
The Emergence of Islamic State: Implications for Pakistan and Afghanistan

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Introduction

The emergence of Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria would have far reaching implications for global peace and security. The quick rise of IS in Iraq and Syria not only jeopardized peace in both the states but also endangered the security and territorial integrity of other regional countries. The agenda of IS militants is not confined to the borders of Iraq and Syria; they want to capture areas once under Muslim empire to ultimately establish a global caliphate according to their own strict version of Islam.

The spill-over of the IS to South Asia would have a wide range of implications for Pakistan and its neighbouring states. The IS militants would get support of the likeminded militant organizations in Pakistan that may help them to establish their foothold. It would not be easy for the organisation though. Since 2002, Pakistan's military has carried out numerous operations against different transnational militant groups to dismantle their sanctuaries, including: the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Al-Qaeda, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and several other local militant outfits. Now these militant groups mainly operate from Afghanistan. The IS would get the support of these militant groups in terms of new recruits, planning, propaganda, and on-ground tactical help.

The Islamic State is the wealthiest militant organisation in the world; it can provide funds to cash-strapped militant organizations, which might work to benefit them. In such a scenario, more and more radical groups as well as individuals from Pakistan might join Islamic State for monetary benefits if nothing else. Militant outfits like the TTP have faced huge setbacks in military operations. They lost their central command and control centres, communication networks, and most importantly their operational bases. The IS funds would put

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a new life into the TTP and would help them in reorganization and fresh recruitment, which could result in a new wave of violence engulfing Pakistan. The TTP and other affiliated militant organizations could then carry out attacks against Pakistani security forces, government installations, rival sects, and religious minorities more lethally. Therefore, it is important to understand the emergence of IS and its subsequent impact on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The emergence of Islamic State: A brief overview

The emergence of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria is the result of US intervention in Iraq in 2003, which resulted in dismantling of the Saddam regime as well as an unending violence in the country. Militant groups like Al-Qaeda also jumped in Iraqi insurgency and formed Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) led by a Jordanian militant Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. He continued to be the commander of AQI until his death in an airstrike by the US military in 2006.¹

After his death, the AQI faced huge setbacks. In 2010, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi took the command of this group. Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi reformed and reorganized AQI to give rise to the organisation now known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant or (ISIL).² After the abrupt withdrawal of the US forces in 2011, the Iraqi military was unable to control the resurgence of ISIS. Another reason of IS victory was the marginalization of Sunni tribes.³ In 2013, the IS-led violence was at its peak in which over 7,000 people lost their lives. Mostly Shia Muslims and non-Muslims were targeted by the IS.⁴

Ultimately in 2014, the ISIS in a well-coordinated and swift attack captured the key town of Mosul about 400 kilometres north of the capital Baghdad.⁵ In Syria it managed to capture Raqqa, a town with strategic significance about 445 kilometres north-east of the capital Damascus.⁶ It was around this time that the IS militants declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria.⁷ The Iraqi troops left their positions as well as weapons and fled. After capturing Mosul, the ISIS militants renamed the group as Islamic State and proclaimed caliphate in Iraq with Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as the so-called caliph.⁸ This was the time the Islamic State started attracting foreign fighters in great numbers. According to some estimates more than 20,000 foreign fighters from over 90 countries – including around 3,400 fighters from the US and other Western countries – are fighting alongside the IS.⁹ Such a development makes IS a truly transnational militant organisation. To counter this unprecedented threat to global peace and security, the US-led alliance of over 60 countries is carrying out airstrikes against IS in Iraq and Syria.

Recently, Russia has also got militarily involved in the conflict. Russian aircraft bombed the IS positions in Raqqa and Aleppo and significantly degraded the IS capabilities. There are also allegations by the US that Russian airstrikes are aimed at anti-Bashar al-Assad groups instead of the Islamic State.¹⁰ According to Russia it has achieved significant success in recent airstrikes and destroyed most of the IS ammunition and heavy weaponry. According to Russian military it has destroyed several targets of the Islamic State.¹¹ Although Russian claims could not be verified independently, consistent Russian airstrikes

coinciding with ground offensive by the Syrian military would weaken the IS position in Syria and Iraq.

