ISK has managed to perpetrate one of the deadliest attacks in the country's history, highlights the operational prowess of the group. Taking note of this, TTP is likely to increase its operational effectiveness to pose a potential challenge and counterweight to ISK and its networks in the country.

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

In August 2018, Al-Qaeda in the in the Indian Subcontinent's (AQIS) spokesperson, Usama Mahmood released an audio statement titled, 'Pakistan is Ours' marking the country's independence day.[189] In the audio, Mahmood stated that the causes of conflicts in Pakistan

are the government, military and links to the U.S. He added that the purpose of Pakistan's creation was to enforce sharia law in the country. Mahmood did not discuss AQIS' operations or threaten further attacks in this audio.[190]

Other than this message that was released on Telegram, AQIS largely remain absent and inactive in Pakistan, aside from details of one key arrest. Reports revealed that a high-profile militant identified as Umar Jalal Chandio alias Kathio was detained in Karachi, after being arrested in 2015 by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD).[191] Disputed reports have indicated that Ayman Al-Zawahiri, leader of Al-Qaeda is based in Pakistan.[192] If these claims are true, then a revival of AQIS coupled with its partnership and linkages with AQC cannot be denied. Yet, AQIS and local AQ networks situated in Karachi have adopted a very localised approach to their operations, aiming to garner support and recruits within Pakistan, and then assert its strength.[193]

Previously in June 2017, Ansar al-Sharia, a pro-AQ group surfaced in Karachi, comprising returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) from Syria who had fought for the Al-Nusra Front and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.[194] In July 2017, reports revealed that the group was involved in five terror plots in Karachi and Balochistan province and by September 2017 the involved suspects had all been arrested.[195] Since then, the

[186] Salman Masood, "*Death Toll in Pakistan Suicide Bombing Rises to 128*," *New York Times*, July 14, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/world/asia/pakistan-suicide-bombing-election.html.

[187] Hassan Ali Khan. "Mastung Is One Of The Deadliest Terrorist Attacks In Pakistan's History," *Express Tribune*, July 16, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1758888/1-149-martyred-mastung-now-deadliest-terrorist-attack-pakistans-hi/.

[188] "ISIS Claims Deadly Attack On Tribal Region In Pakistan," *Al Arabiya*, November 24, 2018, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2018/11/24/ISIS-claims-deadly-attack-on-tribal-region-in-Pakistan-.html.

[189] "Al-Qaeda In The Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) In 'Pakistan Is Ours' Statement," *Middle East Media Research Institute*, August 17, 2018, https://www.memri.org/reports/al-qaeda-indian-subcontinent-aqis-pakistan-ours-statement-pakistan-army-napoleon-pakistan.

[190] Ibid.

[191] "AQIS 'High-Profile Militant' Held In Karachi," *Dawn*, November 20, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1446665/aqis-high-profile-militant-held-in-karachi.

[192] Jeff Stein, "Ayman al-Zawahiri: How a CIA Drone Strike Nearly Killed the Head of Al-Qaeda," *Newsweek,* April 21, 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/ayman-al-zawahiri-cia-donald-trump-drone-strike-osama-bin-laden-pakistan-587732.

[193] Don Rassler, "Al-Qa`ida in Pakistan: A Metric Problem?" *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 10, no.8 (2017), https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaida-in-pakistan-a-metric-problem/.

[194] Farhan Zahid, "Waiting for Resurgence: Al-Qaeda Core in Pakistan," *Counter Terrorist Trends & Analyses* 9, no.9 (2017): 1-4

[195] Farhan Zahid, "Jamaat ul Ansar al-Sharia: The New Al-Qaeda Threat in Pakistan," *James Town Foundation*, September 22, 2017, https://jamestown.org/program/jamaat-ul-ansar-al-sharia-the-new-al-qaeda-threat-in-pakistan/; "The Rise and Fall of Ansarul Sharia Pakistan," *DAWN,*

authorities have successfully dismantled the Ansar al-Sharia network in Karachi. Periodically, small AQ-linked networks are likely to emerge in parts of Pakistan, but these will represent a low-impact and diffused threat as authorities are likely to preemptively detect, arrest and detain members.

China as a Key Target

China has invested over US $62 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, developing a network of roads, pipelines and railways to connect Balochistan province in Pakistan with Xinjiang in China.[196] Currently, there are more than 20,000 Chinese nationals working across Pakistan, with more than 70,000 short-term visit visas being issued per year. These Chinese economic projects, nationals and interests face a growing threat from a range of local and transnational terrorist and insurgent groups as discussed below.

Threat from Islamist Terrorist Groups

In September 2018, TTP released its code of conduct, which states that all 'non-Islamic countries allied with Pakistan are viable targets'.[197] While the code of conduct does not directly name China, it remains vulnerable to attacks by TTP due to two key reasons. First, TTP had identified the U.S. as an enemy because of its counter-terrorism alliance with Pakistan, construction as kuffar (disbelievers) and drone strikes that have targeted TTP fighters in the tribal areas since the group's formation in 2007.[198] Considering that U.S. has strained relations with Pakistan, and China has become a key stakeholder with a strong physical presence, it will become a prominent target. Second, TTP has opposed China's treatment of the

minority ethnic Uyghur population in Xinjiang province. In 2012, TTP claimed responsibility for killing a Chinese tourist labelling the attack as "revenge" for the Chinese government "killing our Muslim brothers in the Xinjiang province".[199]

The ISK has also targeted the Chinese presence in Pakistan, reflecting the group's label for China as an "oppressor of Muslims similar to Israel, India and the US". In June 2017, Amaq media agency claimed that it had executed two Chinese nationals who were kidnapped within Balochistan province in May that year.[200] The increasing Chinese presence in Balochistan province and elsewhere provides IS cells and networks an opportunity to gain visibility and media coverage by targeting foreign nationals and business professionals. This remains particularly important for IS due to its territorial defeat in Iraq and Syria, possible shift towards Afghanistan as a safe-haven/base for operations and portrayal of itself as a group that is as strong as it was back in 2014.

Threat from Baloch Separatist Groups

Baloch separatist groups perceive the Chinese presence as an exploitation of local resources, referring to China as a 'colonising power' next to Pakistan. Overall, six Baloch separatist groups have announced displeasure towards the Chinese presence, which is exacerbated by the government's inability to address Balochi grievances. Earlier in August 2018, Allah Nazar Baloch, commander of the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) addressed a letter to the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, stating that Chinese nationals, including fishermen, laborers and tourists are legitimate targets.[201]

September 9, 2017,
https://www.dawn.com/news/1356467.
[196] Abdul Basit, "Attacks On Chinese Nationals and Interests In Pakistan Are Likely To Continue. Here's Why," *South China Morning Post*, November 27, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2175238/attacks-chinese-nationals-and-interests-pakistan-are-likely.
[197] "Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: Strategy (Code of Conduct)," *Umar Media*, September 16, 2018.
[198] Dan De Luce and Sean D. Naylor. "The Drones are Back," *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/26/the-drones-are-back/.

[199] Amira Jadoon and Sara Mahmood," Fixing the Cracks in the Pakistani Taliban's Foundation: TTP's Leadership Returns to the Mehsud Tribe," *Combating Terrorism Sentinel* 11, no.11 (2018): 21-25 https://ctc.usma.edu/fixing-cracks-pakistani-talibans-foundation-ttps-leadership-returns-mehsud-tribe/.
[200] Michael Clarke, "Executions in Pakistan: Is ISIS Targeting China?" *CNN,* June 16, 2017, https://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/14/opinions/china-isis-pakistan/index.html.
[201] "Balochistan Is Not Xinjiang, Baloch Leader Warns China," *Business Standard*, August 17, 2018, https://bit.ly/2Hj1u7r.

In addition to the BLF's declarations, the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) remains one of the strongest threats to China, due its prominent physical strength (2,000 to 3,000 militants), and favourable geographical location (operating out of Afghanistan, situated along the mountainous areas of Iran).[202] Earlier, in August 2018, the BLA had targeted a bus transporting Chinese engineers in the Dalbandin district in a suicide bombing, with those in the bus suffering minor injuries.[203] More recently in November 2018, three BLA gunmen killed at least four people in an attack targeting the Chinese consulate in Karachi.[204] While no Chinese diplomats or staffers were killed in the attack, it marks the second time BLA used suicide bombing as a tactic. The gunmen who attempted to enter the consulate were wearing suicide vests, but were unable to detonate them. This shift in tactics by a group that relied on mortar attacks and ambushes, signifies a willingness to learn from other terrorist groups and evolve.

Bilateral Dynamics

China becoming a prominent target for terrorist and separatist groups will lead to increasing pressure on the state to implement effective counter-terrorism strategies. China has also labelled TTP as a key threat to peace and stability within Pakistan, after the group threatened to cut off access to the Karakoram Highway, the land connection between Pakistan and China.[205] Pakistan had then deployed a large contingent of army troops along the critical route for protection. Militancy in Balochistan province has been closely linked to India and Pakistan's proxy war. Pakistan has allegedly claimed that Indian intelligence is involved in Balochistan and has been funding militancy

in the province.[206] These assertions were further strengthened in March 2016, when an Indian spy, Kulbhushan Jadhav, was arrested in the province and admitted to India's support for Baloch separatism. While India has rejected these claims, any surge in violence in Balochistan province in the long-term is likely to affect bilateral ties between India and Pakistan.

Localised Responses and Regional Dynamics

Pakistan is faced with a dual threat of religious extremism and terrorism. On one hand, there are a number of local and transnational terrorist groups, both ethno-separatist and religious-nationalist in nature. Despite military operations, most of these groups still possess the capability to conduct attacks, operate stealthily and use social media/encrypted messaging platforms as a means of communication, propaganda dissemination and recruitment. On the other hand, the more mainstream threat emanating from Barelvi radical groups, particularly the TLP, is equally concerning. The TLP has the capability to lockdown major cities, mobilise thousands to engage in violent protests and demand that their policies be implemented through pressure tactics.

There is significant ideological opposition towards Rizvi and his party, TLP, which comes from notable Pakistani religious leaders such as Maulana Tariq Jameel of Tableeghi Jamaat, a missionary Islamist organisation, and Dr Tahirul Qadri of the Pakistan Awami Tehrik (PAT), a moderate Barelvi political party and offshoot of Minhaj-ul-Quran.[207] These scholars have rejected Rizvi's vision and approach, labelling it as absolutist and intolerant.[208] They have also stated that Rizvi and TLP misquote history and religious scriptures to justify their extremist perspectives. These ideologues can act as a counterbalance to TLP's violent and dangerous rhetoric.

---

[202] Basit, "Attacks On Chinese Nationals And Interests In Pakistan Are Likely To Continue. Here's Why," November 27, 2018.
[203] Gul Yousafzai, "Five Wounded In Attack On Bus Ferrying Chinese Workers In Pakistan," *Reuters*, August 11, 2018, https://reut.rs/2P2if6T.
[204] "Karachi Attack: China Consulate Attack Leaves Four Dead," *BBC News*, November 23, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46313136.
[205] Zahid Hussain, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Regional Geopolitics," *IFRI: Center for Asian Studies*, June 2017, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/hussain_china_pakistan_economic_corridor_2017.pdf.

[206] Devika Mittal and Amit Ranjan, "India-Pakistan: Contours of Relationships," *Space and Culture, India* 4, no.1 (2016): 6-15.
[207] "Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi | Tariq Jameel Ki Gustakhion Ka Mun Tor Jawab," *YouTube*, June 28, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4LGN8-mWEA; Ahmed Yusuf, "What is behind the sudden rise of the TLP?" *Dawn*, August 5, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1425085.
[208] Ibid.

Given the above, the state needs to focus on ideological responses to violent extremism. In January 2018, the government released the 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' narrative that rejected terrorism, sectarian hatred and use of violence to impose Islamic law through a fatwa (religious decree) by 1,800 Islamic scholars from across the country.[209] However, these initiatives will have limited effectiveness in isolation. More holistic and long-term gains would require integration of efforts such as *Paigham-e-Pakistan* in revamping the education system, regulating madrassas to promote tolerance while addressing the grievances of the youth. In addition, the state must avoid providing patronage and support to extremist religious groups and political parties. The rule of law must be upheld and mob power and violence checked, if not eliminated. Although the authorities have arrested Rizvi and booked him for sedition and terrorism, the impact of these actions on TLP's followers and the prospects of violence and protests remains to be seen.

Taking additional steps against proscribed terrorist organisations have become more urgent, considering that Pakistan has been in the spotlight for not taking stronger action against terrorism. In November 2018, US President Donald Trump alleged that Pakistan had done nothing despite receiving 'billions of dollars' in aid from the US. Prime Minister Imran Khan dubbed Trump's comments as false accusations, adding that Pakistan has suffered loss of lives and economic costs while supporting the US War on Terror. The friction between the heads of state, paired with US withdrawal of US $300 million in military aid, has put the country in the spotlight. In June 2018, Pakistan was placed under the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list, a global watchdog looking after money laundering and terrorist financing, for not taking sufficient action to prevent money-laundering and counter terrorist financing. FATF is officially due to meet in January 2019 to discuss the progress of Pakistan and other countries.[210]

This looming deadline requires Pakistan to show tangible progress in tracing and freezing the assets of more than eight terrorist and banned groups and organisations. Growing international pressure indicates that action taken against terrorist groups must be effective by combining military action with ideological responses to mitigate long-term recruitment, and strategic policies cutting off financial sources for these groups, while denying them physical safe-haven.

Outlook

In 2019, it is unlikely that Pakistan will be shifted to FATF's black list to join North Korea and Iran. It is expected that Pakistan might remain on the grey list due to broader geopolitical dynamics, with the US as a major financier of the FATF. The US, partly responsible for grey-listing, wants Pakistan to take more responsibility in countering terrorism and ensuring that groups damaging US interests in Afghanistan are not granted safe havens in the country. A continued reduction of terrorism and effective dismantling of groups targeting Pakistan from Afghanistan will also depend on peace and stability within Afghanistan. Pakistan faces a difficult geographical situation as 2,430 kilometers of a porous border with rough mountainous terrain is shared by both countries. By the end of 2019, Pakistan has plans of fencing the border in a $550 million project to prevent cross-border infiltration.[211]

Earlier in August 2018, the country announced the deployment of 60,000 additional paramilitaries along the shared border as an extension of counter-terrorism efforts.[212] Yet despite enforcing these security measures, cross-border movement of terrorists will only face partial deterrence.

---

[209] "Paigham-e-Pakistan" – Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Narrative," *Daily Pakistan*, January 19, 2018, https://dnd.com.pk/download-paigham-e-pakistan-pakistans-counter-terrorism-narrative/138145.

[210] Mehtab Haider, "27 Actionable Plans: FATF Sets Another Tight Deadline For Pakistan," *The News*, November 26, 2018, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/398194-27-actionable-plans-fatf-sets-another-tight-deadline-for-pakistan.

[211] Farman Kakkar, "Is History Repeating Itself in Afghanistan," *The News on Sunday*, December 30, 2018, http://tns.thenews.com.pk/history-repeating-afghanistan/#.XCyxIBMzbBI.

[212] The National, "Pakistan Recruits Thousands More Troops To Guard Afghan Border," August 9, 2018, https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/pakistan-recruits-thousands-more-troops-to-guard-afghan-border-1.758536.

