
ISIS, Sub-Continent and the Days Ahead

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Abstract:

ISIS is fast emerging on the political landscape of Middle East. But its impact is crossing the borders and the wave created by this wind is making its presence felt in sub-continent as well. Political Islamists have been trying hard to put forth their views in subcontinent. But so far they have failed to create the much needed impact. Will ISIS squeeze the political space of Political Islamists? and hence become the new face of political Islam in subcontinent. And what are those conditions which can help them grow on subcontinent and outclass the political Islamists? An effort has been made in this paper to answer these questions.

Key words: Hizb-e-Islami, ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), Pakistan-Afghanistan corridor, Sub-continent, TTP (Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan).

Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic state of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), whatever you call it, despite American bombardment is making head way in Iraq and in Syria. And definitely it is making a lasting impact on the surrounding areas as well. Here in Kashmir as well, we are told that some boys were seen waving the black colored flags of ISIS.¹ Whether their presence in Kashmir is a reality or just a hoax, it is such a matter of debate that can wait for a while.

¹ Times of India, 17 October, 2014.

But there is one area where ISIS is making some practical gains i.e. Pakistan- Afghanistan corridor. Recently TTP's (Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) chief spokesman Shahid Ullah Shahid announced that he along with five other commanders of TTP (which include the powerful commanders from regions like Khyber district and Peshawar district) have pledged their allegiance to ISIS and have asserted that from now onwards they will be working on the agenda of ISIS and that they have accepted the 'caliphate' of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi.² Shahid Ullah Shahid, however, made it clear it was their personal decision and not that of entire TTP leadership. After this announcement TTP removed Shahid Ullah Shahid from his post and announced that they have no such programme to join ISIS. In Afghanistan also, a senior commander of Hizb-e-Islami³, announced his decision of joining ISIS.⁴ In this case also, Hekmatyar later distanced himself from his commander's statement and announced that Hizb-e-Islami has no such programme on its agenda.

Though the number of fighters who have joined ISIS from the sub-continent is small, slowly more people are joining its ranks as the group is gaining ground. Further, because of its quick gains in Iraq, the ISIS is leaving a lasting impact on the fighters in this region. There are few important reasons responsible for the emergence of the ISIS in Afghanistan-Pakistan.

Firstly, almost all the militant outfits fighting in the subcontinent region have practically shunned the global agenda, which over the years arrested thousands of fighters towards them. These fighters that came from the many parts of the world were disappointed with this change of strategy in

² Indian Express, 14 October, 2014.

³ Hizb-e-Islami is a resistant front led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a renowned guerilla fighter who led Afghan resistance against USSR during 1980s and is still fighting American occupation along with Afghan Taliban

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-2nd-September-2014>

militant outfits (from global agenda to localized one).⁵ Hence with the emergence of ISIS (which has out and out a global agenda), the fighters feel rejuvenated and hence, shift of loyalty towards ‘Caliphate.’

Secondly, Pakistan Army has been making inroads in the strong forts of TTP in tribal areas. Thus, has weakened the TTP internally. Also because of many other acts, differences have emerged within TTP leadership as well. Also the period of talks between Pakistan Government and TTP has allowed these differences not only to grow but surface fully on the ground. This can be seen in many ways. Like TTPs’ Punjab wing has decided to stop all militant activities in Pakistan and focus their entire attention on Afghan battlefields.⁶ While as in Pakistan, they have decided to focus on the peaceful activities to “change” the system. Because of this entire scenario, a large group of fighters is getting disillusioned and emergence of ISIS has proven like rain in a desert for them. So this group feels that TTP has lost the zeal to fight and hence they shift their loyalties towards ISIS in large numbers.

Thirdly, another reason is that those forces which have been working for the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan through democratic means have failed by and large. They have been the part of system from last 70 years but have gained nothing substantial so far. In fact their impact has been minimal vis-à-vis policy making of the state. Because of this, a good number among them joined militant ranks with this aim to reach their destiny via more assertive means. But TTP and other militant outfits have failed to fulfill their desire. Also many acts of TTP have disappointed many of these disgruntled forces and they have returned to the main stream. To overcome this phase of disappointment and disillusionment, these people feel ISIS is the right stage and right party to bank on.

⁵Exclusive Analysis- Afghanistan Risk outlook 2009-Jules Stewart-
www.julesstewart.com/exclusive-analysis

⁶ <http://arynews.tv/on/>

Fourthly, also ISIS has felt that Pakistan-Afghanistan corridor is an important area for furthering their agenda. If they want to conquer their Asia, they know that they must have strong presence in these countries. It is because of this reason that ISIS has twice called for unconditional release of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui.⁷ This clearly shows that ISIS wants to attract youth of this region by playing the popular cards.

All this clearly indicates that ISIS wishes to make its presence felt in this region. Instability, occupation and human rights violations are simply adding fuel to the fire. There can be another version to this story as well. Since there is a strong group of people within Muslims as well who feel that ISIS is working on American agenda for destabilizing Muslim world. As per them, ISIS is doing US's job in Middle East. It is a theory that now as America is slowly moving out of Afghanistan, they wish to root in ISIS so that infighting starts between ISIS and other militant outfits in the region and the situation remains unstable, which in the final run suits American interests.

Whatever be the reason, one thing is sure that ISIS is making inroads in sub-continent and this is a sign of worry for Islamic movements and resistant fronts. Their emergence will choke the entire space for peaceful activism and hence will push Islamic movements another 70 years back. Also resistant movements in this region can become weak in a sense that instead of focusing on regional struggles, these indigenous movements will surface again on the global surface, hence limiting the international space, support and recognition to such movements.

⁷ An interview of Raheemullah Yousufzai with GEO news programme 'Aaj GEO Kai Saath.

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