

TTP'S Safe Havens in Afghanistan: A Constant Threat to Pakistan's Internal Security

Arshad Mahmood

National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Shaheen Akhtar

National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

Though Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is significantly weakened and dislodged from former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) yet, it has relocated to bordering areas in Afghanistan under ideological umbrella of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and gets operational and logistics support through Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies. ISIS, having been greatly marginalized in the Middle East is struggling to gain foothold in Afghanistan with TTP as its proxy to execute the deadly terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The presence of ISIS in Afghanistan not only poses threat to Afghanistan but its collusion with TTP threatens Pakistan's internal security as well. Pakistan's sacrifices go in vain if cooperation from Afghanistan and the US forces is not forthcoming in defeating ISIS and TTP operating from Afghanistan. The article argues while domestic reforms and effective implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) by Pakistan is important to quell extremism and terrorism from urban centres, the cooperation from regional countries, harbouring TTP is vital for the elimination of scourge of terrorism from the region.

Key Words: TTP, ISIS, Al-Qaida, Extremism, Terrorism, National Action Plan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Safe Havens, Regional Cooperation

Introduction

During Afghan Jihad of 1979 regional sectarian extremism and terrorism was confined to Pashtun dominated Afghan- Pakistan regions as compared to current diffusion in urban centres. Former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) recently merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and parts of Balochistan were known for housing Taliban (Aman, 2016). Post 9/11 terrorists' strongholds in Afghanistan are exacerbating Pakistan's internal security threat spectrum besides fanning religious extremism in the society (Nasr, 2001). The 9/11 attacks gave terrorists a renewed confidence that they possess power like a state and can influence international system as per their vision (Smith, 2008).

However, post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq threatened their survival forcing them to flee to safer hideouts for waging violent struggle against the US hegemony in the Middle East. ISIS, which had initially succeeded to establish its self-styled caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria till its ouster in the wake of coalition attacks (especially from second half 2016 to first half 2017) is

providing funding and ideological umbrella to terrorist organizations like TTP which is now operating from Afghan soil.

Post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan, and Pakistan's shift in policy towards former jihadi outfits brought former rivals closer to common cause of fighting USA and its allies, declared apostate by Al-Qaida's Salafi Ideology. Pakistan and its Army were declared number one enemy by the terrorist entities, especially TTP, Al-Qaida and later by ISIS. According to Khalid, "interestingly, this conceptually feeds into Benedict Anderson's seminal theory of *nations* being nothing more than imagined communities." ISIS taking inspiration from Western imperialist powers, and by accentuating a non-realistic global caliphate seek to super-impose an *imagined community* over the Ummah acted as catalyst for regional terrorist entities hiding in Afghanistan (Khalid, 2017).

While looking at theoretical foundations, the domestic factors of Pakistan, interference by regional countries and systemic pressures are governed by the principles of neoclassical realism. It is not only question of elite perception and adoption of peculiar foreign policy by Pakistan, but hostile regional security is compounding Pakistan's security dilemma. It is not only Indo-Afghan nexus which is posing threat to Pakistan's internal security, but presence of the US in Afghanistan is exacerbating Pakistan's security concerns as well (Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro, 2009). Relations among regional countries are plagued due to persisting regional disputes and wider international interference (Waltz, 1979). Situation in Afghanistan is still grim, and the US South Asian Strategic Review has further complicated the US-Pakistan- Afghanistan relations (Davis and Landler, 2017). India has emerged as an important player in the equation. The complexity of the situation warrants a comprehensive regional strategy of combating terrorism and eradicating the threat through shared responsibility of regional countries and the US. Pakistan as a state will have to strictly enforce actions identified under NAP for addressing her internal vulnerabilities and defeating the extremist ideology.

Undoubtedly, challenges to Pakistan's security intensified after the incident of 9/11, being the "moment of historical rapture and epochal event" that drew a clear line through the world history pre and post 9/11 world and the US, pushing the US and the Western world in the storm of anti-Islamic sentiment (Holloway, 2008). Expansion of US War in Iraq, elimination of core Al-Qaida leadership with US drones prompted emergence of ISIS in the Middle East in 2013-14. The growing ISIS influence in Iraq and establishment of its caliphate attracted attention of TTP and cooperation between two terrorist entities was reported in Afghanistan. TTP inclination to cooperate with ISIS is driven by two factors first; TTP's losing grip of territorial control in FATA, and a "virulent apocalyptic allure toward the ideology and successes of ISIS or its ability to bankroll extremists more lucratively than other radical groups" (Khalid, 2017). The importance of cooperation among Afghanistan- US-Pakistan cannot be overemphasised. The positive role of regional countries in reconstruction of Afghanistan is a welcome idea, yet principles of

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respect to sovereignty of other nations and non-interference into internal affairs must be adhered to by all the participating nations.

