

Afghanistan Religious Plague: The Case of Islamic State Khorasan

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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Abstract-

The 9/11 events in U.S change the dynamics of counter terrorism in the world, appealing for international and regional cooperation or coalition to curb the emerging threat on human security. From Al Qaeda to ISIS, Boko-Haram to Al Shabaab and now ISK in Afghanistan. This paper expose on some operations conducted by U.S-Afghan forces to combat ISK ideology and aspiration in proclaiming an Islamic caliph. It is worth noting that, some of the major aspects or particularity of jihadist groups is deceit and bias on education and precisely that of girls. Nonetheless, the paper exposes the constitutional provision on education in Afghanistan, a strategic factor in the fight against terrorism. Terrorists or jihadist can still surrender and engaged in amnesty programs in the form of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

Introduction

Global terrorism has always been tagged to the Arab world, precisely to the Islamic culture. Though considered a religion of peace, which condemns the use of violence by some unscrupulous individuals, who misinterpretate the Holy Quran for political reasons. Afghanistan became safe haven for one of the Islamic State's most dangerous and lethal affiliates, the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) five years ago. Since the formation of the group in January 2015, several military assaults(state) or operations has been coordinated in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The drop in jihadist tendencies prior to 2019, is no evidence that the groups operationality or agenda have been curbed. However, as this paper expose, intense targeting of ISK in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as substantial losses for the group over the past four years, necessary for understanding future trends.

The strength of the group has encountered several losses in several provinces, ISK's militants and supporters were killed in Nangarhar, 91% of 11,668 individuals killed and about 63% of 696 individuals captured between 2015 and 2018. Within Nangarhar, the majority of those losses (7,593 or 72% killed, and 182 or 42% captured) took place in just three districts: Achin (4,260 or 40% killed, 95 or 22% captured), Deh Bala (aka Haska Mina) (1,859 or 18% killed, 45 or 10% captured), and Kot (1,474 or 14% killed, 42 or 10% captured). The group also encountered fierce attack from coalition and Afghan in Jowzjan, Zabul, Kunar and Kabul, areas next to Nangarhar. In Afghanistan, the group recorded a total of 11,668 deaths, 696 individuals captured, and 375 individuals surrendered, which were primarily concentrated in Nangarhar, with ISK leaders targeted, killed or captured in regions close to the Afghan-Pakistan border, in close proximity to its stronghold in Nangarhar.

Despite prevalent operations against ISK by the Afghan military machine, jihadist tendencies still evident in the country. Counter terrorism analyst and scholars have raised several questions in relation to religious plague in Afghanistan, as to what is the nature and level of manpower losses incurred by ISK in crusade against the group? How have these operations affected ISK's operational capacity? These questions simply expose us to the counter terrorism operations by the Afghan military machine.

Counterterrorism Operations in Afghanistan

Drawing from two epistolary of Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) signed from the 'Wali of ISK' addressed to the 'Commander of the Faithful and Caliph of the Muslims,' retrieved by U.S. forces and exploited by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point in 2018, it (letters) provides insight from the

perspective of the group, an organization that has been subjected to extensive state-led operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan yet continues to survive.

The group is recognized as the Islamic State's deadliest affiliates, with most of devastating attacks in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. She was ranked amongst the top four deadliest terrorist groups globally in 2018, along with groups like the Afghan Taliban and Boko Haram. ISK's survival in Afghanistan-Pakistan has triggered grave concerns globally as well as in the immediate region with regard of jihadist tendencies, especially withdrawal of the United States' machines in Afghanistan. By examining the above questions, this paper provides insight on various operations and the particularity of terrorist organizations.

Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS)

International security strategies have emerged alongside technological dynamics; google earth, drones and GPS system. As such, counter terrorism operations can be coordinated from a distance or even a country. The evolution of jihadist trends in Afghanistan did not feature on President Barack Obama's June 2016 War Powers Resolution letter, despite the warning of an MP from Kunar that some 3,000 youths had joined ISK. In February 2016, a report by RUSI estimated the size of ISK to be 7,000-8,500 ISK in Afghanistan and 2,000- 3,000 in Pakistan. Operation Freedom's Sentinel marked a drop in ISK fighters from around 1,000 by the end of 2016 to around 2,000 at the end of 2018. The security challenges in the region and Afghanistan apparatus in particular, resonates for an increase of ISK's force size from 2,000-5,000 by September 2019, critical to modern counter terrorism and organized crimes.

