ON THE DEBATE ON FOOTPRINTS OF ISIS IN PAKISTAN – POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES

(Ms Mahroona Hussain Syed)∗

Abstract

Sporadic incidents of terrorism that were claimed by Islamic State/ affiliated groups in Pakistan have turned the issue of their presence or otherwise in Pakistan into a constantly asked question in the local and international media. The fear raised by journalists, academicians and even speculators, especially in the international media, is that ISIS has managed to create a strong presence in Pakistan, even after Pakistan has dealt an effective blow to C in the country through military operation in FATA. At this point in time, as Pakistan fast moves toward successful culmination of Operation Zarb-e-Azb, this debate and line of argumentation will have far reaching impact on Pakistan’s future. This article analyzes the IS’s own declared ideological foundations, followed by its grand strategic designs for the region; and links it to the updates and evidence provided by media on ISIS’s presence in Pakistan by the year 2016 to see the viability and probability of replication of this phenomenon in the Pakistan of today and point at future challenges for the country.

Key Words: terrorism, phenomenon, culmination, academicians, affiliated

∗ Ms Mahroona Syed is a sociologist, government and public policy analyst and now a PhD scholar in the Department of Governance and Public Policy at NDU. She is currently serving as Research Associate at Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad.
**Prelude: ISIS-K**

Despite some major territorial gains achieved by forces opposed to ISIS (alternatively ISIL or Daesh) in 2016, mainly on the outskirts of ISIS (or Daesh)-controlled areas, fears of ISIS's growing footprints in Pakistan are expressed ad nauseam. Daesh's ambitions for Afghanistan seem focused on setting up what it calls "Khorasan Province," taking the name of an ancient province of the former Persian Empire comprising territories in today's Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and some Central Asian states. The ISIS idea of Khorasan is purportedly attributed to a saying of the Holy Prophet (SAWW), quoted in 'Al –Nasai’ which prophesizes about a Ghazwa-e-Hind (Battle of Hind) to be carried out by an army from ‘Khorasan’ carrying black flags which will help establish writ of Islam in the world.¹

Following declaration by ISIS, an official acknowledgement of ISIS’s grand design confirmed in December 2015 by US Gen John F. Campbell, Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, about ISIS's attempts at establishing Jalalabad as ‘the base of the Khorasan Province’.²

Source: Map as quoted in What ISIS and the 'caliphate' mean for Pakistan

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¹ Source: Map as quoted in What ISIS and the 'caliphate' mean for Pakistan

² ISSRA Papers 2016

This article analyzes the prospects of an ISIS foothold in Pakistan through the prism of some key factors which may influence establishment or otherwise of an ISIS foothold in Pakistan, using data from secondary open sources available online and through news reported in local and international media. These factors include ISIS’s own current global outreach and its current capabilities, evidence of ISIS presence in South Asia – in particular in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the global response against ISIS and Pakistan’s own response and internal dynamics etc.

The ISIS in 2016

First factor that influences any analysis of likelihood of ISIS foothold in Pakistan must take into account the current situation regarding ISIS and its capabilities. There are conflicting accounts of how actually ISIS is faring in terms of areas within its control. Not so surprisingly, since most dissemination of news and ensuing perception management is being spearheaded by western media, which naturally pursues respective governments’ agendas; very few independent accounts, excluding IS’s own media campaigns, are there to make an independent analysis. The lines between pack of myths and reality-on-ground are actually quite blurred. However, one can make a few deductions from the news bombarded across the world on this issue.

Sifting through the information available on open sources, ISIS seems to be increasingly able to sell the brand name ‘IS’ to a wide variety of youth, for recruitment from all corners of the world, without discrimination on the basis of education, profession, family background, wealth, class, ethnicity or gender. This is happening
despite its brutal tactics and a narrow and too-strict-interpretation of Islam which does not even match with the actual medieval Islam’s traditions according to many analysts on Islamic civilization. The basic attractions adding to its mass appeal are namely: the idea of a universal Islamic caliphate, successful battle outcomes with the ability to hold on to the ‘conquered’ battlegrounds for past many years. As the international narrative would portray that populations living under IS-controlled areas are living in fear, one would see such narrative with relative skepticism since ‘fear’ alone cannot hold a population of two countries hostage for so many years. Without support of population, it is very difficult to hold ground for such a long period of time. There is a need to bring evidence on how ISIS is delivering governance and related services to the population in areas under its control, in order to ascertain facts in this regard.

