

ISIS: THE NEW TERROR

DHIRAJ KUKREJA

INTRODUCTION

The world today is facing a major crisis, which is not the financial slowdown, but the ever-growing phenomenon of global terrorism. All nations, whether from the developed group or the Third World, have been afflicted with this malady, and have had their share of terrorist attacks. Three infamous dates stand out in the recent history of terrorist attacks—9/11, 26/11—and now, the recently added 13/11. It was on these dates that terrorists, through senseless attacks on innocents, got the better of three emblematic cities across the globe: New York, Mumbai, Paris. The target of the latest attack on 13/11, Paris, was a symbol of democracy, freedom, and secularism, not just in contemporary times, but right through its turbulent history.

For years, countries have been struggling with terrorism, yet today the threat has acquired new dimensions with the methods and techniques employed. No longer confined to within the boundaries of a single nation, terrorism has now spread its tentacles on an international level, acquiring a global status by operating through vast networks. The attacks in Paris reflect the realities existing in the world today. The attackers, who inflicted the mindless violence in Paris, are a part of a group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which sees Islam and the non-believers of the West locked in an undeniable and destined conflict, giving belief to Samuel Huntington's

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Clash of Civilisations theory. Huntington’s clash of civilisations spectre, which was rejected when first written, seems frighteningly true today. His theory is premised upon the thought that cultural and religious identities, being the highest rank in a ‘civilisation’, would be the main source of conflict on the cessation of the Cold War. It is a different issue that the ISIS has killed more Muslims, believers in Islam, than people of other religions combined!

Lenin is reported to have said, “The purpose of terrorism is to terrorise”. All terrorist groups display this trend, but the ISIS has shown it as its gory business card. The weapons of such groups are not the guns and bombs that they use; their primary weapon is the reaction that they hope to invoke: the more violent the reaction of those affected, the more successful they consider their mission.

There is a phrase in the French language, just as in many other languages too, “*un malheur ne vient jamais*”, which translates as “misfortune never arrives alone”. Yet, in this instant attack, it was not a misfortune, but horror of the worst kind, for it brought with it monstrosities and barbarism of a type, been seen before. The ISIS had arrived in the neighbourhood, unwanted, and without an invitation!

WHAT IS THE ISIS? THE GENESIS – HISTORY TO THE PRESENT

The rise of the Islamic State, IS, as it is also known, is not a new phenomenon; some analysts consider it as a new strand of an old problem. It caught the attention of the world in 2014, when it took over large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria and declared itself a caliphate, a state governed under the *Sharia* law of Islam. A brief mention here about the caliphate in history would be apt.

The Ottoman Empire, which lasted almost as long as the Roman Empire, included not only the Middle East, but also North Africa, much of the North Black Sea coast, and Southeastern Europe, right up to the

gates of Vienna. For 1300 years or so, the caliphs, or the “successors”, took pride in developing the Islamic community that the Prophet Muhammad had left behind. The caliphs were far from being rigid and inflexible; while a few were Islamist, they loved music (anathema to the IS); had a passion for not just reading the Koran and the Muslim *Sunnah*, but also spy novels, and theatre. The caliphs saw themselves as defenders of all faiths that came to them for protection, not just Islam. Ultimately, of course, the caliphate, like other Eastern European dynasties like the Habsburgs and Romanovs, was dissolved. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal abolished the Ottoman Empire, and a year later, the title of caliph was also abolished.

The present leader, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, a little known cleric until he usurped the title of caliph, claiming direct descent from Prophet Muhammad’s family, made a rather theatrical entry onto the world stage a few days after the IS had taken over the city of Mosul in 2014. Incidentally, Baghdadi was imprisoned for 10 months in an American prison in Southern Iraq, known as “Camp Bucca”, infamously known as the “academy of *jihadis*”.

What is fuelling the IS is not Islam, but a very radical ideology, as claimed by many experts. According to the IS, every Muslim on the face of this earth has to follow its rules, or face the consequences of being declared an apostate or a heretic; for the IS, an apostate is a bigger enemy than a ‘non-believer’, such as Hindus, Christians, or Jews.

