

**The White Supremacist Terrorist Threat to Asia:
A Preliminary Assessment**
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Editorial Note:

Diffused, Chronic and Evolving Global Threat Landscape

In the face of a dynamically metastasising terrorist threat, the global security landscape is evolving into one that is more diffused, chronic and dispersed, where low-to-medium level individual acts of violence are becoming commonplace. The chaotic, unpredictable ways in which terrorist events unfold, is now enjoined by new actors such as the far-right movement, with the potential to further spread across the globe.

Though the propensity to react violently has increased, the favoured modus operandi remains low-end urban terrorism (stabbings, vehicular ramming and use of home-made explosive devices), mainly due to the inability of like-minded extremist groups to form organisational structures and augment their capabilities for coordinated attacks. However, the very fact that these extremist entities can form virtual communities on social media and share a bond is alarming. With this as a given, the upgrading of violent capabilities is a question of when, not if.

There has been a noticeable explosion of radicalism across the ideological spectrum. Various entities linked to the far-right movement in the West, some anti-establishment groups, as well as supporters and followers of global jihadist movements, namely Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS), have actively exploited the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing violent race protests in the US, to further their respective agendas. In short, it appears the chaos and volatility of current times, is mirrored within the global extremist-radical milieu.

Against this backdrop, the present issue of the Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses (CTTA) features five articles. First, **Kumar Ramakrishna** examines White Supremacist Terrorism in parts of the West, and the potential security implications for Asia. According to the author, the threat has become increasingly transnational, with growing evidence of White Supremacist networks in the US and parts of Europe strengthening their international linkages. Closer to home, the threat is limited, although violent elements within Asian ultranationalist movements of various persuasions may in future seek to network online and draw tactical inspiration from their counterparts in the West.

Second, **Abdul Basit** explores the implications of the ongoing peace process in Afghanistan on the South Asian militant landscape. The expected US exit from Afghanistan is creating a triumphant jihadist narrative in South Asia. However, the author is of the view that unlike in the past, when defeat and withdrawal of a major power from Afghanistan fuelled global jihadism, this time around, the absence of a global power might reinvigorate local and regional trends of jihadism in the region, although transnational jihadism would be weakened.

Third, **Sudha Ramchandran** analyses the rising Hindutva influence which aims to transform India into a Hindu state. The author maintains that the aggressive pursuit of the Hindutva agenda by the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its fraternal organisations is deepening the insecurities of India's religious minorities, especially Muslims. With their repeated and robust assaults on Indian secularism, Hindutva radicals are not only weakening the idea of India, but also compromising the security of all its people.

The last two articles take a closer look at growing female involvement in Islamist terrorist groups in South and Southeast Asia. In the first of these articles, **Unaesah Rahmah** reasons that even as more women have taken on active roles as suicide bombers and attackers, in pro-IS terrorist networks around Indonesia, they still abide by the traditional gender roles ascribed by these groups, with men still playing the dominant role. Nevertheless, the landscape is evolving, and more women have demonstrated a desire for greater agency, given the gender-oriented drivers fuelling female jihadism in Indonesia.

The final article by **Shafi Md Mostofa** highlights female radicalisation in Bangladesh, which is marked by women's growing participation in violent acts. According to the author, the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack was a turning point in this regard. Since then, women in a departure from their previous roles as nurturers and caretakers of jihadists are acting as suicide bombers, propagandists, recruiters and mentors for would-be female radicals in Bangladesh. The so-called Islamist model of obedience to husband, ideological conviction, Muslim victimhood narratives and crises in life, are identified as the main drivers of female radicalisation in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, we hope for everyone to stay healthy as we surmount the COVID-19 pandemic, from wherever you are reading the CTTA.

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The White Supremacist Terrorist Threat to Asia: A Preliminary Assessment

Kumar Ramakrishna

Synopsis

This article¹ assesses the threat of White Supremacist Terrorism (WST) globally and to East Asia. Definitional issues pertaining to WST are first examined, as well as the central theme of the White Supremacist ideology fuelling WST in the contemporary era: the “Great Replacement” thesis. The article analyses the surge in WST attacks in recent years, comparing its frequency and severity with violent jihadist terrorism. In short, while the WST threat is significant and becoming a transnational one, with increased international networking between WST threat groups, this largely holds for white-majority countries, mainly in the West. For the moment, WST does not appear to be an imminent threat in Asia.

Introduction

On 7 May 2020, reports broke in the United Kingdom (UK) of a far-right extremist, Filip Golon Bednarczyk, 25, pleading guilty to terror offences and having explosives. Arrested by UK counter-terrorism officials last December, Bednarczyk was found in possession of bomb manuals and bomb-making materials. An analysis of his electronic devices revealed an interest in firearms, knives and killings.

Significantly, Bednarczyk, a Polish national, also possessed a copy of the manifesto of Australian Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the 2019 attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, in which 51 people were killed in shootings at two different mosques. The first attack had been live-streamed on Facebook.² Like Tarrant, Bednarczyk claimed that “white people are being ‘replaced’” and called for further attacks.³ It transpired he was targeting Jews, Muslims, the LGBT community and “liberals”, who were perceived to be “tolerant” of such communities.⁴

Bednarczyk’s case has highlighted the growing threat of White Supremacist Terrorism (WST), variously characterised as “right-wing terrorism”, “neo-Nazism”, “far-right terrorism” and “white supremacy extremism”.⁵ A 2019 Soufan Center report, for example, argues that by “nearly every metric, white supremacy extremism has become one of the single most dangerous terrorist threats facing the United States, if not the single most dangerous”.⁶ As the Bednarczyk case shows, WST threatens other Western countries as well.⁷

This article assesses the WST threat globally and to East Asia. Definitional issues pertaining to WST are first examined, as well as the central theme of the White Supremacist ideology fuelling WST in the contemporary

¹ The author would like to thank Ivan Ng Yan Chao and Yogaananthan s/o Theva for their research support for the wider project that this essay draws upon.

² *White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement* (New York: The Soufan Center, September 2019), p. 26.

³ Lizzie Dearden, “Far-Right Extremist Who had Christchurch Terror Attack Manifesto Was Collecting Bomb Components”, *The Independent*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/far-right-extremist-terror-bomb-manual-old-bailey-filip-golon-bednarczyk-a9502596.html?amp>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In this article, while the term “White Supremacist” will be used in the main, the alternative term “far right” will also be used interchangeably, in line with current generally accepted thinking in academic and policy circles.

⁶ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 9.

⁷ Daniel Koehler, *Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right: Policy Options to Counter an Elusive Threat* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Policy Brief, February 2019), p. 2.

era: the “Great Replacement” thesis. The article then analyses the surge in WST attacks in recent years, comparing its frequency and severity with violent jihadist terrorism, before concluding with some implications of the WST threat for Asia.

Defining “White Supremacist Terrorism”

Like the definition of terrorism more broadly,⁸ there is no consensus as to the definition of WST. Daniel Byman argues that the term “right-wing terrorism” should be seen as a label of convenience that “lumps together various causes, including white supremacy, anti-LGBTQ movements, gun rights militants and hostility to the federal government”.⁹ In the United States context especially, there is much overlap between “hate crimes” and White Supremacist “terrorist” acts.¹⁰

Nevertheless, some analysts observe that hate crimes tend to be of a more spontaneous nature, with many such acts committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol by people with criminal antecedents and no strong political affiliations.¹¹ By contrast, acts of terrorism usually require meticulous planning and are driven by relatively clear political goals, which organised terrorist groups tend to have.¹²

Defining something as a “hate crime” or “terrorist” act has significant implications for the government’s response. In the US, violence committed by White Supremacists tends to be prosecuted not as terrorist acts, but as hate crimes or homicides.¹³ A similar tendency occurs in Germany.¹⁴ Such definitional debates have resulted in an under-allocation of resources to deal with the threat

⁸ For a discussion of the conceptual challenges in defining terrorism, see Anthony Richards, *Conceptualizing Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 30-31.

⁹ Daniel Byman, “The Threat from Within,” *The National Interest* (July/August 2019), p. 54.

¹⁰ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 47.

¹¹ Kathleen Deloughery, Ryan D. King and Victor Asal, “Close Cousins or Distant Relatives? The Relationship Between Terrorism and Hate Crime,” *Crime & Delinquency*, Vol. 58, No. 5 (2012), pp. 663-688, 665.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Helen Taylor, “Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes: Legal Definitions and Media Framing of Mass Shootings in the United States,” *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2019), pp. 227-244, 231.

from WST, stemming partly from a lack of clear understanding of the phenomenon.¹⁵

That said, a significant recent development was the US State Department’s decision in April 2020 to, for the first time, designate the Russian White Supremacist group known as the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) as a global terrorist organisation. The RIM was said to have provided paramilitary training to neo-Nazis and White Supremacists, recruiting mainly Europeans but also Americans into its ranks as well. This move enables US authorities to freeze the assets of and deny entry into the country of RIM members.¹⁶

Beyond the US, RIM’s designation will have a far-reaching impact. For example, it will likely limit the ability of RIM members to travel and forge connections with other members, supporters, and potential recruits around the world. In the online domain, several of the group’s well-known social media accounts face being shuttered, with social media companies now furnished with important legal tools to take enforcement action. This will temporarily impact on RIM’s ability to propagandise and recruit. Being starved of finances also impacts on the group’s funding and potentially limits the extent of its training activities.¹⁷

Overall, while generally viewed as a positive step, some analysts have called on the US and Western governments to go further still in enhancing their counterterrorism toolkits to tackle other groups and the broader WST threat.

¹⁴ Koehler, Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right, p. 7.

¹⁵ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 48.

¹⁶ Conor Finnegan, “State Dept. Labels White Supremacist Group Terrorists for 1st Time Ever”, *ABC News*, 7 April 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/state-dept-labels-white-supremacist-group-terrorists-1st/story?id=69998908>.

¹⁷ Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Samuel Hodgson, Dr. Colin P. Clarke, “The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and its Links to the Transnational White Supremacist Extremist Movement”, *International Center for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, 24 April 2020, <https://icct.nl/publication/the-russian-imperial-movement-rim-and-its-links-to-the-transnational-white-supremacist-extremist-movement/>.

The “Great Replacement” Motif

White Supremacists vary in the finer details of their ideological motivations. However, an underlying theme that has come to the fore over the past decade has been the notion of what the French philosopher Reynaud Camus in 2012 called *Le Grand Remplacement (The Great Replacement)*. This is the “conspiracy theory” that claims that “white, Christian Europe is being invaded and destroyed by hordes of black and brown immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa”.¹⁸ Worryingly, geopolitical, domestic and economic turbulence has helped populist social media, political personalities and movements to mainstream the Great Replacement theme within Western societies.¹⁹

Influential authors such as the conservative British journalist Douglas Murray, for instance, have voiced deep concerns about how Muslim immigration is gradually eroding a tired European civilisation.²⁰ His book has gained significant popularity amongst anti-immigration politicians in the US and Europe – such as the right-wing Hungarian leader Victor Orban.²¹ Murray writes about how the “mass movement of peoples in Europe” has resulted in “streets in the cold and rainy northern towns of Europe filled with people dressed for the foothills of Pakistan or the sandstorms of Arabia”.²²

Lamenting about White Christian Europe’s “existential civilisational tiredness”, Murray warns that “while the movement of millions of people from other cultures into a strong culture might have worked”, the mass movement of “millions of people into a guilty, jaded and dying culture cannot”. White

¹⁸ James McAuley, “How Gay Icon Renaud Camus Became the Ideologue of White Supremacy,” *The Nation*, 17 June 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/renaud-camus-great-replacement-brenton-tarrant/>.

¹⁹ David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (London and New York: Verso, 2018); Julia Ebner, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-Right Extremism* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

²⁰ Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

²¹ Murtaza Hussain, “The Far Right Is Obsessed with A Book About Muslims Destroying Europe. Here’s What It Gets Wrong,” *The Intercept*, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/25/strange-death-of-europe-douglas-murray-review/>.

Christian Europe, he goes on to argue, “one of the most cultured civilisations in history”, is about to be “swept away by people who are unworthy of them”.²³

This Great Replacement motif articulated by Murray, Camus and other prominent conservative intellectuals has been weaponised as a rallying cry for white supremacists around the world, including Robert Bowers, who killed 11 worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018 and Tarrant, the Christchurch attacker, whose own manifesto posted online is called “The Great Replacement”.²⁴ WST extremists motivated by anxieties over perceptions of a “White Genocide” have targeted Muslims, Jews, African-Americans, Hispanics and LGBT groups in recent times.²⁵

How Serious is the WST Threat?

While most analysts concur that WST is a rapidly growing threat, perspectives can diverge on the issue of whether it has become the most pressing terrorist challenge today. The Soufan Center, for example, asserts that the threat from WST to Americans “may have surpassed that of Islamist terrorism”²⁶ and that WST is “far harder to defeat than jihadism”²⁷ in the longer term. In support of this argument, the Center points to how 73% of deadly violent extremist incidents in the United States between 2001 and 2016 were perpetrated by White Supremacist extremists, with radical Islamists being responsible for only 23%.²⁸

In Europe, meanwhile, Koehler argues that between 2016 and 2017, the number of WST

²² Murray cited in Ibid.

²³ Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe*, pp. 3-7.

²⁴ McAuley, “How Gay Icon Renaud Camus Became the Ideologue of White Supremacy”.

²⁵ For instance, Timothy Wilson, a WST killed by US law enforcement before carrying out a bomb attack on a hospital treating COVID-19 patients in Belton, Missouri in March 2020, had also planned to attack “a school with a large number of black students, a mosque and a synagogue”. See “Coronavirus: Man Planning to Bomb Missouri Hospital Killed, FBI Says”, *BBC.com*, 26 March 2020,

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52045958>.