Otherwise, everything about IS, especially in terms of strategy, is thoroughly modern, highly efficient and organized in its campaign. Initially funded through donations from wealthy supporters, IS has rapidly expanded into a self-financing and self-sustaining business. Their financial success model is based on siphoning of large quantities of oil from the conquered territories, kidnapping, extortion, selling antiquities and artifacts stolen from museums and art galleries, confiscating gold bullion during organized bank heists and of course, acquiring military equipment and hardware during their advances in various areas, leading to an asset build up of, reportedly, up to $2 billion.

Within its own structure, IS is highly organized, maintains an element of independence and self-determination, remarkable internal cohesion which is strong enough to offset and insulate itself
against any counterterrorism-related efforts. The pyramidal style of leadership under Dr Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi, a highly professional use of social media ranging from issuing tutorials on assembling bombs to showing gory videos of killings and giving detailed accounts of operations and acquisitions in the form of annual reports has made them more popular among the youth. This attention to details does not depict an impulsive or hurriedly made strategy but a rather cold, well-calculated and effective one made by some battle-hardened strategists.

As far as ideological narrative is concerned, ISIS is far ahead and known to keeping on modernizing themselves in every possible respect. To increase their sustainability and their mass appeal, already there are reports that they have started to expand their ideological frontiers to include all four schools of Islamic thought. The ISIS narrative is becoming more appealing to the youth as it talks of revival of past glory, West’s conspiracies and puppet regimes in Muslim countries, governance failures, justice and shunning away nationalistic ideals to form ‘a universal caliphate’ which not only are perfectly saleable concepts but also suit the grand strategic design of international powers of subdividing Middle East region.

**ISIS’s Global Outreach by 2016**

ISIS can be credited for expanding its global outreach quite consistently as more militant-terrorist groups like Philippines’ Abu Sayyaf, Jordan’s Sons of the Call for Tawhid and Jihad and the Algerian Soldiers of the Caliphate pledge allegiance, whether or not they agree with the ISIS’s interpretation of Islam. The sites selected as targets for terrorist activities include France, Libya, Sinai Peninsula. Networks and cells have been uncovered in Morocco,
Israel, Palestine, Belgium and UK etc. Although as far as IS Caliphate map is concerned, quite curiously it does not cover entire Europe, on the pretext that those areas were never formerly under Muslim control but nonetheless, IS has carried out activities in many European countries. The November 2015 Paris attacks and Brussels attacks in 2016 are latest additions to their profile.

**ISIS in South Asia**

Within South Asia, an Indian Home Ministry report of July 2015 talks of evolving a national plan of action against ISIS as the Indian intelligence agencies had raised fears of a ‘silent threat’ due to increasing ISIS influence in at least a dozen states, including especially Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. According to an estimate, 100 – 300 Muslims from India have reached Syria including those Indian Muslims engaged in fighting in Afghanistan, alongside youth of Indian origin from the UK, South Africa etc. However, Lt Gen D. S. Hooda, the Chief of Indian Army’s Northern Command, is reported to have said that the ISIS was “creeping towards this side” in India from Pakistan. An article by Iftekharul Bashar similarly states concerns about rising militant activism in Bangladesh and Myanmar, especially after the rise of ISIS.

**ISIS in Afghanistan**

Next, the ISIS presence in Pakistan’s next door neighbor Afghanistan which is stuck in a quagmire of instability and unrest may have impact on ISIS’s attempts for setting foot on Pakistan’s soil. Year 2015 broke the news of an ISIS presence in Helmand Province of Afghanistan when ISIS recruiters were reportedly killed in a US drone strike. Later, similar reports came from Nangarhar, and four districts namely Achin, Naziyan, Bati Kot and Spin Gar
were captured by ISIS, according to Gen. John F. Campbell, the US Commander of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Afghan Government was particularly alarmed by a pro-ISIS protest that took place at Nangarhar University in 2015. The Afghan chapter of ISIS also followed ISIS tactics in Iraq by setting up ‘Radio Caliphate’ to attract Afghan youth into its folds.

