

# SEMINAR ON ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGE OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM AND RADICALISATION AT IDSA ON NOV 23, 2016

## SESSION I - IDEOLOGICAL FRONTIER AGAINST TERROR

On 23 November 2016, the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, hosted an international seminar titled 'Addressing the Challenge of International Terrorism and Radicalisation' in the lead up to the Sixth Heart of Asia- Ministerial Process meeting scheduled for 3 and 4 December in Amritsar.

In his welcoming remarks, Director General Shri Jayant Prasad articulated the Indian position on the rise of terrorism and radicalisation and highlighted the present threat of Islamic radicalism making inroads into India. In his inaugural address, Governor NN Vohra gave a broad overview of the spread of Islamist radicalism in the world and underscored the importance of Afghanistan in fighting the menace, without which the region cannot be expected to have lasting peace. He stressed that Pakistan is fomenting the problem of jihadism and jihadist ideology in India and emphasised that combating jihadism at the ideological level is as important as defeating the scourge militarily. The key theme that emerged in both their speeches was the urgency to adopt the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) by the UN General Assembly.

### **SESSION I - IDEOLOGICAL FRONTIER AGAINST TERROR**

**Chair: Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan**

**Panellists: Dr Adil Raseed, Research Fellow, IDSA, Dr Mostafa Zahrani, Director General of Strategic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran and Prof Haldun Yalcinkaya, Senior Researcher and Coordinator for Security Studies Programme ORSAM**

The first session, chaired by Amb. Chinmaya Gharekhan focused on the ideological frontier against terrorism. Dr Adil Rasheed, Research Fellow IDSA, outlined some of the conceptual confusions currently bedeviling counter-terrorism experts over issues of radicalisation and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism (CVET) techniques. He delineated the differences between counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation and articulated the need to understand the psychological state of individuals who are radicalised and indulge in terrorist activities. Dr Rasheed pointed out that although some experts question the viability of governments running highly elaborate and expensive ideological de-radicalisation programmes, there is ample evidence to conclusively establish the link between terrorist organisations and their ideological radicalisation of vulnerable sections of society. Extremist groups invest heavily in highly sophisticated forms of propaganda, ranging from indoctrination in seminaries (like madrassas) to online radicalisation, training and even recruitment. He said it is because of such extremist indoctrination that the madrassas in the Af-Pak region, which were once supposed to generate Islamic scholarship, got converted into 'mujahideen'-producing factories in the war with the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s and that process has continued

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to the detriment of world peace to this day. It is this extremist radicalisation which is reflected in the very formation and the name of the 'Taliban' - which literally means 'students' - and is a clear illustration of how ideological radicalisation leads to formation of terrorist groups.

Similarly, it is the extreme Islamist literature of Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Farag, Taqiuddin Nabhani, Abdullah Azzam, Muhammad Al-Maqdisi and Abu Bakr Naji that has radicalised the minds of the current crop of terrorists in Al-Qaeda and the ISIS. He also underscored the need for developing effective forms of ideological and religious counter-narratives to be carefully and meticulously constructed to be disseminated to various segments of society as part of a comprehensive strategic communication programmes using traditional, conventional and advanced mediums of information dissemination.

Dr Mostafa Zahrani, Director General of Strategic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran, presented his views on the way globalisation has impacted the spread of terrorism. He argued that just like terrorist groups are using globalisation to spread their radical ideology, states fighting it will have to provide a collective frontier against global terror. He pointed out that Iran sees Syria as the global test case for counterterrorism, which explained its involvement in the Syrian theatre. He stated that Islamic terrorism is not the result of the pre-existing sectarian conflicts but a recent political phenomenon born out of anti-globalisation sentiments. He argued that globalisation has created fault lines across societies and intensified differences between them. Dr. Zahrani added that major international powers have played a major role in creating a power vacuum in regions that are today considered fertile grounds to harvest terrorists - Afghanistan and Iraq. He suggested that states tackle the corruption fuelling these extremist movements and the international community ensure that no state is deprived of the benefits of globalisation.

Following Dr. Zahrani, Prof. Haldun Yalcinkaya, Senior Researcher and Coordinator for Security Studies Programme ORSAM, presented his study on the spillover of the Syrian Conflict into Turkey. Drawing similarities between the extremist movement in the Kashmir Valley and the developments in Turkey he noted that Islam is a merely a tool employed to achieve political objectives. Prof. Yalcinkaya argued that religious edicts were twisted to create a narrative that would strengthen the claims made by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The promise of re-establishing a Caliphate has a broad resonance among fighters that are joining the group from Turkey and elsewhere, along with the allure of heroism and martyrdom and the pride of bringing honour to one's community. This was closely linked to Dr. Zahrani's opinion that asymmetric distribution of the benefits of globalisation have created a sense of alienation within societies, an emotion that is heightened by modern technology. In conclusion, Prof. Yalcinkaya suggested that Turkey must further secure its porous borders if it wishes to no longer allow passage to ISIL through its territory.