TTP is enjoying support of foreign intelligence agencies and various terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan. After Al-Qaida, TTP finds ISIS as spiritual citadel and a sustained conduit of financial support. ISIS, after having suffered serious reverses in the Middle East since 2016-17, relocated to Afghan- Pakistan bordering region where the organisation had sympathisers and sectarian proxies, ready to wage violent war against Muslim sectarian minorities and non-Muslim minorities. Afghan provinces like Kunar and Nuristan have become TTP safe havens, TTP not only enjoys patronage but operational and logistic support is also extended by hostile intelligence agencies. TTP had been conducting high impact attacks inside Pakistan and terrorising masses. The assault pattern and composition of fighting force revealed that foreign terrorist elements, possibly old affiliates of Al-Qaida or ISIS sympathisers assisted TTP in high profile attacks. Assault on Karachi Airport by Uzbek fighters in June 2014 and brutal massacre of children in Army Public School (APS) Peshawar in December 2014 were the most tragic and momentous events.

Besides, sectarian strife in the Muslim World and Pakistan, competing interests of regional countries and systemic forces reinforce terrorist narrative of Crusade against Muslims and Clash of Civilizations. After 9/11 the Evangelical Christians and Neo-conservatives in the US administration injected a new life into anti-Muslim tirade thus stoking fire between two communities or civilizations. Though the vast majority of Christians and the Muslims world did not endorse the impression of war against Islam yet, terrorists successfully labelled the fight as such. The events of 9/11 and Neo-cons policy of Unilateralism and Pre-emption brought Huntington's thesis of "Clash of Civilizations" into play (Primakov, 2005).

Threat from TTP, reinforced by assistance from other terrorist entities to harm the interest of the State of Pakistan is real. The threat has potential to spread terrorism in Afghanistan- Pakistan bordering region and thus impact international fight against terrorism. The support of local proxies, interference by regional countries and systemic forces are contributing towards consolidation of TTP in Afghan- Pakistan region. The complexity of situation demands coordinated counter terrorism effort- a missing link marred with misperceptions and allegations against each other.

Evolution of TTP- organisation and ideology

Owing to roots in Afghan Jihad of 1979, TTP in some form or appellation had been continuing since 2002-2003. TTP was officially established in 2007 and its organisational setup was headed by Baitullah Mehsud as ameer (commander) of the terrorist organisation (Jamal and Ahsan, January 2015). In November 2013, Fazlullah a former Secretary General of the organisation was elevated to the head

of TTP who has been responsible for most deadly terrorist attacks including gruesome massacre of children in Army Public School (APS) Peshawar in 2014. Fazlullah was finally eliminated by a US drone on 14 June 2018 in Kunar province of Afghanistan (Firdous, June 15, 2018).

Despite ideological differences, TTP and other terrorist organisations including ISIS practising Salafi/Wahaabi or Deobandi school of thought have learnt to coexist due to mutual interdependence and survival (Khan and Wei, December 2016). There is no official or clear estimate of the TTP in Pakistan-Afghanistan region. Figure ranges from 30,000 in unofficial or private circles whereas, official channels put the estimate to 5000 – 15000 TTP operatives. ISIS and its affiliates, Central Asian chapter of ISIS- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) export regional religious terrorism. TTP is also reported to have been supporting ISIS jihad in Syria by recruiting foot soldiers from Pakistan and had a field day with hefty payments (Dawn, November 2, 2014 and Stakelbeck 2015). TTP zealots have pledged loyalty to Islamic State in Khurasan Province (IS-KP) (Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics) with the objective to broaden its base of recruitment (Gambhir, December 3, 2015). TTP may be at a disadvantage to fully capitalize on ISIS support because Afghan Taliban fought back and evicted ISIS fighters from their bases in Afghanistan (Khattak, December 20, 2016).

The cooperation between TTP and Islamic State (IS) is also attributed to their complementary tactical objectives even when the two are distinct entities having ethnic and linguistic differences, diverse political objectives and social strata of the core militant force. After dismantling of Al-Qaida, certain foreign militants have also joined TTP ranks and files and they may be acting as intermediaries between both the terrorist organisations and promoting operational synergy (Indian Express, February 2017). In almost all terrorist attacks executed by TTP, either in Islamabad or provincial metropolis, ISIS footprint was discernible. ISIS is providing spiritual motivation to TTP and other affiliates in the region (Rana, July 2015).