Most media reports however, state that Afghan Taliban clearly outnumber the ISIS fighters. The Afghan Taliban had sent a formal letter to Al-Baghdadi to stop recruiting in Afghanistan, saying there is room for only "one flag, one leadership" in their fight to re-establish Islamist rule. Though Michael Ryan considers the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda as “tactical twins and strategic enemies” but even Al Qaeda has shown its disdain for ISIS and clashes with ISIS have been reported in Afghanistan many times. In 2016, IS launched a suicide attack on Pakistan’s consulate in Jalalabad. However, soon Afghan government announced uprooting of ISIS grip in Afghanistan, with the Afghan President Mr Ashraf Ghani saying: “We can say with pride that today Afghanistan is the only nation where Daesh is on the run. They are on the run in Nangarhar, and Afghanistan will be their graveyard,” Considering that Kabul government controls little part of Afghanistan beyond Kabul, one wonders how seriously such an assertion can be taken.

**Global Response against ISIS: From Operation Timber Sycamore to Operation Inherent Resolve**

Analysis of global response against ISIS needs to take into account Timber Sycamore Program of USA since 2012 in sending indiscriminate lethal and nonlethal assistance to arm favored rebel groups, even al-Qaeda affiliates, against Syrian government, duly funded by KSA, Qatar and Turkey. Brad Hoff’s May 2015 account in *The Levant Report*, states that on August 12, 2012, the Defense
Intelligence Agency (DIA) of USA warned in a memo that “If the situation unravels, there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), ...and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime,” including “The West, Gulf countries, and Turkey”.\textsuperscript{15} According to Brad Hoff, the same report revealed that ‘US had been helping to organize the flow of arms’. U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter stated at the World Economic Forum in Davos that the United States is “looking for opportunities to do more, and there will be boots on the ground.”

As far as UN is concerned, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon talked of threats posed by the Tehreek-e-Khilafat in Pakistan and affiliates of ISIL in South. In his report given to the UNSC in February 2016, stating that till the middle of December 2015, 34 groups had reportedly pledged allegiance to Daesh. "In view of its territorial claims of more 'provinces,' it is expected that Daesh affiliates will increase in number and that its membership will grow in 2016”.\textsuperscript{16}

Nonetheless, a 66-nation Global Coalition to counter ISIL with the motto ‘One Mission-Many Nations’ had been launched since September 2014. The statistics available on anti-IS Operation Inherent Resolve show 12685 strikes by US and coalition; to be 8661 in Iraq and 4024 in Syria till 1 June 2016. While the cost of these operations is totalled at $ 7.4 billion with the average daily cost being $11.8 million ever since kinetic operations started in August 2014, about 26000 targets have been destroyed so far in different areas.\textsuperscript{17} However, Pentagon Chief Ash Carter was said that members of the pre-dominantly US-led anti-ISIS coalition are
'Doing nothing at all'. US White House on its part declares its strategy against ISIS to ‘defeat ISIL and eliminate the threat of terrorism’, meaning that elimination of target, i.e. ISIL is not the goal as theoretically should have been in a counterterrorism effort. This point is important since the US clarified that to them, when making comparison between Afghan Taliban and ISIL, "the Taliban is an armed insurgency, ISIL is a terrorist group,"

As far as ISIS ideology is concerned, internationally, although ISIS is able to attract educated youth even from the western world, societies especially Muslim world have rejected ISIS ideology and methods. Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2015) reveals that views about ISIS are overwhelmingly negative in many parts of the world. However, one does find opposing accounts too. According to some independent researchers, “attitudes towards (the Islamic State) are often more favorable than outsiders commonly assume,” opines Mara Rivkin. This is another indicator that Western narrative may or may not be bought by the population living in IS-controlled areas since they may choose a known governance structure than a life of uncertainty and unknown alternatives as given by western powers as observed after their invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan.

Analyzing the above, a few things are obvious. In any case, current strategy made by global powers to deal with ISIS is still more enemy-centric, based on counterterrorism-related notions and certainly not looking for long term solutions. US especially, as the coalition leader, is not looking to deliver governance neither complete elimination of ISIS is a goal at the moment. The strategy to launch sporadic air strikes on ISIS footholds at places of choice.
while providing arms at other, will, as desired by western powers, make the phenomenon last longer.