Historically there are strong cross-border links between militant groups operating on both sides of the border. Presently, groups such as JuA and TTP maintain active operational strongholds in Afghanistan, owing to the full-blown military operations that obliterated their strongholds in Pakistan's tribal areas. In December 2018, reports of ISK fighters being trained in Afghanistan for suicide attacks in Pakistan highlight that Pakistan will remain a key target.[213] The continued instability, lack of conflict resolution (between the Afghan government and the Taliban) and IS' FTFs movements from Iraq and Syria will allow ISK to operate and strengthen its position in Afghanistan. A strong physical base will permit its fighters to continue conducting large-scale and mass-casualty attacks. ISK will remain assertive in Pakistan through its local affiliates LeJ-A and JuA, while facing opposition from TTP. The TTP, after its change in leadership, is likely to make a comeback to reclaim its position. As such, the militant landscape in Pakistan will remain complicated and volatile in the year ahead, necessitating more consolidated and holistic approaches and renewed commitment from the state apparatus to counter the threat. This would require continuing the fight militarily, bolstering ideological responses to mitigate future recruitment and cutting the financial sources of terrorist operations.

SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka witnessed the eruption of communal violence by religious violent-extremists in 2018. Since the end of the 26-year civil war involving Tamil insurgents in 2009, Buddhist radicals espousing hegemonic appropriation for the majority Sinhalese have exposed Sri Lanka to communal tensions and conflicts. The several alleged plots of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) foiled by the Sri Lankan authorities in the North and Eastern regions also point to the potential rejuvenation of the group. The likely return of dozens of IS fighters from Syria with an

exposure to transnational jihadism could further undermine Sri Lanka's communal harmony.

Communal Violence

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country comprising the Buddhist Sinhalese community majority, and sizeable minority communities of Hindus (mostly Tamils), Muslims and Christians. The ethnic Sinhalese community constitutes the majority (74%) and are mainly Buddhist; Tamils are the largest minority (15%) and are mainly Hindus. Muslims form the second largest minority (10%).[214] Since the 1940s, there have been conflicts between the majority Sinhalese and minority communities over various issues. 2018 saw two major incidents of communal violence, among the worst seen in the country in a decade. In March, riots erupted in the city of Kandy after four Muslim youths allegedly attacked a Sinhala Buddhist man.[215] The man subsequently succumbed to his injuries and his attackers were promptly arrested and detained. His death sparked anger and violence and led to the arrest of 24 local Sinhalese men.[216] As per media reports, Buddhist radical groups then converged on the town with hundreds of their supporters and attacked several businesses, homes and places of worship that belonged to the Muslim community. The government was criticised for its slow response in imposing a state of emergency and deploying the military to assist the police.[217]

Rise of Buddhist Extremist Groups

Since 2012, anti-Muslim sentiment has been on the rise, with radicals, including members of the Buddhist clergy, accused of orchestrating organised campaigns of hate

---

[213] Haider Ali, "Family Of Mastung Suicide Bomber Under Training In Afghanistan For Further Attacks: Report," *Daily Pakistan*, December 11, 2018, https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/family-of-mastung-suicide-bomber-under-training-in-afghanistan-for-further-attacks-report/.

[214] Sudha Ramachandran, "Sri Lanka's Anti-Muslim Violence," *The Diplomat*, March 13, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/sri-lankas-anti-muslim-violence/.
[215] Sajjad Ashraf, "Ethnic Tensions Worry Sri Lankan Muslims," *Gulf News,* March 19, 2018, https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/ethnic-tension-worries-sri-lankan-muslims-1.2191004.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Meera Srinivasan, "Muslim Shops, Buildings, Targeted Again In Kandy City," *The Hindu*, March 7, 2018, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/fresh-round-of-anti-muslim-violence-in-sri-lanka/article22969117.ece.

speech and propaganda against Muslims. These groups adhere to a form of ethno-nationalism that privileges Sinhalese Buddhists, marginalises other faith-communities, and justifies minorities' subordination.[218] A major group is the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), a breakaway faction of the right-wing nationalist political party Jathika Hela Urumaya. The BBS promotes propaganda through rallies and social media – along with calls for violence – that draws from the global spread of Islamophobia. The BSS peddle narratives that portray Muslims as violent-extremists and their rapid population growth is framed as a ploy to outnumber the Sinhalese. Their growing economic power is also perceived as weakening Sinhalese dominance over the country.[219]

The influence of Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka, although on the fringes of society, needs monitoring, particularly given their ability to harness street power. In August, hundreds of Buddhist monks and agitators held a number of protests when the BBS founder Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara was arrested on charges of contempt of court.[220] His arrest is a rarity, as the authorities often overlook allegations of inciting violence by radical leaders against minorities.[221] According to scholars, the government's "soft approach" with radical leaders is due to a fear of backlash from Sinhalese voters, which only emboldens the extremists further. Throughout Sri Lanka's history, Buddhism has been politicised, and plays a significant role in shaping the Sinhala

Buddhist identity.[222] Holding such groups accountable for their inflammatory rhetoric is crucial to ensuring that tensions do not spill over and fuel greater violence.

Islamist Fundamentalism

In recent decades, some Muslims in the eastern regions have been influenced by Salafism, brought to the country, by returning local preachers and members of the diaspora who spent years studying and working in the Middle East.[223] The global spread of Salafist movements has also had a visible impact, with mosques and madrassas mushrooming in some areas of Sri Lanka. Moreover, the influence of organisations such as *Thowheed Jamath* (Party for the Oneness of God), which preach strict religious interpretations and intolerance of non-Muslims, is also apparent. Reports have highlighted Muslims in some towns isolating themselves from the wider community by, for example, attending segregated schools. A number of women also now wear the *burqa* (veil), previously uncommon among Sri Lankan Muslim women, who traditionally observed Sri Lankan dress practices. These developments have exacerbated both ethnic tensions, and also divisions within Muslim communities, specifically between mainstream Muslims and Salafists. Sinhala nationalist groups cite them as evidence of a radicalisation of Muslims.[224]

Although the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group is known to operate a few hundred cells in Asia, there are no known militant groups supporting radical Islamists within Sri Lanka.[225] Nevertheless, 36 Sri Lankan nationals have travelled to Syria in 2016; some of these fighters might eventually return after the military defeat and territorial

---

[218] Mario Arulthas, "The Failed Promise of Reconciliation in Sri Lanka," *The Diplomat*, October 11, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/the-failed-promise-of-reconciliation-in-sri-lanka/.

[219] Alan Keenan, "Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka," *International Crisis Group*, March 7, 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/buddhist-militancy-rises-again-sri-lanka.

[220] "Monks Stage Protests Countrywide," *The Island*, June 19, 2018, http://www.island.lk/index.php?page_cat=article-details&page=article-details&code_title=186547.

[221] Gnanasara was prosecuted on charges of contempt of court, after reportedly barging into a court while in session. He proceeded to threaten and accuse a woman, who was in court for proceedings concerning her husband, a prominent missing journalist, of supporting ethnic minority extremists and tarnishing the reputation of the military.

[222] Ashraf, "Ethnic Tensions Worry Sri Lankan Muslims," March 19, 2018.

[223] Ranga Jayasuriya, "The Creeping Reach of ISIS is Gradually Radicalising Sri Lanka," *The Quint*, July 27, 2016, https://www.thequint.com/news/world/the-creeping-reach-of-isis-in-gradually-radicalising-sri-lanka.

[224] Ibid.

[225] Rohan Gunaratna, "Sri Lanka Faces Twin Threat," *Benar News*, April 4, 2016, https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asia-pacific-threat-update/Rohan-Gunaratna-04042016163531.html.

losses in Iraq and Syria.[226] All the identified terrorists were from well-educated and affluent backgrounds. According to the government, most of these individuals were motivated by a desire to create a global Sunni caliphate.[227] Other factors include a sense of alienation and persecution they developed resulting from the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence in Sri Lanka. These returning fighters could attempt to radicalise politically disenfranchised Muslim youth, as threat groups seek to expand and attract more recruits.

Tamil Ethno-Nationalism

In 2018, there have been efforts from abroad to revive the LTTE.[228] According to the government, the LTTE, which was defeated in 2009, operates an international network of front organisations intent on financing an extremist agenda among the Tamils living in former conflict zones.[229] Other sources note that sentiments for a separate Tamil state in the North have lingered in recent years with a deterioration in the law and order situation there. Criminal gangs are fighting each other and stealing from the civilian population.[230] This has caused growing resentment among these Tamils towards the government and is exacerbated by the lack of economic opportunities and political autonomy. In October 2018, a former Tamil state minister was arrested for advocating a return of the LTTE.[231] She had argued in a July speech there was less violence against women and children during the LTTE era, when the separatists controlled a third of the country

and operated their own police and courts.[232] These remarks sparked protests from Sinhala nationalist groups, which accused her of trying to resurrect the terrorist outfit.

Current President Maithripala Sirisena assumed power in 2015 with strong backing from minority groups after pledging reparations for war victims and accountability for human rights abuses during the conflict.[233] His administration has been under significant international pressure to address war-era abuses by both the military and rebels. The LTTE was known to conscript child soldiers and use suicide bombers, while both sides were accused of indiscriminately killing civilians. The United Nations (UN) estimates tens of thousands of civilians were killed in the last phases of the war.[234] Many remain unaccounted for.

On October 26, Sirisena, in a controversial move, sacked the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and his cabinet, and replaced them with a government headed by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa. [235] Relations between the two leaders, who had joined forces in the 2015 presidential election to defeat Rajapakse, had soured amid disagreements over economic reform, government administration and an alleged assassination plot against Sirisena. Wickremasinghe subsequently challenged the move both in Parliament and the courts and was reinstated to the premiership on December 16, after the Supreme Court ruled that his sacking was illegal. Rajapakse, who resigned following the court ruling, is likely to bide his time in opposition until the next election, which can be called within two

[226] "36 Sri Lankans Gone To Syria: Def. Secy," *Daily Mirror*, April 1, 2018, http://www.dailymirror.lk/101721/36-sri-lankans-gone-to-syria-some-to-join-isis-def-secy.
[227] Ibid.
[228] "Sri Lanka Warns Of Tamil Separatist Struggle," *The Straits Times*, May 20, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka-warns-of-tamil-separatist-resurgence-abroad.
[229] Iromi Dharmawardhane, "Sri Lanka", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 7, no.1 (2015): 46-49, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CTTA-Jan_Feb-2015.pdf.
[230] Jehan Perera, "Cry Behind Provocative Call For Return Of LTTE," *New Age*, September 20, 2018, http://www.newagebd.net/article/45940/cry-behind-provocative-call-for-return-of-ltte.
[231] "Sri Lanka Arrests MP For Hailing Defeated Tamil Rebels," *Channel News Asia*, October 8, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka-arrests-mp-for-hailing-defeated-tamil-rebels.

[232] Ibid.
[233] "Sri Lanka Enacts Law To Compensate War Victims," *Channel News Asia*, October 10, 2018.
[234] Colum Lynch, "Sri Lanka's Crushing Of Tigers May Have Killed 40,000 Civilians," *The Washington Post*, April 21, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/un-sri-lankas-crushing-of-tamil-tigers-may-have-killed-40000-civilians/2011/04/21/AFU14hJE_story.html?utm_term=.1f3ea8664b62.
[235] "Sri Lanka President Sacks PM Ranil Wickremesinghe," *Hindustan Times*, October 27, 2018, https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/sri-lanka-president-sacks-pm-ranil-wickremesinghe-appoints-ex-president-mahinda-rajapakse-as-new-premier/story-qUs6cvy4i4d2nuGOlBGFOO.html.

years.[236] His party is expected to mount a strong challenge given the grassroots support it enjoys among the Sinhala majority.

Some analysts have warned that the political situation, which has forced Sirisena and Wickremasinghe back into an uneasy governing alliance and reinvigorated Rajapakse's political ambitions, could embolden radical groups and put the country's fragile peace at risk. [237] Ethno-nationalist tensions peaked during Rajapakse's Presidency from 2005 to 2015, with political observers accusing his government of giving patronage to Sinhala Buddhist extremists. [238] Such concerns aside, a possible change of government at the next general election could provide a needed boost for the economy and a stalled post-war reconciliation process.

LTTE Plots

In June 2018, Sri Lankan police in the Northern district of Puthukkudiyiruppu arrested several former LTTE men in a trishaw found with explosives, arms and ammunition, as well as military fatigues with LTTE insignia.[239] Subsequent investigations revealed they had been detained in 2009, rehabilitated and released before their recent re-capture. Previous security operations in 2016 had uncovered weapons and explosives, including suicide jackets, in the towns of Chavakachcheri and Mannar.[240] The revival of the LTTE as a formidable

insurgent movement is unlikely as there is no mood in the north for a return to a LTTE-sponsored conflict. However, there is a need for constant vigilance regarding this threat. Pro-rebel activists abroad have staged frequent anti-Sri Lanka government protests in cities such as London and Toronto, although no violence has been committed by the LTTE since its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was gunned down in 2009.[241]

Responses

Since the emergence of ethno-religious tensions in 2012, the government has yet to investigate or prosecute leaders of Buddhist groups involved in attacks on Muslims. According to the International Crisis Group, Sri Lanka's politicians need to rise above communal affiliations and the fear of alienating their voters to bring security and stability.[242] Law enforcement must also decisively act against extremist groups and their leaders. The arrest of the radical monk Gnasasara in August is a positive step, but going forward, the government would have to contend with strong public disapproval of the state prosecuting a religious figure.

The cabinet in September 2018 conditionally approved new counter-terrorism legislation that sought to criminalise acts of violence and hate-speech directed against any community in the country.[243] Following a two-year consultation process, the proposed new laws were watered down, after some politicians and activists protested that the initial drafts were too sweeping as offences initially listed in the act were seen to impede free speech.[244] While balancing these

[236] Ratindra Kuruwita and Zaheena Rasheed, "Si Lanka's disputed Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns," *Al-Jazeera*, December 15, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/sri-lanka-disputed-prime-minister-mahinda-rajapaksa-resigns-181215073615336.html.

[237] Jeffrey Feltman,"Sri Lanka: An Urgent Case For Conflict Prevention," *Brookings Centre for East Asia Policy Studies*, October 31, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/10/31/sri-lanka-an-urgent-case-for-conflict-prevention/.

[238] Ibid.

[239] D.B.S. Jeyaraj, "Does Recovery Of Arms From Former LTTE Cadres Indicate Revival Of Tamil Insurgency In Sri Lanka?" *Daily Mirror*, June 30, 2018, https://newsin.asia/does-recovery-of-arms-from-former-ltte-cadres-indicate-revival-of-tamil-insurgency-in-sri-lanka/.

[240] Rohan Gunaratna, "Sinhala Muslim Riots in Sri Lanka: The Need for Restoring Communal History," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 10, no.4 (2018): 1-4, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CTTA-April-2018.pdf.

[241] "Sri Lanka Warns Of Tamil Separatist Struggle Resurgence," *The Straits Times*, May 20, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka-warns-of-tamil-separatist-resurgence.

[242] Alan Keenan, "Buddhist Militancy Rises Again in Sri Lanka," *International Crisis Group*, March 7, 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/buddhist-militancy-rises-again-sri-lanka.

[243] "Monitoring Social Media Necessary to Check Hate Speech: PM," *The Sunday Times*, March 25, 2018, https://www.sundaytimes.lk/180325/news/monitoring-social-media-necessary-to-check-hate-speech-pm-287689.html.