²⁶ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 43.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

attacks increased by 43%.²⁹ A 2019 study by the Institute for Economics and Peace asserted that taking Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand as a whole, WST attacks made up 17.2% of all terrorist incidents, compared to only 6.8% attributed to Islamist jihadist terror networks.³⁰ Nevertheless, data from the 2019 Global Terrorism Index shows while WST attacks in the West have surged, they are not as deadly as Islamist terrorist attacks, with the average Islamist terrorist attack since 1970 causing 3.6 deaths (if the September 11 attacks are excluded) as opposed to 0.92 deaths attributed to WST.³¹

According to a 2018 Europol report, from 1970-2018 in the West, there were 26 Islamist attacks killing at least 10 people, as opposed to 11 WST attacks. Specifically in the context of the European Union, jihadist attacks in Europe have not only been increasing in frequency, but exceed all other types of terrorist attacks in terms of the number of deaths and casualties.³² Out of the 205 failed, foiled or completed terrorist attacks in Europe in 2017, only 3% were linked to WST, as opposed to 67% linked to ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorism, and 16% linked to jihadist terrorism.³³

Similarly, in the Australian context, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization's (ASIO) 2018-2019 annual report notes the increased sophistication and organisational skills of WST groups and the growing threat posed by them.³⁴ At the same time, it was assessed that the principal terrorist threat in Australia "remains Sunni Islamist extremism and emanates primarily from small groups and individuals inspired, directed or encouraged by extremist groups overseas".³⁵ It would appear therefore, that although WST

represents a growing threat in Western countries, the main terrorist threat remains Islamist terrorism - with the US perhaps a notable exception.

In any case, the threat posed by WST has certainly become more *global*. White Supremacist civil organisations and movements - not merely WST threat groups - do maintain international linkages with each other, especially White Supremacists from the United States, Canada, the UK, Sweden and Germany.³⁶ Ukraine has emerged as a significant transnational hub for White Supremacists.³⁷ The Ukraine-based Azov Battalion, for instance, is emerging as a "critical node" in the transnational WST network. It has also reportedly set up a Western Outreach Office to attract foreign fighters from Western countries to train them in combat skills and imbue in them the ideals of "White Supremacy".

Azov Battalion operatives have distributed recruitment fliers at right-wing rock music concerts in Germany and organised educational programs, youth camps and public lectures to inculcate White Supremacist values – even targeting very young children.³⁸ Foreign fighters from 55 different countries have also travelled to Ukraine to participate in the civil war there between the pro-Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatists - joining both sides.³⁹

In this regard, it is worth noting the historical parallel between developments in Ukraine, and the migration of foreign jihadists to Afghanistan in the 1980s, and more recently, the Iraq-Syria theatre, to fight.⁴⁰ At the same time, at least 42 of the countries from which White Supremacist fighters have emerged are generally regarded as having predominantly

²⁹ Koehler, *Violence and Terrorism from the Far-Right*, p. 3.

³⁰ *Global Terrorism Index 2019* (Sydney: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). p. 48.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018* (The Hague: Europol, 2018), p. 5.

³³ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁴ ASIO *Annual Report 2018-2019* (Canberra: Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 2019), p. 4.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁶ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 31. For more details of transnational links between American and European WST groups, see the US Anti-Defamation

League report: "American White Supremacist Groups Exploiting International Connections", *ADL.org*, 16 March 2020, <https://www.adl.org/blog/american-white-supremacist-groups-exploiting-international-connections>.

³⁷ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 8.

³⁸ *IntelBrief: The Transnational Network That Nobody Is Talking About* (New York: The Soufan Center, March 2019), <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-transnational-network-that-nobody-is-talking-about/>.

³⁹ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

White/Caucasian populations. Further, European states make up the 10 countries with the most number of fighters who have travelled to the Ukraine.⁴¹

The Director-General of ASIO reported in February 2020 that Australians as young as 13 years old were being targeted and “signing up as members of international white supremacist hate groups such as The Base - a US WST threat group - where members use online platforms to disseminate “extremist right-wing ideologies and encourage each other into committing acts of violence”.⁴² In January, several members of The Base were arrested for firearm offences and conspiracy to commit murder. Authorities said they had “uncovered and foiled plans for several attacks across the country”.⁴³

Like The Base, the Atomwaffen Division, another US WST threat group, has been seeking to grow its organisation transnationally and “recruit members from a range of different countries”.⁴⁴ Worryingly, both The Base and the Atomwaffen Division - like Christchurch mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant - subscribe to the operational philosophy of “accelerationism” - the idea that WST groups should launch multiple attacks on political and economic targets to “build the social tension that will accelerate the collapse of the System”.⁴⁵

Such WST groups see the current COVID-19 pandemic as confirmation of their accelerationist outlook and are reportedly exploiting it to “push their propaganda and ideology” and “strike at their perceived foes” –

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴² Ben Doherty, “Asio Boss Warns of Rising Foreign Interference and Far-Right Extremism in Australia”, *The Guardian.com*, 24 February 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/24/rightwing-extremism-a-real-and-growing-threat-asio-chief-says-in-annual-assessment>.

⁴³ Amresh Gunasingham and Kyler Ong, “Why Asia May Not be Immune to Far-Right Extremism”, *Channel News Asia.com*, 27 February 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/far-right-terrorism-could-come-to-asia-12472250>.

⁴⁴ “Far-Right Extremists and White Supremacists Grow More Emboldened”, *IntelBrief* (New York: The Soufan Center, 24 February 2020).

⁴⁵ “White Supremacists Embrace ‘Accelerationism’”, *Anti-Defamation League (ADL)*, 16 April 2019, <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-embrace-accelerationism>.

“Jews and migrants” whom they accuse of “starting and spreading the virus”.⁴⁶ Little wonder that the US State Department, by March 2020, had begun seriously considering designating Atomwaffen Division – because of its transnational links to other WST threat groups – as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation. This would enable the government to adopt a “more rigorous posture” in countering such entities.⁴⁷

That said, structurally, WST threat groups have a number of weaknesses that hinder them from being able to organise and conduct potent terrorist attacks compared to their jihadist counterparts. Despite forging transnational linkages, the White Supremacist movement as a whole is very decentralised and factionalised.⁴⁸ While the international jihadist movement has produced global terrorist networks like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, there has to date been no similar WST organisation of similar globe-spanning stature.⁴⁹

Europol’s 2018 report also states that the “[White Supremacist] scene “is fragmented and manifests itself in a variety of forms”.⁵⁰ A 2015 analysis of WST in Western Europe argues that although there have been WST incidents in Western Europe, “the threat from organized right-wing terrorism to West European citizens is likely significantly lower today than some 20 to 30 years ago”.⁵¹ Thus, it appears likely that WST attacks will largely continue to be conducted by individuals not even formally part of a group.

⁴⁶ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Samuel Hodgson and Colin P. Clarke, “The Growing Threat Posed by Accelerationism and Accelerationist Groups Worldwide”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/the-growing-threat-posed-by-accelerationism-and-accelerationist-groups-worldwide/>.

⁴⁷ “Designating White Supremacist Groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations”, *IntelBrief*, (New York: The Soufan Center, 13 March 2020).

⁴⁸ *White Supremacy Extremism*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018*, p.51.

⁵¹ Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, No. 3 (2015), p. 3.

Such assessments are in line with the wider academic literature on terrorist attacks, which suggests that lone wolf terrorist attacks help avoid the risks involved with multiple attackers.⁵² A US study of WST incidents similarly found that successful far-right incidents are more likely to be carried out by lone actors.⁵³ In a similar vein, Europol's 2018 report highlights the recent development of so-called "Hive Terrorism" in Europe, where individuals who were not previously connected with organised WST groups have nevertheless become involved in lone wolf WST plots.⁵⁴ As Taylor notes, "white supremacists need not belong to any of these groups but can instead be inspired by their ideologies".⁵⁵

Some significant WST lone wolf attackers since 2011 have included Anders Breivik (Oslo, 2011),⁵⁶ Dylann Roof (Charleston, 2015),⁵⁷ Robert Bowers (Pittsburgh, 2018),⁵⁸ Brenton Tarrant (Christchurch, 2019)⁵⁹ and Patrick Crusius (El Paso, 2019).⁶⁰

Implications for Asia: WST a Limited Threat – For Now

How serious is the WST challenge to Asia? The following observations appear pertinent:

- All of the reported WST attacks thus far have occurred in white-majority countries, especially the US.

⁵² Brent R. Klein, Jeff Gruenewald and Brent L. Smith (2017). "Opportunity, Group Structure, Temporal Patterns, and Successful Outcomes of Far-Right Terrorism Incidents in the United States." *Crime & Delinquency*, Vol. 63, No. 10 (2017), pp. 1224-1249, 1228.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 1238.

⁵⁴ European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2018, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Taylor, "Domestic Terrorism and Hate Crimes", pp. 227-244.

⁵⁶ Catherine Appleton, (2014). "Lone Wolf Terrorism in Norway," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vo. 18, No. 2 (2014), pp. 127-142.

⁵⁷ Ray Sanchez, and Ed Payne, "Charleston Church Shooting: Who is Dylann Roof?" CNN.com, 16 December 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/19/us/charleston-church-shooting-suspect/index.html>.

⁵⁸ Jay Croft, "The Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting Believed to be the Deadliest Attack on Jews in American History," CNN, 28 October 2018, <https://www.abc57.com/news/the-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-believed-to-be-deadliest-attack-on-jews-in-american-history>.

- These have typically been lone wolf attacks.
- Firearms are the weapon of choice of almost all the attackers.
- Many attackers would post a manifesto or some other kind of material online prior to the attack so as to achieve increased publicity.
- The attacks appear to feed off each other, with attackers referencing previous attackers as inspirations and, in turn, inspiring other attackers of their own.⁶¹
- Muslims and Jews appear to be the most common attack targets.⁶²

There can be no doubt that - especially following the March 2019 Christchurch attack which resulted in a spate of copycat attacks - that WST now poses a significant security threat. However, an important qualification should be made. While the threat is becoming a transnational one, with increased international networking between WST threat groups, this largely holds for Western, or more broadly, white-majority countries.

For the moment, the available evidence does not suggest that WST presents an imminent threat in Asia. There appears as yet to be no explicitly articulated and commonly held White Supremacist global agenda put forth by a single, unified transnational White Supremacist entity – akin to Al Qaeda and its

⁵⁹ John Battersby, and Rhys Ball, "Christchurch in the Context of New Zealand Terrorism and Right Wing Extremism," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2019), pp. 191-207.

⁶⁰ Tom Embury-Dennis, "El Paso Shooting: 21-year-old Suspect Patrick Crusius 'Espoused Racist Tropes and Voiced support for Christchurch Mosque Gunman,' *The Independent*, 4 August 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/el-paso-shooting-suspect-patrick-crusius-white-supremacist-trump-texas-walmart-a9038611.html>

⁶¹ Brenton Tarrant, for instance, referenced Breivik, and the former in turn was referenced by Crusius.

⁶² Patrick Crusius targeted the Hispanic community. The point is White Supremacist violence is based on the fear of being "replaced" by other supposedly aggressive and morally suspect out-groups. Michael Davis, "The Manifesto Posted on 8chan by Alleged El Paso Shooter Minutes Before Attack," *MEMRI Inquiry & Analysis Series No. 1467*, 6 August 2019, <https://www.memri.org/reports/manifesto-posted-8chan-alleged-el-paso-shooter-minutes-attack>.

Twenty-Year Master Plan for achieving global domination.⁶³

That said, the 2011 Oslo shooter Anders Breivik, has urged that “far-right, Islamophobic movements in Europe and India” should “learn from each other and cooperate as much as possible” because their “goals are more or less identical.”⁶⁴ Breivik’s point was that while the ideological content of White Supremacism is dissimilar from that of Hindu extremism, both “movements are bound by a mutual hostility towards immigrants and Muslims and have similar overarching nationalistic visions.”⁶⁵

In Asia, extreme far right nationalism – but of a different ideological strain from White Supremacism – has been evident. In Mongolia, groups such as the Tsagaan Khass or “White Swastika” have adapted White Supremacist ideas to a local context. Desiring to ensure that “as a nation our blood is pure”, they fear – in a way reminiscent of Great Replacement ideas in the West – that “mixing with Chinese” would enable them to “slowly swallow us up”. Tsagaan Khass has thus targeted Chinese-Mongolian inter-racial couples and engaged in anti-immigrant violence.⁶⁶

Tsagaan Khass activists could potentially network via social media with and draw tactical inspiration from their White Supremacist cousins in the West. After all, the latter have already started looking eastwards. In December 2019, White Supremacists previously affiliated with the aforementioned Azov Battalion were pictured in Hong Kong, likely “to learn from the anti-government protests, riots, and resistance” groups. While many Hong Kong protesters rejected the “Ukrainian fascists” for fear of undermining the political legitimacy of their movement, this is a situation worth monitoring.

⁶³ Brian H. Fishman, *The Master Plan: ISIS, Al-Qaeda and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁶⁴ Mehdi Hasan, “How the White Nationalists Who Love Trump Found Inspiration in the Group that Gave Us Narendra Modi”, *The Intercept*, 21 September 2019,

<https://theintercept.com/2019/09/21/howdy-modi-trump-anders-brevik/>.

⁶⁵ Gunasingham and Ong, “Why Asia May Not be Immune to Far-Right Extremism”.

⁶⁶ Tania Branigan, “Mongolian Neo-Nazis: Anti-Chinese Sentiment Fuels Rise of Ultra-Nationalism”,

Finally, it would also be important to detect if other ultra-nationalist Asian movements – such as Buddhist extremists in Myanmar and Sri Lanka for instance⁶⁷ - network with White Supremacists in the West, adapting ideological themes and operational tactics to local contexts - in the manner of the Tsagaan Khass.⁶⁸

In sum, WST could be assessed as a limited threat to Asia – for now.

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The Guardian, 2 August 2010,
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/02/mongolia-far-right>.

⁶⁷ Amresh Gunasingham, “Buddhist Extremism in Sri Lanka and Myanmar: An Examination”, *Counter-Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Volume 11, Issue 3 (March 2019), pp. 1-6.

⁶⁸ “Are White Extremists Trying to Expand their Networks into Asia?”, *The Cipher Brief* (New York: The Soufan Center, 6 December 2019),

https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/are-white-supremacists-trying-to-expand-their-networks-into-asia.

The US-Taliban Deal and Expected US Exit from Afghanistan: Impact on South Asian Militant Landscape

Abdul Basit

Synopsis

The 1979 Russian invasion and the 2001 United States (US)’ intervention in Afghanistan strengthened global jihadism in South Asia, as a plethora of local and regional jihadists lent their support to Al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Taliban. In the wake of the ongoing Afghan peace process and the expected US exit from Afghanistan, the local and regional militant trends in South Asia are likely to be reinvigorated, while global jihadism will be weakened. Consequently, it is less likely that despite the expected chaos and volatility, a post-US Afghanistan would once again become the epicentre of global jihadism. Arguably, the absence of a big enemy like Russia and the US will keep global jihadists away from the Afghan theatre, barring a handful of AQ remnants and a few supporters

*and fighters of the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK)*¹.