In Afghanistan, drawing inspiration from ISIS ideology, TTP emerged as a major ally of the ISIS after bloody resistance by Afghan Taliban. However, no sizeable ISIS footprint has been reported in Pakistan. Possibility of lone wolves affiliated with ISIS or certain extremist individuals eulogizing ISIS cannot be ruled out. The sectarian militant organization Lashkar-e- Jhangvi (LeJ), a TTP affiliate, also draws inspiration from ISIS ideology. There had been reports of low level cooperation between both the entities especially in Balochistan (Shahid, April 5, 2018). ISIS assisting LeJ in execution of violent sectarian terrorist attacks against Shiite community substantiates Pakistan's contention that TTP is being sponsored and funded by foreign intelligence agencies, especially the Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies. Negligible number of splinter elements of former jihadi organisations involved in Kashmir struggle was also reported joining TTP to grind their own axe for politico-religious motives. The ideological influence of ISIS in

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Pakistan is noteworthy because when ISIS captured Mosul in July 2014, Jundullah and Tehreek-e-Khilafat Pakistan (TKP) were the first two organizations that pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Zahid, January 30, 2017). Islamic State in Khurasan Province (IS-KP) is another entity pledging its support to ISIS in the region (Curtis, 2011).

TTP used to draw inspiration from Al-Qaida but after killing of Osama Bin Laden its ideological cooperation tilted towards ISIS, especially since 2013 onwards. Though ISIS was unruly subordinate of Al Qaida, which later rose to the level of unchallenged rival, yet its brutal ideology and tactics of beheading Shiite Muslims and non-Muslim attracted TTP hardliners to emulate similar inhuman practices in Swat and FATA regions of Pakistan. ISIS strategies exposed the agenda of terrorist organization by emerging as competing entity and did more harm to Al Qaida strategies rather than supplementing those. The scholars predict that Al Qaida has more chances to survive in the long run as opposed to ISIS due to its structural and ideological strengths (Schmit, 2016). Irrespective of the fact whether Al-Qaida remains a dominant ideological force or is overshadowed by ISIS, the TTP is likely to benefit from these Arab terrorist entities and threaten Pakistan's internal security and revives terrorism in FATA and Swat regions (Petraeus Dangerous Strategy, 2018).

Factors strengthening TTP's ideological appeal sectarian strife in the Muslim world

Muslims history has had phases wherein sectarian extremism was promoted to promote a particular sect of Islam. For example, Wahhabism was promoted in eighteenth century (1770) which culminated in raiding of Shiite Muslims; the acrimonious sectarian relations persist within Muslim countries especially Saudi Arabia and Iran. The conflict of interest and ideology between Saudi Arabia and Iran is exploited by the ISIS (Black, 2016). TTP also exploited the void by joining anti-Shiite terrorist activities and attempting to stoke explosive sectarian fault line in Pakistan.

Post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan

Post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan brought together various terrorist groups having different ethnic and ideological background. Pakistani Taliban supported the indigenous Afghan resistance against the US forces and did not endorse Pakistan's support to the US and the coalition. They termed it as stabbing in the back by the Pakistani security establishment and vowed to avenge the killing of their fighters in the US drone strikes. The military action in Islamabad in 2007, to evict terrorists from the Red Mosque acted as a catalyst for Pakistani Taliban to unite and announce a joint resistance movement of TTP. Al-Qaida exploited the situation and stepped up its attacks against targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan. After elimination of Osama Bin laden (OBL), Al-Qaida was weakened and

marginalized and the vacuum was filled by the ISIS. TTP colluded with wide network of former Al-Qaida militants like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (Taj, 2017). Thus, the TTP started gaining strength with the foreign support and the Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies (Cookman, 2017).

Anti -Muslim nationalist extremism in the western world

The landscape of extremist ideologies is expanding with the passage of time and competing interests of various ethnic, sectarian and extreme right mind-set wielders is responsible for fanning the fire of xenophobic extremism. During recent years the US and the West too, are facing the challenge of resurgence of right wing nationalism leading to intolerance in otherwise tolerant and civilized societies. Mistreating other ethnic groups, desecrating their places of worship and discrimination based on ethnic background, colour, and belief are now quite common. Thus, the champions of human rights and equal opportunities to progress are challenged by a new phenomenon and have little to offer to the Muslim world which is otherwise labelled as an intolerant society. President Trump saying, “Muslims hate us, they hate our values and prosperity” are the extreme kind of expressions against fellow human beings, certainly fanning Islamophobia, irrespective of differences or accesses that have been committed by some Muslim terrorists (Gerges, 2011).