[244] "Sri Lanka's New Draft Counter-Terrorism Legislation Is Human Rights Compliant," *The Sunday Observer*, September 16, 2018, https://newsin.asia/sri-lankas-new-draft-counter-terrorism-legislation-is-human-rights-compliant/.

concerns, the government needs a set of enforcement and deterrence mechanisms to effectively deal with the threat. On the counter-terrorism front, the dismantling of the security and intelligence apparatuses in the north and east has encouraged the emergence of criminal and extremist groups.[245]

Moreover, there is a need for law enforcement, military and security apparatuses to have dedicated units to monitor IS propaganda, financing, recruitment and other activities.[246] In the past, the authorities were primarily fixated with a possible LTTE resurgence, that they inadequately addressed the emerging threat from IS and other jihadist groups.[247] There is a need for holistic programs, similar in scope to the initiatives used to rehabilitate former LTTE insurgents, to deradicalise Muslims who have been indoctrinated by extremist ideologies. The government also needs to partner with mainstream Muslim religious and community groups to engage youth and guide them away from extremist and exclusivist propaganda.

Outlook

While progress has been made in several areas, including mass resettlement of civilians in war ravaged regions and rehabilitation of extremists, Sri Lanka still faces several challenges in making the transition from a post-war to a more peaceful society. The recent riots illustrate how rapidly tensions can degenerate into violence, especially in the current social media age where platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp can be used to whip up unrest and spread misinformation. Facebook's role in the March 2018 riots was highlighted in the media, with posts rapidly spreading misinformation about Muslims to incite hate and violence.[248] Some of these posts

remained online for days after they were first reported, until the authorities imposed a temporary ban on social media after tensions had resulted in violence.[249] The increasing exposure of Sri Lankans to extremist and exclusivist narratives in the physical and online spheres needs to be addressed. To better deal with these and other security and political challenges, the government also needs to take several preventive and rehabilitative measures.

Abdul Basit is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He contributed on Afghanistan and can be reached at isabasit@ntu.edu.sg.

Iftekharul Bashar is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore. He contributed on Bangladesh and can be reached at isiftekharul@ntu.edu.sg.

Mohammed Sinan Siyech is a Research Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He contributed on India and can be reached at ismsiyech@ntu.edu.sg.

Sara Mahmood is a Senior Analyst with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. She contributed on Pakistan and can be reached at issmahmood@ntu.edu.sg.

Amresh Gunasingham is an Associate Editor with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He contributed on Sri Lanka and can be reached at isAmreshLG@ntu.edu.sg.

---

[245] Rohan Gunaratna, "Sri Lanka Faces Twin Threat," *Benar News*, April 4, 2016, https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asia-pacific-threat-update/Rohan-Gunaratna-04042016163531.html.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Balasubramaniyan Viswanathan, "Islamic State in Sri Lanka," *Geopolitical Monitor*, July 12, 2016, https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/islamic-state-in-sri-lanka/.
[248] Amalini De Sayrah, "Facebook Helped Forment Anti-Muslim Violence in Sri Lanka," *The Guardian*,

May 5, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/05/facebook-anti-muslim-violence-sri-lanka.
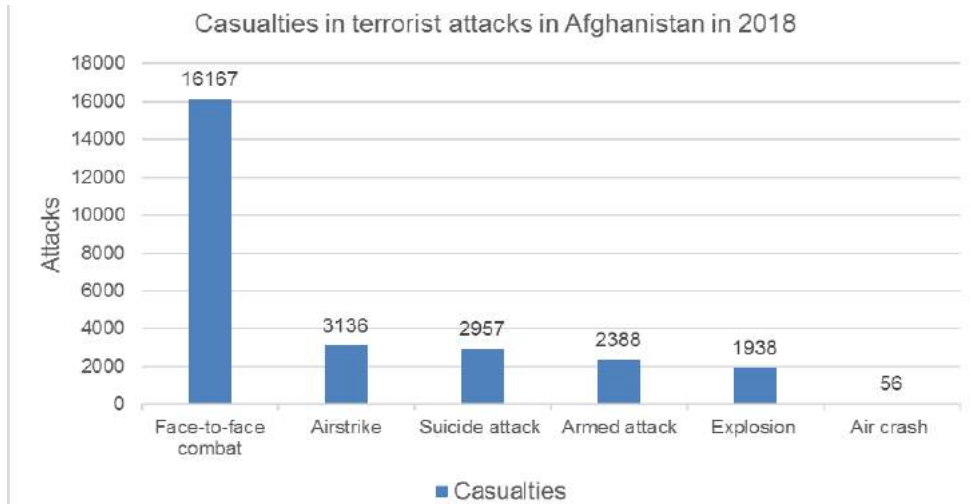[249] Ibid.

Appendix (Afghanistan)

Figure 1: Causalities in Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan in 2018[1]

Year	Peace Initiative	Interlocutor	Outcome
2010	Karachi Peace Process	United Nations (UN) reached out to the Taliban deputy commander Mullah Ghani Bradar in Karachi.	Talks failed. Mullah Bradar was arrested in Karachi.
2013-14	Qatar Peace Process	United States (US) allowed the Taliban to open an office in Qatar to hold formal negotiations.	President Hamid Karzai opposed, US cancelled the talks.
2015	Murree Peace Process	Pakistan arranged a meeting between the Afghan government and the Taliban Qatar office.	News leaking Mullah Umar's death scuttled the talks.
2016	Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)-led Peace Process	US, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan.	Killing of Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansoor in a drone attack in Balochistan ended the QCG process.
2017	Kabul process	President Ashraf Ghani extended unconditional offer for talks, to recognise Taliban as a political party, to share power and release Taliban prisoners.	The Taliban rejected the offer maintaining they would only talk to the US.
2018	Eid-ceasefire and ensuing peace talks.	US represented by Zalmay Khalilzad	The talks are ongoing.

Table 1: Peace Talks Efforts from 2010 to 2018

No.	Scenario	Expected Outcome
Option 1	Postpone elections	To avoid political uncertainty and election disputes to facilitate peace process
Option 2	Hold elections, but the incoming government should act as interim body	Allow the warring parties to reconcile and come up with a governance structure
Option 3	Loya Jirga should appoint an interim setup	-Same as above-
Option 4	Convene a Bonn-like conference	The conference should devise a power-sharing formula that incorporates the Taliban

Table 2: Different Options to Approach Afghan Peace Talks

---

[1] Ahmad Shah Erfanyar, "2018 Casualties Indicate 7 Percent Surge," *Pajhwok,* January 3, 2018, https://www.pajhwok.com/en/2019/01/03/2018-casualties-indicate-7-percent-surge.

CENTRAL ASIA
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

In 2018, terrorism posed a multi-faceted and continued threat to Central Asia. While the dynamics and characteristics of the terrorist threat may differ across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, certain challenges are visible across the board. The major regional risks that Central Asian countries continued to face in 2018 are: (i) transnational terrorism in the form of Central Asian terrorist units fighting in foreign conflict zones; (ii) the growth of clandestine terrorist sleeper cells in the region; (iii) homegrown attacks inspired by online extremist ideologies; (iv) and the radicalisation of Central Asian migrant communities abroad.

Central Asian Militants Split between Islamic State and Al-Qaeda

In the context of Central Asia, both Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda (AQ)-linked groups represent an equally significant threat. Most recent official estimations from the region indicate that nearly 5,500 Central Asians, including 2,000 nationals of Uzbekistan, 1,300 to 2,000 of Tajikistan, 850 of Kyrgyzstan and 500 to 600 of Kazakhstan, travelled to Syria and Iraq to join jihadist groups fighting there.[1] Despite media reports regarding 360 Turkmens drawn to the war in Syria, the Turkmen government has denied the involvement of its citizens in this conflict.[2] There are significant variations in the ethnic composition of Central Asian militant units aligned with IS and of those with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the successor of AQ's former Syrian affiliate Al-Nusra Front. The majority of Kazakh and Tajik fighters have merged with IS as militant divisions known as 'Kazakh Jamaat' and 'Tajik Jamaat'. In comparison, Uzbeks have joined Kateebat at Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ) and Kateebat Imam Al-Bukhari (KIB), which have close battlefield ties to HTS. Each group presents its own challenges that will be discussed below.

Islamic State Seeks to Reinforce its Influence

In 2018, Tajikistan saw two separate attacks that were carried out by individuals inspired by IS. This was a significant development as it was the first IS-claimed attack in Central Asia. IS has previously restrained from getting involved in attacks in Central Asia as the group's leadership emphasised that attacking this region was not the highest priority.[3]

In July 2018, five Tajik men killed four foreign cyclists in a car-ramming attack, accompanied by an on-foot gun and knife assault in the Khatlon province of Tajikistan. The victims consisted of two Americans, a Swiss and a Dutch national. In response, the Tajik government blamed elements of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), a former opposition party banned as an extremist group in 2015. IS unhesitatingly claimed that its 'soldiers had carried out the attack in response to calls to target citizens of the coalition countries'.[4]

In November 2018, a group of terrorist inmates staged a riot at a high-security prison in Khujand province in Tajikistan, leading to the deaths of two prison guards

---

[1] Some of these figures were put forth by law-enforcement officials from the respective Central Asian countries during the regional counter-terrorism experts meeting held in Tbilisi, Georgia in September 2018, where the author attended as a speaker. However, they prefer their identity and affiliation to remain anonymous.

[2] "IG i Novie Ugrozy Bezopasnosti Postsovetskikh Gosudarst (IS and New Security Threats to the Post-Soviet Countries)," *Sputnik-news.uz*, March 9, 2016, https://ru.sputniknews-uz.com/analytics/20160309/1965841.html.

[3] Mumin Ahmadi, "Boeviki 'Islamskogo Gosudarstva' Ugrojayut Tadjikistanu 'Djihadom (Islamic State' Fighters Threaten Tajikistan with Jihad')," *Radio Ozodi,* January 4, 2015, http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/26775997.html.

[4] "Islamic State Claims Attack That Killed Four Foreign Cyclists In Tajikistan," *RFE/RL's Tajik Service,* July 30, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-terrorism-possible-attack-four-foreign-cyclists/29398154.html.

and 21 inmates. Through Amaq media agency, IS leadership claimed responsibility by stating that one of its fighters was responsible for the outbreak of the riot.[5] It is worth noting that IS preferred to remain silent when a group of 27 gunmen attacked two commercial gun stores and attempted to storm a military base in Kazakhstan's Aktobe city in June 2016. The Kazakh government believed that the gunmen were inspired by the speeches of IS' spokesperson Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, who was killed in an airstrike in Syria in 2016.

The two recent IS-linked attacks in Tajikistan aligns with the group's grand strategy of global expansion after continued territorial defeats in Syria and Iraq.[6] Similar to other regions, IS is seeking to increase its ideological and operational influence in Central Asia. However, before its territorial defeat, the main purpose of IS' propaganda activities in Central Asia was to recruit and mobilise potential fighters from the region for its contingents in the Middle East. IS needed more fighters to survive the onslaught it was facing in Syria and Iraq.

In 2018, IS has continued to disseminate online propaganda statements and materials in Central Asian languages, notably in Kazakh, Tajik and Russian. IS' associated Central Asian units, including Tajik and Kazakh Jamaat, do not have their own media wings responsible for propaganda operations. IS' extremist messages focusing on Central Asia are often produced and published directly by the group's main media structures such as Al-Hayat Media and Wilayah of Khayr Media. In terms of its content, graphic design and process of online promotion, the materials in Central Asian languages have shown the markings of IS' typical media production.

A case in point was the release of the 13-minute footage, entitled Subul as-Salam (Pathways to Peace), by Wilayah of Khayr

Media in January 2018. Featuring a number of Kazakh militants fighting in Syria's Deir al-Zor Governorate, the video clip is of high quality and is subtitled with Arabic translations of speeches from Kazakh and Russian languages. The video was distributed via multiple online social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Odnoklassniki and encrypted messaging platforms including, Telegram and Zello. The main themes in this video included delegitimising secular governments in the region and calling on local supporters to conduct low-tech attacks[7], which have become IS' global trademark. In the video, a fighter named Abu Sayf al-Kazakhi, appealed to the people of Kazakhstan and claimed that Muslims have a caliphate now and they are now obliged to travel to the lands of caliphate. He stated that, "if you see any attempt to stop you from migrating to the caliphate…you have to crucify or stab the kuffar (infidels) or destroy their cars".

Kateebat at Tawhid wal Jihad and Kateebat Imam Al-Bukhari Remain Focused on Syria

Although AQ-linked Central Asian groups have not conducted any attacks in Central Asia since 2016, KTJ and KIB are operationally more capable than IS. The attacks claimed by IS in Central Asia involved simple, unsophisticated and low-cost tactics that were not necessarily directed by IS. In contrast, KTJ conducted two high-profile attacks in Kyrgyzstan and Russia: the suicide car bombing at the Chinese embassy in Bishkek in August 2016 and the metro bombing in Saint Petersburg in April 2017. KTJ's leader, Abu Saloh, ran these operations directly from Turkey and Syria

---

[5] "Two Guards Killed in Khujand Prison Riot," *Asia Plus,* November 12, 2018, https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/incidents/20181112/two-guards-killed-in-khujand-prison-riot.

[6] Rohan Gunaratna, "East Asia Part of IS's Grand Strategy for Expansion," *BenarNews,* September 25, 2017, https://www.benarnews.org/english/commentaries/asia-pacific-threat-update/singapore-link-09252017123147.html.

[7] A low-tech attack is a form of terrorist operations involving the use of simple tactics and primitive weapons that can be easily obtained and used by anyone at any time. This mode of attack does not require extensive planning and professional experience from the perpetrator. In the light of heightened propaganda calls, vehicular assault, stabbing and arson have become the most fashionable tactics for attacks carried out by IS-inspired individuals in many parts of the world, including Central Asia. For more details see: Kumar Ramakrishna, "ISIS "Weaponisation of Everyday Life"," *RSIS Commentaries,* March 27, 2017, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/nssp/co17054-london-march-2017-isis-weaponisation-of-everyday-life/#.XBifr_kzaM8.

after employing complex and expensive methods with the use of trained fighters.[8]

KTJ and KIB are now among the largest foreign militant groups that have actively taken part in militant offensives against the regime in Syria's Idlib and Hama provinces. Both of these groups have managed to survive and expand their strength largely due to the support and protection offered by HTS. In return, KTJ and KIB have provided HTS with manpower on the ground.

Unlike IS' Central Asian fighters, KTJ and KIB have their own media divisions, which are called 'Jannat Oshiqlari' (Lovers of Paradise) and 'Al-Bukhari Media' respectively. These media outlets extensively produce and disseminate extremist content in the online domain. In 2018 alone, KTJ and KIB released more than 100 audio statements and videos on their Uzbek-language blogging websites. The groups' supporters have re-distributed these files to other online domains such as YouTube, Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki and Telegram.

Unlike IS, which has shifted its strategy towards encouraging attacks in Central Asia, KTJ and KIB are still focused in calling their supporters and sympathisers to travel to Syria. In a video statement released in November 2018, KTJ's leader Abu Saloh pointed out that his group remains committed to 'preserve jihad in the land of Sham' until the *rafideen* (rejectionists)[9] regime is overthrown in Syria.