Russia is not part of US led coalition against IS but a major stakeholder in the Syrian conflict. Russia is involved in the Syrian conflict because of three main reasons: First, Russia wants to protect its ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria.¹² Second, Russia got a naval base in Syria which is strategically important for the Russian military to remain relevant in this region.¹³ Third, Russia is also suffering from terrorism back home. There is a possibility that Islamic State militants may try to approach Chechen militants in Russia to consolidate their position in Caucasus region.¹⁴

The developments in the Middle East have not, however, stopped them from trying to exert influence in other regions. Many militant groups around the globe have accepted Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as their caliph and pledged allegiance to him. Especially some key TTP commanders in Pakistan and Boko Haram in Nigeria announced their allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.¹⁵ The Islamic State is opening new branches in other countries in order to accomplish its goal of global caliphate.

Funding is the backbone of every militant organization, and IS does not seem wanting in this regard. They have got multiple sources of income, which include: kidnapping for ransom, extortion, oil sales on black market, donations from likeminded people, human and antique smuggling, and drug trade.¹⁶ Such a huge financial base could not only help IS in sustaining insurgency in Iraq and Syria, but also in supporting other militant groups and affiliates in other regions around the globe.

The emergence of IS in Iraq and Syria would have far-reaching implications for Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both states are suffering from religiously motivated terrorism and extremism led by Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other affiliated groups. Thousands of people have lost their lives to terrorism, and financial cost to both countries is also gigantic. For instance, Pakistan has lost over 80,000 people in the war against terror since 2005.¹⁷ The financial cost to the country is over \$100 billion.¹⁸ Afghanistan is no different from Pakistan. The US spent over \$1 trillion on the country but the security situation in Afghanistan is still worse than Pakistan.¹⁹ There are several likeminded extremist organizations in both countries which could work as a launch-pad for the Islamic state.

Is Islamic State a threat to Pakistan?

Pakistan is a fertile country for extremist groups because of the presence of numerous extremist organisations and their support networks among the likeminded segments of the society. The nuclear weapon state was once known as a safe haven for militant groups like Al-Qaeda, Taliban, IMU, as well as dangerous local sectarian organizations like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and others. After its emergence in Iraq, the IS published a roadmap for the next five years. The document refers to the region where Pakistan and Afghanistan are located as “Khorasan.” The Islamic State has formed a ten-member Strategic

Planning Wing, which would be responsible for recruitment, planning, funding, and training of the militants under the banner of IS in Pakistan.²⁰

According to a report of the provincial government of Balochistan, the IS militants have recruited between 10,000 and 12,000 fighters from Hangu in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, and Kurram Agency and some other areas in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).²¹ After concerted efforts and successful military operations by Pakistani military and intelligence agencies, the TTP-linked militants lost their ground. Since they are on the run, they are happy to get IS support in Pakistan.

The IS nexus with the militant groups in Pakistan

The IS possesses huge financial resources and militant organisations in Pakistan are now short of funds because of the continuous operations by Pakistan's security forces. This naturally attracts them to each other. In fact the IS militants are planning to establish local chapters in many countries around the globe, and in Pakistan their "Khorasan" branch would recruit locals to carry out terrorist activities against Pakistan's security forces, religious minorities, other sects of Islam, and public places.