The core ideology of the IS is the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate, the Islamic Empire led by a supreme leader. Saudi Arabia is considered the epicentre of Islam and the custodian of the two holy mosques at Mecca and Medina. The IS believes in absolute, impressive power and, hence, hopes that some Islamic countries may come into its fold; it eyes Saudi Arabia as

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the prime target. The IS believes in the *Wahhabi* school of Islam, practised widely in Saudi Arabia under the active support of the monarchy. It has declared a war against not only the non-believers, but also other sects and schools of Islam, thus, implementing one of the key tenets of *Wahhabism*. It holds a special hatred for countries like the USA, Israel and other Western nations; there are other nations like Spain and India, where Islam once prevailed, which are also on the IS' radar. It, therefore, is targeting not just the non-Muslim nations and religions, but other Muslim majority nations, and nations where once Islam was all-powerful, but is not any longer. The IS wishes to control such states, not just symbolically, but to ensure the spread of its ideology.

The IS evolved from the Al Qaeda affiliate in Iraq, and was led by a Jordanian, Abu Musa al Zarqawi, who was later killed in a US drone attack in 2006. It is interesting to note that there was no Al Qaeda in Iraq before 2003, the year of the US invasion. It was only after the fall of the secular regime and the toppling of Saddam Hussein—which brought about a Shia government – that Al Qaeda and its successor, the IS, flourished. In the wake of the US invasion, Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama, roped in other *jihadis* and became the main face of the insurgency in US occupied Iraq. The Al Qaeda in Iraq formed an umbrella organisation, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), which was significantly weakened in the face of the US' surge and the 'awakening movement' of the Sunni tribesmen against its brutality.

It was in 2010, after Baghdadi took over the reins of the organisation, that the process of rebuilding it commenced, and it announced its arrival by staging several attacks a month on enemy ground. By 2013, Baghdadi shifted his focus to Syria and joined the Al Nusra Front, which were supported by Al Qaeda and other regional players, with an aim to topple the Bashar al Assad regime. With no major success in Syria, he merged his forces in Iraq and Syria and created the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), now known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – ISIS.

Once problems surfaced between the Shia-led regime in Iraq and the Sunni minority, the IS reverted its attention to Iraq, enlisting the support of Sunni

tribes and Saddam loyalists, and started occupying territory. It occupied the central city of Fallujah and then, over-running Mosul, it marched towards Baghdad, brutally massacring captured Iraqi soldiers, ethnic and religious minorities, in large numbers. Though its plan to take over Baghdad was not successful, the IS did occupy a number of towns and cities and consolidated its position; it then declared the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate and changed its name to Islamic State, the name it bears now.

The IS has since broken away from its parent sponsor, Al Qaeda, and has emerged as the single largest and most potent threat to the world today. It is the first terrorist group to occupy and control territory; it runs schools and hospitals in the towns and cities under its control, ruling with an iron hand under the *Sharia*.

STRATEGY OF THE IS

It is difficult to overstate how constrained the IS will be by its radicalism. The modern international system, born of the 1648 treaty, "Peace of Westphalia", relies on each state's willingness to recognise borders, however grudgingly. For the IS, that recognition is ideological suicide. Other Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas have succumbed to the enticement and sweet words of democracy, and the potential for an invitation to join the community of nations, complete with a UN seat. Negotiations and accommodation have worked, at times, for the Taliban as well, when, under its rule, Afghanistan exchanged ambassadors with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Arab Emirates, an act that invalidated the Taliban's authority in the Islamic State's eyes. To the IS, these are not options, but acts of apostasy.

Until recently, the IS had focussed its attention only on the regions it controls. In the wake of fresh military setbacks, after the Russian entry and the American support to the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, the IS seems to be changing its tactics. Earlier, its attacks were concentrated in Iraq and Syria, but recent attacks in Beirut, Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt, the downing of a Russian airliner, and the Paris attacks, are indications of its reaching out to spread chaos in the world, with renewed vigour.

The most important aim of the recent attacks seems to be to polarise populations across the world, Muslim, and non-Muslim, based on religion. The IS' recruitment methodology is based on its philosophy, to eliminate the "gray zone of coexistence" between Muslims living in the West and their non-Muslim neighbours. Its thinking is that the 'gray zone' is a twilight area that exists between good and evil, and has been highlighted by the events of 9/11 and thereafter. The IS quotes George W. Bush's "either you are with us or against us" speech, and terms the actual terrorists as those from the West. It further states that the "time has arrived for a repeat of 9/11 to divide the world and destroy the gray zone"; the terror attack on Paris could be viewed in this perspective.