Introduction

The US-Taliban peace deal signed in late February 2020 to bring the 19-year old war to a negotiated settlement, seems to be floundering as violence has returned to the Afghan battlespace.² Following the unclaimed brutal attack on Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi hospital, a Médecins Sans Frontières-run maternity clinic,³ and a funeral in eastern Nangarhar province,⁴ President Ashraf Ghani ordered the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to switch from defensive to offensive mode.⁵

To initiate the intra-Afghan negotiations, the Afghan government is sticking to its demand of a ceasefire,⁶ while the Taliban are not

¹The fight against the US has kept the Taliban’s organisational coherence intact. This unity and discipline will be tested with the possible US exit from Afghanistan. A recent UN report has identified three types of divisions within the Taliban movement: a) between the military and political commissions over the question of intra-Afghan peace talks, b) between the pro and anti-Al-Qaeda Taliban factions over the question of severing linking with the transnational militant group, and c) the Qatar political office seems split between the supporters of moderate Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradr and the followers of the hardliner Maulvi Muhammad Abbas Stanakzai. For details see, “Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,” *United Nations Security Council*, May 2020, <https://www.undocs.org/S/2020/415>.

² Jack Detsch, Robbie Gramer and Dan Haverty, “Is Afghan Peace Deal Dead on Arrival?” *Foreign Policy*, May 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/14/afghanistan-peace-deal-dead-arrival-trump-taliban-attacks/>.

³ Flora Drury, “Afghan maternity ward attackers came to kill the mothers,” *BBC News*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/amp/world-asia-52673563>.

⁴ “Afghanistan: Deadly suicide attack targets funeral in Nangarhar,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/afghanista>

[n-deadly-suicide-attack-targets-funeral-nangarhar-200512081739828.html](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-security/afghan-president-orders-troops-to-switch-to-offensive-stance-after-attacks-idUSKBN22O2CN/).

⁵ “Afghan president orders troops to switch to offensive stance after attacks,” *Reuters*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-security/afghan-president-orders-troops-to-switch-to-offensive-stance-after-attacks-idUSKBN22O2CN/>.

⁶ “Khalilzad Urges Taliban to Agree to Ceasefire,” *Tolo News*, April 26, 2020, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/khalilzad-urges-taliban-agree-ceasefire>; In an announcement on May 30, Abdullah Abdullah, head of the High Council for National Reconciliation said that Kabul was ready to hold talks with the Taliban at any moment. For details see, “Afghanistan’s Abdullah says ready for Taliban talks at any time,” *Al-Jazeera*, May 30, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/afghanista_n-abdullah-ready-taliban-talks-time-20053011207538.html; However, the Taliban insisted on the release of 5,000 prisoners to start negotiations. The spokesman of Taliban’s political office Suhail Shaheen mentioned in a tweet that so far 2,284 prisoners have been released. For details see “So far, a total of 2284 prisoners of the Islamic Emirate have been released,” *Twitter*, May 31, 2020, <https://twitter.com/suhailshaheen1/status/1267113409872609283>.

budging from their pre-condition of 5,000 Taliban prisoners being released.⁷ Following the three-day Eid truce announced by the Taliban⁸ and the subsequent release of 900 Taliban prisoners by the Afghan government⁹ as well as the political accord between Ghani and his rival Dr Abdullah Abdullah, which mandates the latter to spearhead the negotiations, hopes of kickstarting the peace process have been revived.¹⁰ At any rate, any outcome of the Afghan peace process (positive or negative), will have far reaching consequences on the South Asian militant landscape.¹¹

Against this backdrop, this article will explore some implications of the US-Taliban deal and the expected US withdrawal on South Asia's militant landscape.¹² The anticipated US exit is creating a triumphant jihadist narrative, that another superpower has been defeated in Afghanistan, and has emboldened disparate jihadist movements in the region. The article will argue that the possible US withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to reinvigorate the local and regional jihadist movements in South Asia, but it would weaken global jihadism.

A plethora of local and regional militant groups, which redirected their activities from Kashmir or anti-Shia militancy to help the Taliban oust the US from Afghanistan, are likely to refocus their attention to their old agendas. Hence, Afghanistan might turn into a hub of local and regional militancy in South

⁷ "Taliban rejects Afghan government's phased release of prisoners," *Al-Jazeera*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/taliban-rejects-afghan-government-phased-release-prisoners-200311073806368.html>.

⁸ "Taliban Announces Three-Day Ceasefire for Eid," *Tolo News*, May 23, 2020, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/taliban-announces-three-day-ceasefire-eid>.

⁹ Kathy Gannon and Tameem Akhgar, "Afghan government releases hundreds of Taliban prisoners as part of peace deal with US," *New York Times*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/05/26/afghan-government-releases-hundreds-of-taliban-prisoners-as-part-of-peace-deal-with-us/>.

¹⁰ "Afghanistan: Ghani and Abdullah sign power-sharing deal," *Al-Jazeera*, May 17, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/afghanista-n-ghani-abdullah-sign-power-sharing-deal-200517105526348.html>.

¹¹ "What Will Happen if the U.S. Military Pulls Out of Afghanistan Without a Peace Deal?" *International*

Asia, but in the absence of a big enemy like Russia and the US, it is unlikely to become an epicentre of global jihadism.

This article, in the context of the US-Taliban deal, only includes South Asian jihadist groups in the discussion. Non-jihadist groups engaged in insurgencies, political violence and other forms of religious extremism in South Asia are beyond the scope of this article. It is equally important to point out that though jihadist groups can be differentiated, on the basis of their declared operational and ideological interests, as local, regional and global groups, on the ground, these lines are quite blurred. Finally, it is important to highlight that the arguments laid out in this article will be reversed, if the US (for any reason) revisits its decision to exit Afghanistan. Likewise, if the Taliban movement splinters as a result of differences between the pro-talk and pro-fight elements, it can boost global jihadism, and more specifically the Islamic State (IS). The demotion and replacement of hardline Taliban commander Sadar Ibrahim with Mullah Yaqoob, the son of Taliban's founding leader Mullah Omar, as head of the military wing points to existing divisions within the Taliban leadership ahead of expected peace talks.¹³

This article has relied on interviews of terrorism experts in South Asia and consulted IS' weekly newsletter *Al-Naba* and *Voice of Jihad*, AQ's three-page statement congratulating the Taliban on their victory in Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Sub-

¹² *Crisis Group*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/what-will-happen-if-us-military-pulls-out-afghanistan-without-peace-deal>.

¹³ President Donald Trump is keen to bring home the US troops before the election in November, this year. For details, see Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Julian E. Barnes, "Trump Wants Troops in Afghanistan Home by Election Day. The Pentagon Is Drawing Up Plans," *New York Times*, May 26, 2020.

¹⁴ Tahir Khan, "Mullah Omar's eldest son takes control of Taliban's military wing," *Arab News*, May 10, 2020,

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1672716/world>; It is also being speculated that some top Taliban leaders, including supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada and his deputy and head of the Haqqani Network Sirajuddin, have contracted the coronavirus, leaving Yaqoob as the acting commander, for details see, Lynne O'donnell and Mirwais Khan, "Taliban Leadership in Disarray on Verge of Peace Talks," *Foreign Policy*, May 29, 2020,

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/29/taliban-leadership-disarray-coronavirus-covid-peace-talks/>.

continent (AQIS)' monthly magazine *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad*. The paper has also utilised published primary and secondary sources such as media reporting, policy reports and expert commentary on the subject. Divided in three sections, it first looks at the nature and composition of the South Asian militant landscape. Then, the article examines how the US-Taliban deal is creating a triumphant jihadist narrative in South Asia and why it is likely to reinvigorate local and regional jihadism in the region. Finally, the article explores why the deal is likely to weaken global jihadism in South Asia.

Nature and Composition of South Asian Militant Landscape

The South Asian militant landscape is chaotic, divisive and complicated, with a highly competitive operational environment.¹⁴ It is also an overcrowded space where militant groups of various persuasions operate. The region has the second highest concentration of militant groups in the world after the Middle East.¹⁵ In the last four decades, these groups have cooperated and competed against each other.

Generally, four types of militant groups operate in South Asia. First, country-focused jihadist outfits such as the Afghan Taliban, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Indian Mujahideen (IM) and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Second, sectarian extremist outfits like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Jandullah and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). These are hybrid groups because they not only fall in the local and regional categories, but they have also coalesced with AQ and IS. Third, regional militant

organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) et al. Fourth, global entities like AQ and its regional affiliate AQIS as well as IS' official branches in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

Historically, AQ has dominated the South Asian jihadist landscape.¹⁶ The region is AQ's birthplace.¹⁷ Most of the groups operating in the region respect AQ as the vanguard of the jihadist movement in the region and the world.¹⁸ In the 1990s, these groups trained in Afghanistan in AQ-operated camps and signed Osama bin Laden's Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders. However, the advent of IS challenged AQ's ideological supremacy in the region as some groups gravitated towards the former.¹⁹

A Triumphant Jihadist Narrative in South Asia

In South Asia's diverse jihadist community, the Taliban's perceived victory over the US has created a triumphant jihadist narrative that after Russia, another superpower has been defeated by Afghanistan.²⁰ This narrative is likely to fuel jihadist recruitment across the region, along with reinvigorating local and regional groups which joined hands with the Taliban to push out the US from Afghanistan.²¹ Now that this mission, at least in the jihadists' view, seems accomplished, they will turn their man and fire power towards their pre-9/11 areas of focus i.e. Kashmir, anti-Shia militancy and country-focused violent activities to overthrow democracy and enact Shariah rule. Hence, there will be a regionalisation and localisation of the South Asia jihadist landscape.²²

¹⁴ Abdul Basit, "Lesson Learned from South Asia's Terrorism Troubles," *The National Interest*, April 23, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/lessons-learned-south-asias-terrorism-troubles-53867>.

¹⁵ Farhan Zahid, "Jihadism in South Asia: A militant landscape in flux," *The Middle East Institute*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/jihadism-south-asia-militant-landscape-flux>.

¹⁶ Anne Stenersen, "Al-Qa'ida's Comeback in Afghanistan and its Implications," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 9, Issue 6, (September 2016), pp. 21-27, https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CTC-SENTINEL_Vol9Iss93.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Farhan Zahid, "Al-Qaeda's Future in Pakistan Amid the Rise of Islamic State," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. XII, Issue 20, (October 2014), pp. 5-7,

https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TerrorismMonitorVol12Issue20_02.pdf?x39073.

¹⁹ Katahrine Houreld, "Islamic State seen overtaking al Qaeda in South Asia social media war," *Reuters*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-militants/islamic-state-seen-overtaking-al-qaeda-in-south-asia-social-media-war-idUSKBN0OZ0ZI20150619>.

²⁰ Author interview with Javed Rana, a Pakistan-based journalist who regularly covers Afghanistan, May 10, 2020.

²¹ Author interview with Farhan Zahid, a Pakistan-based researcher working on terrorism and political violence in South Asia, May 8, 2020.

²² Author interview with Raffaello Pantucci, Senior Visiting Fellow International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam

Following the US-Taliban deal, AQ's general command issued a three-page statement in March lauding the Taliban's "great victory."²³ The statement also mentions founder and supreme leader of the Taliban Mullah Omar's message, who said, "Allah has promised us victory, and Bush has promised us defeat. The world will see which of these promises will be fulfilled."²⁴ Similarly, AQIS has published a special issue of its monthly Urdu language magazine *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad* in March, congratulating the Taliban for "defeating" the US.²⁵ More importantly, AQIS has changed the name of its magazine from *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad* (Voice of Afghan Jihad) to *Nawa-e-Ghazwa Hind* (Voice of the Great Indian Battle) which indicates that with the expected US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the future focus of the group will be on India and Kashmir.²⁶

Likewise, an Uzbek militant group, Katibat Imam al Bukhari (KIB), which operates both in Syria and Afghanistan, has also felicitated the Taliban on their apparent victory in Afghanistan.²⁷ Also, internal discussions of various Kashmiri militant groups seem to be inspired by the perceived Taliban victory. Such groups have argued that if the Taliban can defeat the US in Afghanistan, they can do the same against India in Kashmir.²⁸

School of International Studies, Singapore. May 8, 2020.

²³ Thomas Joscelyn, "Al-Qaeda Lauds Taliban's Great 'Victory' Over America and Allies," *Long War Journal*, March 13, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/03/al-qaeda-lauds-talibans-great-victory-over-america-and-allies.php>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "A New World is Emerging as the Old Tyrants are Dying," *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad*, March 2020, pp.1-3, <https://www.nawaighazwaehind.com/?p=1601>

²⁶ "Ghazwa-e-Hind: The Harbinger of Islam's Dominance in the Indian sub-continent and the Whole World," *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad*, March 2020, p. 8, <https://www.nawaighazwaehind.com/?p=1601>

²⁷ Caleb Weiss, "Uzbek jihadist group congratulates Taliban for 'victory' in Afghanistan," *Long War Journal*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/03/uzbek-jihadist-group-congratulates-taliban-for-victory-in-afghanistan.php>

²⁸ Author interview with Sudha Ramchandran, independent political and security analyst in Bangalore, India, May 16, 2020.

²⁹ Asad Hashim, "Exclusive: Pakistani Taliban down but not out, says ex-spokesman," *Al-Jazeera*, April 4, 2020,

Adjacent to the above-mentioned congratulatory messaging, some organisational realignment and shift in geographical focus is already underway. For instance, in a recent interview with Al-Jazeera, the former TTP spokesman Ihsanullah Ihsan hinted at the possibility of cooperation between TTP and ISK.²⁹ Likewise, in Indian Kashmir, various local militant groups have formed an umbrella organisation, the Resistance Front (TRF), to combine their manpower and resources against the Indian security forces.³⁰ This group has claimed several attacks in Kashmir in recent months.³¹ In April, ANDSFs discovered six training camps of JeM between Khost and Jalalabad where over 400 militants have been trained and currently they are fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan.³² Following the Indian government's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the country's Constitution, which has stripped the significant autonomy enjoyed by Kashmir for several decades, resentment and anger in the area has heightened. If militant groups channel this anger and grievances effectively, militancy is likely to increase.³³

Contrary to this congratulatory messaging, IS in its weekly newsletter, *Al-Naba*, mentions that the US has been defeated in Wilayah

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/exclusive-ehsanullah-ehsan-pakistan-taliban-spokesman-200403075526508.html>; Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "On the Taliban, Pakistan, and Islamic State: An Interview With the Former TTP Spokesman," *The Diplomat*, April 20, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/on-the-taliban-pakistan-and-islamic-state-an-interview-with-the-former-ttp-spokesman/>

³⁰ Devesh K. Pandey, "New outfit with suspected LeT link comes under scanner," *The Hindu*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/new-outfit-with-suspected-le-link-comes-under-scanner/article31302508.ece>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Shishir Gupta, "Next wave of 400 Jaish terrorists for Kashmir could be from its Afghan camps," *Hindustan Times*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/next-wave-of-400-jaish-terrorists-for-kashmir-could-be-from-its-afghan-camps/story-MUJTQWV4LtMC7nLHKVRFL.html>

³³ Author interview with Raffaello Pantucci, Senior Visiting Fellow International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore. May 8, 2020.