Not only Muslim countries are passing through chaos, but the Western societies too, are polarized on ethnic lines and are likely to experience extreme nationalist sentiment across their nations. Hatred against Muslims may be result of acts of terrorism in Western countries but indiscriminate use of force by the US and Western allies in Afghanistan and Middle East and resultant civilian casualties are certainly provoking Muslim sentiments against the Christian world. It is incumbent upon entire civilized world that not only the flashpoints are mellowed down, and the ongoing conflicts are managed but the perception of the Christian World out to undo Islamic world, display of extreme sense of Islamophobia must be addressed so as to defeat the extremist forces in the Islamic world. The extreme right sentiment in the US and the West- France, Netherlands, Austria, Norway and Denmark are fuelling the xenophobic sentiments. Maltreatment of the Muslim women by the hooligan youth in these countries, burning of mosques and attacking Islamic centres are reinforcing the ideology of terrorist organisations like TTP misusing Islamic injunctions. These terrorist entities often claim to be helping oppressed Muslims and vow to unite against “Crusaders” (Zakaria, June 20, 2016). Atrocities by the Buddhist monks in Myanmar and ominous silence in the Western world only reinforce terrorist agenda of killing innocent human beings to take revenge of atrocities against the Muslims in Christian and Buddhist countries.

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Competing regional interests and systemic forces

Presence of multiple terrorist organisations in Afghanistan that are posing threat to Pakistan and Afghanistan indicate divergent interests of the regional countries. Iran, being a Shiite affiliate of Hazara Afghan community was at loggerheads with Pakistan in 1990s over the formation of Taliban government in Afghanistan. After 9/11, Russia, China and India emerged as important players for regional security and investment in Afghanistan. This clash of interest is fomenting unrest in the region with serious blow back effects on Pakistan's internal security. Installation of US backed regime in Afghanistan not only lacks legitimacy but also public support to create national harmony for lasting peace in Afghanistan. By alienating the largest ethnic group of Pashtuns from power, the Ghani government is not likely to succeed in bringing about national consensus for future political dispensation in Afghanistan.

Due to changed geo- political and geo- economic realities in South Asia, India gained prominence as an important player in South Asian security architecture and her strategic alliance with the US adversely impacting the strategic balance in South Asia. India entering Afghanistan under the guise of reconstruction and economic development has pursued its proxy war against Pakistan, so as to avenge insurgency in Indian occupied Kashmir (IoK). Indian academics however, project New Delhi's role in Afghanistan quite differently and describe it as a "greater and proactive role in the regional stability and cooperation" (Krishnamurthy, August 20, 2017). The Trump administration's Afghan strategy pressuring Pakistan while encouraging Indian role has angered the people and the government of Pakistan. The strategy of pressuring Pakistan and seeking cooperation under coercion has been quite counterproductive.

Post 9/11 US invasion of Afghanistan created dilemma for Pakistan to either side with the super power or Afghan Taliban which challenged internal stability of the country. This bad blood worsened with the passage of time and the extremist forces turned their guns towards Pakistani Government and its security establishment. India capitalized on the internal discord in Pakistan and started sponsoring and funding anti-state terrorist organisation – TTP. The challenge to Pakistan's internal security intensified when inside help was reported especially in case of high profile terrorist attacks against GHQ, Naval and Air Force bases (Khattak, 2017).

The major international players and regional countries are complicating the security landscape of South Asia reflected in continued turmoil in Afghanistan and deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan. The two major powers- USA and Russia are creating space for geo-political and geo- economic competition, thus inviting interference by regional countries. India attempted to use the war on terrorism as an opportunity to delegitimize Kashmir freedom movement labelling it as extension of terrorism in IoK – from Afghanistan to Indian soil (Banerjee and Kueck, 2004). Pakistan's concerns over destabilization being masterminded by

Indian intelligence agencies through Afghan proxies are validated after arrest of Kalbushan Yadev. Yadev was Indian regional spy chief mandated to foment unrest in Karachi, Balochistan and FATA. For broader regional peace, the regional countries assisted by major powers must shun their myopic agenda and work together for a greater cause of regional peace and security.