Operation Green Sword

The 'global war on terror' a phrase formulated in U.S, has not been sourced out following the event of the 9/11. As such, U.S. air support, code named Operation Green Sword (OGS), is another phenomenal strategy to combat ISK, after several offensive around Achin and Deh Bala in June 2016. Though the operations limit Obama's collaboration with the military machine at the time, but OGS exposed U.S counter terrorism strength in delivering serious manpower, leadership, and material losses to ISK, working in tandem with uprising forces and complementary Taliban counteroffensives.

OGS was coordinated within the same period with Phase III of Operation Shafaq, the ANSF's first post-ISAF strategy that was based on a "hold-fight-disrupt" method advancing towards southern Nangarhar to target ISK operational strongholds. Some of the challenges were; counter-ISK operational lag, and support or alliance. these challenges were mitigated by the Former Commander of USFOR-A General John Nicholson's, who took note of the situation in Afghanistan and stressing on the need for reduction in static checkpoints that were causing high numbers of ANSF casualties. Still, U.S. airstrikes were coordinated in tandem with the ANSF counteroffensive throughout 2016 (notably a U.S. drone strike on July 26, 2016, which killed ISK's emir Hafiz Saeed Khan).

Operation Hamza

Operation Hamza was coordinated by ANSF and U.S. in 2017 to expulse ISK in Kot district, followed by ground operations into Mohmand Valley from four forward operating bases established in Achin and Kot. The events of the 9/11 and the Iraqi war has redefined counter terrorism strategy of U.S, the military machine has adopted air strike, particularly the use of flying birds (drones) to support ground operations, thereby limiting military and civilian casualty. Operation Hamza stalled the necessity of the use of flying

birds in global war on terror, due to the challenges encountered in accessing ISK camps in Asadkhel area's cave networks situated at the entrance to Mohmand and Pekha valleys in Achin.

The terrain led the United States military machine to adhere to the use of non-nuclear bomb, the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), on ISK tunnels. The operation led to the death of around 655 ISK-linked individuals, and paved the way for ANSF and U.S. Special Forces to enter Mohmand Valley after the destruction of ISK's entrance cave networks.

One of the major success of the operation was the murder of ISK's second emir, Abdul Hasib Logari, in a joint raid by Afghan and U.S. special forces. Though like any terrorist organization, after the death of their leader, the organization or group aspire to strengthen operational security measures, acquire more weapons (heavy and light weapons), pay sustainable salaries for aspirants and control communications channels, in order to coordinate future attacks. This is usually done by reinforcing existing terrains occupied and dispatching its fighters into other zones with affiliates, from Nazyan immediately to the east, for logistical and operational cooperative alliance with LeI, and in Deh Bala through former Afghan Taliban fighters.

More so, alliances and factions amongst terrorist organizations are usually short term. For example; ISK fighters attempt to take Tora Bora from the Taliban, which led to an exchange of fire for weeks is no doubt, that 'terrorists are enemies to themselves'. However, from mid-2018, the coalition counter operations and pressure weakened ISK, inflicting heavy losses in addition to those from Operation Green Sword and Operation Hamza.

Particularity of Jihadist Groups

Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) emerged as a terrorist group in 2015, following several security challenges involved in the region. Its first flag bearers, who adhere to Islamic State Core in Iraq and Syria included Hafiz Saeed Khan, the head of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP's) Orakzai faction, and some of his fellow TTP commanders. The group's gained support from Ansar-ul-Khilafat Wal-Jihad, which pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in July 2014, to Hafiz Saeed Khan in January 2015, and Pakistani Jundullah, which pledged allegiance in November 2014 after an allegedly meeting with an official Islamic State delegation. Other groups provided operational or logistical support to ISK included but not limited to; Jamaat ul-Ahrar, a splinter TTP faction, and other Sunni sectarian groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Through ISK social affiliation to other transnational organizations, a new ideological was developed, as well as strategy in conducting attacks jointly.

Some of the factors which resonates on ISK's expansion are; governance failures, fragmented Taliban control, weakened tribal resilience in key southern districts, an abundance of existing militant groups and networks with local expertise, and proximity to recruitable population or aspirants, who adhere to the ideology due to poverty. Beyond these factors, ISK has also succeeded to adapt to communication framework like other terrorist organizations appealing to the younger generations like its global wilayat cousins, and as well, the group (ISK) also developed its own radio station, Khilafat Ghag (Voice of the Caliphate), for its propaganda. Below the paper examines some of the particularities of jihadist groups.

DECEIT

The 19th century remains a strategic period in the development and history of transnational crimes and jihad in particular. Jihad was perceived as a ‘Holy War’ for educational revival, which is contradictory with today’s actors; non respect of the holy Quran, engage in suicide attacks prohibited, recruitment of youths for violence and religious extremism, through development of fundamentalist ideology.