Also, some experts believe that the possibility of IS spreading its roots over most of North and central Africa, Middle East and the Indian subcontinent is preposterous. It is hard to ignore that the Russians have stepped up support to the Syrian government and soon Turkey will turn her army towards IS too. On the other hand, Coalition airstrikes, no matter how half-hearted and ineffective they may be but are still a hindrance for IS. With this, thinking of any aggression against Iran by IS will only make Iranians join the party.

Overall, seeing the broader picture, it would hardly be a surprise if out of all the parties to the conflict in this arena, the only grand winner turns out to be the Kurds, as the idea from the very beginning seems to create a Pro-West ‘Kurdistan’ in the heart of Middle East..

However, how ISIS manages and maintains relationship with Sunni world is also an issue critical to its sustenance because IS’s small outreach to non-Arab Sunni support does limit its base to quite an extent. On the other hand, ISIS still faces a divided opposition and the mutual hatreds of its enemies remain IS’s strongest card. Also, emerging nationalistic and patriotic tendencies in majority Muslim states while carefully avoiding ethnic and sectarian undertones, may offer one alternative to tendencies towards idealizing a transnational Islamic State Caliphate. However, the frightening ability of IS to maintain hold on vast territory cannot be ignored which gives a boost to their portfolio. Despite these setbacks in Iraq and Syria, the ISIS’s slogan *baqiyya wa tatamaddad* (“remaining and expanding”) seems to be a self-fulfilling prophecy for the time being.
Evidence from Within Pakistan

Interestingly, consistent orchestrated attempts are regularly made to blame Pakistan for every ill in the world, even if it is the emergence of ISIS in Middle East. For example, a New York Times article chose to find Pakistan’s hand even in the birth of the IS phenomenon. The allegation was taken so seriously by the Government of Pakistan as to invite a formal response from MoFA. Another article from Hudson Institute goes on to ascribe origins of ISIS to Pakistan due to its founding members (e.g. Abu Musab Al Zarqawi) or at least the ideological alignment of its founding members (e.g. Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi), former Afghan Jihad veterans’ use of this part of the region as a base or transit area during America’s war against Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan.

However, within Pakistan, nothing substantial has come out in concrete till date, apart from very occasional incidents of purported signs of ISIS presence in Pakistan. The official statements coming from higher authorities state clearly that ISIS has ‘no organized presence in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, provincial ministers, politicians and provincial government officials belonging to police department have been giving statements from time to time about arrests made and presence found of ISIS or at least their affiliates. Balochistan’s Home and Tribal Affairs department officials have been quoted in newspapers on reported recruitment of anti-Shia elements of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jammat by Daesh and formation of ISIS’s 10-member Strategic Planning Wing. The
Balochistan government\textsuperscript{34} in a secret report has reportedly warned Federal government about attacks in KPK also. In KPK and Balochistan pro-ISIS graffiti, wall chalking incidents, pamphlets and black flags have been found while ISIS has even claimed to have recruited about 10000-12000 from Hangu and Kurram districts.\textsuperscript{35} News of ISIS plans to attack government buildings, military installations, members of Shia community, religious minorities have also come in newspapers.\textsuperscript{36} A number of arrests of people claiming to be ISIS operatives were made, including the suspects of Safoora Goth massacre and their female aides in Karachi\textsuperscript{37} who were running Idara al Zakra Academy to generate funds from the wealthy for their cause.\textsuperscript{38} Although government keeps on denying presence of ISIS on Pakistani soil, DG IB testified before a committee of the Senate on IS being a ‘serious’ threat to Pakistan.\textsuperscript{39}

Curiously, urban educated youth from settled areas which have observed considerable economic development in comparison with rest of the country have responded to the call of ISIS — a trend mirroring global trends in this regards. For example, most of the arrests have been made in Punjab and Sindh, and from cities of Lahore, Karachi, Sialkot etc.