In Europe, the attacks, it so seems, are aimed at forcing the governments to join the coalition attacks in Syria and Iraq, thus, widening the gulf between the local populace and the large number of Arabs and Muslim migrants staying in those nations. If the rift does widen, the IS speculates that it would bring the Muslim population to side with it and obliterate the 'gray zone'. The attacks in Beirut and Egypt are seemingly to deepen the schism between the Sunnis and Shias; bombs have exploded in predominant Shia areas and in Shia mosques. Other Sunni nations, Saudi Arabia, in particular, are aiding to increase the divide, such as by the military campaign in Yemen.

HOW THE IS MAKES ITS MONEY

The IS is now known as the most brutal of all terrorist groups; it is also known as the richest of all such groups. Where does it get its money from, for all terror organisations need money, and a lot of it, for weapons, vehicles, salaries, propaganda material, and international air tickets – none of which comes cheap?

Generally, the main sources of income of all Islamic terrorist groups, including the IS, are donations from wealthy Muslims, kidnappings, extortion, drugs and narcotics, and 'taxes'. The IS has brought about a paradigm shift in the terrorists' business model by using oil money and extortion in the territory it controls, which is about the size of Britain. A report compiled for Reuters in October 2014, lists 13 Iraqi oilfields, three refineries, five cement plants, some

big wheat silos, and a salt mine under its control. Its self-declared caliphate also includes some of the best agricultural land in the Fertile Crescent, and the heavy industry that Saddam Hussein had concentrated in loyal Sunni Arab areas. According to the RAND Corporation, the IS revenues increased from around \$1million a month in 2008, to \$3 million daily in 2014.¹ Another estimate by a 2014 Thomson Reuters Report claims that the IS controls assets worth over \$2 trillion and generates \$3 billion income each year.² It is reliably known that the sale of oil is its main source of income, combined with the sale of electric power to the Syrian government through third parties, though nobody really has a clear grasp of exactly how much money the IS generates and has at its disposal. There are other estimates as well, but all punctuated with caveats.

The major oilfields in Syria and Iraq, including al-Omar, have a production capacity of about 75,000 barrels per day, and there are others with lesser output. Ground reports—though firm evidence is hard to come by—hint at the IS selling oil at prices as low as \$25 per barrel and yet making profits to the tune of \$5 million each day, which works out to a total of \$1.5 billion annually from oil alone.³ While large oil exports can be effectively blocked by the Western nations, as is done during the imposition of economic sanctions, the movement of the IS oil is difficult to trace. However, it is presumed that the oil travels from northwest Iraq and northeast Syria to southeast Turkey.

A recent investigative report by two London-based scholars, George Kiourktsoglou and Alec Courtroubis, has exposed the route taken by the IS oil. It reportedly passes through the Turkish port of Ceyhan to the rest of the world.⁴ This was done through continuous monitoring and noticing a perceptible increase in container-traffic from Ceyhan, which was done between July 2014 and February 2015, just the time when the IS had taken control of the oilfields in Syria.

Another source of income for the IS is natural gas. The Thomson Reuters Report mentions that IS-controlled natural gas fields generate about \$500

1. Yatish Yadav, "Blood Money", *Sunday Express Magazine*, November 29, 2015.

2. Ushinor Majumdar, "Barrel Money", *Outlook*, November 30, 2015.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

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million from sales. It is interesting that this gas is being routed to the thermal power stations in Syria, located in areas under control of the Assad regime!

Like the Taliban, the IS too has gained notoriety for destroying ancient, pre-Islamic sites and museums. While some of the destruction has been shown to the world, part may have been kept a secret, for it is another of the sizeable sources of income. The IS has been in the international black market for the sale of ancient artefacts; the Washington Institute for Near East Policy

estimates the amount to be over \$100 million a year.⁵

The IS, having control of territory, and having declared itself as a caliphate, functions like any other government with an established bureaucracy, complete with a rule book, and principles of administration. It has imposed taxes on people staying in its territory and levies taxes from non-Muslims on goods, electricity, water, telecommunications, cash withdrawals from banks and salaries; goods vehicles entering its territory are levied \$300-400. On a rough estimate, these taxes raise about \$350 million annually.

On the darker side of revenue-generation is the income through ransom from kidnappings, and sale of captured American equipment. It runs a flourishing business of selling American vehicles, construction equipment, and other such seized items, in addition to US arms and supplies. It also auctions abandoned properties, or those belonging to people killed by it. The ugliest face of revenue-generation is through selling women, mainly from the Yazidi and Shia-Turkoman minorities, to its fighters or in the slave markets of other terrorist groups.