The banned militant organisation Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led by Maulana Fazalullah faced huge setbacks in the recent military operations by the Pakistan military. The TTP militants lost their safe havens in North Waziristan and now Pakistan army is controlling most of the FATA.²² There are reports that some TTP commanders from FATA accepted Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as their caliph. Former spokesman of TTP Shahid Ullah Shahid said in a statement, "I am going to announce my allegiance to Al-Baghdadi al-Qarshi. I will obey his every command, whether good or bad and whatever the situation. Neither the TTP nor its leader Maulana Fazalullah has directed me to announce my allegiance to the ISIS, but I and five senior leaders have decided to join al-Baghdadi al-Qarshi."²³

The other five TTP men who announced allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi were key commanders: Hafiz Saeed Khan who operated from Orakzai Agency; Hafiz Daulat Khan who was TTP commander in Kurram Agency; Maulana Gul Zaman who was controlling the affairs in Khyber Agency; Mufti Hassaan who was the TTP commander for Peshawar; and Khalid Mansoor who was responsible for Hangu.²⁴ In addition to this, TTP commander from Bajaur, Maulana Abu Bakar, his deputy Qari Zahid, and affiliates, commanders, fighters, religious advisors, and Shura have accepted Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as their caliph.²⁵

Two recent terrorist attacks in Karachi pointed towards the IS connection in Pakistan. The security forces found IS leaflets after the failed assassination attempt on Dr Debra Lobo, the American Vice Principal of the Jinnah Medical and Dental College in Karachi, as well as the target killing of 44 people of the minority Ismaili Muslim community in the city.²⁶ After the preliminary investigation, the security forces captured a few people allegedly linked with Al-Qaeda, which shows that likeminded militant organizations or

people are carrying out terrorist attacks and use the brand name of the Islamic State.²⁷

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) is another militant organization in Pakistan that could join hands with the Islamic State.²⁸ Formed in 1996, the group is designated as a terrorist organisation by the governments of Pakistan and the United States, and has been involved in several sectarian attacks. Some estimates suggest that LeJ has over 1,000 active members.²⁹

The IS and LeJ are ideologically very similar. LeJ has carried out some of the deadliest attacks against Shia Muslims in Pakistan. The IS militants want to exploit their sectarian connection in Pakistan. Recently a militant group linked with IS in Karachi carried out a deadly attack targeting the Shia community in which 47 people were killed.³⁰ The Islamic State is an overtly sectarian organization and its strategy of attacking Shia Muslims in Iraq has worked due to weak Iraqi security apparatus. The IS militants exploited the power vacuum to create instability and ultimately established their control over major towns in Iraq.

The IS was successful in creating a sectarian clash between the Shia and Sunni tribes which ultimately destabilized Iraq. The Iraqi security forces were weak, ill-trained, and least motivated, which paved the way for the highly trained, motivated, and well-equipped fighters of the IS to acquire physical space in Iraq and Syria. The Islamic State in collaboration with the TTP and LeJ might ignite sectarian violence in Pakistan.³¹ It is expected that the Shia Muslims along with Ahmedis and Christians could bear the brunt of the emergence of IS in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan must take concrete measures to ensure the security of minorities and all other sects.

Pakistan's militant groups want to join hands with IS for monetary benefits. An effective campaign by Pakistan security forces has destroyed the command and control centres of these militants as well as their safe havens and financial assets. Now they are short of funds and the Islamic State is currently the wealthiest militant organisation in the world that can provide them with funds.

Pakistan's military does not consider the emergence of IS a threat though. Corps Commander of the XI Corps (Peshawar) Lieutenant General Hidayat-Ur-Rehman, said, "For us it's just a change of name, and there is no need for Pakistanis to worry. There are several defections in the Taliban now, which are becoming part of Daesh (IS). But we're well aware of the situation and are able to tackle them effectively."³² Chief of Army Staff of the Pakistan Army General Raheel Sharif, during his visit to the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies London, said that Pakistan would not allow even the shadow of Islamic State in the country.³³ The recent military operation in North Waziristan and intelligence-based operations in Karachi and other parts of the country prove the seriousness of Pakistan's security forces to eliminate militancy from Pakistan.