Since August 2018, there has been a noticeable decline in the production of KIB's and KTJ's online extremist materials in comparison to the same period over the last year. This coincides with Turkey and Russia's agreement to create a demilitarised buffer zone in Syria's Idlib province in September 2018. The ceasefire agreement has significant implications for KTJ and KIB in Syria as the core structures and their family members are located in the areas where the demilitarised regime is going to be established. The successful implementation of the Idlib agreement could possibly lead KTJ, KIB and relevant groups, to leave their key positions in the province and look for a new safe haven elsewhere.

Idlib Agreement Impacts the Future of KTJ and KIB

After the Idlib ceasefire agreement, the future of KTJ and KIB in Syria remains largely unclear. According to the agreement, Turkey has taken responsibility to convince both moderate rebels and jihadist fighters, including the HTS coalition that comprises KTJ and KIB, to hand over their heavy weaponry in the deescalation zone. Disarmed militants would then migrate to Turkish-controlled safe zones in the north of Syria such as Afrin and Al Bab. At this juncture, it is difficult to predict if the core groups in the HTS coalition will comply with Turkey. Given their close battlefield relationship, it can be expected that the greater contingent of KTJ and KIB fighters would merely follow the existing dynamics within the HTS core. In October 2018, HTS released an online statement that outlined its vision regarding the future of the Syrian war. However, the organisation has avoided to reveal its formal position regarding the ceasefire. Despite this, it remains likely that HTS would endorse Turkey's appeal. Rejecting Turkey's demands could undermine the long-standing support that HTS is believed to have tacitly received from Turkey.[10] It is possible that some members of KTJ and KIB do not want to leave the buffer zone and continue to fight against the Syrian regime, while others may defect to different terrorist factions or relocate to Turkey. Afghanistan could be another possible destination for potential Central Asian jihadists fleeing Syria.

Afghanistan already hosts at least five Central Asian militant groups – the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), Jund al-Khilafah, Jamaat Ansarullah and KIB's Afghan wing. As all of

---

[8] Oved Lobel, 'Is Al-Qaeda's Syrian Affiliate Adopting Islamic State Tactics in Russia?' *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed,* July 4, 2018, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2017/7/5/is-al-qaedas-syrian-affiliate-adopting-is-tactics-in-russia.

[9] This is a derogatory term used by Islamist terrorist groups to describe Shia and Alawite forces whom they regard as heretics and apostates.

[10] Thomas Joscelyn, "Analysis: Jihadists in Syria react to Sochi agreement," *FDD's Long War Journal,* October 16, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/10/analysis-jihadists-in-syria-react-to-sochi-agreement.php.

these groups in Afghanistan maintain close ties with AQ and the Taliban, KIB and KTJ fighters fleeing Syria could end up joining anyone of them. Likewise, pro-IS Central Asian fragments may move to Afghanistan to merge with the Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK), which is believed to have up to 6,000 active fighters.[11]

In September 2018, Andrey Novikov, the head of the Anti-Terrorism Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), stated that IS has been seeking to build its stronghold in Central Asia and create new sleeper cells and activate existing ones. According to Kyrgyz Deputy Prime Minister Zhenish Razakov, militants attempted to cross into the region from northern Afghanistan with the purpose of targeting Central Asia.[12] However, in the online extremist domain, there have been no indications of Central Asian terrorist groups relocating to Afghanistan. Furthermore, existing Central Asian groups in Afghanistan have been largely quiet and almost inactive as they struggle to survive after being expelled from Pakistan's tribal areas between 2014 and 2015.

On 22 March 2018, the United States (US) Department of State included KIB to its list of specially designated global terrorist organisations. A statement released on the State Department website noted that the objective of the move is to deny KIB the resources it needs to plan and carry out attacks.[13] Although both KTJ and KIB are outlawed as terrorist organisations by Central Asian countries, KTJ has not been designated as a terrorist organisation by the United Nations (UN), US or EU. Given the close operational ties of KTJ with HTS and its

growing ideological affiliation to AQ, these global actors should consider blacklisting the group.

Such criminalisation measures have proven to be very effective in curbing the threat of transnational terrorism. For instance, the US' decision to designate KIB as a terrorist organisation had a visible demoralising effect on the group due to the fear of possible US air strikes after the ban. This has been evident from the content of the statement released by KIB on its Telegram channel not long after the ban. KIB stated that it 'was surprised' by the US decision and tried to deny its connections to AQ by claiming that 'it does not have ideological or intellectual ties with any faction internationally enlisted'.

Radicalisation of Central Asian Diaspora Communities

In the past, there were limited cases of radicalisation within the Central Asian diaspora mostly concentrated in Russia, Turkey and the US. Yet an unprecedented surge in attacks by Central Asians across Bishkek, Istanbul, Stockholm, Saint Petersburg and New York were reported between 2016 and 2017. This indicated that the migrant and diaspora radicalisation remains a key challenge. Although members of the Central Asian diaspora and migrant communities did not carry out any attacks in other countries in 2018, dozens of Central Asians were arrested in Russia during anti-terrorism investigations. In March 2018, for instance, Russian counterterrorism agencies cracked down on the activities of a large network of IS recruitment cells and document forgery syndicates in Moscow. The clandestine network that was made up of 60 foreigners, including individuals from Central Asia, had recruited foreign and local nationals in Russia for IS and facilitated their illegal journey to the Middle East. The authorities uncovered three fake documentation-producing labs in 17 locations that they raided.[14]

---

[11] Ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, *UN Security Council*, May 30, 2018, https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1435051/1226_152 8897591_n1813039.pdf.

[12] "Russian, Kyrgyz Troops To Hold Counterterror Drills In Eastern Kyrgyzstan," *RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service,* September 25, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-kyrgyz-troops-to-hold-antiterror-drills-in-eastern-kyrgyzstan/29508580.html.

[13] "Media Note of the United States Department of State on "State Department Terrorist Designation of Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari," March 22, 2018, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/03/279454.ht m.

[14] Rafael Fakhrutdinov, "V rezultate spetsoperatsii zaderjano 60 inostrannykh grajdan (As a result of special operation, 60 foreign citizens were detained)," *Gazeta.ru*, March 13, 2018, https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2018/03/13/11681395.s html.

It is pertinent that recent terrorist attacks by Central Asians living abroad were part of a larger trend in a number of Western countries with minority Muslim populations. The advent of digital media and communications, combined with the heightened interest and propaganda capabilities in terrorist groups to exploit migrant vulnerabilities, cases of radicalisation and recruitment have become more frequent among Central Asians living abroad.

The vulnerability of immigrants is directly related to their geographical distance from home. The limited knowledge of language, culture and socio-economic conditions in the destination country often leads to a sense of alienation and injustice within migrant communities, making them more susceptible to extremist indoctrination. The extensive use of the internet and encrypted networking tools by terrorists have also allowed their ideology to gain traction. Studies suggest that between 80 to 90% of the Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek nationals who went to the Middle East to fight were radicalised and recruited while working as foreign labourers in Russia.[15] It is estimated that nearly 5 million Central Asians now live in Russia – 2.6 million Kazakhs, 1.1 million Uzbeks, 590,000 Kyrgyzs, 470,000 Tajiks and 190,000 Turkmens.[16]

Outlook

The future trajectory of the Central Asian terrorist threat will be determined by two main factors: the ongoing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan and the future of IS and AQ. With many Central Asian jihadists committed to die as 'martyrs' in the 'holy war', most of them may not return home. According to official reports, 470 Tajik and 150 Kyrgyz nationals were killed in Syria and Iraq since the conflict started.[17]

Meanwhile, there were a number of video clips that showed militants burning their passports in a symbolic renunciation of their former national identities. The recent attacks in Tajikistan have shown that IS' influence is spreading through the virtual domain despite its territorial losses. IS will attempt to inspire and sustain low-tech attacks through decentralised local cells or lone actors using its persistent propaganda efforts.

KTJ and KIB will likely survive and maintain their combat capacity in Syria. The Bishkek and Saint Petersburg attacks indicate that suicide bombing will remain a favourite tactic for KTJ's future operations in Central Asia. In an audio statement released on YouTube in August 2018, Abu Saloh claimed that more than 25 trained militants in his group were 'waiting their turn for a *fidayeen* (suicide) operation'.[18]

The decrease in the production of online extremist materials is a positive development as it is expected to impede radicalisation and calls for violence. Central Asian governments have identified and blocked nearly 600 websites that promote extremist ideas.[19] However, these efforts are not overwhelmingly effective as the terrorist groups have been quite resilient in creating new websites and social media accounts to spread propaganda. The shift by terrorist groups from open-end to encrypted messaging platforms has made their detection and prevention of attacks more challenging.

Given the fact that the Central Asian international diaspora is expanding, radicalisation involving individuals who had come from the region remains a security concern for both Central Asian republics and

[15] Kathrin Hille, "Russia And Radicalisation: Homegrown Problem," *The Financial Times,* December 8, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/77156ed2-9ab0-11e5-be4f-0abd1978acaa.

[16] "Origins and Destinations of the World's Migrants, 1990-2017," *Pew Research Center*, February 28, 2018, http://www.pewglobal.org/2018/02/28/global-migrant-stocks/?country=RU&date=2017.

[17] Jamshed Marupov, "Why Do Isfara Residents Become Jihadists?" *CABAR*, November 1, 2018, https://cabar.asia/en/why-do-isfara-residents-become-jihadists-multimedia/; "150 Kyrgyz Citizens

Killed In Syria Fighting Alongside IS,"*RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service*, June 28, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/official-150-kyrgyz-citizens-killed-in-syria-fighting-alongside-is/29325374.html.

[18] The propaganda speech of KTJ's leader Abu Saloh that appeared on a YouTube channel run by an anonymous supporter of the group: "Shom ahlining sobitqadamligi (The Devotion of the Syrian People)," *YouTube (Yangi Darslar)* August 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D505mFX8BrA.

[19] Kanymgul Elkeeva, "Ekstremizm pytajetsa prolezt cherez lyubuyu shel (Extremism Is Seeking to Penetrate Through Any Gap)," *RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service*, January 10, 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_extremism_sites_internet/28967239.html.

host countries in the long term. VK and Odnoklassniki are Russia-based online social networking services that are popular in Russia, Central Asia, Trans-Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and some parts of Eastern Europe. Although these social networking sites were initially launched in Russian, they are now available in several languages. Russian national legislation criminalises posting and re-sharing of extremist content in the online domain and obliges local internet providers and tech companies to block and remove such content. In compliance with this regulation, both VK and Odnoklassniki have shown their determination and ability to disrupt the extremist exploitation of their services. Despite this, online extremist resources remain largely available for Central Asians who study, live and work overseas. For example, dozens of video and audio lectures of pro-Al Qaeda Central Asian ideologues like Takhir Yuldash (now deceased), Abu Saloh, Salakhuddin Haji Yusuf (now deceased) and Abu Yusuf Muhojir still remain on YouTube and Odnoklassnik. This is partly due to the lack of manpower with knowledge of Central Asian languages who could help detect and block terrorist content in these languages. As such, it remains essential to remove these online extremist materials to curb radicalisation among Central Asians both at home and abroad.

Nodirbek Soliev is a Senior Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He can be contacted at isnsoliev@ntu.edu.sg.

UYGHUR VIOLENCE AND JIHADISM IN CHINA AND BEYOND

In 2018, there was no record of violent incidents carried out by Uyghurs in China. As such, Uyghur-perpetrated violence in the country has fallen to its lowest level since 2008.[1] However, this positive development should not be seen as an indicator that the volatile Xinjiang province will continue to experience enduring peace and stability in the long run. Instead, it has been argued that the recent drop in violence has been maintained largely due to strict security measures and mass surveillance tactics.[2] The increasingly complex nature of the issue indicates that the potential exists for Uyghur violence to escalate. This is specifically in light of the reported inception of a state-initiated mass 'reeducation' campaign for Uyghur and other Muslim minorities across the province. By reportedly sending Xinjiang's Muslim population to 'vocational education centres', China's attempts to 'prevent extremism' may lead to a resurgence of ethnic unrest in Xinjiang.

Nature of Violence in Xinjiang

The violence in Xinjiang can be broadly divided into two main categories. Firstly, homegrown ethnic riots are primarily fueled by the ethno-cultural and religious grievances of the Ugyhur minority community towards Chinese policies. Acts of violence in this category are often random and show no confirmed links to any organised militant entity. The most recent case of ethnic riots that took place in Xinjiang was in February 2017, when three Uyghur assailants resorted to knife stabbings in Hotan Prefecture. The second category includes acts of terror committed by active members and supporters of Uyghur jihadist groups,

particularly the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP).[3] Uyghur terrorist organisations have not been able to mount any terrorist attack inside China since TIP claimed responsibility for the Urumqi open-air market attack in May 2014.[4]

'De-Extremification' of Uyghurs through Mass 'Reeducation'

In August 2018, United Nations (UN) human rights experts estimated that China was holding close to one million local Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities for 'political indoctrination' purposes in what resembles a 'massive internment camp…shrouded in secrecy'.[5] International media reports have since compelled Chinese authorities to acknowledge the existence of a network of mass internment facilities that have been developed in Xinjiang since 2017.[6]

---

[1] This is the author's own conclusion based on the data compiled from online newspaper reports.

[2] "China Has Turned Xinjiang Into A Police State Like No Other," *The Economist,* May 31, 2018, https://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/05/31/china-has-turned-xinjiang-into-a-police-state-like-no-other.

[3] TIP was founded in Afghanistan in 1997 and seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in Xinjiang province and beyond. Due to the military and security measures undertaken by the Chinese authorities, TIP and its predecessor, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), has not been able to develop a visible operational foothold inside China. A dearth of opportunities to fight at home has pushed the group to seek sanctuaries elsewhere. The group presently operates in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Iraq.

[4] Jacob Zenn, "The Turkistan Islamic Party in Double-Exile: Geographic and Organizational Divisions in Uighur Jihadism," September 7, 2018, *Terrorism Monitor: The Jamestown Foundation,* https://jamestown.org/program/the-turkistan-islamic-party-in-double-exile-geographic-and-organizational-divisions-in-uighur-jihadism/.

[5] Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. Says It Has Credible Reports That China Holds Million Uighurs In Secret Camps," *Reuters,* August 10, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights-un/u-n-says-it-has-credible-reports-that-china-holds-million-uighurs-in-secret-camps-idUSKBN1KV1SU.

[6] Nectar Gan, "Xinjiang Camps: Top Chinese Official In First Detailed Admission Of 'Training And Boarding' Centres," *The South China Morning Post,* October 16, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/2168724/china-admits-xinjiang-training-and-boarding-centres-first.

The concerns of the international community have revolved around the coercive character of this campaign as well as its scale.[7] Scholars and observers have argued that these facilities function as arbitrary detention camps.[8] This is so as the Chinese authorities have sent Uyghurs to such facilities for indefinite periods without trials. In these cases, they are forced to go through 'political reeducation' aimed at cultivating loyalty to the communist party, and in some cases, face maltreatment. As an extrajudicial procedure, these measures deny basic human rights such as the right to liberty and security, thus violating international law.