The events of the 9/11 in U.S expose how globalized the world is, with the development of new patterns of attacks by non-conventional actors (jihadist, terrorist or extremist, usually flagged as Islamist). From 2015 till date, ISK has succeeded to indoctrinate some poor civilians to adhere to its ideology and principles, but the group has encountered a multitude of counter terrorism operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, several counter attacks were conducted by flying birds, as well as the use of the United States’ largest non-nuclear bomb, in combination with ground operations help kill several ISK’s emirs, along the capture of militants.

Education

The education menace began in 1996, after the Taliban captured Kabul and proclaimed Islamic Emirate, Mullah Omar decreed that provision of education for girls was temporarily suspended due to security concerns. A suspension which was never lifted after five years of Taliban rule, although its enforcement was never absolute. One of the major rights in the world and enshrine in every constitution of a country is the right to education. Religious plague in Afghanistan is a moderation of other states involved in the ‘game’. For example, the closure girls’ schools and restriction of other forms of non-religious education by Afghan Taliban before. But one of the fundamental elements in the contemporary threats is leadership, as some support education but with the need of implementing Sharia. However, the delivery of education, like other public services, remains challenging to areas engulfed in internal wrangling. Some of the aspect the lead to such dysfunction at the level of education are; corruption, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient personnel inhibit wider access to education, which can be resolve through sensitive non-state provision backed by nuanced dialogue and mediation which can increase prospects for effective education. Below is the constitutional provision on education in Afghanistan, contrary to the aspirations of jihadists and religious extremists in Afghanistan.

Afghan Constitution’s Provisions on Education

Article Seventeen

Ch. 1, Art. 17

The state shall adopt necessary measures for promotion of education in all levels, development of religious education, organizing and improving the conditions of mosques, madrasas and religious centers.

Article Forty-Three

Ch. 2, Art. 22

Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (lisâns), free of charge by the state.

The state is obliged to devise and implement effective programs for a balanced expansion of education all over Afghanistan, and to provide compulsory intermediate level education.

The state is also required to provide the opportunity to teach native languages in the areas where they are spoken.

Article Forty-Four

Ch. 2, Art. 23

The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.

Article Forty-Five

Ch.2, Art. 24

The state shall devise and implement a unified educational curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of

Islam, national culture, and in accordance with academic principles, and develop the curriculum of religious subjects on the basis of the Islamic sects existing in Afghanistan.

Article Forty-Six

Ch.2, Art. 25

Establishing and operating of higher, general and vocational education are the duties of the state.

The citizens of Afghanistan also can establish higher, general, and vocational private educational institutions and literacy courses with the permission of the state.

The state can also permit foreign persons to set up higher, general and vocational educational private institutes in accordance with the law.

The conditions for admission to state higher education institutions and other related matters to be regulated by the law.

Conclusion

Counter terrorism forces and countries have developed several programs for jihadist, terrorists or religious extremists, who surrender, and appeal the were brainwash by criminal ideology, are usually engaged in amnesty programs developed as part of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Though others are simply captured or surrender during counter terrorism raids. It is worth noting that force sizes, composition, and grand strategy are not static in relation to the ‘global war on terror’. For example, the changes introduced by one of U.S military machine field commander in Afghanistan (USFOR-A) General John Nicholson, alongside the Trump White House’s 2017 South Asia Strategy, and President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani’s narrative for achieving peace, through adequate cooperation with the coalition’s efforts to disrupt, degrade, and destroy ISK in Afghanistan. Although the United States reduced its overall force size as part of ongoing peace negotiations in the territory, her special operations force, which coordinated counter-ISK operations particularly in southern Nangarhar, contribute in training and fighting alongside its Afghan partners.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.

ABOUT ITCT

ITCT is UK based organisation and founded in 2018. It is a non-political and non-profitable organisation and is a unique think tank in itself. There is not a single organisation around that specifically counters the narratives of Islamist terrorism by using the tools of Islamic Theology. ITCT exposes the root causes of Political Islam and works hard to eliminate it through introducing the actual concept of Islamic Theology.

ITCT conducts a comprehensive research to find out the key elements that draw the most vulnerable people of the society into the fire of religious extremism. ITCT works on three main factors in order to educate the Muslim community:

- That Islamist Terrorism is wrongly associated with Islam
- And is committed by misguided Muslims
- By manipulating religious texts to brainwash Muslims

ITCT has three pillars to stand on:

- **MISSION**
Countering Islamist Terrorism
- **VISION**
Educating Muslim Community
- **OBJECTIVE**
Providing the Solution of Islamist Terrorism

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