Khorasan but “Islam has not yet won.”³⁴ IS upholds that this victory is not because of the Taliban who are termed as “mushrik” (hypocrites), but due to America’s inability to conclude the war in Afghanistan.³⁵ In late May, a similar message was echoed by the IS spokesperson Abu Hamza al-Qurashi in an audio message published by group’s media arm, Al-Furqan media.³⁶ The editorial further notes, “Taliban’s control of Afghanistan will not bring Islamic rule until they repent to Allah.”³⁷ In another publication aimed at a South Asian audience, Voice of Hind, IS has questioned the very notion of victory maintaining that winning or losing a piece of land from “kuffar” (infidels) is not victory. Rather, victory is to steadfastly follow “Deen” (Islam) while facing difficulties and challenges.³⁸

Localisation and Regionalisation of South Asian Jihadism

In the current scenario, the lines between regional and global militants in South Asia have become quite blurred with the emergence of AQIS and ISK.³⁹ Both these entities are branches of AQ and IS but other than (global) branding, their leaders and membership are local. Furthermore, the ideological narratives of AQIS and ISK (Ghazwa-e-Hind) focus on South Asian local and regional conflicts.⁴⁰ Besides, over the last

few years, AQ has glocalised its jihadist strategy by embedding its fighters within local militant movements.⁴¹ Also, AQ in South Asia is following a policy of strategic patience and de-emphasises violence to avoid attention. This glocalisation in and of itself has also strengthened regional and local trends of militancy.⁴²

Most often, the AQIS-ISK fighting, tit-for-tat propaganda warfare and ideological blame games, have overshadowed local and regional struggles as well as drained their manpower and financial resources.⁴³ To avoid this intra-jihadist fighting, local and regional groups are likely to tread an independent path and stay away from getting sucked into this AQIS-ISK enmity.⁴⁴ Two cases in point are TTP and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). When IMU defected from AQ to IS,⁴⁵ its then leader Usman Ghazi was assassinated by the Taliban and later the group split between pro-AQ and pro-IS factions.⁴⁶ A similar thing happened to TTP which has splintered into several factions after a few factions within the group gravitated towards ISK.⁴⁷ In an overall sense, local groups which joined ISK and AQIS in South Asia have weakened.

Moreover, one lesson that can be gleaned from the Taliban’s claimed victory in Afghanistan for local and regional South Asian

³⁴ “America Has Been Defeated but Islam Has Not Yet Won,” *Al-Naba*, April 2, 2020, p.3, https://jihadology.net/wp-content/uploads/_pda/2020/04/The-Islamic-State-al-Nabā'-Newsletter-228.pdf

³⁵ “Prerequisites for victory,” *Voice of Hind*, March 2020, pp. 3-6.

³⁶ “And the Disbelievers Will Know Who Gets the Good End?” (English Translation of Abu Hamza al-Qaurashi’s audio statement), *Ad-dawlāh al-islamiyyah*, (Pro-IS Rocket Chat Group), June 1, 2020, p.6; Jeff Seldin, “Islamic State Calls Coronavirus Pandemic a Plague of Biblical Proportions,” *Voice of America*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/islamic-state-calls-coronavirus-pandemic-plague-biblical-proportions>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Taliban from Jihad to Apostasy,” *Voice of Hind*, March 2020, p.10.

³⁹ Author interview with Arabinda Acharya, Associate Professor Homeland Security Program, Rabadan Academy, United Arab Emirates, May 18, 2020.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ John A. Turner, *Religious Ideology and Roots of the Global Jihad*, (New York: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 123-139.

⁴² Don Rassler, “Al-Qaeda in Pakistan: A Metric Problem?” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 10, issue 8, (September 2017), pp. 13-20, <https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaida-in-pakistan-a-metric-problem/>.

⁴³ Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Damon Mehl, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 8, Issue 6, (June 2015), pp. 11-14, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-movement-of-uzbekistan-opens-a-door-to-the-islamic-state/>.

⁴⁶ Bruce Pannier, “The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled,” *Radio Free Europe*, November 28, 2015, <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/islamic-movement-uzbekistan-comes-unraveled/27395405.html>;

Presently, IMU has two factions. The pro-AQ faction is Katibat Imam Al-Bukhari, which has a presence in Syria and Afghanistan. The pro-IS faction operates in the northern parts of Afghanistan.

⁴⁷ “Pakistani Taliban splinter group splits further over tactics,” *AP News*, November 12, 2017, <https://apnews.com/339c89be9c49455f8436c68cb2292a51/Pakistani-Taliban-splinter-group-splits-further-over-tactics>.

militant groups, is that if a group's goals are limited and realistic, the enemy is clearly defined, and there is a coherent organisational structure and strategy, the chances of victory are greater.⁴⁸ Unlike AQ and IS, which have been decimated by the US, the Taliban's Afghan-centric approach proved effective.⁴⁹ Keeping this in view, local and regional South Asian militant movements, are likely to stay away from AQ and IS because not only would it dilute their local causes, but it will also provide a convenient pretext to state authorities to crackdown on indigenous movements, framing them as transnational terrorists.⁵⁰ So, the local groups are likely to follow the successful local model rather than global jihadism, which seems to be failing in the South Asian context.⁵¹

Global Jihadism is Likely to Be Weakened

Prior to the emergence of IS in Iraq and Syria in 2014, Afghanistan was the main trendsetter of global jihadism in the world. Since the 1980s, aspiring jihadists from around the world travelled to Afghanistan for training and participation in jihadism. Moreover, most of the jihadist movements around the world emanated from the Afghan Jihad. However, with the pending US departure from Afghanistan, the above-mentioned trends are unlikely to be replicated. In the absence of the US, global jihadists are unlikely to return to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is unlikely to become the epicentre of global jihadism for the following four reasons.

First, as mentioned above, a Russia or US like big enemy would be missing from the equation in a post-US Afghanistan. So, jihadists from the Middle East, Africa and the rest of the world will not return to Afghanistan barring a handful of hardened supporters and fighters of IS. Already the unrest in the Middle East and Africa provides enough organisational platforms and conflicts for the jihadists from

these regions, such that they are less likely to travel to Afghanistan. The emotive appeal of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa for jihadists from these regions will be greater than the attraction of local and regional South Asian conflicts. A Yemeni is more likely to fight in Yemen compared to wanting to travel and fight in Kashmir and vice versa.

Second, the Afghan Taliban, notwithstanding their claimed victory, and in-line with their Afghan-centric approach, could discourage foreign jihadists from returning to Afghanistan. This is because a return of foreign jihadists will potentially weaken the Taliban's territorial control and dent their image. Not allowing Afghanistan's soil to be used for attacks against the US and its allies is one of the key conditions of the US-Taliban deal. So, to keep their territorial control and enhance their chances of forming the government in Afghanistan in collusion with other Afghan political groups, the Taliban may try to keep foreign jihadists out of Afghanistan.⁵²

Third, AQ has been reduced to a shadow of its former self and is incapable of attracting foreign jihadists to Afghanistan. Moreover, AQIS since its formation has exclusively focused on local and regional issues in South Asia employing local leaders and fighters.⁵³

At the same time, ISK would remain involved in anti-Shia militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Almost all anti-Shia Sunni extremist groups such as Jandullah, LeJ and LJA have pledged allegiance to IS. These outfits will continue their anti-Shia militancy from ISK's platform.⁵⁴ ISK may continue to operate in Balochistan's areas close to Iran's border. This positioning would also allow ISK to target Chinese nationals involved in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, the

⁴⁸ Author interview with Muhammad Feyyaz, a PhD scholar at Queen's University, Belfast working on terrorism in Pakistan, May 18, 2020.

⁴⁹ Author interview with Kabir Taneja, Fellow with the Strategic Studies programme, the Observer Research Foundation, India, on May 20, 2020.

⁵⁰ Author interview with Syed Abdullah, researcher of terrorism and political violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan with a particular focus on Al-Qaeda, May 16, 2020.

⁵¹ Author interview Muhammad Sinan, Senior Analyst International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, May 18, 2020.

⁵² Author interview with Muhammad Feyyaz.

⁵³ Author interview with Farhan Zahid.

⁵⁴ Author interview with Khawaja Khalid Farooq, former Inspector General of Punjab police and ex-National Coordination of Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority, May 18, 2020.

flagship infrastructure project of China's Belt and Road Initiative.⁵⁵

Finally, the leadership crisis within AQ and ISK will also bar them from creating space for their agendas in the South Asian militant landscape. In recent years, AQIS Asim Umar⁵⁶ and AQ's heir apparent Hamza Bin Laden have been killed in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ Likewise, ISK's emir Abdullah Orakzai aka Sheikh Aslam Farouqi⁵⁸ and Zai-ul-Haq aka Sheikh Omar Khorasani who was the group's leader for South Asia and Far East have been arrested by ANDSFs.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Afghanistan's peace process is floundering sooner than expected. Yet, the US remains committed to the troop withdrawal timeline agreed with the Taliban in the Doha agreement. This alleviates any pressure on the Taliban to de-escalate violence as demanded by the Afghan government and continuously shapes the Taliban's victory narrative. This continuing violence and victory narrative entail far-reaching security implications for South Asia.

Alongside the intra-Afghan peace process, a regional dialogue among Afghanistan's regional stakeholders (India, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, among others) is also needed to come to some kind of consensus on a policy of non-interference in Afghanistan as well as how to join forces to deny any space or opportunities to non-state violent actors.

Notwithstanding India-Pakistan adversarial relations, South Asian countries will have to form a regional counter-terrorism mechanism to address different forms of terrorism and political violence in the region which at times cuts across the states.

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⁵⁵ Author interview with Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Research Fellow at Deakin University, Australia, May 12, 2020.

⁵⁶ "Asim Umar: Al-Qaeda's South Asia chief killed in Afghanistan," BBC News, October 8, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49970353>.

⁵⁷ "Hamza Bin Laden: Trump confirms al-Qaeda leader's son is dead," BBC News, September 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49701132>.

⁵⁸ "Afghan forces announce arrest of local ISIL leader," Al-Jazeera, April 5, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/afghan-forces-announce-arrest-local-isil-leader-200404171431866.html>.

⁵⁹ "IS regional leader Sheikh Khorasani arrested in Afghanistan," BBC News, May 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52623291>.

Hindutva Violence in India: Trends and Implications

Sudha Ramachandran

Synopsis

In recent years, anti-Muslim violence in India has increased alarmingly. Underlying this violence is the Hindutva ideology, which aims at making secular India a Hindu state. The aggressive pursuit of a hardline Hindu agenda by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its fraternal organisations is deepening the insecurities of India's religious minorities, especially Muslims. At the same time, the growing influence of Hindutva groups has implications for other religious groups, including Hindus. With their repeated and robust assaults on India's secularism, Hindutva radicals are not only weakening the idea of India but the security of all its people.

Introduction

On February 23, violent Hindu mobs attacked Muslims with stones, sticks and iron rods in northeast Delhi. Before long, Muslim youth retaliated and over the next three days entire neighbourhoods in northeast Delhi were convulsed in Hindu-Muslim violence in which the latter suffered disproportionately. Most of the 53 people killed and the 200 injured were Muslim and, while houses and shops of members of both communities were looted and torched, destruction in Muslim neighbourhoods was greater.¹

Muslims account for roughly 14 percent of India's 1.3-billion population. For decades, they have been at the receiving end of

structural, cultural and direct violence.² Such violence has grown manifold since May 2014, when the BJP was voted to power and then re-elected with a larger majority in May 2019. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cities bearing Islamic names are being renamed.³ History textbooks are being re-written to legitimise Hindu nationalist ideology; text that contradicts this is being deleted.⁴ Muslims are being accused of waging a 'corona-jihad' in India, of spreading the coronavirus deliberately among Indians.⁵ Scores of Muslims have been lynched to death and laws that go against India's secular Constitution have been enacted. The violence in northeast Delhi is therefore part of a continuum of violence that is being unleashed against India's largest religious minority.

This article explores anti-Muslim violence in India since 2014. At the forefront of this violence is the Sangh Parivar, a conglomerate of Hindu nationalist organisations that includes the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), its ideological fount, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), its global forum and the Bajrang Dal, its foot soldiers, among others. The article begins by examining the Hindutva ideology, which drives the Parivar's violence against Muslims and then goes on to explore how the BJP is furthering its ideological agenda of creating a Hindu *Rashtra* (i.e. state). Finally, the article explores the implications of Hindutva violence for India. The article draws on primary and secondary sources. In addition to examining

¹ "Explainer: What do we know about the communal violence that left 53 dead in Delhi in February 2020?" *Scroll*, March 6, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/955251/explainer-what-do-we-know-about-the-communal-violence-that-left-47-dead-in-delhi-in-february-2020>.

² Taha Abdul Rauf, "Violence Inflicted on Muslims: Direct, Cultural and Structural," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46, No. 23, June 4, 2011, pp. 69-76.

³ Apoorvanand, "The reason for renaming places," *The Hindu*, November 13, 2018,

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-reason-for-renaming-places/article25478180.ece>.

⁴ Romila Thapar, "They Peddle Myths and Call It History," *New York Times*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/opinion/india-elections-modi-history.html>.

⁵ "Tablighi event: Shobha smells 'Corona jihad,'" *The Hindu*, April 4, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/tablighi-event-shobha-smells-corona-jihad/article31259288.ece>.

the writings of key Hindutva ideologues, it explores articles reproduced in Hindutva publications like *Organiser*, the RSS' official voice, to gain an understanding of the Hindutva ideology and key agenda. The article has also drawn on an interview with a former member of the RSS published in a news magazine. Secondary sources consulted include published books and articles, which provide ground insights especially relating to incidents of violence.