However, Chinese officials have denied its engagement in arbitrary detention and political indoctrination. According to them, launching a system that they describe as 'vocational education and training institutions' represents broader 'de-extremification efforts'.[9] The authorities explained that 'residents who have been influenced by extremism' are sent to such facilities to 'improve their Chinese language and acquire legal knowledge and vocational skills'.[10] Vocational training includes making clothes and shoes, food processing, assembling electronic products, typesetting and printing, hairdressing and e-commerce. Through such procedures, Uyghurs are expected to

'experience ideological emancipation' and have better employment opportunities.[11]

Uyghur Grievances Could Breed Renewed Violence and Militancy

The inception of 'vocational education' facilities show that China is now embracing the concept of corrective approaches in its efforts to prevent extremism. Chinese authorities and scholars believe that these efforts have achieved 'positive effects'.[12] In October 2018, Shohrat Zakir, the governor of Xinjiang, said that the region has been safe from the outbreak of violent incidents for nearly two years as a result of this policy.[13] However, the assessment and evaluation of the actual effects of this policy has not yet been done. From a theoretical perspective, it is unlikely that attempts at influencing religious-cultural and political expressions of the ethnic minority through involuntary methods and direct interventions would be effective. Instead, it could eventually lead to an escalation of ethnic tensions in Xinjiang.

Throughout 2018, there was a visible increase in anti-Chinese activism within the Uyghur community living abroad.[14] This trend has been observed in both the real and virtual domain. Uyghur activists and expatriates protested against the reeducation campaign in the United States, Australia, Turkey, Germany and Kyrgyzstan. Uyghur social media users have used online platforms to promote social solidarity and resistance to what they perceive as 'state repression'.

They were especially active on Facebook and Twitter where they launched several online petitions for the release of Uyghurs

---

[7] Philip Wen, Michael Martina and Ben Blanchard, "Exclusive: In Rare Coordinated Move, Western Envoys Seek Meeting On Xinjiang Concerns," *Reuters,* November 15, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-exclusive-idUSKCN1NK0H0; Stephanie Nebehay, "U.N. Rights Chief Bachelet Takes On China, Other Powers In First Speech," *Reuters,* September 10, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-rights/u-n-rights-chief-bachelet-takes-on-china-other-powers-in-first-speech-idUSKCN1LQ0QI.
[8] Charlotte Gao, "Xinjiang Detention Camp or Vocational Center: Is China 'Calling A Deer A Horse'?" *The Diplomat,* November 18, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/xinjiang-detention-camp-or-vocational-center-is-china-calling-a-deer-a-horse/.
[9] Adrian Zenz, "Thoroughly Reforming Them Towards A Healthy Heart Attitude': China's Political Re-Education Campaign In Xinjiang," *Central Asian Survey,* September 5, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2018.1507997.
[10] "Xinjiang Successful In Curbing Spread Of Terrorism, Official Says," *China Daily*, October 16, 2018, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201810/16/WS5bc55ea0a310eff303282a57.html.

[11] Liu Xin, "Xinjiang's Efforts To Replace Extremism With Opportunity Are Not Like The Guantanamo Bay Tactics The West Imagines," *The Global Times,* November 20, 2018, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1128196.shtml.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "China Defends Internment Camps For Uighur Muslims," *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/china-defends-internment-camps-uighur-muslims-181016072549867.html.
[14] "Uygurs Around The World Rally In Protest Against Chinese Security Campaign In Xinjiang," *The South China Morning Post*, March 16, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2137468/uygurs-around-world-rally-protest-against-chinese.

detainees from reeducation camps. The activists also collated testimonies from individuals, whose relatives or friends were in detention, sentenced or missing, to pass along to the UN and the European Union (EU).[15] Abdusalam Muhemet, a local Uyghur from Xinjiang, spent two months in a nearby reeducation camp after being detained by the police for reciting a verse of the Quran at a funeral. He stated that such camps 'breed vengeful feelings and erase Uyghur identity.'[16]

IS' Uyghur Fighters in Crisis

Currently, Uyghur militants have no visible presence in China. Severe and comprehensive security measures that China has taken in recent years have prevented Uyghur terrorists from building their capacities and developing a viable infrastructure in the mainland. Forced to operate clandestinely, sympathisers and supporters of Uyghur terrorists have even fewer opportunities and access to professional training and weaponry in the country. As China has effectively blocked extremist websites and social media, Uyghur terrorists face difficulty in reaching out to the Uyghur population in Xinjiang even through online platforms.

IS had an insignificant number of Uyghur fighters who have not yet evolved as an independent unit. IS' Uyghur fighters have not carried out any attacks outside Syria and Iraq. These militants have disappeared from the online domain since 2017, which indicates that they could have been killed or captured alongside other local and foreign fighters. It is also possible that IS' Uyghur division has been disbanded and are now dispersed across Syria and Iraq.

TIP Remains Undefeated

The military defeat of IS by coalition forces in 2017 did not cripple TIP in Syria as this group has been fighting as part of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the successor of Al-Qaeda's former Syrian affiliate, Al-Nusra Front. With an estimated number of fighters ranging from 1,000 to 5,000, TIP is one of the largest foreign militant groups fighting in Syria to topple the Syrian government.[17] Notably, the vast majority of TIP fighters are ethnic Uyghurs from Xinjiang.

Unlike IS' Uyghur fighters, TIP's operational divisions are quite active in both Afghanistan and Syria. In 2018, there were no attacks by TIP against Chinese targets at home and abroad. Based in Afghanistan and under the leadership of its *bash emir* (supreme leader), Abdulhaq Damullam, TIP's central structure continues to be a strategic ally of the Taliban. TIP has conducted joint attacks with the Taliban against the Afghan government force in the northern provinces of Afghanistan. In a video released online in March 2018, TIP and Taliban militants were featured killing and taking captive several Afghan soldiers in an unknown location, which is alleged to be in the northern part of the country.[18] In a counter-insurgency operation against the Taliban in Badakhshan, a volatile northwestern Afghan province close to the border with China, the Afghan National Army (ANA) killed two Uyghur militants among others in April 2018.[19]

It is worth noting that TIP's Syrian division is one of the few militant units that has pledged allegiance to the Taliban. In February 2018,

---

[15] Owen Churchill, "Speaking Out: Uygurs In The United States Break Silence On China's Crackdown," *The South China Morning Post*, September 12, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2163939/speaking-out-uygurs-united-states-break-silence-chinas.

[16] "'Transformation' camps in China," *The Straits Times,* September 11, 2018, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/transformation-camps-in-china.

[17] Ben Blanchard, "China Envoy Says No Accurate Figure On Uighurs Fighting In Syria," *The Reuters,* August 20, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-china/china-envoy-says-no-accurate-figure-on-uighurs-fighting-in-syria-idUSKCN1L508G.

[18] Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, "Turkistan Islamic Party Highlights Joint Raids With The Afghan Taliban," *FDD's Long War Journal*, March 12, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/turkistan-islamic-party-highlights-joint-raids-with-the-afghan-taliban.php.

[19] Sarah Zheng, "Two Chinese Militants Among Seven Killed In Anti-Terrorism Operation In Afghanistan," *The South China Morning Post,* April 1, 2018, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2139833/two-chinese-militants-among-seven-killed-anti-terrorism.

the Doğu Türkistan Bülteni, a Turkish-language website affiliated to TIP, reported the appointment of the two Uyghur militants to the top leadership of the group's Syrian branch. They had previously served with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The statement named Abu Omar Turkistani as a 'general leader' of the group in Syria.[20] It further revealed that another veteran, Abu Umar al-Turkistani, was appointed to lead the group's military operations. This proves the strong connection between TIP and the Taliban. It also indicates that despite the geographical distance between Syria and Afghanistan and TIP's close battlefield cooperation with HTS, the Taliban holds a degree of control over TIP's Syrian wing.

Until recently, TIP's main headquarters had been Jisr al-Shughur district in Idlib. The September 2018 deal between Turkey and Russia on the creation of a demilitarised buffer zone in Idlib province has led to some uncertainty about TIP's fate in Syria. Idlib was the last major bastion of an estimated 70,000 anti-regime forces, which include moderate rebels and rival jihadist factions.[21] According to the deal in Idlib, Turkey was supposed to persuade all moderate and jihadist fighters, including the HTS coalition which includes TIP, to hand over their weapons in the buffer zone and to evacuate to Turkish-controlled safe zones in the north of Syria such as Afrin and Al Bab. The immediate priority for TIP is to ensure a new sanctuary in Syria in the light of the new

battlefield realities that have been evolving after the Idlib ceasefire.

At this point, it remains unclear whether TIP and HTS have decided to accept Turkey's offer. Given their strategic alignment, many of the TIP's current fighters will likely follow HTS' steps. On 14 October 2018, HTS released a two-page online statement outlining its vison of the future of the Syrian war. [22] However, the group has avoided revealing its formal position regarding the buffer zone. Notwithstanding this, HTS will likely endorse Turkey's request. The rejection could undermine the long-standing support that HTS is believed to have tacitly received from Turkey.[23] In a worst case scenario for TIP, some members of the group may seek shelter in Turkey while others defect to other jihadist factions which do not want to leave the buffer zone and continue their fight against the Syrian regime.

Possible Trajectory of Uyghur Jihadism: China and Beyond

Overall, there are three broad political trends that could emerge if the situation in Xinjiang deteriorates. Firstly, there could be a renewed cycle of ethnic unrest, mostly in the form of knife attacks. The tough security measures introduced by China after the deadly inter-ethnic clashes in 2009 in Urumqi between local Uyghurs and Han Chinese communities have appeared to exacerbate, rather than ease existing tensions. This had led to a string of retaliatory attacks by Uyghurs, especially between 2013 to 2015.[24]

Secondly, the restrictive security measures could prompt an increased outflow of undocumented Uyghur asylum-seekers from China into neighboring regions. Uyghur migrants have used Southeast Asia as a transit route to fly over to Turkey – a

---

[20] This announcement originally came from an online message entitled "Türkistan İslam Partisinde görev değişimi. Afganistan İslam Emirliğinden yeni atamalar" ('A Leadership Change in Turkistan Islamic Party. New Appointments by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'). The message was released by Ferganali Yakup, a contributor of Doğu Türkistan Bülteni, a TIP-linked Turkish language website, on 24 February 2018. It was available at:
https://www.doguturkistanbulteni.com/turkistan-islam-partisinde-gorev-degisimi-afganistan-islam-emirliginden-yeni-atamalar/ (now defunct)
The propaganda speech of KTJ's leader Abu Saloh: "Shom ahlining sobitqadamligi" ('The Devotion of the Syrian People'), YouTube channel *(Yangi Darslar)* 16 August 2018,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D505mFX8BrA.
(This channel is run by an anonymous supporter of the group).
[21] Maxwell B. Markusen, "Idlib Province and the Future of Instability in Syria," *CSIS Briefs*, September 21, 2018,
https://www.csis.org/analysis/idlib-province-and-future-instability-syria.

[22] Thomas Joscelyn, "Analysis: Jihadists In Syria React To Sochi Agreement," *FDD's Long War Journal,* October 16, 2018,
https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/10/analysis-jihadists-in-syria-react-to-sochi-agreement.php.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Rachel Harris, "Securitization And Mass Detentions In Xinjiang: How Uyghurs Became Quarantined From The Outside World," *Quartz,* September 25, 2018,
https://qz.com/1377394/securitization-and-mass-detentions-in-xinjiang-how-uyghurs-became-quarantined-from-the-outside-world/.

destination preferred by Uyghurs.[25] An estimated 100,000 to 300,000 Uyghurs live in Turkey.[26] Neighbouring countries in Central Asia have also seen Uyghurs crossing over. Tight border controls and security measures along the borders of Xinjiang with Central Asia prevent Uyghurs from migrating to this region in large numbers. However, recent cases suggest that a small number of Uyghurs are illegally crossing the borders into Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan to seek asylum.[27]

Thirdly, Uyghur and other militants could see the illegal Uyghur immigrants abroad as a recruitment pool. In the past, China has alleged that members of Uyghur diaspora and migrant communities in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan have been recruited to fight in Syria.[28] There were cases in the past where some undocumented Uyghurs asylum seekers joined local militant groups in Indonesia after failing to enter Turkey through Southeast Asia.[29] While conflict zones and surrounding regions may see acts of terror perpetrated by Uyghurs from Xinjiang, it is likely that China will remain safe from large-scale attacks planned by Uyghur militant groups. This is because Uyghur militant groups are now fighting away from home – in other theatres of war.

Outlook

It is important for China to understand the complexities of the violence in Xinjiang. There is a significant difference between ethnic riots and terrorist attacks in the spectrum of political violence. Without treating the grievances of the Uyghur and other minority grievances sensitively, it will be impossible to effectively curb the potential for ethnic riots and the public support for terrorism. However, a rise in terrorist activities in Xinjiang seems unlikely in the short term. Additionally, there have been no signs of movement of Uyghur fighters from Syria to Xinjiang. It is unlikely that TIP will set its sights on China in the near future as the group is heavily engaged in battlefield operations in its immediate theatres of conflict.

Due to the geographic distance between Syria and China, the ability of TIP's Syrian division to plot and direct large-scale and sophisticated attacks inside China remains limited. Furthermore, in Afghanistan, TIP has become considerably weaker since the focus of Uyghur jihadists had shifted to the Syrian conflict and away from Afghanistan. Furthermore, enhanced border control measures will prevent any potential militant incursions through China's narrow border with Afghanistan.

Beyond the domestic threat, Uyghur jihadism could possibly affect China's interests across the Eurasian continent, especially through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's diplomatic, business infrastructure and personnel in conflict-ridden countries may become a potential target for the current transnational network of Uyghur militants. As such, cross-country and regional cooperation coupled with intelligence sharing on terrorism remains necessary for China and other countries where Uyghur jihadists have settled.

Nodirbek Soliev *is a Senior Analyst at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He can be contacted at* isnsoliev@ntu.edu.sg

---

[25] Nodirbek Soliev, "The Rise of Uyghur Militancy in and Beyond Southeast Asia: An Assessment," *The Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) 9,* no. 2 (2017): 14-20. Available on https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CTTA-February-2017.pdf.

[26] Christina Lin*, "*A Buffer Zone for Erdogan's Turkic Settlements In Syria?" *Asia Times,* October 11, 2015, http://www.atimes.com/a-buffer-zone-for-erdogans-turkic-settlements-in-syria/.

[27] "Kazakhstan Denies Asylum To Chinese 'Reeducation Camps' Whistle-Blower," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty,* October 5, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-china-xinjiang/29528175.html.

[28] Jason Burke, "Clues Suggest Istanbul Nightclub Gunman May Be A Uighur," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/global/2017/jan/05/istanbul-nightclub-why-attacker-may-be-a-uighur.

[29] Soliev, "The Rise of Uyghur Militancy in and Beyond Southeast Asia: An Assessment," 14-20.

EVOLVING JIHADIST LANDSCAPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group's battlefield and territorial losses in Iraq and Syria have driven the jihadist movement underground and introduced a new dimension to the evolving nature of relations between IS and its arch-foe Al-Qaeda (AQ). Given the fluidity of the operational environment in the Middle East, the prospect of low-level tactical or transactional collaboration between IS and AQ cannot be ruled out. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria involving various terrorist and militia groups over the past eight years have resulted in an ever-changing threat landscape in which various alliances and rivalries have transformed quite rapidly. This article analyses the possibility of cooperation between Islamic State and Al-Qaeda in the Middle East and the likely implications of such a scenario for the region and counter-terrorism responses.

Islamic State's Losses: Possible Reemergence?