**Infighting Amongst Splinter Groups After Operation Zarb-e-Azb Successes**

On its part, the ISIS had announced its organizational structure for Pakistan and Afghanistan, formally accepting the allegiance of Hafez Saeed Khan, a former leader of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Orakzai Agency, and appointing a former Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim as his deputy.\textsuperscript{40}
Mullah Fazlullah of Swat was inspired by the notion and considered himself the founder of the ‘Khurasan movement’. Many other groups and commanders in Pakistan and Afghanistan subscribed to the same idea, but only a few have dedicated themselves to the cause of establishment of the Islamic state of Khurasan.\(^4\)

Nevertheless, the leadership of Pakistani Taliban had earlier issued a statement of rejection soon after a rejection issued by the Afghan Taliban against IS, when pledges of allegiance started pouring in from low-level commanders of both Islamist movements to the Islamic State (ISIS).\(^4\) So entry of ISIS into the arena would be largely unwelcome as it adds to the number of competing powers in the ongoing turf war. TTP has already been dismantled in Pakistan after Operation Zarb-i-Azb and for its left over elements, if any, ISIS may or may not be a lucrative undertaking. Especially, in the long run, whether the local militant groups will be able to adapt according to the ISIS framework, after the successes achieved through Operation Zarb-e-Azb is yet to be seen. A violent confrontation between ISIS affiliates and other major groups in the region, such as, Al Qaeda, the TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and the Afghan Taliban however, may remain a possibility since TTP leadership had given statements against it.\(^4\) Another impact has been, as some reports suggest, that owing to the increasing influence of ISIS over Pakistani and Afghan terrorist groups, Al Qaeda has changed its approach to become more inclusive in recruiting local militants instead of its old policy of maintaining the group’s core as ‘an exclusive club of Arab militants’.
Analyzing for Future

Various aspects have come up through analysis. At the moment, ISIS phenomenon is being seen as a transnational terrorist network and the question of granting it legitimacy of a state is not being discussed, and is still an embryonic idea, although it holds command over a large tract of land for quite a longer time period now.

While analyzing about future prospects of ISIS, the great geostrategic game being played in this arena should be kept in mind. The infamous PNAC map is one idea worth considering while strategizing for the future of Pakistan.44 The melting down of borders in the Middle East and spillover effects on surrounding areas, emergence of ISIS-K in Afghanistan could be, in a worst case scenario, possible precursors to an attempt at balkanization of Pakistan. While officially and diplomatically staying neutral, Pakistan needs to spruce up its own intelligence base on the dynamics of Middle East and make preemptive strategies, instead of the traditional reactionary approaches.

One cannot deny that, in a way, ISIS proffers an opportunity to some global powers as a proxy to attack Iran in future. Pakistan will need to stand guard against this proxy war being played on Pakistani soil under a new bandwagon because within Pakistan, the existence of sectarianism - a proxy war tool – has been overly amplified. Contrary to the way the narrative is shown on media, one may find almost only seasonal episodes of violence attributable to sectarian issues, if any. That too coincides with the time when the government is trying to maintain tight control on outlaws and
terrorist activities and movements. Even within the region, the Afghan Taliban are known to abstain from anti-Shia violence. Thus, stakeholders in Middle East and elsewhere need to be advised that harping on old divisive sectarian themes will do no good to anyone, especially since Shias and Sunnis are not inherently confrontational. It is not a sustainable theme for this region of moderate people for creating a divide. Also, banking on ISIS or some elements /factions of it, for advancement of some parochial interests is a dangerous proposition for countries like KSA because ISIS targets even Sunni youth and youth of other religions too. Considering that, just like an overall similar trend in entire Muslim Ummah, 70% of Saudi population is under 30, allowing youth to fall prey to such sectarianism-based enterprises to cut down influence of some other nations will be counterproductive for regional peace.

As far as ISIS-K is concerned, Afghan Taliban and US, even some remnants of Al Qaeda strike apparently a unique commonality of interests against ISIS as the combined outcome of the recent offensives of all these parties, including especially the US drone strikes, have led to one outcome—decimation of ISIS-K forces in Afghanistan. Since any emerging security-related scenario has an impact on Pakistan, this one aspect may seem to augur well for the time being viv-a-vis presence of Daesh in Pakistan. This article supports the view that at the moment, due to turf wars, leadership issues and inability to make any territorial gains is one manifestation of IS less likely to stand ground in Pakistan. But ISIS’s territorial successes in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan may
Influence the ISIS’s ability to influence outcomes of its efforts in Pakistan.