While the IS may not have received as much donations as some of the other terrorist groups, these still comprise a substantial source of revenue. The IS is estimated to have received \$40 million in 2013-14 from donors in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait; Qatar has been accused by its own

5. Yadav, n. 1.

neighbours of funding all radical groups in the region, including the IS and Al Nusra Front. US intelligence has reportedly identified 20 Qatar citizens as IS financiers and blacklisted 10 of them. It uses alternative remittance methods from Western countries; a report has identified 28 online fund transfers wherein 17 beneficiaries linked to the IS withdrew money in 16 distinct business entities in Egypt, Germany, Greece, and Tunisia.

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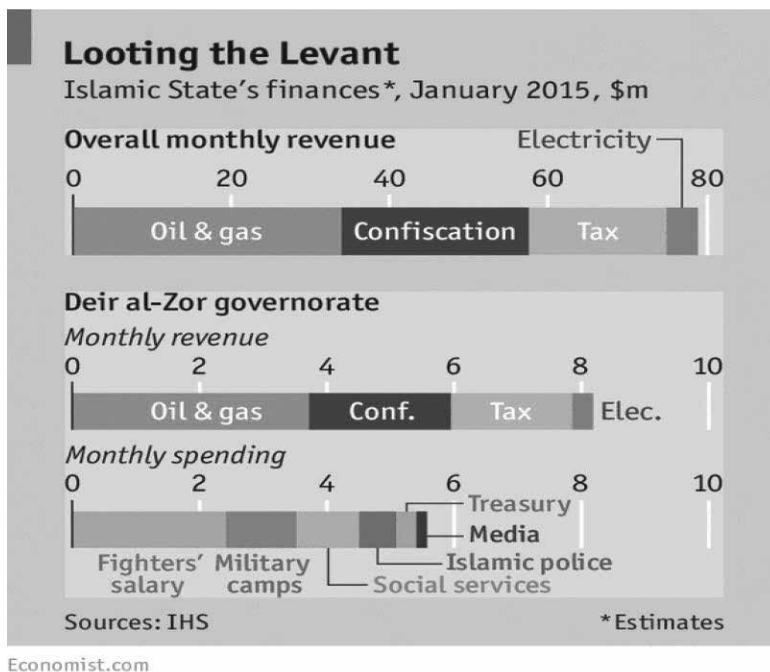
Recently, after 13/11, a combination of the increased coalition air attacks and the plummeting oil prices affected the IS' finances. Its retreat from Kobani in January 2015 cost it not only access to a key Turkish border crossing, but also the big Lafarge cement plant there. In October 2015, it lost Baiji, Iraq's largest oil refinery. American air support for anti-IS rebels now threatens to cut off the IS' last direct access to the Turkish border, hampering its ability to attract new foreign fighters. Feeling the strain, IS' taxes and fines have climbed and grown more indiscriminate. Scores of imprisoned suspected collaborators have paid upwards of \$30,000 to avoid being beheaded! Tensions fuelled by pay differentials have degenerated into skirmishes between local and foreign fighters.

Total oil production has reportedly fallen from 100,000 barrels a day to below 40,000⁶. The traffic of tankers transporting oil between Mosul and Raqqa, has fallen sharply following repeated attacks; after the strikes on big

6. "Islamic State's Finances - Degraded, not yet Destroyed", *The Economist*, December 12, 2015.

refineries, refining has become a cottage industry. This has resulted in an increase in fuel prices, and a drop in IS salaries and morale. Fearful of an exodus, the IS has raised the cost of an exit permit to \$1,800, and demands two named guarantors, who risk losing their heads, should the permit-holder not return. The revenues have fallen, but the sources have not yet dried up. An estimate of the IS' finances can be seen in Fig 1 below.

Fig 1.



INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

In June 2014, when the IS declared itself a caliphate, its presence was limited to its area of influence in Syria and Iraq. However, in just over a year, it has grown into a terror organisation with a global presence, and safe havens in Syria and Iraq. The IS' major attacks worldwide, in 2015, are listed below.

- January – Two gunmen, affiliated to the IS, attacked the Charlie Hebdo office in Paris.