Pakistan military has been fighting these militants since 9/11; they know their strategies, and tactics. The denial of safe havens to militants in FATA would be a major challenge for the IS to establish its foothold in

Pakistan. Moreover, the security apparatus in settled districts of the country is much better than before. It would be very difficult for the IS-linked militants to establish their network in settled areas. There is a greater seriousness on the part of the government to eradicate militancy from Pakistan. Owing to the military operation in North Waziristan, the overall security situation in the country has considerably improved. According to Inter Services Public Relations, 2,763 militants have been killed in the year-long Operation Zarb-i-Azb. More than 837 safe havens have been destroyed and 253 tons of explosives have been recovered.³⁴ According to Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) — an independent Islamabad-based think tank — terrorist attacks in the country have decreased by 50 per cent from 154 per month before the Operation Zarb-i-Azb to 71 per month after one year of the operation.³⁵ Since the onset of the military operations in 2009, the TTP command, control, and communication network has been seriously disrupted. With more than 160,000 regular army personnel deployed in FATA, getting a physical space by the IS-linked militants in tribal areas would be difficult.³⁶

Notwithstanding the odds stacked against them by Pakistan's security force, the Islamic State and its affiliates would aim to target Pakistani military and other security forces though. They could aim their violence against the police, rangers, and the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) because these forces dislodged the TTP and other militant organizations from their safe havens. The IS and their cronies in Pakistan would like to demoralize the Pakistani security forces by carrying out terrorist attacks on senior officers, their families, and military installations etc. The IS and its linked militant groups in Pakistan would also want to find a refuge in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Without a physical space it would be difficult for the IS or its affiliates to operationalize their plans on a larger scale in this region. They need a base for training, planning, regrouping, and reorganization.

The rise of Islamic State and its implications for Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a very weak war-ravaged country with feeble security forces, fragile economy, and an active insurgency. Ethnic divide in Afghanistan further complicates the affairs. The Islamic State in its larger plans includes expansion to other areas, such as what it calls "Khorasan" that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and parts of Iran and Central Asia. Afghanistan being an unstable country would be an ideal place for the IS militants to establish their command and control centre.³⁷ Afghanistan would provide them physical space and on-ground bases with its large swathes of lawless, ungoverned, and remote areas. The surfacing of the Islamic State in Afghanistan would be devastating for a country already in turmoil. The IS in Afghanistan would make some ground because of the power vacuum after the withdrawal of the US forces.

The operations led by the US in Iraq and Syria have degraded IS capabilities. Thousands of IS fighters have been killed in the airstrikes by the US and its allies. The Islamic State is also looking for new recruits who can help sustain its insurgency in Iraq and Syria. It also needs recruits for its plans of

expansion in “Khorasan.” The commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan General John F Campbell once said, “There’s recruiting going on in Afghanistan, there is recruiting going on in Pakistan. There is money being passed back and forth.”³⁸ But they are passing through initial phase of organization, and are not yet fully operational.³⁹ It is expected, however, that if serious steps are not taken, the militants linked with the IS could pose a serious threat to the safety and security of this region. There are reports of the IS presence in Helmand, Faryab, and Nangarhar provinces.⁴⁰

The US military is cognizant of the presence of Islamic State in Afghanistan. According to the US assessment, the IS militants are establishing their network in Afghanistan. Despite the fact that they are small in number right now, they have got plans to establish their control in Afghanistan.⁴¹ Even the Afghan President warned the US and the international community that Islamic State is making ground in Afghanistan, and is recruiting and pouring funds in the country to establish its foothold.⁴²

The IS had designated Mullah Abdul Rauf, a former Taliban commander, for recruitment and reorganization in the Helmand province.⁴³ Later, he was appointed as the deputy commander for the region. On 9 February 2015, he was killed in drone strike.⁴⁴ His death did not mean the end of IS in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region though. The senior most commander of the IS for this region now is Saeed Khan from Orakzai Agency in Pakistan.⁴⁵ The IS in Afghanistan would soon replace Mullah Rauf and come up with a new leader. According to another report, the IS has taken control of five northern provinces of Afghanistan and is also controlling the drug trade in the south.⁴⁶

There are over 1,000 IS militants in these areas – predominantly Uzbeks and Chechens – and their numbers are growing day by day. The IS-linked militants are exploiting its natural and mineral resources in Afghanistan such as Lithium, which is in abundance in certain areas of Afghanistan and probably the target of IS militants to generate funds.⁴⁷

Under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between Afghanistan and the US, the US-led alliance would not station more than 14,800 troops in Afghanistan.⁴⁸ Such a meagre force cannot stop IS emergence in Afghanistan.