2018 saw the so-called Islamic State (IS) cede most of its territory in the Iraq-Syria theatre, amidst continued political and social unrest in the Middle East. As of late 2018, IS occupies a sliver of the Jazeera desert in Iraq's Anbar province, and a few towns along the Euphrates River banks in Syria. These territories make up less than 1 per cent of the territory it controlled at its peak in 2014.[1] Thousands of IS jihadists — including senior leaders, veteran field commanders and foreign fighters — have been killed in United States led military campaigns.

The group's command and control infrastructure has been destroyed and its revenue/resources have been neutralised. Moreover, the number of foreign fighters, once numbering 1,500 a month in Iraq and Syria, has also dropped sharply, although reports indicate IS still attracts about 100 new foreign fighters to the region each month.[2]

Despite its territorial defeat, IS has yet to be uprooted and decimated, and its ideology continues to find resonance among its followers and sympathisers globally. It is estimated that IS has more than 30,000 militants present in Iraq and Syria.[3] The continued political instability has also provided possible conditions for IS' re-emergence as a guerrilla force in the Iraq-Syria theatre, with a rising number of kidnappings, murders and bombings attributed to an underground network of IS cells, operating under a decentralised chain of command. In Iraq, IS sleeper cells have, in recent months, carried out ambush attacks against Iraqi security forces and civilians, particularly in the Anbar, Kirkuk and Salahuddin provinces.[4] These attacks have the potential to undermine the current security efforts of the new Iraqi government and to deliver badly-needed economic

---

[1] "After The 'Almost 100 Percent' Defeat of ISIS, What About Its Ideology?" *Al Jazeera Center For Studies*, May 8, 2018, http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/05/100-percent-defeat-isis-ideology-180508042421376.html.

[2] Eric Schmitt, "Fight Against Last Vestige of IS in Syria Stalls," *The New York Times,* November 6, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/06/world/middleeast/isis-syria.html.

[3] "After The Caliphate," *BBC*, November 27, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595.

[4] Schmitt, "Fight Against Last Vestige of IS in Syria Stalls," November 6, 2018.

progress, particularly in the Sunni majority areas that were devastated by the war. In Syria, between 1,500 and 2,000 militants remain in the town of Hajin, in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, which is one of the last IS occupied territories in the theatre coming under increased attacks from Western led coalition forces.

Although significantly diminished, IS still wields considerable social media prowess to rally its followers on the ground and online. While previously focused on gaining legitimacy for its idea of a caliphate, IS social media now focuses on combat and terror operations demonstrating the group's persistence in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, and the toll it is inflicting on regional governments and factions.[5] This so-called long war of attrition strategy employed by IS emphasises that losses of territories or key leaders will only strengthen its fighters' resolve. In August 2018, IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi cemented this shift in narrative with a speech titled 'Give Glad Tidings to the Patient,' in which he stated: "the scale of victory or defeat with the mujahedeen, the people of faith and piety, is not tied to a city or a village that was taken".[6]

Al-Qaeda Goes 'Glocal'

In comparison to IS, AQ has been quietly rebuilding and expanding its footprint in several theatres of conflict in the Middle East and beyond. In Syria, AQ reportedly has upwards of 20,000 armed men, with another 4,000 in Yemen and at least 7,000 in Somalia.[7] The group's strategy lies in working closely with local affiliates such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) in Syria, which capitalised on the activities of its *Idarat al-Manateq al-Muharara* (Liberated Districts Administration) to take over the governance of populated areas captured from the Assad regime through, for example, the provision of electricity, water, sanitation and other

municipality functions.[8] In Yemen, AQ, through its Yemeni branch Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has worked to secure support from key city and tribal leaders as well as the local population by rebranding itself with a local name 'The Sons of Hadramawt', which references the largest province in the country. It has also organised a number of community projects. AQAP's Twitter feed in 2016 was dominated by information about development activities such as providing access to water and electricity while references to the imposition of strict interpretations of Sharia laws were downplayed and kept to a minimum. When tribesmen were accidentally killed in operations that targeted the Yemeni military, AQAP published apologies and negotiated the payment of blood money.[9]

Scholars have characterised these efforts as evidence of AQ becoming truly "glocal,"[10] having to some extent, effectively incorporated local grievances and concerns into a global narrative that forms the foundation of an all-encompassing grand strategy.[11] This pragmatic approach has found resonance among local rebels in dire need of financing, who have been lured by the terrorists' resources. Some, in the process, have then become radicalised to the jihadi cause.[12] These resources also provide a solution to civilians grappling with poor socio-economic conditions. To a certain extent, AQ's push to "win the hearts and minds" of the populace has found some traction.

---

[5] Michael Munoz, "Selling The Long War: Islamic State Propaganda after the Caliphate," *Combating Terrorism Center*, November 2018, https://ctc.usma.edu/selling-long-war-islamic-state-propaganda-caliphate/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Bruce Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda's Resurrection," *Council On Foreign Relations*, March 6, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection.

[8] Charles Lister, "Profiling Jabhat Al-Nusra," *Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings Institution,* July 28, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/iwr_20160728_profiling_nusra.pdf.

[9] Elisabeth Kendall, "What's Next for Jihadists In Yemen?" *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/23/whats-next-for-jihadists-in-yemen.

[10] Hoffman, "Al-Qaeda's Resurrection," March 6, 2018.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Martha Crenshaw, "Time For Peace Talks With ISIS And Al Qaeda?" *Foreign Policy*, September 19, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/19/time-for-peace-talks-with-isis-and-al-qaeda/.

Tactical Collaboration: What Does It Entail?

The IS defeat in Syria and Iraq saw a shift in the trajectory of the group. A recent United Nations (UN) Security Council report states that IS "is transforming into a terror organisation with a flat hierarchy, with cells and affiliates increasingly acting autonomously."[13] As for AQ, the report observes that it "has remained remarkably resilient" and in several regions "poses a greater threat" than IS.[14] The UN report goes on to warn of a 'potential new threat' resulting from greater collaboration between the two rival organisations to plan and coordinate attacks.

There are several, potentially insurmountable challenges to an alliance between IS and AQ, including the use of contrasting military tactics, the current priority of attacking the far enemy and the clash of personalities within the respective leadership groups. These issues have led to rivalry and disagreement between the two movements in the Syria-Iraq theatre as each grew in size and scale. Outside of Iraq and Syria, IS and AQ also operate separately, despite both groups aiming to control territories and implanting themselves within local communities where they have a presence. However, the evolving jihadist landscape could provide the necessary conditions for opportunistic, tactical or transactional collaboration in the form of, for example, cohabitation in hideouts and exchanging of information, intelligence, weapons and logistics networks against a common enemy.[15]

Such forms of cooperation, short of a merger, between rival jihadist organisations are necessitated by changing operational environments. Jihadist groups operate like entrepreneurs and aim to maximise their profits and minimise their losses. When two competing entrepreneurs are threatened by a third entity, it is expected that they will combine their resources, efforts and energies against a new common threat. Both IS and AQ are Sunni militant organisations with similar worldviews and are waging armed struggles to create a Sunni Caliphate (with qualitatively different approaches). Moreover, tactical and transactional forms of cooperation at the individual level in a non-official capacity, particularly in the Middle East's fluid operational environment, cannot be ruled out. This would be a worrisome prospect given the scale of fighters within their combined ranks, extensive networks and affiliates within and outside of Iraq and Syria.

At the same time, political and social instability across much of the Middle East caused by failures in governance, corruption, economic mismanagement and high youth unemployment continues to affect large parts of the region.[16] Extremist groups such as IS and AQ can exploit such a vulnerable geo-political climate for their own religious and political ends. Both groups are committed to wage war on the West and apostate Muslim governments to create a global caliphate - while rejecting the existing world order.[17]

Terrorist groups, particularly IS, have also capitalised on the intensifying sectarian rift brought about by the geo-strategic competition playing out between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region. The two regional powers have been mobilising popular support and sponsoring militia in proxy wars in civil conflicts from Iraq to Syria to Yemen. Threat groups have exploited the Shiite-Sunni tensions to shape and drive conflict, hoping to acquire greater influence.[18] Recent events, including the imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Iran and the strong international

---

[13] "Twenty-First Report Of The Analytical Support And Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant To Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaeda And Associated Individuals And Entities," *United Nations Security Council*, February 27, 2018, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2018/14.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Assaf Moghadam, "Terrorist Affiliations in Context: A Typology of Terrorist Inter-group Cooperation," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 8(3), March 2018, https://ctc.usma.edu/terrorist-affiliations-in-context-a-typology-of-terrorist-inter-group-cooperation/.

[16] Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda Versus ISIS: Competing Jihadist Brands in the Middle East," *Middle East Institute,* November 7, 2017, https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PP3_Lister_CTQaeda_0.pdf.
[17] "An ISIS–Al Qaeda 'Frankenstein' Could Be On Its Way," *The National Interest*, May 14, 2017, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/isis%E2%80%93al-qaeda-frankenstein-could-be-its-way-20648.
[18] Lister, "Al-Qaeda Versus ISIS: Competing Jihadist Brands in the Middle East," November 7, 2017.

rebuke of Saudi Arabia over the killing of a dissident journalist, may affect the landscape, a prospect that could be exploited further by jihadi militants.

Outlook

Terror attacks are likely to increase not only in Iraq and Syria but also beyond. IS' strategy of using its affiliates and supporters overseas to mount attacks could lead to IS imitating AQ's gradualist approach. In this approach the group focuses on embedding itself into local insurgencies, recognising that the overthrow of Middle Eastern regimes and establishment of a global Sunni caliphate is unlikely in the short-term, until the 'far enemy' (the United States and its European allies) is defeated and driven out of the region. Affiliate groups have a strong presence in Southeast Asia, West Africa, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel, among others. Since 2015, IS has also inspired or directed attackers in Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia.[19] For its part, AQ has demonstrated increasing resilience, relevance and fluidity in its strategy to coordinate and establish agreements with local populations and other armed groups. This has been effective in escalating jihadist activity in the Iraq-Syria theatre. Any form of close collaboration between IS and AQ presents serious security challenges that will aggravate the threat landscape further. 2019 is poised to be yet another challenging year for governments and security agencies in the Middle East. While various existing counter-terrorism approaches, including developing a robust ideological counter-narrative is integral, greater effort should be put into mitigating sources of discontent that lead to violent extremism.

Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff, is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. He can be contacted at ishuzaifah@ntu.edu.sg.

---

[19] Martha Crenshaw, "Time for Peace Talks with ISIS and Al Qaeda?" *Foreign Policy*, September 19, 2018, https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/19/time-for-peace-talks-with-isis-and-al-qaeda/.

Islamic State's Online Social Movement Lifecycle: From Emergence to Repression in Southeast Asia

Throughout 2018, the Islamic State's (IS) online extremist content in Southeast Asia reflected the group's response to repression and its territorial losses in Iraq and Syria. As it attempts to recuperate from perpetual blowbacks by counter-terrorism agencies, IS has adapted to the changing security environment by creating a solid support base in the online space. This article analyses IS' online and real world trajectory, specifically within Southeast Asia, using the Social Movement framework. In 2018, IS continued its focus on creating a solid support base through the online space, which remains a challenge and threat to regional security. The group has developed tactics to appeal to audiences in diverse online communication platforms. The article argues that new influential IS preachers, propagandists and recruiters could tap into IS' online space and increase the group's reach and presence. As such, IS online networks in Southeast Asia could move back to the earlier stages of the social movement lifecycle, with more visibility.

Online Social Movement Lifecycle

IS-linked online extremism, its support base and networks represent an online social movement. According to social movement theorists such as Castells and Diani, a social movement is represented by a group of people with a collective identity and shared values, and consists of both formal and informal networks.[1] The online social movement of IS comprises both formal and informal networks with people who remain bonded by shared beliefs, and mobilised on conflict-based narratives. IS' informal online cells and networks present on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Telegram and WhatsApp are formed based on individuals'

shared beliefs linked to ideologies and life values incorporating misconstrued religious concepts such as *The Al Kubro Generation* (The Great Generation), *hijrah* (migration) and *al wala wal bara* (disavowal and loyalty). IS informal networks recruit followers and are mobilised around narratives linked to the war against Islam, a theme repeatedly found within their online propaganda. The sections below will detail the four different stages of IS' online social movement as witnessed from the online and physical rise of the group in 2014 and its physical decline in 2018.

Stage 1: Emergence

The lifecycle of IS' online social movement in Southeast Asia began even before the group declared its establishment in June 2014. The emergence stage as described by Macionis and Hopper, reflects the rise of a movement based on the existence of widespread discontent.[2] This discontent was observed during the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011. At that time, the extremist online community showed inclination towards supporting Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Al-Qaeda (AQ) while expressing angst against Bashar al Assad's targeting and persecution of Sunni Muslims in Syria. Similar sentiments prevailed among online extremists in Indonesia and Malaysia, where the support base for terrorist groups was stronger in comparison to other countries in the region.[3]

Stage 2: Coalescence

The coalescence stage, alternately referred to as the 'popular stage', occurs when discontent 'becomes focalised and collective'[4] and sees the emergence of a leader of the social movement. In the case of

---

[1] Jonathan Christiansen, "Social Movement and Collective Behaviour: Four Stages of Social Movements," *EBSCO Research Starters,* https://studylib.net/doc/8192139/four-stages-of-social-movements.

[2] Ibid.
[3] This is based on research done on online extremism in Southeast Asia by the Informatics team at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) since 2006.
[4] Ibid.

IS, the coalesce stage occurred in June 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the formation of the group and the caliphate, marking his ascendance as its leader.[5] During this stage, IS became a platform for aggrieved individuals to gather under one movement that recognised the injustices against Sunni Muslims in Syria and elsewhere. IS' exploitation of religious concepts such as hijrah and discrimination against Muslims, prompted at least 40,000 individuals from about 110 countries, to travel to Iraq and Syria.[6] From Southeast Asia, at least 691 individuals joined IS in both countries[7] and they also represented the group's online social movement from their respective countries. The Malaysian Special Branch Counter Terrorism Division for instance, revealed that 98% of Malaysian terrorist supporters and members were recruited online.[8]

Stage 3: Bureaucratisation

The stage of bureaucratisation refers to an increased organisation of the social movement, which Blumer defines as 'formalisation'.[9] Between 2016 and 2017, the online social movement of IS became more organised. Likewise, this progression and development was similar to the group's physical operations. On the ground, IS developed 'The Structure of the Khilafah', an organisational structure which was announced in a 15-minute video posted online in July 2016.[10] In the virtual domain, IS propaganda and recruitment initiatives in Southeast Asia were crystallised into two

major avenues. Firstly, IS media agencies such as 'Furat Media' and 'Al Hayat Media' produced IS videos and other propaganda materials that were targeted towards followers at large, regardless of their nationality. At times, these propaganda materials were made appealing and relevant to individuals in Southeast Asia. Second, a more in-depth 'localisation' of the IS narrative was achieved through Southeast Asian IS operatives online. Examples include the notorious Malaysian IS recruiters Muhammad Wanndy Muhammad Jedi, Fudhail Omar, Akel Zainal and Muhammad Bahrunaim Anggih Tamtomo. These IS primary nodes in the online domain acted as the major network for IS supporters and sympathisers in Southeast Asia.