- February – A series of attacks in Libya, including on an oilfield, left four foreign nationals dead.
- February – A sole gunman, who drew inspiration from the IS, went on a shooting spree in Copenhagen, killing two.
- March – 22 killed, including 19 foreign tourists, in an attack on a museum in Tunisia.
- April – Several attacks on the Egyptian Army left more than 12 personnel dead.
- May - A single suicide bomber killed more than 20 people during prayers in a mosque in Saudi Arabia.
- June - An attack on a tourist resort at Port El Kantaoui, on the Mediterranean coast in Tunisia, killed 38 people.
- July - An attack in Suruc, in Turkey, near the Syrian border, killed 31 people, of whom a majority were students.
- August – An audacious attack on Saudi Special Forces, near the Yemen border, killed 15 were people in a mosque within the Special Forces HQ camp.
- September – More than 45 killed in two separate attacks in Yemen.
- October – A Russian passenger airliner blew up over Egypt, killing all 224 on board.
- November – Suicide bombers targeted the capital of Lebanon, Beirut, killing 43 people.
- November – In its most dramatic attack, the IS used multiple gunmen and suicide bombers in a coordinated attack in Paris, killing 130 people.

Although the IS has killed more Muslims than Christians, Jews, and others over the past few years, most Arab and Islamic nations have adopted an ostrich-like attitude. These nations pretend that the radical elements are a problem to be solved by the Western nations. Today, the only Arabs and Muslims who are fighting the IS are Syrian President, Bashar Assad, Egypt's President, Abdel Fattah-al-Sisi, the Iraqi government, and Iran and its proxy in Lebanon, the Hezbollah.

The latest terror attacks in Paris seem to have galvanised other nations to react into taking a concerted and coordinated stance against the IS. The attack has also exposed the confusion amongst the Arabs, the Muslims and the Western nations, in their stand against the IS and the Syrian crisis. The viewpoints and action plans of some of the major players, are as follows.

- **USA:** America is in a conflict with itself! It is training and assisting the Sunni militia to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria, while being unable or unwilling to stop Iran from its support to the Hezbollah, which backs Assad and is fighting the IS.
- **Russia:** President Putin has always been a supporter of the Assad regime in Syria and wishes it to continue in power. Until recently, Russian aerial attacks were mainly directed on the rebel militia in Syria. However, after the initial report on the crash of the Russian airliner and the IS claiming responsibility, it has now intensified its aerial attacks, not just against the Syrian rebels, but also against the IS strongholds.
- **Turkey:** It seems to be playing a double game. Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member, is friendly with the Kurds in Iraq, but is fighting them in its own territory and Syria, while the Kurds are fighting against the IS. By bombing the Kurds in Syria, and imposing an embargo on supplies, Turkey has been accused of helping the IS. The shooting down of a Russian fighter aircraft has soured relations with Russia, further complicating the Turkish stand.
- **Iran:** Iran wants President Assad to continue for two reasons: one, as a counter to Israel, and two, as a Shia ally in the region. Having just come back into the international mainstream through the nuclear deal signed with the P5+1 nations, Iran has its own domestic issues to resolve, but also wishes to establish itself as a regional power. Besides, it has a rebellious Sunni population close to the Iraqi border, and the Taliban and the Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, to deal with. Nevertheless, it is providing support to the Assad regime, through its proxy, Hezbollah of Lebanon, which is fighting the IS in Syria.
- **Saudi Arabia:** Saudi Arabia, in an effort to counter the rising aspirations of Iran to establish itself in the region, lit the fire in Syria by supporting

the anti-Assad rebels, an act that has the support of the USA, Qatar, and Turkey. It has also attacked the Houthi rebels, a Shia group in Yemen, to divert the resources of Iran.