Violent Ideology

Hindutva is not Hinduism and vice versa. Hindutva is a modern political ideology that views India as a Hindu nation and defines Indian culture in terms of Hindu cultural values. Its goal is to make India a Hindu state. In his 1923 treatise, Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar said that Hindus are the only true Indians as their *pitrabhū* (fatherland) and *punyabhū* (holy land) are in India. Muslims and Christians, however, could not be considered Indian as their holy lands were not in India but in "far off Arabia or Palestine."⁶ Savarkar's ideological successor, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, who was one of the founders of the RSS said that the "foreign races" i.e. Muslims and Christians in India "must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion ... must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or ... stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights."⁷

⁶ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva* (New Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan, 1923), p.113.

⁷ Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939), pp.47-48.

⁸ "Hindutva: The Growth of Violent Hindu Nationalism," *Outlook*, November 20, 2002, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/hindutva-the-growth-of-violent-hindu-nationalism/217969>.

⁹ Proponents of Hindutva maintain that their violence is in self-defence i.e. to protect Hindu beliefs and culture from the centuries-old assault by 'foreigners' i.e. Muslim invaders and Christian colonial rulers. *Ibid*. A former member of the RSS says that "there is much respect for violence" in the organisations. Members are taught that "non-violence is cowardly and it is due to this cowardliness that we [India] stayed enslaved for thousands of years." They are taught to engage in tit-for-tat violence. Sushil Kumar, "We were told non-violence is cowardly: Bhanwar

Based on Hindu supremacism and deeply exclusionist and discriminatory in outlook, Hindutva is therefore a violent ideology.⁸ Adding to the violence of its core beliefs is its justification of the use of violence for achieving its goal of establishing a Hindu state.⁹ For decades, the quasi-militaristic RSS has trained its uniformed cadres at daily early morning drills in plying *lathis* (bamboo batons). The lethality of weapons that Sangh Parivar activists use in organised violence targeting Muslims has grown over the decades.¹⁰

Rise of the Sangh Parivar

Hindutva organisations remained on the periphery of Indian politics for several decades and it was only with the Ramjanmabhoomi movement gathering momentum in the 1980s that they began moving to the political centre-stage. Spearheaded by the VHP, the Ramjanmabhoomi movement pledged to 'liberate' a site in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, which it argued was where Hindu deity Ram was born. It maintained that a temple that once existed there was torn down by Mughal King Babar in 1528 A.D., who built a mosque, the Babri Masjid in its place.¹¹ An aggressive campaign to mobilise mass support to (re)build a Ram temple at the site was set in motion.¹² In December 1992, the Parivar took a major step forward in this regard when Hindutva activists demolished the Babri

Meghwanshi, a Dalit activist who quit the RSS," *The Caravan*, March 14, 2020, <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/we-were-told-non-violence-is-cowardly-bhanwar-meghwanshi-a-dalit-activist-who-quit-the-rss>.

¹⁰ "VHP, Bajrang Dal Distribute Trishul in Gujarat to Fight Love Jihad," *The Quint*, June 15, 2017, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/vhp-bajrang-dal-distribute-trishul-gandhinagar-youth>.

¹¹ "Appendix: Summary of the evidence proving destruction of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi temple in 1528 AD," Vishwa Hindu Parishad, <https://vhp.org/frequently-asked-questions/ramjanmabhoomi-append/>.

¹² "1990-L.K. Advani's rath yatra: Chariot of fire," *India Today*, December 28, 2009, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20091228-1990-l.k.-advanis-rath-yatra-chariot-of-fire-741621-2009-12-24>.

Masjid.¹³ The mosque's demolition and the horrific violence it triggered across India polarised the society and politics along communal lines.¹⁴ From winning just two seats in the 1984 general election, the BJP went on to head the coalition governments at the centre in 1998, 1999, 2014 and 2019.

Even when it was on the political margins or in opposition, the BJP and its fraternal organisations would unleash violence on Muslims and to a lesser extent, Christians. In power, their violence became even more deadly as state agencies and institutions were deployed to target minorities. In February 1992, Hindutva activists led frenzied mobs in killing thousands of Muslims in the western state of Gujarat. The BJP's inaction, or the lack of official efforts to halt the attacks targeting Muslim, prompted some analysts to describe the violence as a pogrom.¹⁵

The political rise of the BJP has boosted Hindutva. Additionally, the BJP's re-election with an increasing majority in 2019 enabled it to independently form the government, unlike 2014 when it needed the support of allies. Since then, the BJP has aggressively pursued the Hindutva agenda. With the BJP in power, the Parivar constituents have shown less inhibition in unleashing violence on Muslims.¹⁶

Preparing the Ground

¹³ "Babri Masjid demolition: December 6, 1992, a day that lives in infamy," *India Today*, December 6, 2018, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/babri-masjid-demolition-anniversary-1403792-2018-12-06>.

¹⁴ Zoya Hasan, "Communal Mobilization and Changing Majority in Uttar Pradesh," *Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, in David Ludden, (ed.), *Making India Hindu*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.81-97.

¹⁵ Ashutosh Varshney, "Gujarat 2002 was independent India's first full-blooded pogrom. Delhi 1984 was a semi-pogrom," *The Print*, February 26, 2020. <https://theprint.in/opinion/gujarat-2002-was-independent-indias-first-full-blooded-pogrom-delhi-1984-was-a-semi-pogrom/371684/>.

¹⁶ This is evident, for instance, in the sharp rise in the number of attacks nation-wide over the past six years on Muslims in the name of cow protection.

¹⁷ Zaheeb Ajmal, "The Family Man: Propagating Muslim stereotypes in a run-of-the mill plot," *National Herald*, November 28, 2019, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/the-family-man-propagating-muslim-stereotypes-in-a-run-of-the-mill-plot>.

¹⁸ For instance, at an election rally in Delhi in January, Minister of State for Finance, the BJP's

Muslims have been called 'Pakistanis' and reviled as 'traitors' and 'terrorists' for decades, whether in films or the mainstream media.¹⁷ Negative stereotyping and demonisation of Muslims by BJP politicians has been instrumental in preparing the ground for violence against Muslims.¹⁸ Muslim men are often depicted as sexual predators and philanderers. This negative stereotyping has come in handy to prevent inter-faith marriages. Hindutva activists accuse Muslim men of luring "gullible" Hindu women into marriage, forcibly converting them to Islam and thus waging a 'love jihad' against Hindus.¹⁹ Violent countering of 'love jihad' is justified as it is a "dangerous game."²⁰ There have been several instances of Muslim men being beaten up, even killed, to 'save' Hindu women from their clutches²¹

The role of demonisation in mobilising mobs to unleash violence has been repeatedly underscored in the rising incidents of cow vigilantism in India. The cow is considered sacred by Hindus, who revere it as '*gau mata*' (the universal mother). Since the late 19th century, the cow has emerged as an important symbol of Hindu nationalism and has proved to be a powerful rallying point against Muslims. Muslims eat beef unlike many upper-caste Hindus. Hindutva activists justify violence against them as an act of cow protection and therefore a "sacred duty."²² Between May 2015 and December 2018,

Anurag Thakur, raised the slogan "*Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro saalon ko*," (a chant inciting assembled crowds to shoot traitors i.e. Muslims), *Scroll*, January 27, 2020, <https://scroll.in/video/951289/watch-anurag-thakur-minister-of-state-for-finance-lead-goli-maaro-saalon-ko-slogans-at-rally>. This slogan has been raised by other Parivar leaders too at public events.

¹⁹ Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar, "BJP, RSS Leaders Caught Using 'Love Jihad' Bogey to Fuel Communal Polarisation," *The Wire*, October 5, 2015, <https://thewire.in/communalism/bjp-rss-leaders-caught-using-love-jihad-bogey-to-fuel-communal-polarisation>.

²⁰ Mihir Srivastava and Raul Irani, *Love Jihad: An Open-Minded Journey into the Heart of Western Uttar Pradesh*, (New Delhi: Westland Publications, March 2020).

²¹ Tushar Dhara, "In Rajasthan, a case of love jihad cuts stereotypes of caste and party allegiances," *The Caravan*, July 26, 2019, <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/love-jihad-rajasthan-bhadarna>.

²² Mohammed Sinan Siyech and Akanksha Narain, "Beef-related Violence in India: An Expression of

Hindutva activists killed 44 people, mainly Muslims, and injured some 280 others in over 100 attacks across India.²³

Abetting Hindutva Extremists

Cow vigilantism and other violence targeting Muslims arise from Hindutva extremism.²⁴ In many attacks, there have been allegations that the police, politicians and the courts colluded to let the perpetrators off the hook.²⁵ This is the case too in major terror attacks carried out by Hindutva organisations.²⁶ Not a single Hindutva extremist outfit, including the Abhinav Bharat, which was involved in attacks on the Samjhauta Express and the Mecca Masjid in 2007 and in the 2008 Malegaon blasts, figures in India's list of proscribed organisations.²⁷

Those involved in the planning of violent attacks have even been rewarded. This is the case with Pragya Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blasts case that resulted in the death of eight people and injury to 100 others. Although she is yet to be cleared of multiple charges she faces under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the BJP gave her a ticket to contest the 2019 general election. A parliamentarian now, she was appointed to a parliamentary defence panel late last year and although the appointment was subsequently cancelled after opposition parties protested, her rise indicates the support Hindutva extremism enjoys at the highest levels of India's government.²⁸

Islamophobia," *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Vol. 4, No.2, (Spring 2018), p. 190.

²³ Iain Marlow, "Cow vigilantes killed at least 44 people in three years, report finds," *The Print*, February 20, 2019, <https://theprint.in/india/governance/cow-vigilantes-killed-at-least-44-people-in-three-years-report-finds/195450/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mohammed Iqbal, "Pehlu Khan lynching case: Rajasthan court acquits six accused," *The Hindu*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pehlu-khan-lynching-case-all-six-accused-acquitted-by-rajasthan-court/article29092863.ece>.

²⁶ "No One Killed Samjhauta Blast Victims? Aseemanand, 3 Others Walk Free 12 Years After 68 Died on Train," *News18*, March 20, 2019, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/nia-court-acquits-all-four-accused-in-samjhauta-express-blast-case-2073275.html>.

²⁷ National Investigation Agency, Government of India, Terrorist Organisations Listed in the First

Advancing the Hindutva Agenda

While Hindutva organisations have successfully polarised the society with their anti-Muslim hate campaigns and violence, progress with regard to enacting laws that undermine Muslim identity, among other things, was limited until recently as the BJP lacked the two-thirds parliamentary majority. That majority was secured with its landslide victory in the May 2019 general election. Since then, the BJP government has taken steps to change laws to take forward its Hindutva agenda.

On July 30, 2019, parliament enacted legislation criminalising 'triple talaq,' a Muslim practice of 'instant divorce.'²⁹ The new law provides legal protection to Muslim women in relation to marriage and divorce.³⁰ However, it undermines the constitutional right of Muslims to have their own personal laws, i.e. on matters related to marriage, divorce, maintenance, etc. The new law could pave the way for the BJP to push through a Uniform Civil Code (UCC), an important item on the Hindutva agenda.³¹ A UCC would serve to homogenise Indian society. It is likely that under the BJP, the proposed UCC will reflect majoritarian Hindu ideals.

In August 2019, the BJP government revoked Articles 370 of the Constitution, which provided Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with limited autonomy and Article 35A which served to preserve the demographic composition of the State.³² This has been a

Schedule of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, December 30, 2019,

<https://www.nia.gov.in/banned-terrorist-organisations.htm>.

²⁸ Siddharth Varadarajan, "Pragya Thakur: BJP's Original Sin Was to Make Her an MP," *The Wire*, November 22, 20, <https://thewire.in/politics/pragya-thakur-bjp-narendra-modi-defence-panel>.

²⁹ This is a practice which allowed a Muslim man to end a marriage by simply uttering the word *talaq* (divorce) three times in succession.

³⁰ Zakia Soman, "Triple talaq law is a step towards parity," *New Indian Express*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2019/jul/31/triple-talaq-law-is-a-step-towards-parity-2011943.html>.

³¹ "Triple talaq: Instant divorce ban draws mixed reactions in India," *Deutsche Welle*, July 31, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/triple-talaq-instant-divorce-ban-draws-mixed-reactions-in-india/a-49830803>.

³² "Article 370: What happened with Kashmir and why it matters," *BBC News*, August 6, 2019,

long-standing demand of the RSS.³³ Its revocation is seen as another step towards the Parivar's goal of establishing a Hindu state.³⁴ The revocation of these articles fully integrates J&K into the Indian Union and dilutes its distinct demographic identity. J&K is India's only Muslim-majority state.

Hindutva scored another victory in November last year, when India's Supreme Court handed the disputed Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi site in Ayodhya to Hindus for construction of a temple there.³⁵ Not only did the verdict legitimise the unlawful destruction of the Babri mosque and reward those who carried it out, but it also handed a major victory to Hindutva groups in a case where their legal claim was weak.³⁶

Likewise, the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in 2019 has shaken the sense of security among Indian Muslims. The CAA envisages fast-tracking Indian citizenship for persecuted minorities from neighbouring Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, but denies this to Muslims in these countries. Religion has never been a criterion for Indian citizenship, so far. CAA changes that and goes against India's secular Constitution. Many fear that the CAA in conjunction with government plans for a National Register of Citizens (NRC) will have devastating consequences for Indian Muslims. It could strip millions of their Indian citizenship.³⁷

Implications for India

Hindutva is putting India's secularism in peril. Unlike in the West, where the term 'secularism' means the separation of State and Church (religion), in India, it means that all religions are equal in the eyes of the law; the State has equi-respect for all religions. Although the word 'secular' was incorporated in the Constitution only in 1976, the secular principle was entrenched in the document from the start.³⁸

The Indian Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, etc. Article 25(A) states that "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion."³⁹ These constitutional rights are in grave danger.

In this regard, the experience of other South Asian countries is instructive. Unlike India, these countries imposed one religion, language or ethnicity on their population to homogenise the population. The idea of privileging one religion and language, as in the case of Pakistan, has contributed to the emergence of powerful ethnic and nationalist movements.

Disquiet simmering among Muslims has deepened in recent years. Until now, the Muslim response to the BJP's discriminatory moves was one of quiet resignation.⁴⁰ That changed in December. The enactment of the CAA brought millions of Muslims, especially

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>.

³³ G.D. Sharma, "Mookerjee Proposes, Abdullah Disposes," *Organiser*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.organiser.org//Encyc/2019/10/30/Mookejee-Proposes-Abdullah-Disposes.html>

³⁴ Purnima S. Tripathi, "RSS agenda on Kashmir in action," *Frontline*, August 19, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article29059214.ece>.