The IS and the Afghan Taliban

It would not be easy for the IS to establish its bases or training camps in Afghanistan because it would have to face a three-pronged challenge. The first challenge comes from the US-led coalition. It is hammering its fighters in Iraq and Syria, and is not going to let it acquire physical space in Afghanistan. The second challenge comes from the Afghan national security forces. The third, and perhaps more important, challenge is posed by the Afghan Taliban. Afghanistan is the home of Afghan Taliban, and they would never allow any militant group to replace them or undermine their role in the country.

There were reports of clashes between the IS militants and Taliban for the control of certain areas. In Farah province the IS militants established a training camp and recruited around 600 people. Soon after, the Afghan Taliban

besieged the camp and outnumbered IS militants. After heavy fighting, the IS militants ultimately surrendered and were banished from the province.⁴⁹

The IS militants could establish connections with militant groups other than the Taliban, like the IMU and ETIM. The leader of Hizb-i-Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, has extended his support to IS militants in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ The support of Hizb-i-Islami could accelerate IS recruitment in Afghanistan and create serious challenges for the internal security of the country.

The IS militants possess a vast amount of cash and a transnational image, which may attract the local militant groups to break away with Taliban and join hands with it. The militants in Afghanistan would compare the Afghan Taliban and Islamic State. The Afghan Taliban is focused on Afghanistan. They do not have any plans for establishing a global caliphate in the near future. Whereas the IS militants have declared that they want to regain the lost territories once under Muslim empires. They might consider Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi greater in status than Mullah Omar because the former has got wider support of the other militant organizations and a larger base of operations, whereas Mullah Omar and his successor are considered as leader of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban only.

Afghanistan is a poverty-stricken country where significant proportion of the population lives below the poverty line. According to an estimate, 36 per cent of the Afghan population lives below the poverty line with monthly income not exceeding \$30.⁵¹ In addition to this 68 per cent of the Afghan population is under the age of 25.⁵² This makes the youthful population of the country productive if utilized properly and destructive if used otherwise. With high unemployment rate and rampant poverty, Afghanistan is a fertile land for militancy. The slain leader of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, Mullah Rauf, offered \$500 per month to a new recruit in Helmand province.⁵³ The IS militants could get thousands of recruits for their terrorist activities in Afghanistan because of widespread poverty and unemployment. It could pose a serious challenge to the US-led alliance, Afghan government, and the Taliban insurgents.

Afghanistan is lucrative for the Islamic State because of its drug trade. Afghanistan is a hub of opium production and drug trade, which generate billions of dollars. According to an estimate, Afghanistan cultivates more than 94 per cent and produces about 95 per cent of the world's opium.⁵⁴ Taliban alone generate \$100 to \$155 million per annum from drug trade.⁵⁵ More than 16.5 million people around the world use illicit drugs annually, generating an estimated US \$68 billion worldwide in opiate market.⁵⁶ The IS wants to exploit this area to generate funds for its operations in this region and beyond. If the Islamic State militants establish their firm control in Afghanistan, they might not need any other source of funding because the drug trade would alone be sufficient for them.