- **Iraq:** The puppet Shia regime, put in place by the withdrawing US forces, seems to be in no hurry to end the conflict against the IS, as that would bring the rebel Sunnis back into the political focus. It would defend Baghdad, for it is symbolic of the power-seat, but would not, as yet, reclaim Fallujah.
- **Israel:** The entire conflict situation seems to suit Israel. The Hezbollah is busy fighting in Syria; Syria itself, is on the defensive; Iran is getting involved into an uncertain war, with the end nowhere in sight. This involvement of the key players in the region has shifted the spotlight from the Palestine cause, giving Israel a reprieve for the time being.
- **The Kurds:** Syrian or Iraqi or Turkish, they are celebrating their recent military successes and want to defend their newly formed borders. They hope that their military successes would bring them closer to the realisation of their dream of an independent Kurdistan. Their campaign is not so much to crush the IS—they thereby hope that it would divide the Arabs and dilute the fight against them.
- **UK:** The UK has been actively involved in air strikes against the IS in Iraq, but not in Syria, since September 2014. After the terror attacks in Paris on 13/11, Prime Minister David Cameron just about managed to get the approval of the British Parliament, across party lines, and has commenced strikes against the IS in Syria too. The reluctance of the British Parliament to get involved in air strikes in Syria can be seen in the manner the motion was passed; while in 2014, the motion was passed by 524 votes against a mere 43, this year only 397 votes, against 223, approved the motion. It is now in the crosshairs of the IS for a Paris-type attack.
- **EU:** France and Germany were supplying military aid to anti-Assad rebels in Syria, while restricting their air strikes against the IS only to Iraq. After the Paris attack, France has “declared war” against the IS and has gone on a bombing spree against IS targets in Syria. It has called for a “large alliance” to take on the IS “decisively”, but has not invoked Ar-

A recent announcement by Saudi Arabia of the formation of a 34-nation Islamic military alliance to coordinate the fight against terrorism in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Afghanistan, is rare and surprising. The focus of the alliance, as stated in the announcement, is not just on the IS, but on any and every terrorist organisation that surfaces in these nations and around.

Article 5 of the NATO Charter, which would have obligated all members, including Turkey that is playing a dubious game in the region, to provide military assistance to France.

The many IS attacks all over, and the 'indifference' and confusion in the ranks of the major players of the region and beyond, raise some unpleasant questions. Why are the global public opinion-makers not giving due attention to this war on terror? Why are the supply chains of the sophisticated weapons to the IS not being broken? Who is buying the oil from the IS, giving it finances to fund its terror activities?

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INDIAN RESPONSE

The Paris attacks revived memories of the dark night of 26/11 in Mumbai. This, and earlier attacks elsewhere, had the alarm bells ringing in the Indian

7. *Hindustan Times*, December 17, 2015, p. 22.

security and intelligence establishments. Indian intelligence has report of an entity called Wilayat Khorasan (WT) that has been operating since January 2015 in the AfPak region and could affect Indian interests there. The Khorasan region, eastwards from northeast Iran into the Nangarhar province in Afghanistan, includes parts of Central Asia, and the extreme northern parts of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which are now under Pakistani occupation.

Although there is scant evidence of any foreign fighters under the flag of the IS in Afghanistan, some experts believe that the group's recruits in Afghanistan are local insurgents, previously operating with other local extremist groups, and have simply changed loyalties to the IS. It remains unclear whether any substantial command-and-control relationship exists between Afghanistan's IS adherents and the leaders of the group's strongholds in Iraq and Syria. Whatever be the case, there are some unconfirmed reports of IS militants gaining a foothold in the region, causing concern not just to the US troops stationed there, but also to the Indian security apparatus.

The WT, also known as the Islamic State of Khorasan, is the training ground for *jihadis*, whose final destination is Syria. While a concentrated attack, as in Iraq or Syria, is not expected in India, 'lone wolf' attacks by individuals inspired by the ideology of the IS, cannot be ruled out as India is in the IS' list of enemies.

As on date, the IS' presence is rather faint in India, but it is managing to influence some misguided youth to migrate to the ways of violence. The National Intelligence Agency (NIA) estimates that only 23 Indians have left to fight for the IS; another 15-20 were prevented from leaving or brought back from intermediate places.⁸ Indian intelligence and security agencies are

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8. Meetu Jain, "Are We Prepared", *Outlook*, November 30, 2015.

continuously monitoring the traffic on the internet to detect people in contact with the IS; on any indication of their planning to leave, or help somebody to carry out any anti-national or terror activity, they are sure to be intercepted.

An India-specific *jihadi* organisation, Ansar-ut Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind (AuT) is reported to have pledged allegiance to the IS in 2014; this could be the face of the IS in India. It has been active in the cyber space and has posted IS messages, sub-titled, not just in Urdu or Hindi, but in English and other regional languages as well. The AuT is looking to seduce recruits for the IS through these posts on the internet.

So far, the security and intelligence establishment in India has done well in preventing some, and intercepting some, radicalised youth from joining the IS. Steps have been initiated, not just by the government, but also by the large Muslim population of India, to curtail the influence of the IS within the country. In addition, India is in constant touch with the Middle East nations, sharing intelligence inputs, to coordinate on the activities of the IS.