³⁵ "Ayodhya verdict | Temple at disputed site, alternative land for mosque, rules Supreme Court," *The Hindu*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ayodhya-verdict-temple-at-disputed-site-alternative-land-for-mosque-says-supreme-court/article29930961.ece>.

³⁶ Achin Vanaik, "India's Supreme Court Ruling Is Another Victory for Hindu Nationalism," *Jacobin*, November 2019, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/11/india->

[supreme-court-ruling-babri-mosque-hindu-nationalism](#).

³⁷ Ziya Us Salam, "CAB: Rooted in Hindutva Ideology," *Frontline*, December 19, 2019, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article30328365.ece>.

³⁸ Sanjay Hegde, "Secular in Spirit and in Letter," *The Hindu*, December 7, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/secularism-and-the-provision-for-it-in-the-constitution/article7955211.ece>

³⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, "Misunderstanding secularism," *Indian Express*, August 11, 2014, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/misunderstanding-secularism/>.

⁴⁰ Ipsita Chakravarty, "What explains the silence among Muslim communities on the Ayodhya judgment?" *Scroll*, November 14, 2019, <https://scroll.in/article/943510/what-explains-the-silence-among-muslim-communities-on-the-ayodhya-judgment>.

women, out on the streets of India's cities. Secular liberals of other communities joined the protests against the move.⁴¹

The use of force to disperse political protests could push Muslims to choose non-political means. There is a danger of Muslim anger erupting into violence. It could prompt alienated youth to turn to arms. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the anti-Muslim violence that followed provoked a string of terror attacks in Mumbai. Hundreds of Muslim youth joined militant groups in the 1990s. The anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat a decade later was a similar trigger to Muslim radicalisation and the proliferation of extremist groups in India during the 2000s. The current upsurge in Hindutva violence could fuel a new wave of Islamist radicalism.⁴²

Islamist and global jihadist groups are eyeing potential recruits among the angry Muslim masses. In late February, the Islamic State's Indian affiliate, Wilayat-al-Hind, carried an image of a Muslim man being beaten up by Hindu mobs in Delhi on the cover page of the first issue of its mouthpiece, *Voice of Hind*. In the lead article, it pointed out that Indian Muslims are "on the verge of being stripped" of their "last shred of dignity" and called on them to retaliate.⁴³ The Wilayat-al-Hind went further in the March issue of *Voice of Hind* and called on Muslims to target police who have been deployed on the streets to enforce the Covid-19 lockdown. It said: "Use this opportunity to strike them with a sword or a knife or even a rope is enough to stop their breath, fill the streets with their blood."⁴⁴

Conclusion

The Hindutva ideology is an important source of violence in India. It is driving the anti-Muslim violence in the country, which has assumed grave proportions in recent years. The anti-Muslim violence has manifested itself not only in rising physical attacks on Muslims but in other insidious and no-less dangerous ways: virulent hate speech and demonisation of Muslims and their way of life. Equally dire are

ongoing moves on the legislative front that are undermining Muslim rights and their identity and could even strip millions of Muslims of their citizenship. The rapid inroads that Hindutva is making into India's Constitution, the manner in which it is prejudicing the outlook of people and colouring social interaction and politics should concern not just Muslims or Christians but Hindus as well.

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⁴¹ Mahtab Alam, "CAA: The Peaceful Protests by Muslims That No One Is Talking About," *The Wire*, December 29, 2019, <https://thewire.in/rights/caa-peaceful-protests-muslims>.

⁴² Sudha Ramachandran, "India: Fanning the Flames of Extremism and Terror at Home," *Terrorism Monitor*, January 15, 2020,

<https://jamestown.org/program/india-fanning-the-flames-of-extremism-and-terror-at-home/>.

⁴³ "So where are you going?" *Voice of Hind*, March 2020, p.6.

⁴⁴ "Corona Virus," *Voice of Hind*, March 2020, p.7.

Women in Jihad: An Indonesian Context

Unaesah Rahmah

Synopsis

In pro-IS networks around Indonesia, females have taken on frontline roles, including as suicide bombers, combatants, and knife-attackers. While their deployment as suicide attackers has been most commonly observed, this article examines various case studies, to shed light on the interplay of gender dynamics inherent in these radical groups. For counter-terrorism agencies, such observations can offer lessons on the gendered nuances of female participation in the jihadist cause in Indonesia, and provide a more targeted counter-terrorism strategy for female radicals.

Introduction

Since the emergence of the Islamic State (IS), a substantial body of research has gone into examining the evolving role of women in Indonesian terrorist networks. For example, some scholars have observed, compared with the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) generation of terrorists, women in IS circles today have taken on more active roles, including as fundraisers, recruiters, ideological propagators, and in logistical support.¹

When the first (would-be) female suicide bomber emerged in Indonesia in 2016, security experts came out to argue that pro-IS women also had greater self-agency.² This claim refuted earlier perceptions that women jihadists did not have free will and were usually coerced into joining terrorist groups,

either by their husbands or fathers. Other scholars have reasoned that women, like their male counterparts, have multiple motivations for joining terrorist organisations, prompted by a mix of personal crises, socioeconomic and political grievances, as well as religious seeking reasons.³

This article examines case studies⁴ of female violent actors in Indonesia, to throw a spotlight on their motivations and individual experiences as part of a terrorist network. It is argued that despite the role of women in violent extremist groups shifting from supporter to initiator and now perpetrator, they do not enjoy equal standing with men, given the patriarchal values that still ground pro-IS networks. From an operational perspective, dependence on men for guidance and know-how to execute attacks also still prevails. Around Southeast Asia, Indonesian female perpetrators have not only participated in attacks in Indonesia, but also in neighbouring Philippines.

Women as Perpetrators of Violence

The Suicide Bomber

Female suicide bombers in Indonesia have come in two forms: the solo attacker and those acting as part of family networks. So far, only women involved in family-based cells have successfully executed mass-casualty attacks. In several other instances, law enforcement agencies have largely succeeded in foiling attack plots involving female attackers.

Female Supporters of the Islamic State," Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 30, No. 6, pp. 890-910.

⁴ Some of the information is based on the court documents related to Dian Yuli Novi (2016), Ika Puspita Sari (2016), Jumiatiun alias Umi Delima (2016), Anggi Indah Kusuma (2017), Dita Siska Millenia (2018), Siska Nur Azizah (2018), and some of JAD East Java Members (2018).

¹ V. Arianti and Nur Azlin Yasin, "Women's Proactive Roles in Jihadism in Southeast Asia," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, Vol.8, Issue 5, May 2016, pp. 9-13.

² "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists," *IPAC Report*, No. 35, January 31, 2017.

³ Nava Nuraniyah, "Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalization of Indonesian

In December 2016, Dian Yuli Novi became the country's first known (would-be) female suicide attacker after plotting to bomb Jakarta's presidential palace. Her plan was foiled, however, when police caught wind of it and arrested her a day prior. A few days after Dian's arrest, another woman, Ika Puspita Sari, was apprehended for plotting another suicide bombing in the tourist island of Bali.⁵

Two years later, in May 2018, three family-based suicide attacks, in which women and children participated, struck Surabaya and Sidoarjo. The Surabaya attack, which claimed several dozen lives, is still one of the deadliest terrorist incidents in the country. Two families linked to Jemaah Anshar Daulah (JAD), a local pro-IS group, orchestrated the series of coordinated blasts that targeted three churches and the Surabaya police headquarters. The blast in Sidoarjo, in contrast, was largely a failed attack. The bomb had exploded prematurely, only killing the family attackers, comprising a husband, his wife, and their child.⁶

In 2019, the trend of family-based suicide attacks continued in Indonesia. Asmar Husain, alias Abu Hamzah, a pro-IS individual based in Sibolga, North Sumatra, was arrested by police and accused of planning several suicide attacks involving his wife, Solimah, and two other women whom he planned to marry. After arresting Hamzah, authorities proceeded to his home, where a standoff ensued. Refusing to surrender, his wife Solimah detonated herself, along with her child.⁷ The bomb also destroyed 155 houses nearby.⁸

In the same year, an Indonesian husband and wife duo carried out the Jolo church bombings in the Philippines, which killed 23 people and

wounded 95 others.⁹ To date, the Jolo attack is the most lethal suicide attack involving an Indonesian female perpetrator. The other attacks involving women in Surabaya, Sidoarjo and Sibolga caused far fewer fatal casualties.

A common thread running through these incidents is that although women took on frontline roles, they were not involved in the attack preparation or selection of targets - functions which resided with their male counterparts. Dian, the 2016 Jakarta Palace attacker, for example, had been radicalised online and vowed to become a suicide bomber for IS. While showing intent, she also took instruction from other conspirators, including her husband Nur Solikhin. Prior to their marriage, Solikhin, an IS Supporter, had been instructed by Bahrun Naim, a prominent Indonesian IS fighter then based in Syria, to find a "bride" for a suicide attack.¹⁰

In subsequent media interviews, Dian revealed that despite wanting to become a suicide attacker, she still adhered to the gender roles prescribed by IS. In an interview with New Naratif, she reasoned that the obligation for jihad still falls primarily with men, and her desire to perform jihad did not mean she sought gender equality. In its propaganda messaging, IS has increasingly encouraged women to take on front-line roles, which analysts say is partly motivated by a desire to shame reticent male fighters into action. Viewed from this lens, female attackers still view the primary responsibility for violent jihad as residing with men, and believe they are only permitted to step into such roles when the men are unwilling or unable to do so.¹¹

Operationally, females also tend to leave key decision-making to the men. For example,

⁵ "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists," Op.Cit.

⁶ Sidney Jones, "Surabaya and the ISIS Family," *The Interpreter*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/surabaya-and-isis-family>.

⁷ "The Ongoing Problem of Pro-ISIS Cells in Indonesia," *IPAC Report*, No. 56, April 29, 2019, pp. 9-11.

⁸ Lil Askar Monza, "BNPT dan PUPR akan Tangani Rumah Rusak Akibat Ledakan Bom Sibolga," *Tempo.co*, March 17, 2019, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1186084/bnpt-dan-pupr-akan-tangani-rumah-rusak-akibat-ledakan-bom-sibolga/full&view=ok>

⁹ Ana P. Santos, "Who Were the Indonesian Husband and Wife Behind Jolo Bombing?," *Pulitzer Centre*, December 27, 2019, <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/who-were-indonesian-husband-and-wife-behind-jolo-bombing>

¹⁰ "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists," Op.Cit.

¹¹ As written in the Manifesto al-Khansa, women can engage in combative jihad when: the enemy is attacking their country; there are not enough men to protect it, and the ulama have issued a fatwa approving it. Also see Charlie Winter (Trans.), "Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade," *Quilliam*, February 2015.

Dian had let Bahrun Naim decide the place and time for the Jakarta Palace attack, while Nur Solikhin led the bomb preparations.¹² Based on interviews, she revealed her husband was meant to wake up at the break of dawn on the day of the planned attack to take her through the bomb detonation process.

Similarly, in the Surabaya and Sibolga bombings, investigation reports revealed Dita Oeprianto and two other husbands involved had assumed responsibilities for preparing the bombs and planning the attacks.¹³ Their wives and children mainly participated as attendees of the religious discussion, while also playing a role in Dita's plan.¹⁴ Abu Hamzah was also the key planner and recruiter in his network. Having picked up bomb-making skills, he had, by 2018, assembled 100 kgs of high-explosive bombs, with assistance from his wife.¹⁵

In other instances, females also played secondary roles in bomb-making preparations. For example, Anggi, a Hong Kong deportee arrested for her role in a plot to attack a government munitions plant, had been well-versed in bomb-making. Yet in this plot, it was Young Farmer, a male compatriot, who initiated the bomb assembling and instructed Anggi's husband to purchase the bomb materials. She later revealed she had not known when and for what purpose the bomb would be used.

In comparison, Ika, the 36-old-year would-be Bali attacker, took the initiative to create a Telegram group and to actively plan the attack. However, even here, she subsequently handed leadership of the cell to Abu Jundi, who was part of a pro-IS Katibah al-Iman network based in Bandung, reportedly

believing that he had more experience and knowledge in planning and execution. After her cell members were apprehended by the authorities, she contacted Nur Solikhin and asked to be a suicide bomber, again letting him decide the target and time of the attack on her behalf.

The Combatant

In Indonesia, female combatants have been involved in terror groups such as the East Indonesia Mujahedeen (MIT). In one case, the wives of three MIT members joined their husbands in the jungles to receive physical, shooting, and throwing-bomb training. One of them, Ummu Delima, the wife of Santoso, a deceased leader of MIT, said she had joined him in order to obey his instructions, protect herself from the state security apparatus, and help the group fight against the *infidels* (the government and law enforcement).¹⁶ The other two wives expressed similar sentiments. Again, it can be observed that while female combatants are motivated to take up arms, they still abide by stereotypical gender roles.¹⁷

Leebarty argues the MIT wives-turned-combatants usually started off as victims – both of their male relatives and the wider group. For example, Ummu Delima is said to have been victimised by her brother (she was forced into marriage with a terrorist fugitive while young).¹⁸ According to Leebarty, such women can, over time, become influenced by the radical ideology and values espoused by the wider network. Some even turn into attackers. Another female combatant, Cici Rezky Fantasy Rullie, who was the daughter of the Indonesian couple linked to the Jolo attacks, had engaged in a shootout with the Philippines military.¹⁹ In December 2018, she

¹² "Perintah Meledakkan Bom dari Bahrun Naim," *Majalah Tempo*, December 19, 2016, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/laporan-utama/152182/perintah-meledakkan-bom-dari-bahrun-naim?hidden=login>.

¹³ "The Surabaya Bombings and the Future of ISIS in Indonesia," *IPAC Report*, No.51, October 18, 2019.

¹⁴ "The Surabaya Bombings and the Future of ISIS in Indonesia," Op.Cit.

¹⁵ "The Ongoing Problem of Pro-ISIS Cells in Indonesia," *IPAC Report*, No. 56, April 29, 2019, pp. 9-11.

¹⁶ "Mothers to Bombers: The Evolution of Indonesian Women Extremists," *IPAC Report*, No. 35, January 31, 2017, p.14.