The IS militants carry a legacy of attacking rival sects and minorities. In Iraq they have carried out hundreds of suicide attacks against the Shia population and the Yazidi Tribes. In Pakistan their affiliates are involved in sectarian violence. There is a possibility that the Shia Muslims in Afghanistan

may also bear the brunt of their brutal tactics. Recently the Hazara community in Afghanistan approached the Taliban for protection against the Islamic State after two incidents of kidnapping of Hazaras (predominantly Shia) by masked men linked with the Islamic State.⁵⁷ According to the Deputy Police Chief of Zabul province Ghulam Jillani Farahi, the Islamic State militants were behind this kidnapping. The drivers of the buses said that the abductors spoke a foreign language and wore black masks and dresses. The Afghan Taliban had also denied their involvement in this incident.⁵⁸ In such a situation, the Shia Muslims along with other minorities might face a greater risk from the emergence of IS in Afghanistan.

Conclusion and recommendations

The IS militants are trying to establish their foothold in Pakistan and Afghanistan. They need physical space in these two countries to carry out their terrorist activities in the region. The IS wants to establish its control over the area it terms as “Khorasan,” because IS considers it necessary for the achievement of its larger goal of establishing a global caliphate.

The IS militants have already made inroads into Pakistan and Afghanistan. The IS cannot take control of territories in Pakistan, because Pakistan possesses a strong military and security forces apparatus. Pakistan’s military has demonstrated its capabilities against TTP-linked militants in tribal areas. It would be difficult for the IS to defeat Pakistan military and take control of FATA or any other part of the country and use it as a safe haven. But the IS can disrupt peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan by carrying out terrorist activities on a limited scale in collaboration with their likeminded militant groups like the offshoots of Al-Qaeda, TTP, LeJ, defectors from Afghan Taliban, IMU, ETIM, and the Chechen militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, might be a soft target for the IS where it might get some physical space in remote areas where there is no firm control of the Afghan government. The IS militants would face a challenge from the Afghan Taliban though. It would not be possible for the IS to establish its power in the Taliban-controlled areas. Afghan Taliban inflicted heavy losses on IS militants in a direct clash in the Farah province. On the other hand, however, the capabilities of the IS to carry out terrorist attacks in Afghanistan cannot be ignored. There is a need for a coordinated and comprehensive strategy by Pakistan, Afghanistan, America, and regional states to neutralize this militant group for long-term peace and stability of the region. Here are a few suggestions for countering the threat of IS in the region.

Regional coalition

The Islamic State is a transnational militant organisation with huge financial resources and affiliates around the globe. It poses an unprecedented challenge to the global peace and security. The level of threat posed by the IS demands a comprehensive strategy at the regional and global level. Although under the leadership of the US many countries have come up to counter this threat in Iraq and Syria, it would not be enough. In Afghanistan and Pakistan,

the situation demands a different strategy. Here the IS militants are not controlling large territories as they do in Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, the threat of Islamic State is emerging after the allegiance of the local militant commanders to it. All regional actors like: China, Central Asian states, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia want a peaceful and stable Afghanistan for long-term peace and development.⁵⁹ All these regional states must help and support Afghanistan – as well as Pakistan – in its endeavour to eradicate this menace.

Enhanced intelligence cooperation

The Islamic State has proved to be an effective and well organized force. This is the reason it was able to exploit the weak areas of Iraqi and Syrian security forces. To defeat such a force there is a need for enhanced intelligence sharing and coordination among all stakeholders. Pakistan and Afghanistan have already signed a joint intelligence sharing pact to improve intelligence sharing and enhance coordination between them.⁶⁰ Such collaboration would help both the states in overcoming this threat collectively, and timely action would help curb Islamic State network in this region.

Building a counter-narrative

The role of religious scholars cannot be ignored in countering terrorism. There have been many decrees by the religious scholars against IS ideology.⁶¹ A counter-narrative must be built around such decrees with supportive arguments from the Holy Quran and *Sunnah* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)). There is no room for brutality or extremism in Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and it does not preach violence and terrorism. The true picture of Islam should be revived in respective Muslim countries. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have been employing this strategy of de-radicalization and counter extremism in their respective countries with great success.⁶² These two countries may take the lead in devising a counter-narrative to the IS ideology which is logically supported with Quran and *Sunnah*.