In terms of warfare, given the military capabilities and equipment, guerilla warfare suits ISIS more but within the region comprising Afghanistan and Pakistan, unless some massive support comes from a conventional army, ISIS on its own does not have the capacity to fight a conventional, highly professional army like that of Pakistan, now well-trained in asymmetric warfare. In the sense of scope of terrorist attacks, IS differs from TTP; contrary to ISIS, TTP could not even attempt to lay its hands on any of the state’s strategic assets. ISIS is controlling areas in Iraq and Syria where the government armies were weakened and governance had failed miserably leading to a loss of writ of state over the entire territory but for TTP, and for that matter ISIS, Pakistan is no Iraq or Syria. Besides the above, the people of this society have not lent support to the ISIS or any other outfits setting up of Khilafat as per their understanding of the one that existed in early days of Islam during the reign of Four Righteous Caliphs (introduction and later outcomes of *Shariah nizam* in Swat point in this direction).

However, a question may arise, that the occasionally seen ethnicity-based violence may open another fault line to be exploited by ISIS-K and like entities. So would it be possibility that nationalist forces in Pakistan will join ISIS as for example what happened in the case of Mali. Muhammad Amir Rana is of the opinion that internal group dynamics, inspiration from ISIS because of its consistent successes elsewhere and presence of 200-plus religious seminaries may be a likely factor contributing to a possible rise of
ISIS in Pakistan. One would argue, considering that 90% of religious seminaries have nothing to do with terror and violence and are more of welfare organizations, taking care of poor and neglected segments of society without much support from the government, such an idea seems to have been overrated by the media.

Nonetheless, Pakistan needs to deny any social and virtual space to ISIS-K. The State and Government need to look better and enjoy social legitimacy to ward off anti-state activities since the enemy is well aware of our internal fault lines. For this effective establishment of rule of law, justice and good governance are the basic deterrents required so that massive following does not automatically come IS’s way in Pakistan. Also, Pakistan needs to carve out a policy to check recidivism amongst militant groups laying arms after Operation Zarb-e-Azb. At the same time, civilian law enforcement infrastructure needs to be developed and equipped enough to deal with emerging challenges. The currently observed over enthusiasm on raising special forces in Pakistan should not come at the cost of normal policing and intelligence gathering. The image of police also requires an overhauling to develop mutual trust between the police and the communities they are entrusted by the state to protect. There is also a need to bring into scrutiny female educational institutions especially madressas for females preemptively as there are increasing reports of women ISIS recruiters being arrested in urban cities as Lahore, Karachi etc.

Pakistan also needs to bring unmanned spaces into the folds of its governance structures. FATA’s integration into the political
system of the country is immediately required. There is also a need to study all aspects of ISIS’s grand design and possibilities in terms of Pakistan’s Kashmir cause.

One cannot ignore the challenge that ISIS movement could at some point in time be exploited as a good proxy for destabilizing CPEC and Pakistan’s desire for regional economic integration. Any terrorist attacks by, or in the name of ISIS, will create massive economic impact in terms of FDI, Stock markets, tourism, human capital and real estate. Regional economic integration is beneficial indeed but Pakistan needs to guard against likely domino impact of terrorist incidents in the region on its economy and projects with international community. There is a need to see, given our security concerns, that amidst the current emphasis to introduce an FDI-led economic growth, this FDI can also create economic and financial dependency on foreign capital for Pakistan and any terrorism-related incidents can make Pakistan vulnerable to flight of capital, jeopardizing its economy to a standstill. To deal with future challenges, domestic resource mobilization through increased involvement of private enterprises is the need of the hour.

Analyzing the current discourse on the issue, conspiracy theories against Pakistan persist abundantly. From the idea that Pakistan had sent Sunni militants to Syrian war zone even before Operation Zarb-e-Azb started, to the idea that Pakistan is training and even giving Pakistani passports to Chinese Uighurs, and militants going to Bosnia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya etc\textsuperscript{51}, the theories know no limits. The implications of such narratives are many. For example, finding a new pretext, although USA’s combat
missions are officially over but America is reportedly thinking of potentially expanding military footprint in south-central Asia, the Middle East and Africa for the ‘fight against the Islamic State,’. Curiously, Tora bora near Pakistan’s border has received most of the recent strikes by US against ISIS. Pakistan would do well to not allow US to raise another bogey and keep the Sword of Damocles hanging over us. Drone attacks, OBL case and ideas like hot pursuit must be kept in mind in this regard. Pakistan should continue to officially deny the existence of IS in Pakistan and handle the matter diplomatically. Since such discourses often are made to create hue and cry over Pakistan's nuclear program. To quote one such article citing multiple sources from within Pakistan stated that ISIS may get a hold of Pakistan's nuclear assets to make a ‘dirty bomb’ as “The mounting concern of an Islamic State presence in Pakistan has put the spotlight on the security of the country's nuclear arsenal.”