¹⁷ Through the Manifesto al-Khansa, IS confines women to stereotypical gender roles as mothers and wives. Its manifesto emphasises that the primary duty of women is their household responsibilities and motherhood. IS also strongly opposes Western concepts of female emancipation and liberation. Men and women followers also adhere to IS' moral code and governance model, which includes women's obedience to their husbands. See Nelly Lahoud, "Empowerment or Subjugation: An analysis of ISIL's gendered messaging," UN Women: Academic Paper, 2018.

¹⁸ Leebarty Taskarina, *Istri Teroris, Korban yang Terlupakan: Kisah Perempuan dalam Kejahatan Terorisme*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2019).

had travelled to the Philippines with her husband, mother, younger sister and brother, while her father was already in the country.²⁰

The Knife-Attacker

Last October, the first known female knife-attacker in Indonesia was involved in a stabbing attack on the country's then chief security minister, Wiranto and his bodyguards. Fitri Andriana, 21, had carried out the attack with her husband, Abu Rara.²¹ They had previously been married in July 2019 at the request of Abu Zee, the amir of a JAD cell in Bekasi.²² It is likely Abu Rara had assumed chief responsibility for planning the attack, given reports he had grown agitated after Abu Zee and other members of his cell had been apprehended by the authorities in September 2019.²³

Another attempted knife attack occurred in May 2018, and involved two young female operatives, Siska and Dita (aged 22 and 18 respectively). The women had gone to the police's Mobile Brigade Corps' headquarters (Mako Brimob) in Depok, planning to help pro-IS inmates detained at the facility. After reading an article on Telegram claiming the police had stopped giving food to the inmates, they claimed to have been motivated to help the inmates and, if necessary, fight alongside them against the police. Both were intercepted by the police. A pair of scissors was found in Siska's bag, which the girls had allegedly planned to use to attack the officers.²⁴

Rare Cases of Greater Agency

While still in the minority, some young female attackers have emerged as exceptions to the gender-role arguments that characterise terrorist networks in Indonesia. The Dita-Siska

case, for example, stands out given both women had acted out of their own volition, without waiting to receive a male counterpart's instruction or know-how. In interviews, Dita revealed she wanted to be an IS fighter and move to Syria. She also did not want to get married as she was still young.²⁵

Similarly, Ika, the would-be Bali suicide bomber, had created a Telegram group, and initially led the planning for an attack on the headquarters of the IJABI (Association of Indonesian Ahlul Bait Congregations), a Shia group based in Bandung.

The three women, Ika, Dita and Siska, came from varied backgrounds. In her mid-30s, Ika had worked as a migrant worker in Malaysia and Hong Kong for over a decade, while Siska and Dita were in university and high school respectively, when each became involved in terrorist activities. A common factor which bound them was the fact that all three were radicalised following sustained exposure to IS propaganda online.

Ika is reported to have first been inspired by the Solo church bombings in 2011, following which she began visiting Bahasa Indonesia extremist websites and joining other pro-IS groups on Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Meanwhile, Siska had been a member of NII KW 9²⁶, an Islamist organisation, when she discovered a senior colleague had misappropriated charity money. According to reports, she then left and pledged allegiance to then IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2017, after propaganda exposure via various pro-IS websites such as Millah Ibrahim and Daulah Islamiyah as well as on Telegram. In the same year, Dita's exposure to pro-IS networks began through an online encounter with a male friend on Instagram. He would later introduce Dita to

²⁰ Ana P. Santos and Nikko Dizon, Op.Cit.

²¹ V. Arianti, "The Stabbing of Wiranto: Growing Trend of Knife Attacks," RSIS Commentaries, October 17, 2019, <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/icpvr/the-stabbing-of-wiranto-growing-trend-of-knife-attacks/#.XpM-MVMzZQI>.

²² Sidney Jones, "The Wiranto Attack and the ISIS Impact," *The Interpreter*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/wiranto-attack-and-isis-impact>.

²³ Sidney Jones, "The Wiranto Attack and the ISIS Impact," Op.Cit.

²⁴ "Dua Siska dan Pemahaman Jihad Anak Muda Kita," *Majalah Tempo*, May 27, 2018.

²⁵ "Dita Siska Millenia: Saya ingin ISIS Ada di Seluruh Dunia," *Majalah Tempo*, May 27, 2018.

²⁶ Negara Islam Indonesia Komandemen Wilayah or Islamic State of Indonesia for Commandment Area 9, is a faction of Darul Islam (DI) which has been suspected by other DI factions to be linked to the Indonesian government's intelligence operations. See Andi Rahman Alamsyah and Vedi R. Hadiz, "Three Islamist Generations, One Islamic state: the Darul Islam Movement and Indonesian Social Transformation," *Critical Asian Studies*, 2017, Vol. 49, No.1, pp.54-72.

pro-IS Telegram channels such as Muhajidin Indonesia, and later, the Turn Back Crime channel.²⁷

Overall, female operatives still largely take instructions and rely on the know-how of male counterparts, usually their husbands. Some also still adhere to the traditional gender roles ascribed in terror networks, despite taking on frontline roles as violent actors. However, a small number has demonstrated a desire for greater agency, as reflected in the cases of Dita, Siska, and Ika. Female pro-IS supporters have also performed *hijrah* (migration) to Syria, by independently planning their journeys, using online postings and direct interactions with IS members based in the theatre.²⁸ Increasingly, younger female jihadis also appear willing to reject traditional IS values such as marriage, opting to be fighters instead.²⁹ The question remains whether this will be a sustained pattern among female radical supporters as more seek to fulfil their jihadist aspirations.

Policy Recommendations

In Indonesia, existing deradicalisation programmes mainly employ a male-centric perception of the role of women in terrorist movements. But as Nelly Lahoud observes, IS has sought to attract more women into its ranks, partly through a strategy of providing the illusion of female empowerment in its online propaganda on channels such as Dabiq.³⁰ Various narratives, including those which assert that the obligation for *hijrah* lies not only with men but also women, have galvanised a growing number of female IS followers to take up frontline roles.

For counter-terrorism agencies, a deeper understanding of the motivations and processes of female radicalisation, which can

²⁷ Dua Siska dan Pemahaman Jihad Anak Muda Kita,” *Majalah Tempo*, May 27, 2018.

²⁸ Sri Lestari, “Gadis yang bujuk keluarganya hijrah ke Suriah: ‘ISIS telah membajak dan merusak Islam’,” *BBC News Indonesia*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-43848676>.

²⁹ “Dita Siska Millenia: Saya ingin ISIS Ada di Seluruh Dunia,” Op.Cit.

³⁰ Nelly Lahoud, “Empowerment or Subjugation: An analysis of ISIL’s gendered messaging,” UN Women: Academic Paper, 2018.

³¹ Eleanor Gordon and Jacqui True, “Gender Stereotyped or Gender Responsive?” *The RUSI Journal*, September 25, 2019.

vary from men, is required to formulate more targeted and effective preventive measures.³¹ To better facilitate this, more female deradicalisation practitioners should be encouraged to participate in the various deradicalisation programmes. A positive step is the main National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT) agency’s push in recent years to add women practitioners to its ranks. More female religious preachers and psychologists are now deployed to engage female detainees as well as the wives of male terrorists, with the aim of persuading the latter away from radical activities.³²

In a broader sense, prisons play a pivotal role in the process of preventing and countering radicalisation. Facilities with suitable infrastructure and trained staff offer a beneficial structure for monitoring, deradicalisation and disengagement programmes. In Indonesia, however, there have been challenges implementing various prison-based programmes effectively, as many of the 34 women correctional facilities and four detention centres, where female detainees can spend a considerable amount of time awaiting trial, are overcrowded, understaffed, and lack basic sanitation.³³

In some overcrowded prisons, inadequately trained staff have also on occasion conducted inaccurate risk assessments of detainees. Coupled with insufficient pre and post-release monitoring mechanisms found in such facilities, this has created space for radicalised inmates to make contact with and recruit other vulnerable individuals into their ranks. In one instance, the wife of Robiatul Muslim Nasution (RMN), a suicide bomber detained in Medan’s police headquarters, is reported to have visited a woman terrorist detainee held in Medan prison several times,

³² Rajagukguk Christin, “Feminisme Kultural dan Peran Perempuan dalam Deradikalisasi BNPT (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme) di Indonesia,” 2018, *Faculty of Social and Political Science of Diponegoro University*, Undergraduate Thesis.

³³ Set of standards that have ruled by Directorate General of Corrections under the Penitentiary Law (Undang-Undang Pemasyarakatan); Working Group on Women and C/PVE (WGWC); Cameron Sumpter, “Managing Indonesia’s Imprisoned Extremists,” *East Asia Forum*, March 24, 2016.

whilst also communicating with her on Facebook, to discuss a terror plot in Bali.³⁴

As the threat environment evolves, these and the other salient issues directly related to female jihadist participation will require appropriate counter-measures and resources by the counter-terrorism agencies. In specifically addressing the gender-oriented drivers fueling female jihadism, rather than deal with it with broad brush-strokes, can help to break the myth of female empowerment through jihadism and the cycle of terrorism through kinship ties.

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³⁴ Achmad Nasrudin Yahya, "Aktivitas Istri Bomber Medan: Sering "Chatting" dan Kunjungi Napi," *Kompas*, November 14, 2019, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/11/14/15111091/aktivitas-istri-bomber-medan-sering-chatting-dan-kunjungi-napi>. Also see "Kerap Temui Napi, Istri

Pelaku Bom Medan Rencana Aksi di Bali," *CNN Indonesia*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20191114174038-12-448410/kerap-temui-napi-istri-pelaku-bom-medan-rencana-aksi-di-bali>.

Key Drivers of Female Radicalisation in Bangladesh

Shafi Md Mostofa

Synopsis

Though women's radicalisation is not a new area of research in Bangladesh, the country has witnessed an escalation of female participation in jihadism since the 2016 Holey Artisan Bakery attack. Women have even acted as suicide bombers in Bangladesh, which some scholars observe as a new trend of militancy in the country. Against this backdrop, this article uncovers some key drivers of female radicalisation in Bangladesh. It argues that the so-called Islamist model of obedience to one's husband, ideological conviction, Muslim victimhood narratives and crises in life, among others, drive women towards radicalisation in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Bangladesh witnessed its first female suicide attack in December 2016,¹ when a young female suicide bomber blew herself up during a crackdown by security forces on a terrorist hide-out in the capital Dhaka.² In recent years, the role of Bangladeshi women in jihadism has changed from being wives of militants and raising children, to more prominent roles such

as violent combatants and social media propagandists, in which they radicalise, mentor, and recruit other would-be female jihadists.³

The current trend of militancy which started in 2013 relied mostly on cyber radicalisation, and culminated in the Holey Artisan Bakery attack in July 2016.⁴ Roul (2018) argues that since then, "an alarming number of women (in Bangladesh) have taken up the cause of militancy."⁵ Roul has further argued that a number of Bangladeshi militant organisations such as the Jama'atul Mujaheedin Bangladesh (JMB), the Ansar al-Islam (AAI) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir-Bangladesh (HTB) have traditionally used women for teaching and propaganda operations. Since mid-2016, however, women have been activated for violent operations.⁶

In December 2016, at least 20 female extremists were arrested by Bangladeshi security forces.⁷ Another research paper claims that around nine women militants were either killed by security forces or committed suicide attacks to avoid arrest between July 2016 and December 2018.⁸ This is a clear

¹ Mohammad Jamil Khan et al., "Dhaka sees first female suicide bomber," *Dhaka Tribune*, December 25, 2016,

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2016/12/25/dhaka-sees-first-female-suicide-bomber/>.

² Ibid.

³ Umme Wara, "New Trends of Radicalisation : Understanding Drivers of Female Radicalisation," National Conference On Prevention of Violent Extremism From A Gender Perspective, *Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies*, November 2018, [http://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Conference%20Report%20\(Gender\).pdf](http://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Conference%20Report%20(Gender).pdf).

⁴ Abul Barkat, "Political Economy of Fundamentalism and Fundamentalist Extremism in Bangladesh," Noakhali Regional Seminar, *Noakhali*, Bangladesh 2016.

⁵ Animesh Roul, "The Shifting Narrative of Women's Role in Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh's Islamic Jihad," *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume: 16 Issue 22 (2018), <https://jamestown.org/program/the-shifting-narrative-of-womens-role-in-jamaat-ul-mujahideen-bangladesh-islamic-jihad/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Deepak Acharjee, "Lawmen concerned over 'rising number of women militants,'" *The Independent*, December 25, 2016, <http://www.theindependentbd.com/home/printnews/73780>.

⁸ Shafi Md Mostofa and Natalie. J. Doyle, "Profiles of Islamist Militants in Bangladesh," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, Issue 5 (October 2019), pp.112-129, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2019/issue-5/8--mostofa-and-doyle.pdf>.

indication of an organised women radicalisation movement in Bangladesh.

A plethora of literature has examined why women are increasingly taking up militancy and why female terrorists are so important for militant organisations. Knop (2007) contends that although Islam condemns the participation of women in violent struggles, extremist groups still provide religious justifications to recruit more women terrorists because: "they have a greater capacity for mobilising support than their male colleagues. Female terrorists provide strong role models for other women who may then seek to emulate their heroines' actions. Female terrorism also increases male recruitment because men can be shamed into joining when women appear to be usurping their dominant role in conflict".⁹

Some scholars argue that women voluntarily join terrorist groups and their "motivations are similar to those of the men: politics, psychology, power, religion, glamour, adventure."¹⁰ Still, a few other scholars contend that women are more vulnerable than men because women can be raped, physically coerced, and emotionally and socially blackmailed within patriarchal societies.¹¹ Some scholars also suggest that a set of social, political, economic,¹² personal and religious factors are driving factors in female radicalisation.¹³ However, none have assessed the issue from the Bangladesh context; only Mohsina (2017) has shed some light on this subject, but even here, she did not

⁹ Katharina Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, Issue 5, (March 2007), p. 401, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701258585>.

¹⁰ Christopher C. Harmon and Paula Holmes-Eber, "Women in Terrorist Undergrounds," *Global Ecco*, <https://globalecco.org/women-in-terrorist-undergrounds>.

¹¹ Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors," *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, 2013, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/NCF_RB_LS_policybrief_1320.pdf.

¹² Seran De Leede, Renate Haupfleisch, Korolkova et al., "Radicalisation and violent extremism focus on women: How women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation," *Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs*, 2017, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STU>

elaborate on the drivers of female radicalisation in Bangladesh.¹⁴ This article attempts to specifically address this gap.