The immediate response, initiated by the tough talk of the French president, in the aftermath of the Paris attacks on 13/11, would have warmed the hearts of many a right-wing element in India. The government has to tread cautiously in giving similar responses to attacks on Indian soil, be they from the IS or any another terror organisation; one false, hurried step could spell a catastrophe. Earlier governments in India, especially under the stewardship of Prime Minister Vajpayee, have displayed restraint and sagacity, and did not succumb to pressure to join any international coalition after the 9/11 attacks. Notwithstanding, the changed geo-political standing of the country since 9/11, the succeeding dispensations in the government have ably resisted the temptations to do so while working for national interests. While taking the threat seriously and remaining wary and alert, the Indian response to any attack has to be measured, on a 'case-to-case' basis.

THE IS IN CYBER SPACE

The conflicting clash between the 21st century technology and the *Salafist-jihadist* interpretation of Islam, which advocates a return to the 7th century lifestyle, ceased to be a topic of debate between the extreme

ideologists and the *mullahs*, when the full potential of the worldwide web was fully realised. Today, the IS and its supporters use the internet and social media platforms in a brazen, overt manner, advertising their 'brand' and spreading their propaganda via mainstream networks, such as Twitter and Facebook.

To achieve what the IS has achieved, in terms of controlling large swathes of territory and recruiting a large army, it needed to master the internet. Most of the people who are attracted to the IS are in their late teens or the early 20s. Research has brought out that in this age group in the developed world, 89 per cent are active online, 70 per cent use social networks daily, and each individual spends as much as 19.2 hours a week surfing the internet.⁹ The *jihadis* are no exception, spending may be more time to ensure the reach of their message.

Most of the IS commanders and the new recruits are technologically knowledgeable. Coding on computers, which includes writing software and placing information on html pages, comes as naturally to them as their mother tongue. Most of the IS business is conducted online, from recruiting and propaganda, to battlefield strategy and instructions. The range, quality and availability of the latest equipment such as HD cameras, editing equipment, software, and special effects libraries, are used by the professional media teams to produce the grisly and barbaric videos for which the organisation has become known.

The IS has made it a point to recruit not just fighters, but also Information Technology (IT) specialists and those with knowledge of online marketing. It also has its recruitment machine largely online, to keep itself relevant with the internet generation of today. Initial approaches could be through an intermediary, or even direct through Facebook or Twitter. Thousands of Twitter accounts, feeds through automatic digital distribution, and messaging networks provide updates on battle reports and news about life in the IS. In this manner, the IS keeps potential recruits and supporters engaged, while countering any adverse propaganda. The Twitter and Facebook profiles are

9. Abdel Bari Atwan, "Slashtagged @ Jehadi Joes", *Outlook*, November 30, 2015.

also used to cyber-stalk and identify enemies; military personnel, politicians, and journalists are the prime targets, some of who, surprisingly post personal details on the social media!

The IS is also known to have employed professional journalists, photographers, film-makers, and editors, but only after they swear allegiance to the caliph. As a result, the quality of films produced are comparable with those of national broadcasters and, in some cases, even Hollywood! It also runs its own radio station, Al Bayan, based in Mosul, and a satellite TV station, Tawheed, from a base in Libya. What the IS *jihadists* may be lacking in terms of sophisticated weaponry, they more than make up through their 'keyboard warriors'.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE: THE ROADMAP

What is the strategy behind this Islamic State-inspired violence? *Jihadists* of all bents of mind seek to create discord, pitting Muslims against non-Muslims in the West and Sunni Muslims against Shia Muslims in the East. The theocratic ideology of Islamism prospers on division, polarisation, and claims of Muslim victimisation. The world must first understand the difference between Islam and Islamism. Islam is a religion, and just like any other religion, it, too, is internally diverse. Islamism, however, can be explained as the desire of one sect to impose its version on the other sects and even on the entire society. Islamism, therefore, is not Islam, but an offshoot of Islam, just as there are offshoots in other faiths. Similarly, *jihad* is a connotation of a struggle, be it spiritual and personal, or a struggle against an external enemy. *Jihadism*, however, is something entirely different; it is the doctrine to spread Islamism through the use of force. Another issue that needs to be understood is that the actions of the IS members cannot be termed as militancy or insurgency; they comprise terrorism, and, therefore, have to be dealt with as such. The urgency of making these distinctions should be apparent to everyone, prior to planning a strategy against the IS.