Reconstruction and development

Militant organizations like the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Al-Shebab, and TTP target impoverished societies. For instance, Al-Qaeda established its foothold in countries like Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen. The TTP was successful in making inroads in FATA, a less developed area as compared to the rest of the country. According to the 1998 census, the adult male literacy rate in FATA was 17 per cent.⁶³ In such impoverished societies, militant organizations with money and a self-styled version of Islam brainwash people for their own objectives.

It is necessary for the regional and global stakeholders that after rooting out Islamic State from Pakistan and Afghanistan they must develop these areas, so that no militant group would penetrate these societies again. Pakistan and Afghanistan depend on each other. Pakistan is the largest trading partner of Afghanistan with bilateral trade of \$2 billion.⁶⁴ Pakistan can play an important role in the development and revitalization of Afghan economy. Afghanistan can

benefit from the developing Gwadar Port of Pakistan and transit its goods to the rest of the world, whereas, Pakistan can have access to resource-rich Central Asian states via Afghanistan for trade and investment. Mutual collaboration for trade and investment would bring peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Development and reconstruction would deny space to militant groups like IS for recruitment, funding, or regrouping in both states.

Curb terrorist financing in this region

The Islamic State is the wealthiest terrorist group in the world. On the basis of its immense financial assets it is helping other terrorist organizations, and establishing its branches in other countries. There is a dire need to curb Islamic State's financing. The US and some other countries have taken some action to disrupt illegal oil sales of the IS militants but the latter have got many other sources of funding. Those sources of funding could only be disrupted with collective effort by regional and global community. The drug trade, human trafficking, charities, natural resources, and extortion on the main highways generate millions of dollars for IS annually. All these sources of funds need to be curbed to halt the advance of the Islamic State militants. In Afghanistan, the IS militants focus on the drug trade. The lucrative drug trade in Afghanistan could generate additional millions of dollars for them. Pakistan, along with other regional states, must take concrete steps to control drug trade originating from this region. Main supply routes of this drug trade are from Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asian states. All these countries must work together and coordinate their operations against drug mafia.

Enhance Pak-Afghan Border Security

Pakistan's border with Afghanistan was considered the most dangerous place on earth because of the lawlessness and safe havens of the different militant groups.⁶⁵ The situation on the border has improved after a concerted military campaign by Pakistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan must take collective measures to improve coordination along the border areas. Both countries must increase the number of check-posts along the border and enhance vigilance to keep an eye on the movement of militant groups.

Pakistan's military has started Operation Zarb-i-Azb in 2014 and successfully dislodged militants from the North Waziristan tribal agency. Now the militants linked with TTP, Al-Qaeda, IMU, and Afghan Taliban are on the run, operating only from Afghanistan. The Afghan military must take concrete steps and deny safe havens to fleeing militants in Nuristan, Kunar, Nangarhar, and Khowst provinces. Joint collaboration between Pakistan and Afghanistan would improve border security and disallow groups like TTP or IS to establish their networks in these areas.

Training of Afghan security forces

Since the Afghan forces are facing a two-pronged threat, one from the Afghan Taliban, and the other from the emerging IS, it is essential for the regional states to help in training of the Afghan National Army and the Afghan

National Police. The US-led alliance is taking the lead in training the Afghan National Security forces. The signing of BSA is a good omen for Afghanistan. Under this agreement, the US and its allies not only bear the financial cost of Afghan military but also train them on modern lines, and improve their fighting skills and overall operational capabilities.⁶⁶

Pakistan military is a professional and well-trained force, its help would be crucial for Afghanistan. Pakistan has already offered to train Afghan national security forces.⁶⁷ The Afghan security forces can learn from Pakistan's counter insurgency experiences. Such collaboration would improve overall operational capabilities of the Afghan national security forces against Islamic State in Afghanistan and it would help them in facing this unprecedented threat efficiently.

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