Defeating TTP and its Afghan based affiliates through collective response

There are visible signs that ISIS is gaining a foothold and Al Qaida being marginalized in Afghanistan. Though there is little evidence of Arab fighters making the core fighting group, it is mainly fighters from Afghan Taliban and TTP who have emerged as conglomeration's new fighting force in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Lot would depend on local support and pool of fighters from terrorist groups like TTP and Afghan affiliates and how they balance out their allegiance to Osama's organisation or new entity with more lethal agenda of dealing with non-Muslims and Muslims alike- ISIS.

The US and coalition forces after bloody war did succeed in dismantling ISIS caliphate from selected areas of Iraq and Syria however, for total elimination of ISIS, US and its Arab allies must brace for a long drawn asymmetric war with terrorist entity. ISIS having grasped the threat had started consolidating its position in already terror conducive region- Afghanistan. Albeit state of Pakistan fought back and evicted foreign fighters and TTP elements from seemingly ungovernable region of FATA. Especially so after an audacious military operation commencing since June 2014, by deploying around 180,000 troops in FATA and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA). TTP proxies under the umbrella of ISIS started conducting terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with great precision and lethality since 2015-16. Currently, Pakistan is consolidating its gains in the shape of fresh intelligence based comprehensive nationwide hunt to nab terror masterminds and destroy the terror infrastructure from settled areas of the country. The operation has been code named Raddul Fasad (RuF) after assumption of command by the incumbent army chief since October 2017.

The concern remains whether ISIS, in concert with Afghan and Pakistani terror proxies will consolidate its foothold in the bordering region with possibility of spreading terrorism in both the countries or a great job done by Pakistan Military will be reciprocated by Afghan side. Afghan forces are expected to evict ISIS cells and TTP command infrastructure and battalions of foot soldiers, operating from safe havens located inside Afghan territories. Elimination of Fazlullah manifests better understanding among Afghan-US-Pakistan militaries and intelligence agencies. US Commander in Afghanistan while speaking to journalists in Pentagon conceded that most of the IS-KP fighters are former TTP operatives who fled after Operation Zarb-e- Azb (2014) by the Pakistan Military (Roy, August 1, 2016). Unless Afghan security forces are able to fight back the

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terrorists, the gains made by Pakistan Military will remain fragile and threat to Pakistan's security may aggravate. In such a scenario, regional security will stay as elusive as ever including peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is a major stake holder in the lasting peace in the region. After formidable challenge by TTP, Pakistan took a bold decision of eliminating the threat of terrorism from its "ungovernable" FATA region. Pakistan Army rendered unprecedented sacrifices by laying down lives from a soldier to a Three Star General, with over 7000 casualties including 3000 killed and thousands maimed for life. The recipe for peace in Afghan-Pakistan region still resides in finding a regional solution by taking all stake holders including Taliban on board for enduring regional security architecture. The prospects are still elusive and are getting blurred with worsening situation in Syria and resultant deteriorating US-Russia relations. A ray of hope though, was rekindled after Afghan president offering an olive branch to Taliban and Pakistan supporting the intra Afghan dialogue. The US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary while visiting Pakistan on 3 July 2018, acknowledged Pakistan's role yet, demanded more efforts to bring Taliban to negotiation table (The Tribune, March 29, 2018). The void in efforts to garner cooperation of regional countries may be attributed to Indo- US nexus, and acceptance of India as a strategic partner of the US in Afghan conflict. This vital aspect of regional peace should be factored in during intra-Afghan dialogue and interstate negotiations for regional peace and security.

Zero interference policy by regional countries is considered a prerequisite for not only defeating ISIS and TTP but its local proxies as well. The staunchest supporters of ISIS like TTP and Jamat-ul Ahrar (JA) are funded and equipped by the Indian and Afghan intelligence, thus neutralizing the operational gains by Pakistan Military. Pakistan, in dossiers to the UN and the US, had categorically claimed of possessing an irrefutable evidence of outside interference. Therefore, to comprehensively defeat ISIS and its regional proxies including TTP, regional countries- Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA, Russia, Iran, India, China, and Central Asian Republics must cooperate for the attainment of common goal of regional peace and security (Rashid, 2008). US, as a major stakeholder in Afghan peace should play its due role to not only defeat the ISIS and its affiliates operating in Pakistan-Afghanistan region but persuading India as well to refrain from destabilizing Pakistan in the larger interest of the regional and global security (Aljazeera, March 2, 2017). Use of drones dilutes US role as honest broker of peace therefore, use of this weapon must be most judicious and against confirmed terrorists only (Ahmed, 2013).