Stage 4: Decline

In the social movement lifecycle, the last stage is decline, alternately referred to as 'institutionalisation', which does not necessarily signify failure. Notably, Miller describes four different ways in which social movements could decline. Relevant to the IS online social movement is the stage of decline brought about by 'repression', which occurs when authorities exert force to 'control or destroy' such a social movement.[11] IS operations both online and in the real-world have faced an onset of repression. For instance, IS has been targeted by a myriad of agencies such as the law enforcement, military, social media companies (SMCs) and governments in Southeast Asia. Damage to both its physical and virtual strength were especially observed since the end of the battle for Marawi in October 2017, and the removal of its content on multiple social media domains such as Twitter, Facebook and Google, amongst others.[12]

Despite the active repression, IS is still actively operating in the online domain. However, repression in the online and physical fronts has led IS to shift from the center (in Syria and Iraq) to the periphery

---

[5] Mark Tran and Matthew Weaver, "ISIS Announces Islamic Caliphate In Area Straddling Iraq And Syria," *The Guardian,* June 30, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/30/isis-announces-islamic-caliphate-iraq-syria.

[6] Francis Chan, "ISIS Returnees Pose Major Terror Threat," *The Straits Times,* October 25, 2017, https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/isis-returnees-pose-major-terror-threat.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Hariati Azizan, "Parents, Is Your Child Being Radicalised Online?" *The Star,* February 21, 2016, https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/02/21/parents-is-your-child-being-radicalised-online/.

[9] Jonathan Christiansen, "Social Movement and Collective Behaviour: Four Stages of Social Movements," *EBSCO Research Starters,* https://studylib.net/doc/8192139/four-stages-of-social-movements.

[10] Al-Furqan Media, "The Structure of the Caliphate," July 2016.

[11] Jonathan Christiansen, "Social Movement and Collective Behaviour: Four Stages of Social Movements," *EBSCO Research Starters,* https://studylib.net/doc/8192139/four-stages-of-social-movements.

[12] Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin, "Trends of Online Extremism in Southeast Asia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 10, no.1 (2018): 25-29

(countries such as Libya, Egypt, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Philippines).[13] IS propaganda in Southeast Asia for instance, has become localised by focusing more on developments in the Philippines. For instance, the photos of Filipino IS operatives who were celebrating Eidul Adha were released by East Asia Wilayah in August 2018, whereas a video of Abu Sayyaf Group's (ASG) clashes with the Armed Forces of Philippines at Jolo in November 2018 was released by IS' Amaq Media agency. Overall, IS' online operations and communications have still managed to slither between cracks in the legal frameworks of their countries of operation.

IS Online Social Movement's Response to Repression

Indonesia

The online terrorist support base in Indonesia has continued to use a myriad of platforms to ensure a steady stream of terrorist propaganda materials for recruitment purposes in 2018. Online extremism continues to thrive and sustain itself in the Bahasa Indonesian domain. Then, online extremism was observed on websites and forums and were perpetrated by AQ affiliated groups in Southeast Asia. Most of the materials were released by JI members and propagandists from Indonesia on websites such as 'Arrahmah' and 'Almuhajirun'.[14] Yet, the legal frameworks in Indonesia do not allow for the prosecution of individuals involved in the spread of terrorist propaganda and incitement towards violence. In 2018, key media agencies and online personalities continued to hide behind encrypted communication technologies and used deceptive tactics to remain hidden.[15] They also maintained a strong presence on public social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and YouTube. 'Gen 5.54' and 'SaveMe' are two examples of

emerging IS Indonesian media agencies that are active online and started operating in 2018. 'Gen 5.54' maintains a few social media accounts and blogs, and is known for its well-designed posters and magazines. It also operated as a mobile application briefly in the first quarter of 2018, but ceased operations after launching blogs and a Facebook account. On the other hand, 'SaveMe' is a video production agency that reproduced Aman Abdurrahman's audios into short videos. These videos have a longer shelf life on social media platforms as they do not violate their community guidelines, as there is no direct incitement to violence. This signifies the efforts of Indonesian terrorist groups to recuperate and regain their support base online as the authorities' crackdown on their physical presence through arrests in different parts of the country.

Malaysia

In contrast, the online social movement of IS is less dynamic in Malaysia and Thailand. Since 2013, at least 340 terror suspects have been arrested[16] for possessing terrorist materials and other related crimes. However, a continuous dip in online extremism was observed in 2018, as online members were not as active as they had been in their heyday from 2014 to 2016. Arrests of members from terrorist cells in 2018 were also not related to the IS online social movement in the country. Moreover, radicalised individuals have resorted to encrypted communication platforms and refrained from publishing their operations and strategies in public platforms to remain undetected. This differed from the arrests made between 2014 to 2016 in which radicalised individuals had clear online footprints, mainly on Facebook. In addition, the expressions of support for IS were also less subtle and intense than in the past. Today, less than 100 social media accounts in the Malaysian online domain actively and openly declare support for the IS agenda.[17]

---

[13] Rohan Gunaratna, "Global Threat Forecast," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no.1 (2018): 1-6.

[14] Antony Bergin, Sulastri bte Osman, Carl Ungerer and Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin, "Countering Internet Radicalisation In Southeast Asia,"*RSIS-ASPI,* 2009.

[15] Rohan Gunaratna, "Death of Bahrun Naim: Mastermind of Terror in Southeast Asia," *RSIS Commentary,* October 3, 2018, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CO18161.pdf.

[16] Sumisha Naidu, "Surge In Malaysia's Islamic State Linked Arrests; Official Explains Anti-Terror Strategy," *Channel Newsasia,* October 19, 2017, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/surge-in-malaysia-s-islamic-state-linked-arrests-official-9324112.

[17] This is based on the research on online extremism in Southeast Asia conducted by the Informatics team at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR).

Thailand

Broadly, the same trends are also replicated in Thailand, where ethno-nationalist terrorists operate in isolation from IS and AQ. Online narratives centre around local issues, with occasional postings of IS symbols and logos by IS-inspired individuals. However, these postings do not present any links to IS ideology or related networks. The emergence of a leader or new propagandist in Malaysia and Thailand, amidst this online hiatus, could create possible active shifts towards violence among the current sleeper support base.

Philippines

For the Philippines, online updates and images of clashes between IS operatives and the military were constant on Facebook and Telegram. The IS-affiliated news agency, Amaq, regularly releases brief statements on operations conducted by IS operatives, specifically in the southern Philippines. IS also released a few photographic reports that showed IS fighters from the Philippines engaged in ground operations. In addition, some of the IS fighters who were killed in Philippines were featured in the Caravans of Martyrs[18] series, all meticulously labelled with 'East Asia' and circulated on social media platforms and extremist online forums. On 21 July 2018, the IS Arabic weekly newsletter Al-Nabaa issue no. 140, referred to East Asia, an area encompassing the Philippines and Indonesia, as a *wilayah* (governorate). Given that IS has lost many of its territories especially in the core areas of Iraq and Syria, a restructuring of the group's dwindling territories is inevitable to maintain the perception that the so-called caliphate is still functioning with an intact presence on the ground.

In the case of the Philippines, it is a bit surprising to see East Asia being acknowledged as a *wilayah*. After the defeat of the IS in Marawi and the death of Isnilon Hapilon, there has been no formal appointment of a *wali* (governor), one of the requirements to establish a *wilayah*.[19]

Furthermore, as remnants of the Maute group are struggling to regroup against the backdrop of ASG's declining influence in Mindanao due to the military crackdown[20], it is doubtful that a proper functioning *wilayah* can be established in the Philippines. Granting the status of *wilayah* to IS peripheral affiliates such as the Philippines is an attempt to compensate for the reduced territorial influence in parts of Syria and Iraq. Consequently, IS content such as statements and photographic reports regarding developments in the Philippines are now more consistently referred to as the 'Wilayah of East Asia'.[21]

These online observations signify the resilience and ability of the online social movement of IS to adapt to the changing environment in waging a protracted battle. This online movement will persevere in finding an innovative way to expand online campaigns and activities. The utilisation of emerging technological platforms and communication technologies will remain a constant in recruitment and operational planning. These online platforms will increasingly be encrypted and other channels such as online gaming programmes will also be included.[22] Given the recent trend of 'family radicalisation', as observed in the Surabaya May 2018 bombings, the domination of small, closed and personal communication links in encrypted platforms on the threat landscape is worrying as it would be harder for authorities to detect. Even though encrypted platforms are used during later stages of recruitment and communications, the use of public and open online platforms is still viable for the creation of cells, groups, plotting attacks and attracting fresh recruits. As such, terrorist groups in Southeast Asia will continue to use public and open online platforms as the main conduit for propaganda dissemination. Most

---

[18] Caravans of Martyrs is a IS propaganda series that shows the photographs of fallen IS fighters from various IS areas of operation in an attempt to glorify the "martyrs".

[19] Jolene Jerard and Nur Aziemah Azman, "Wilayah Philippines: Are We There Yet?" *Journal of the*

Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers 25, no.1. (2017): 3-24.

[20] Michael Hart, "A Year After Marawi, What's Left Of ISIS In the Philippines?," *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2018, https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/a-year-after-marawi-whats-left-of-isis-in-the-philippines/.

[21] Refer to Figure 1 in the appendix.

[22] Muhammad Faizal bin Abdul Rahman, "Countering 'Smart Terrorists' Who Use Online Gaming Platform," *International Policy Digest*, July 12, 2018, https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/07/27/countering-smart-terrorists-who-use-online-gaming-platforms/.

materials in public channels will evolve according to community guidelines in SMCs, and will avoid openly inciting violence. Narratives and symbols will be divorced from the blatant call for violence and shielded with political commentaries and fake news.

Tackling IS Online Social Movement with Computer Mediated Communication Theories and Strategies

As highlighted earlier, the online social movement includes the interaction between members, recruiters and operatives using computer mediated communication (CMC) platforms. In order to understand IS' online presence, it is necessary to analyse its social, organisational structures and tactics while adapting to the evolving environment and related interaction with CMC platforms. One of the many frameworks that can be used for this assessment is the Adaptation Structuration Theory (AST), a framework of group communication within the study of CMC. It purports that outcomes can be moulded by the interactions between technology and social structure.[23] There are also frameworks which investigate the psychology and behaviour of users in CMC, such as the Confirmation Bias theory, Cultivation theory, and Social Learning Theory. In order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of IS and its members' radicalisation processes, motivations, behaviour and their overarching propaganda strategy, the utilisation of these tools to investigate, analyse and assess this quagmire is essential. However, there has been no comprehensive research done on the online social movement of IS in Southeast Asia using such tools.

Upon understanding the primary factors of radicalisation, counter efforts can then be developed based on strategic communication designed with the context of a country in focus. An example of such a strategy is the 4M way which consists of 'The Message', 'The Messenger', 'The Mechanism' and 'Market receptivity'.[24] Here, collaboration among various agencies is required to ensure a coordinated approach that supports an overarching national message or narrative. For instance, the concept of *Pancasila*[25] can be revived and made appealing with specific materials targeted at different audiences in Indonesia. In Malaysia, where IS online materials have been made appealing via the flow in specific group contexts, subtle and alternative messages can be shared by different influencers from a myriad of groups and communities of interest. These strategic communication efforts would be imperative in the long-term battle against IS ideology that is also often combined with other online challenges that include hate speech, fake news and misinformation.

Nur Azlin Mohd Yasin was a former Associate Research Fellow and Nur Aziemah binte Azman is a current Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. They can be contacted at isnurazlin@ntu.edu.sg and isnaziemah@ntu.edu.sg respectively.

---

[23] "Communication Studies Theories: Adaptive Structuration Theory," *University of Twente*, https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-level/meso/AST_theory/.
[24] Kumar Ramakrishna, "The 4M Way To Fight Violent Extremism," *Today Online,* September 7, 2018, https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/4m-way-fight-violent-extremism.
[25] John M Schols and Hassan Shadily in 'An Indonesian-English Dictionary' explained Pancasila as, 'the five basic principles of the Republic of Indonesia: the belief in one God, humanity that is just and civilised, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation and social justice for all Indonesians'.

Appendix

Figure 1: Arabic words circled in red are 'Wilayah Sharq Asia' (Wilayah of East Asia)[1]

---

[1] Al-Nabaa issue 140, July 21, 2018.

ASSESSMENT OF ISLAMIC STATE'S IDEOLOGICAL THREAT

The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group's ideology still poses the most potent threat to Muslim communities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Even after losing its territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria, IS continues to peddle its idea of armed jihad and khilafah (caliphate). Its ideological propaganda continues to resonate with a minuscule fraction of Muslims, inspiring some to persist in mounting terrorist attacks and providing support to the movement. This article examines IS' ideological threat and offers a way forward to deal with it.

Islamic State's Ideological Ambitions

At its peak in 2014, IS declared itself as a worldwide caliphate with its control over vast swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, including Mosul and Raqqa. Having lost its territorial caliphate, IS today has only managed to retain less than 1% of the territory it once captured.[1] However, its struggle to establish a caliphate is not over. IS continues to resist the efforts of coalition-backed forces of driving them out of small towns and desert areas in the Levant, while its affiliates and supporters elsewhere continue to mount intermittent terror attacks. To compensate for its territorial losses, the group increased its propaganda outreach to its followers and potential recruits by promoting its self-styled version of 'jihad and khilafah' via social media. Ideological efforts were largely centred on the issues such as *tawhid* (Oneness of Allah), *manhaj* (methodology), *hijrah* (emigration), *jihad* and *jama'ah* (in the IS context; among other meanings; is a group of Muslims who is led by a caliph).[2]

In Southeast Asia, we have seen those who have succumbed to IS' ideological propaganda doing its bidding and furthering their religious-political objectives. These include the five-month-long armed conflict in Marawi between the Philippines' security forces and IS-affiliated militants[3], the suicide bombings in Indonesia[4] and the arrest of several individuals for their involvement with IS in Malaysia[5] – all done in the name of 'jihad and khilafah'.

Propagating Notions of 'Jihad and Khilafah'

'Jihad and khilafah' continue to be pivotal ideas that IS utilises to lure Muslims into its fold. After capturing large tracts of land in the greater Levant by June 2014, IS hastened the declaration of its so-called khilafah. Five days later, the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appeared for the first time at the Great Mosque in Mosul, Iraq. Proclaiming himself as the new *khalifah* (caliph). He called on Muslims everywhere to pledge the oath of allegiance to him.

The establishment of the khilafah carried a certain appeal to vulnerable Muslims from many parts of the world, leading them to join IS and travel to IS-controlled territories. The group claimed that the khilafah system is the ideal abode for Muslims as *Sharia* laws and Islamic values are 'upheld' and Muslims' rights and dignity are 'restored'.[6]

---

[1] "After The Caliphate: What Next for IS?" *BBC News,* November 27, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45547595.

[2] Islamic State, "Dabiq: The Return of the Khilafah," *Al Hayat Media Center*, July 5, 2014.

[3] Maria T. N. Panzo, "Framing the War: The Marawi Siege as Seen Through Television Documentaries," *Asian Politics & Policy* 10(1) (2018): pp. 149-154.

[4] Kirsten E. Schulze, "The Surabaya Bombings and the Evolution of the Jihadi Threat in Indonesia," *Combating Terrorism Centre Sentinel* 11(6) (2018): pp. 1-6.

[5] Michael Hart, "Malaysia's Counterterrorism Strategy: Keeping ISIS in Check," *Geopolitical Monitor,* January 2, 2018, https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/malaysias-counterterrorism-strategy-keeping-isis-in-check/.