This article is based on interviews of a cross-section of Bangladeshi elites to explore factors that contribute to women's radicalisation in Bangladesh.¹⁵ These interviews were conducted from November 2017 to July 2018 and from June 2019 to September 2019 in Bangladesh. In doing so, the paper uncovers the drivers of women's radicalisation in Bangladesh. This is an analytical, interpretive and exploratory study, which uses exploratory research methods and thematic methods of data analysis.

Key Drivers of Women's Radicalisation in Bangladesh

There are four major drivers of women's radicalisation in Bangladesh: i) the so-called Islamist model of obedience to husbands; ii) ideological conviction; iii) perceived victimisation of Muslims; and iv) crises in life.

i. The So-called Islamist Model of Obedience to Husband

Traditional notions of obedience to the husband is identified as one of the key reasons of women's radicalisation in Bangladesh. Following arrests of a large number of female militants, the police have maintained that most were pushed into militancy by their husbands who were part of militant organisations.¹⁶ In the context of

[D/2017/596838/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596838_EN.pdf](#); "Radicalisation and counter-radicalisation: A gender perspective," *European Parliamentary Research Service*, Jaunuary 2018, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-581955-Radicalisation-gender-perspective-rev-FINAL.pdf>; Becky Carter, "Women and violent extremism," *Helpdesk Research Report*, March 13, 2013, <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq898.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Nazneen Mohsina, "Growing Trends of Female Jihadism in Bangladesh," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 9, No. 8, (August 2017).

¹⁵ In total, 71 interviews were conducted and 11 interviewees were interviewed twice based on purposive sampling. Most of the interviewees were drawn from the security forces, academia, research organisations, and newspaper editorial staff.

¹⁶ "Women were forced into militancy by their extremist husbands: Police," *bdnews24.com*, December 28, 2016, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2016/12/27/wome>

Bangladesh's patriarchal society, women are expected to obey their husbands. In quoting some verses of the Quran and Prophetic traditions,¹⁷ one interviewee said that in Bangladesh, a wife is taught to obey her husband as he is her paradise. In this context, there is great emphasis on the socio-cultural and religious convention of obeying her husband. One interviewee noted:

"So far I understood after interviewing 250 militants in prison that women join militant organisations by being inspired by their husbands because religiously and culturally women are taught to obey their husbands. Therefore, I call this driver the so-called Islamic model of obedience to husband."

Additionally, in most cases, women are financially dependent on their husbands, thus possibly compounding their sense of subjugation to socially accepted spousal obligations.

ii. Ideological Conviction

A good number of interviewees mentioned ideological conviction as a prominent factor for the growth of Islamist militancy in

n-choose-militancy-due-to-pressure-from-husbands-police.

¹⁷ Qur'anic verses used for women subjugation; "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means" (4:34); "And woman shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them" (2:228); "And let two men from among you bear witness to all such documents (contracts of loans without interest). But if two men be not available, there should be one man and two women to bear witness so that if one of the women forgets (anything), the other may remind her" (2:282) (Shafi Md Mostofa, 'Gender Equality in Islam: A Critical Analysis,' *Dhaka University Studies*, Faculty of Arts, University of Dhaka, (2014).

Prophetic Traditions are: "It is not permissible for a woman to fast when her husband is present except with his permission, or to allow anyone in his house without his permission" (Al-Bukhaari, 4899); "If a woman prays her five (daily prayers), fasts her month (Ramadaan), guards her chastity and obeys her husband, it will be said to her: 'Enter Paradise from whichever of the gates of Paradise you wish.'" (Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami', no. 660); "When Mu'aadh came from Syria, he prostrated to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who said, what is this, O Mu'aadh? He said, I went to Syria and saw them prostrating to their archbishops and patriarchs, and I

Bangladesh. This refers to Islamic inspired ideas which transform an individual to accept violent ways in the service of God.¹⁸ In this regard, an interviewee said that religion is a strong motivating force and stated that religiously inspired militants can be ruthless, with commitment and dedication.¹⁹

For example, the Islamic State (IS) promotes the idea of a global Caliphate which promises honour, justice and respect to Muslims across the world.²⁰ Al-Qaeda (AQ) also promotes similar ideas.²¹ According to one interviewee, "the idea of a global caliphate gravitated the attention of a group of young people in Bangladesh." In the same vein, it is argued that "the aspiration to help build, and be part of, a utopian Caliphate and a desire to live in the Caliphate under Sharia law" is one of the major drivers of women's radicalisation.²² Apart from the Global Caliphate narrative, Islamic apocalyptic narratives are also said to push women towards militancy.²³

Both IS and AQ also forward apocalyptic notions based on the Imam Mahdi, an eschatological redeemer of Islam who will appear closer the Day of Judgement to rid the world evil, to grow their following.²⁴ These

wanted to do that for you. The Messenger of Allah said, Do not do that. If I were to command anyone to prostrate to anyone other than Allah, I would have commanded women to prostrate to their husbands. By the One in Whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no woman can fulfil her duty towards Allah until she fulfils her duty towards her husband. If he asks her (for intimacy) even if she is on her camel saddle, she should not refuse" (Ibn Maajah:1853).

¹⁸ Shafi Md Mostofa and Howard Brasted, "Bangladesh: A Fertile Ground for IS Recruitment," in Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Sharam Akbarzadeh (eds.), *Violent Religious Extremism in South Asia: Emerging Trends and Countering Measures*, (London: Palgrave, Springer Forthcoming).

¹⁹ Md Abdul Mannan, "Religion in International Relations," *Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 11, (2013).

²⁰ "Islamic State, Khilafah Declared," *Dabiq*, Issue No 1, 2014; Shafi Md Mostofa and Helen Ware, 'Development of Daesh's Ideology,' *Peace and Security Review*, Vol. 8, No. 18, (2018), pp. 12-22, <http://bipss.org.bd/pdf/Review%207-1-19.pdf>.

²¹ "From the Editor," *Resurgence*, Issue No. 1, 2014, p. 4.

²² "Radicalisation and counter- radicalisation: A gender perspective."

²³ "Words Drenched in Blood," *Furqan Media*, 2017.

²⁴ M. A.Umar, "The Third World War and Dajjal," *Azan*, No. 1, 2013; Howard Brasted et al., "Revisiting S.P. Huntington's The Clash of Civilizations Thesis," in S. Akbarzadeh (ed.),

apocalyptic visions have also served to attract women recruits. The perception of a community of sisters or sisterhood acts as a pull factor for female radicalisation, leading to a variety of ideological tools to radicalise Bangladeshi women. But the main point which was repeatedly reiterated by interviewees when speaking of women's radicalisation is the desire for heaven. Although it seems contradictory that women look for heaven by engaging in violent acts, this appears to be how they are ideologically indoctrinated.

iii. Muslim Victimhood Narratives

The notion of Muslim sufferings at the hands of non-Muslims is one of the most powerful tools exploited by Bangladeshi extremist groups to fuel female recruitment.²⁵ This is also evident from IS and AQ's propaganda in which they have actively exploited issues around Muslim victimisation. For example, AQ has been manipulating the plight of the ethnic Rohingya minority community and blamed Myanmar and Buddhist hardline groups for their suffering. AQ has also warned the Myanmar government of the dire consequences it faces.²⁶ Again in September 2017, AQ urged all Bangladeshi Muslims to support Rohingyas and to take part in fighting the Myanmar government.²⁷

For example, AQ through its Bengali language magazine, *Al Balagh*, asked women to take action against those killing Muslims across the world, including in Arakan and Kashmir.²⁸ On its part, IS has also used the narrative of

Routledge Handbook of Political Islam, (London: Routledge, Forthcoming).

²⁵ Shafi Md Mostofa, "A Study of Al-Qaeda's Propaganda Narratives in Bangladesh," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, (2019), <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CTTA-February-2019.pdf>.

²⁶ "Burma," *Azan*, Issue No. 2, 2013, p. 72.

²⁷ "To Help the Oppressed Rohingyas, What Do the Muslim Ummah Do?" *Al Balagh*, No. 6, (2017), pp. 17-24.

²⁸ Aziz Iusuf, "Dear Sister: how long have you been behind the mirage?" *Al Balagh*, No. 6 (2017), pp. 40-42.

²⁹ Saimum Parvez, "The Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal, Analysing the Islamic State Jihadists and Their Violence Justification Narratives in Bangladesh," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13 (2019), p. 32.

³⁰ Tinka Veldhuis & Jørgen Staun, "Islamist Radicalisation: A Root Cause Model," Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, October 2009,

Muslim persecution to garner support. IS provocatively asserts that "Muslims are facing humiliation and grievances because of their faith; Islam/Islamic culture is under threat, both globally and locally; presence and influence of 'others' in society."²⁹ Arguably, these victimhood narratives evoke a feeling of humiliation and victimisation among some Muslims, who are then urged to take action to defend their community. These Muslim victimisation narratives work equally on men and women. While women are already oppressed in the patriarchal setting, the victimhood narratives provoked by IS and AQ can accelerate some women's radicalisation in Bangladesh.

iv. Crises in Life

A range of studies have upheld the view that personal distress or crises in life can also lead to militancy.³⁰ Some scholars contend that women are more vulnerable than men, in this regard.³¹ Susman & Ahmed (2009) maintain that a majority of IS women suicide bombers suffered social discrimination and were deemed unsuccessful in their own society.³² Zavis (2008) has also asserted these women were unwanted in their society.³³

Income inequalities and economic deprivation also cause crises in life, and have also been identified by researchers as triggers of militancy.³⁴ Bangladesh's economy has been facing challenges related to growing income inequality, despite its recent economic growth.³⁵ An estimated 63 out of 163 (almost

https://www.djis.dk/files/media/publications/import/islamist_radicalisation_veldhuis_and_staan.pdf.

³¹ Naureen Chowdhury Fink et al., "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors."

³² Tin Susman and Caesar Ahmed, "Iraq cabinet member's exit raises gender, sectarian issues," *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 2009,

http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fq-iraq-women12-2009feb12_0_627897.story

³³ Alexandra Zavis, "Grooming a female suicide bomber," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/aug/21/world/fq-women21>

³⁴ Sarwar Alam, "The genesis of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh," PhD Dissertation, *Emory University Atlanta, Georgia*, April 6, 2010, <https://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/AlamNY08meeting.pdf>.

³⁵ Muhammad Mahmood, "Income inequality and poverty in Bangladesh," *Financial Express*, November 11,

38%) million people live below the poverty line in Bangladesh.³⁶ A number of interviewees point to the fact that economic deprivation has forced people towards militancy. This is also evident from a recent research study that found around 25 percent Bangladeshi militants are from the lower class.³⁷ Some women in Bangladesh have been lured into militancy due to socio-economic reasons. For instance, Bangladesh's first women suicide bomber, Shakira was reportedly driven to join an IS affiliated group due to her poor socio-economic condition.

Implications

It is evident that terrorists use women for many reasons such as breaking traditional security mechanisms, achieving target killings, providing messages of intimidation, attracting media attention, replacing men combatants and propagandists as well as circumventing social suspicions. All these contribute towards a heightened threat landscape for any country having to deal with the additional involvement of women in terrorist activity. Without a question, if left unabated, this trend of female radicalisation will have grave implications for Bangladesh's internal cohesion, peace and security.

Hence, while discussing the negative aspect of women's participation in jihadism in Bangladesh, gender-specific initiatives have to be integrated into any Counter-Violent Extremism strategy, as women make up half of the country's population. As security forces directly deal with women radicals, more women can be included in Bangladesh's security apparatus. This will be helpful to build trust with the community and develop community-oriented policing. Gender-specific de-radicalisation programmes and counter-narratives can also be introduced.

As it is also evident from the interviews that with the emergence of IS and AQ on Bangladesh's militant landscape, ideological indoctrination aided by cyber mechanisms has become one of the potent instruments of recruitment. Proper sensitisation through religious education needs to be deployed as a

2017, <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/income-inequality-and-poverty-in-bangladesh-1510415084>.

counter measure to mitigate the pervasive effect of ideologically driven radicalisation.

Conclusion

It is concerning that an increasing number of women in Bangladesh are being recruited into militant organisations. As women remain soft targets for recruitment, there is a need for the security forces and policy makers to build gender specific counter narratives to contain this trend. However, as a precondition to building these counter narratives, the underlying socio-economic and cultural conditions that contribute to the vulnerability of women in this regard, need to be appropriately and sustainably addressed, using a gender-specific lens.

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³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Shafi Mostafa and Natalie J. Doyle, "Profiles of Islamist Militants in Bangladesh."

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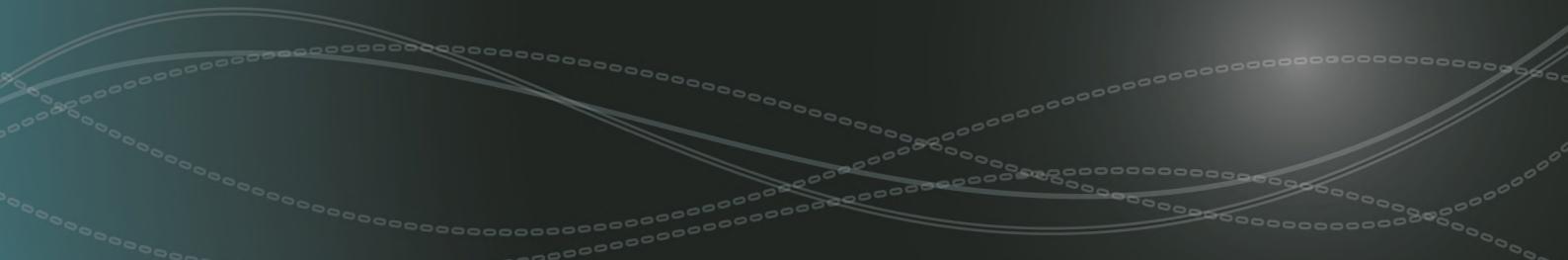
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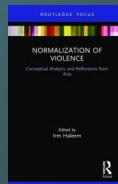


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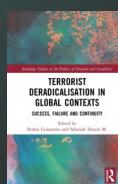


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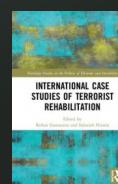
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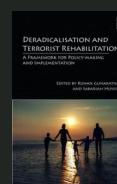
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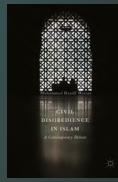
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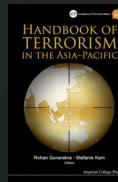
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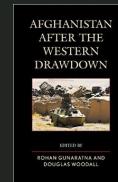
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