The IS has territory, natural resources, and income from the sale of oil and gas, ransom, and taxes. The war against the IS, hence, has to throttle the income, stop its exploitation of natural resources and capture its territory.

Simultaneously, an ideological war has to be conducted to educate the misguided.

Since the November attacks by the IS in Paris, the propaganda machine of the IS had been working overtime to drumbeat violence. It laid claim to a series of attacks and suicide bombings in Tunis, Baghdad, and California. Yet, for all its successes at advertising and projecting terror, life on the ground in the IS after the Paris attacks, has grown darker. The IS, though not yet shrinking in territory, is definitely not expanding. The biggest loss for the IS in November 2015 was probably losing the Iraqi town of Sinjar, which made the journey between its two main cities, Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria, far longer and more perilous. Another setback of significance was the loss of oilfields west of Sinjar, to the Kurdish forces in Syria, which would surely affect its revenues. The aerial attacks by the coalition, in both Iraq and Syria, have also begun to show effects and need to be continued under a common strategy.

Shutting down of social media accounts on platforms needs to be further accelerated to isolate the IS on the internet. This would make it difficult for it to spread its ideology to potential recruits. The Western governments have done well in prodding the social media companies to increase their efforts to identify and block accounts sympathetic to the IS. Aaron Zelin, a fellow at King's College, London, and other researchers have reported a marked deterioration in the number and quality of pictures uploaded in media releases by the IS.¹⁰

With the coalition air attacks successes in checking the advance of the IS and the sharp drop in global oil prices, the IS' finances have faltered. The IS is feeling the strain, and the pressure needs to be maintained. The UN must step in and mandate a force under its flag to fight this war on terror. The differences in opinion on the continuing civil war in Syria are helping the IS. The major players involved—the USA, with its coalition partners, Russia, and Iran—need to resolve their differences at the earliest to put a stop to the Syrian civil war, and, instead, have uninterrupted focus on the war against the IS.

10. "Unfriended", *The Economist*, December 12, 2015.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism is the new face of war in the 21st century. Theatres of terror, some large and some small, have emerged in different continents. People all over the world, are slowly getting accustomed to a life in times of terror.

The new generation is not too religiously inclined, and is getting detached from formal religion even while retaining its spirituality. The professed ideologies of love, goodwill, redemption, and salvation are being used for the wrong purposes. Terrorists, on the other hand, are picking up the cloak of religion to get their cadres together and portray themselves as the guardians of their religion. In several societies with feudal social settings, political formations too, are being cast on religious lines. The IS, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Boko Haram are the major players of terror in recent times. They have nothing in common in their deliverance to the followers of Islam across the world, but their atrocities have become a burden to the true Islamic culture and beliefs.

Most of the weapons on the inventory of the IS have come from the heaps generously donated to the supposed defenders of freedom and democracy, be they in Libya or in Syria. It is ironic that the very nations which gave these weapons, have become the targets of their use. The IS represents a sea-change in how terrorism is conducted. It could become the winning brand, the new icon of 'global *jihad*', which could lead to greater allegiance to it from other terrorist groups. It is important to address ways to reduce the impact of its lopsided ideology, through effective strategies to discredit it, both on the battlefield and in cyber space.

Parts of the Middle East and Africa are in a quagmire, sliding towards a warlord era. States are struggling to control their territory. Parts of states are now under the rule of local chieftains, rebel groups, and terrorist movements. Armed irregular forces are holding effective power over growing areas of Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and may be a few others too. Motivated by extreme forms of militant Islam or regional separatism, non-state actors have grabbed territory and are creating their own version of law and order. As the regional order is

collapsing, non-state actors are filling the vacuum. The IS represents the sea-change in how terrorism is conducted.

The major focus on counter-terrorism strategies has always been on hard power, but policy-makers have realised that such strategies have produced limited results. The world leaders need to rethink their strategy and use soft power instead, for if we do not engage in this ideological war now, the world will continue to face threats that will morph into even greater threats. While there have been some signs of progress in the campaign against the IS, the threat could easily move from conventional warfare to guerrilla-style insurgency, increased suicide attacks and even cyber terror.

The world is not just fighting terrorists, but also an ideology, twisted to suit the depraved mind; an ideology that is not targeting countries, but a way of life.