[6] "What is 'Islamic State?" *BBC News*, December 2, 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29052144.

According to IS, its khilafah is the only legitimate Islamic state and system of government mandated by God. As such, secularism and various other systems and ideologies such as Nationalism, Communism and Baathism are declared as contradictory to Islam.[7] Muslims were then urged by IS to migrate to its controlled territories, "because *hijrah* (emigration) to the land of Islam is obligatory",[8] and that Muslims living in the caliphate would be better Muslims.

To IS, the establishment of its 'khilafah' was made possible because of 'jihad'. Extolling its idea of '*jihad',* the late spokesman of IS, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani,[9] declared that:

> *"The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared."*[10]

It was a clarion call to mobilise Muslims to participate in its 'jihad' or carry out acts of violence in the name of 'jihad'. IS argued that the 'caliphate' it had established was an attempt to change the Westphalian system of nation-states, in which the group insisted was an 'imperialist plot' to destroy the *ummah* (global Muslim community)*.* The khilafah system, it claimed, allowed Muslims to be united under a single Islamic theocracy.

These ideas were highlighted by IS in their video entitled 'The End of Sykes-Picot' which was aired in June 2014.The video showed a borderless map of Iraq and Syria that emphasised IS' ideological narrative of destroying artificial borders and erasing colonial legacies such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The 'caliphate' was also presented as an ideological alternative to the existing systems of government in the Middle East, which the group had branded as apostate and infidel regimes. To further capture the attention of Muslims, IS implored

the help of God to "break down the barriers in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and in all countries, until it reached Jerusalem." [11]

While IS arguments are largely focussed on the Middle East, IS is also reaching out to the wider Muslim world. This is seen in the IS featuring its many foreign fighters in its online publications and its claims of having inspired terrorist attacks and violence in other parts of the world.[12]

The False Caliphate

Despite all the propaganda, IS' khilafah was never modelled after the Rightly-Guided Caliphs (a term used in Sunni Islam to refer to the 30-year reign of the first four caliphs following the demise of Prophet Muhammad). In an open letter to Al-Baghdadi in 2014, over 120 prominent Grand Muftis, jurists and scholars rejected the IS caliphate, refuted IS' interpretations of Islamic texts and condemned its extremist practices and atrocities.[13] Likewise, IS' promise of a better life for Muslims living in the so-called caliphate, was a hoax. Many who had emigrated to live in the caliphate have expressed their dissatisfaction and dismay.[14]

Al-Adnani, who was killed in an airstrike in August 2016, had earlier called for a *mubahalah* (public supplication)[15] in April 2014, asking God to deliver a verdict on the group's legitimacy. This was a clear attempt to elicit support for the group and silence IS' sceptics and critics. To the IS, the establishment of the caliphate in June 2014,

---

[7] Al-Dawlah Al-Islāmiyyah (The Islamic State), *Hāzihi Aqīdahtunā Wa Hāzā Manhajunā* (This Is Our Creed and this Is Our Method), (n.p.: Matābi' Al-Dawlah Al-Islāmiyyah (The Islamic State Press), n.d.), 4.

[8] Islamic State, "Dabiq: The Return of the Khilafah," *Al Hayat Media Center*, July 5, 2014.

[9] Abu Mohammad al-Adnani was the spokesperson of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant who died in an airstrike on August 30, 2016.

[10] Islamic State, "Dabiq: The Return of the Khilafah," *Al Hayat Media Center*, July 5, 2014.

[11] "The End of Sykes-Picot", *Al-Hayat Media Center,* June 29, 2014.

[12] Tim Lister, Ray Sanchez, Mark Bixler, Sean O'Key, Michael Hogenmiller and Mohammed Tawfeeq, "ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks In 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043," *CNN,* February 12, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html.

[13] "Open Letter to Al-Baghdadi", http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/. See also, Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi, *Refuting ISIS* (USA: Sacred Knowledge, 2016).

[14] Lucy Draper, "Would-Be Jihadists' Letters Home Reveal Unhappy, Mundane Life in ISIS," *Newsweek,* February 12, 2014, https://www.newsweek.com/would-be-jihadists-letters-home-reveal-unhappy-mundane-life-isis-288556.

[15] Nelly Lahoud, "How Will the Islamic State Endure?" *Survival* 59(6) (2017): p. 55.

was 'an endorsement from God'. However, the collapse of the caliphate 3 years later has given rise to doubts about its viability and legitimacy.

In retrospect, following the end of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, several unsuccessful attempts had been made to revive the caliphate. IS had opportunistically filled the vacuum by resurrecting its short-lived so-called caliphate, citing religious arguments based on its interpretations of Quranic texts, *ahadith* (prophetic sayings), and *fatwa* (religious edicts) given by traditional Muslim scholars on the khilafah.

Although the caliphate has lost its territories, its establishment in 2014 was significant in illustrating that its resurrection is indeed possible. What is needed is a strong conviction that its revival to unite the *ummah* is a religious obligation. This was evident in Al-Baghdadi's speech on 22 August 2018, in which he stressed that the authenticity of a khalifah should be judged by the willingness of IS members and supporters to remain steadfast in turbulent times and not to lose hope because of the loss of lands or lack of military strength.[16] Baghdadi also asserted that the present state of the IS' khilafah is the will of God and a test for Muslims. Most importantly, he stressed that the Islamic khilafah would emerge once again, and it is the responsibility of the Muslims to make that happen.

Closely tied to the resurrection of the khilafah is the question of jihad which IS sees as the means to re-establish the caliphate. Citing the global war against it as evidence that the 'force of evil' would always be hostile to Islam and find ways to subdue it, IS argues that jihad is necessary to establish the khilafah and counter the West.

Islamic State's Persistent Ideological Threat

With its propaganda appeal and military victories in 2014, IS was able to attract between 27,000 and 30,000 people from at least 86 countries (as of 2015) to come to the

Levant to live and fight in the caliphate.[17] It has also succeeded in influencing many Muslim militant groups - stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia - and vulnerable Muslims in Western diasporas, to pledge allegiance to IS and mount terrorist attacks.

Many have succumbed to IS propaganda over the internet and social media platforms which have been IS' most effective communication and recruitment tools.[18] IS online publications such as *Dabiq, Rumiyah* and *An-Naba'* provide the so-called theological justifications and rationale for the establishment of its khilafah through jihad. These magazines also include infographics and articles on IS battlefront news, Islam, and interviews with prominent fighters and personalities to increase their reading appeal.

In getting its messages across in its publications and videos, IS features 'persuasive and charismatic figures' who appear to be highly religious, knowledgeable and committed to IS' jihad and khilafah. In addition, their rhetoric and passages are often laced with copious quotations of religious texts to add 'authenticity' and 'legitimacy' to its various jihadi appeals. IS' subtle oft-repeated messages and claims of Divine Will would therefore evoke a sense of guilt among vulnerable Muslims for their lack of commitment to Islam or a higher purpose in life.[19]

As such, these propaganda and narratives have continued to ensnare vulnerable Muslims to carry out terror attacks under its banner. Counter-terrorism and counter-ideology experts will therefore need to continue to monitor IS' narratives, and for that matter, all narratives by groups that

---

[16] Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi, "Audio Speech: *Wabashshir aṣ- ṣābirīn* (And give glad tidings to those who are patient in adversity)." *ICPVTR Database* (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore).

[17] "25,000-30,000 Foreigners Fighting For ISIS – Russian Dep. Defense minister," *Russia Today*, November 4, 2015, https://www.rt.com/news/320705-russia-isis-syria-asean/.

[18] Mark Taylor, "An Analysis of Online Terrorist Recruiting and Propaganda Strategies," *E-International Relations,* July 19, 2017, https://www.e-ir.info/2017/07/19/an-analysis-of-online-terrorist-recruiting-and-propaganda-strategies/.

[19] Ali Soufan and Daniel Schoenfel, "Regional Hotbeds as Drivers of Radicalization," in *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes,* ed. Arturo Varvelli (Italy: The Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2016), pp. 15-36.

advocate extremism and violence in the name of religion. More robust responses to neutralise their erroneous religious teachings and propaganda lines would also need to be developed.

Outlook

Going forward, however, much more needs to be done. There are at least five areas that are worth considering. Firstly, there needs to be more development of the contextual interpretations of relevant religious texts. This would reiterate Islam's core values of peace, compassion and moderation and thereby counter jihadis' exploitation of literal readings of the scriptures to justify their acts of violence. There have been several initiatives on this front. Prof Abdullah Saeed for example, has published a book on *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (2014) that advances the case for a contextual interpretation of relevant Qur'anic texts. He argues that such an approach ensures that relevant texts of the Qur'an are applied appropriately, in ways that do not distort "the underlying fundamental principles of Qur'anic teachings".[20]

Secondly, greater efforts should be invested in crafting new narratives to counter jihadi propaganda. Greater emphasis should be given to education (especially science and technology) and economic upliftment for a better standard of living**.** Zafarullah Khan, a lawyer and scholar who has written over 20 books and articles on Islam, law and human rights, has argued in his 500-page Islam in the Contemporary World: A New Narrative (2016), that "Islam needs a total *ijtihad* (reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in view of changing circumstances) that will lead to a wholesome reconstruction of religious thought".[21] He calls on Muslims to, among other things, focus on science and technology,[22] safeguard the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries,[23] and re-evaluate and update Islamic laws relating to

women's rights,[24] economic doctrines and criminal law.

Related to the above is the need for a paradigm shift in the Muslim world that embraces major changes and disruptions that accompany modernisation, globalisation and the technological revolution. This will require a change in mindset and the full application of ijtihad in relevant areas to achieve peace and progress.

Thirdly, it is necessary to reach out to and communicate more effectively with vulnerable Muslim youths who are exposed to jihadi propaganda. Besides making greater use of popular social media platforms, other avenues should be explored or enhanced in some cases. These platforms would include dramas, workshops, comics, videos, television and religious classes. It is essential that the new counter-narratives and rebuttals of jihadi falsehoods are well disseminated, especially to vulnerable groups.

Fourthly, it is imperative that tighter regulatory mechanisms be established to prevent extremist propaganda from infecting the Muslim masses. This would include instituting more stringent curbs on online extremism, and ensuring that only accredited and qualified Muslim preachers teach in and outside of mosques and other platforms. The publication and sale of extremist books and literature that are easily available in some countries should also be checked.

Lastly, there should be international consensus among Muslim clerics, jurists and scholars on the issue of inter-faith dialogue and peaceful coexistence between peoples of different religions, sects and beliefs. World Muslim bodies and centres of learning would do well to actively promote inter-religious harmony, freedom of religion and our common humanity. The pursuit of peace, security and economic well-being should be top priorities.

The above measures, some of which are already being undertaken, should neutralise the corrosive effect of extremist propaganda targeted at Muslim communities. These and various other preventative actions taken so

---

[20] Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty- First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p 3 & p 179.
[21] Zafarullah Khan, *Islam in the Contemporary World: A New Narrative* (Pakistan: National Book Foundation, 2016), pp. 413-431.
[22] Ibid., pp. 277-282.
[23] Ibid., pp. 331-341.

[24] Ibid., pp. 311-329.

far have ensured that IS remains a fringe and deviant group which has even been denounced as the new *Khawarij* (a violent dissident group in the early days of Islam that was viewed with contempt). The challenge that governments and societies face today is to ensure that IS and its likes remain at the fringe, if not eliminated altogether.

Mahfuh Bin Haji Halimi is a Research Fellow, Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman and Ahmad Saiful Rijal Bin Hassan are Associate Research Fellows with the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, a specialist unit within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. The authors are members of the Counter Ideology unit at ICPVTR. They can be contacted at ismahfuh@ntu.edu.sg, issaifulalam@ntu.edu.sg and isahmad@ntu.edu.sg respectively.

Submissions and Subscriptions

Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses

Launched in 2009, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) is the journal of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR). Each issue of the journal carries articles with in-depth analysis of topical issues on terrorism and counter-terrorism, broadly structured around a common theme. CTTA brings perspectives from CT researchers and practitioners with a view to produce policy relevant analysis.

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research has entered into an electronic licensing relationship with EBSCO, the world's largest aggregator of full text journals and other sources. Full text issues of Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses can be found on EBSCOhost's International Security and Counter-Terrorism Reference Center collection.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) welcomes contributions from researchers and practitioners in political violence and terrorism, security and other related fields. The CTTA is published monthly and submission guidelines and other information are available at www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ctta. To pitch an idea for a particular issue in 2017 please write to us at ctta@ntu.edu.sg.

For inclusion in the CTTA mailing list, please send your full name, organisation and designation with the subject 'CTTA Subscription' to ctta@ntu.edu.sg.

RSIS | S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific. For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.

ℬℭ

The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) is a specialist research centre within the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. ICPVTR conducts research and analysis, training and outreach programmes aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and mitigating its effects on the international system. The Centre seeks to integrate academic theory with field research, which is essential for a complete and comprehensive understanding of threats from politically-motivated groups. The Centre is staffed by academic specialists, counter-terrorism analysts and other research staff. The Centre is culturally and linguistically diverse, comprising of functional and regional analysts from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and North America as well as Islamic religious scholars. Please visit www.rsis.edu.sg/research/icpvtr/ for more information.
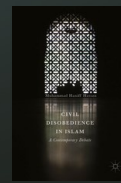
STAFF PUBLICATIONS
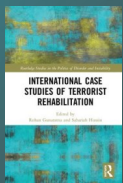
International Case Studies of Terrorist Rehabilitation
Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah Hussin (eds) (Routledge, 2019)
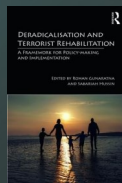
Deradicalisation and Terrorist Rehabilitation—A Framework for Policy Making & Implementation
Rohan Gunaratna, Sabariah Hussin (eds) (Routledge, 2019)

Civil Disobedience in Islam— A Contemporary Debate
Muhammad Haniff Hassan (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Handbook of Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific
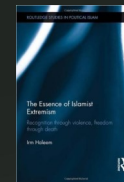Rohan Gunaratna and Stefanie Kam (eds) (Imperial College Press, 2016)
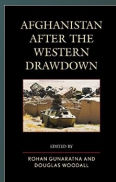
Afghanistan After The Western Drawdawn
Rohan Gunaratna and Douglas Woodall (eds) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015)
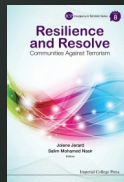
Resilience and Resolve
Jolene Jerard and Salim Mohamed Nasir (Imperial College Press, 2015)
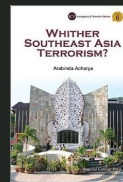
Whither Southeast Asia Terrorism
Arabinda Acharya (Imperial College Press, 2015)

The Essence of Islamist Extremism
Irm Haleem (Routledge, 2011)

ICPVTR'S GLOBAL PATHFINDER

Global Pathfinder is a one-stop repository for information on current and emerging terrorist threats from the major terrorism affected regions of the world. It is an integrated database containing comprehensive profiles of terrorist groups, terrorist personalities, terrorist and counter-terrorist incidents as well as terrorist training camps. This includes profiles from emerging hubs of global terrorism affecting the security of the world, as well as the deadliest threat groups in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus. The database also contains analyses of significant terrorist attacks in the form of terrorist attack profiles. For further inquiries regarding subscription and access to Global Pathfinder, please contact Jolene Jerard at isjolene@ntu.edu.sg.