Besides regional cooperation Pakistan should concentrate on elimination of sectarian extremism and terrorism and take steps which deny terrorist entities their sympathisers and facilitators in the urban centres (Bhojani, May 5, 2017). The mainstreaming of seminaries must be pursued with full vigour and spread of sectarian hatred through any medium should be discouraged. The actions anticipated under National Action Plan (NAP) through National Counter Terrorism

Authority (NACTA) must be implemented as part of internal security policy. Necessary reforms in criminal justice system and judicial infrastructure should be put in place on priority (The Gazette of Pakistan, July 15, 2014). The candid discourse on the causes of terrorism and presence of unwanted elements either in the form of Haqqani network or Lashkar-e- Tayaba (LeT) at Pakistani soil was initiated by previous government of Nawaz Sharif, the present government may review the solution to the problem in the best of national interest. It is widely believed in Pakistan that without resolving Kashmir dispute any unilateral concessions to India will only embolden her to destabilize of Pakistan (The Nation, September 30, 2017). Explicitly to FATA, there is a dire need of raising the stakes for locals in Pakistan and areas across Afghanistan so that they value their life, property and future generations. Merger of FATA with KP is a strategic step to curb the extremist tendencies yet a lot would depend on timely, transparent and inclusive execution of the merger plan.

Conclusion

ISIS, after having been badly mauled in Iraq and Syria has strengthened itself in Afghanistan- Pakistan region due to presence of ideological proxies and ideal terrain to pursue asymmetric warfare. Like Al-Qaida, ISIS comprises Arab command structure with few hundred Arab fighters; however, they have incorporated operatives from regional terrorist entities like IMU, IJU, TTP, JA and LeJ besides some disgruntled elements from LeT, JeM and TTA. ISIS has not only made inroads in Al-Qaida's traditional battle ground but has succeeded in expanding it by exploiting the void created by Al-Qaida's defeat and worsening law and order situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan's Government is facing a dilemma of killing TTP and ISIS fighters with the hammer but absence of an anvil from Afghan and US side renders the entire exercise less effective. Indo-Afghan Intelligence (RAW-NDS) officials support the terrorist attacks on Pakistani security forces in FATA and Balochistan, employing local proxies with ISIS acting as higher coordinating agency.

The US South Asian Strategic Review, and National Security Strategy 2017, essentially demands from Pakistan to deliver what combined US and NATO forces failed to accomplish in Afghanistan. US needs to realize the fragility of gains by ISAF and Pakistan military because it may not be possible to completely defeat extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan- Pakistan region with the use of force alone. US enjoys the leverage of persuading India and Afghan intelligence to refrain from anti-Pakistan activities and concentrate on eliminating terrorist safe havens from Afghan soil. Pakistan has sacrificed thousands of precious lives and suffered huge economic losses but stays committed to eradicate terrorism from FATA and settled areas.

U.S and the international community should also help in repatriation of Afghan refugees who may be providing shelters to some of Afghan terrorist

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groups. Such assistance will not only alleviate unbearable burden on Pakistan but will allay international concerns over alleged terrorist sanctuaries at Pakistani territory as well. Marginalizing Pakistan for any tactical gains will be counterproductive and will impinge upon regional peace. ISIS and TTP if not defeated in Afghanistan, will emerge as a real threat to security in Afghanistan and Pakistan besides vitiating the regional peace. The solution lies in a cohesive and integrated counterterrorism strategy rather than maligning each other and extracting politico- diplomatic mileage.

U.S and regional countries may consider regional dispute resolution mechanism within South Asia by incorporating all outstanding disputes including Kashmir dispute. Role of Russia, China and Iran is equally important because they are also affected by the scourge of terrorism in one form or the other. Use of military force in Afghanistan has proven to be a futile effort and escalation in military operations at this juncture will only aggravate the existing fragile security situation in Afghanistan, in addition to mitigating chances of a negotiated settlement of the dispute.

Pakistan's legitimate concerns on sovereignty and security must be addressed to secure whole hearted support of the Pakistani Government and its military. For complete eradication of extremism and terrorism from the region, Afghanistan and Pakistan should support a viable regional dispute resolution mechanism bedside formulating domestic counter terrorism strategy catering for short, medium and long-term actions.

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Biographical Note

Arshad Mahmood is Ph.D. Scholar, Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Dr. Shaheen Akhtar is Professor, Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.