**Conclusion**

The challenges and possibilities are many for Pakistan but overall, there is a need for a whole-of-the-nation approach to deal with emerging challenges. Equally important it is that the current disjointed government narrative needs to be streamlined into one coherent whole in order to avoid giving mixed messages to the public and international community. The currently ambiguous and too often contradictory federal; and provincial narratives should be done away with and a strong state-sponsored narrative of a moderate Islam and positive future outlook of the country is required.
End Notes

1 See Haqqani’s article ‘Prophecy & the Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent’ published on 27 March 2015 at Hudson Institute. While the subject requires great deal of research but nonetheless this article discusses various aspects regarding this saying in terms of its usage as narrative by different Islamist organizations from time to time. Available at: http://www.hudson.org/research/11167-prophecy-the-jihad-in-the-indian-subcontinent
4 For example, see information on Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters at Global Security.org. Available at: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/biff.htm
7 Ibid
8 See ‘Islamist militancy on the rise in Bangladesh’ by Iftekharul Bashar, RSIS in East Asia Forum. Published on 8 August 2015. Available at: http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/08/08/islamist-militancy-on-the-rise-in-bangladesh/
10 Ibid
14 In fact the arms funneling Op is run through Turkey
15 How the CIA Helped Fuel the Rise of ISIS : Information Clearing House... http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article44091.htm
16 See ‘Warning of Daesh’s tentacles spreading to South Asia :UN chief calls for international action against the grave threat’ in the Gulf News. Published on 12 February 2016. Available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/americas/usa/warning-of-daesh-s-tentacles-spreading-to-south-asia-1.1670962
17 See details at US Department of Defense account of Operation Inherent Resolve. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve
19 See ISIL Strategy :The U.S. Strategy To Defeat ISIL and Combat the Terrorist Threat. Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/isil-strategy
23 ibid
26 War With Isis: The West is Wrong Again in its Fight Against Terror” By Patrick Cockburn . Published on 07January, 2015 "ICH" - "The Independent" – Available at: http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article40642.htm
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31 Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah is reported to have stated that ‘About 100 Pakistanis fled to Syria and Iraq to join Islamic State’. PTI. Jan 5, 2016,
32 ‘About 100 Pakistanis fled to Syria and Iraq to join Islamic State’ published on Jan 5, 2016 in Times of India. Available at:
35 The Dawn newspaper website stated the ‘secret information report’ dated 31 October 2015.
36 Pakistan: ISIS Plans Terrorist Campaign against Christians by Lawrence A. Franklin September 22, 2015. Dr. Lawrence A. Franklin was the Iran Desk Officer for Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. He also served on active duty with the U.S. Army and as a Colonel in the Air Force Reserve, where he was a Military Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Israel. Available at: http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6551/pakistan-isis-christians
38 3 IS-linked women held in Karachi’ in The Nation newspaper. Published on 20 December 2015. Available at: http://nation.com.pk/national/20-Dec-2015/3-is-linked-women-held-in-karachi
40 View from Pakistan: How serious a threat is ISIS? By Muhammad Amir Rana. Published on Feb 9, 2015. Available at:


For reference, the map was published in Armed Forces Journal in USA. It subdivided Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and envisioned Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite republics emerging from a no-longer-united Iraq. Two years later, The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg imagined similar partings-of-the-ways, with new microstates — an Alawite Republic, an Islamic Emirate of Gaza — taking shape and Afghanistan splitting up as well. Another revision came last year suggested by Robin Wright in the same newspaper, in a map that (keeping up with events) subdivided Libya as well.

The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Assessing the Threat. Published on April 7, 2016


See ‘Disrespecting others’ religion is not ‘freedom of speech’: Ch Nisar, (Interior Minister of Pakistan). Published in The Dawn newspaper on Jan 17, 2015. Available at: http://www.dawn.com/news/1157633


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53 Islamic State could steal Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and make ‘dirty bomb’, defence analysts warn