**SESSION II: CONTOURS OF RADICALISATION IN THE  
'HEART OF ASIA'**

**Chair: Prof. SD Muni**

**Panellists: Amb. Abdussamat Khaydarov, Head of Office UNAMA; Dr. Davood Moradian, Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, Afghanistan and Ms. Prabha Rao, Senior Fellow, IDSA**

The session started with Chair's reflections on radicalisation and dilemma of dealing with sponsored and reactionary radicalisation. Panelists in the session addressed a range of issues concerning radicalisation, from the fragile security situation in Central Asia, to the emergence of political Islam in Afghanistan and radicalisation in South Asia.

Amb. Abdussamat Khaydarov, Head of Office, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), discussed how radicalised groups such as Al-Qaida, ISIS and Islamic Jihad Union, had destabilised the Central Asian region including Afghanistan. The sophisticated means of information dissemination, the madrassa network, financial and logistical support from both inside and outside the region, developmental issues, poverty and unemployment are the major factors that contribute to the success of these radicalised groups. He added that around 4000 fighters of ISIS are from various countries of the region. Though governments have taken many measures to counter the process of radicalisation in their respective countries, all have failed due to a number of reasons. Amb. Khaydarov highlighted the case of Afghanistan, and how the counter-radicalisation programme in the country has become a big failure due to lack of unity in the national government. Interests of various political parties, corruption and illiteracy also contribute to this weakness. The majority of Afghan soldiers are illiterate and have no idea about the objectives for which they are fighting, he said. He also highlighted issues such as conflict among the radicalised groups such as ISIS and Taliban as well as conflict in their agendas.

The Afghan government's inability to control and use the soft power of Islamic institutions has inevitably increased Taliban's control and sway over these establishments. The government has control over only a few of the thousands of mosques and madrassas in the country.. According to Khaydarov, the international community is not utilising Afghanistan's potential to be a bridge between Central and South Asia. Though the United Nations, European Union, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and NATO are operational in the country, their efforts are not coordinated and not comprehensive enough to tackle the issue of radicalisation. According to him, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and OIC are not using their full potential while engaging with the region in general, and Afghanistan in particular. He also recommended some measures to counter the threat of radicalisation, which are:

- Better coordination within the region and coordination between international institutions working in the region.

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- Better education, given that half the schools in Afghanistan do not have buildings. OIC can play a greater role in this regard.
- Economic development to tackle the issues of poverty and unemployment.

Dr. Davood Moradian, Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, elaborated the three-dimensional process related to radicalisation with a focus on Afghanistan. He examined how the crisis of modernity, idea of clash of civilisations and crisis in Islamic world collectively contributed to the emergence of 'Political Islam' and subsequently, radicalisation Islamism, i.e. the politicisation of Islamic theology was a result of modernity and modernisation process in the Islamic world. The idea of conflict between East and West, Islam and Christianity or clash of civilisation was present throughout history. Radicalisation is its latest manifestation, he argued. The ongoing crisis in the Islamic world has three aspects; crisis of leadership, economic inequality and civilisational dissonance. Therefore, one should be careful to reduce this crisis to a sectarian issue.

In the context of Afghanistan, the nexus of politicisation of Islam and geopolitical motivations of radical groups is evident, Dr. Moradian said. It was the British who facilitated political Islam by using mullahs to delegitimise the independence movement in the country. Dr. Moradian argued that political Islam was a tool of the West against freedom movements and communism. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's ideological and financial support to radical groups in Afghanistan and Riyadh's efforts to export Wahhabism have intensified the sectarian conflicts in entire Islamic World. Saudi Arabia spends US \$7 billion per annum to spread Wahhabism. According to Moradian, Muslims wish to identify with their religion rather than being non-religious. It is this nature of Muslims which is being exploited by radical groups. He put forth two propositions to address the issue of radicalisation. First, the revival of cosmopolitan Khorasanic Islam, which existed in Afghanistan, India, and Iran. Second, respect for sovereignty of all nations. This is extremely significant in the context of the Islamic world, where Saudi Arabia is playing the role of hegemon. We need respect for sovereignty and independence, not hegemony of some nations, he concluded.

Ms. Prabha Rao, Senior Fellow, IDSA, highlighted the organic nature of connectivity in South Asia and a greater possibility of domino effect of radicalisation in the region. Her talk was centred on Pakistan as a breeding ground for terrorist organisations and radical groups in South Asia. Therefore, according to Rao, it is not possible to talk about radicalisation in India or Afghanistan without emphasising the role of Pakistan. She argued that the number of liberals in Pakistan are shrinking. The country has not used state-sponsored groups for their policy initiatives but as force multipliers. The activities of Haqqani networks in Afghanistan and SIMI in India are instructive. These state-sponsored radical groups are also a part of Pakistani deep state, which is run by mafia and criminal networks. Now the dilemma is that the state had lost their control over these networks and their activities. She also said that Pak Madrassas sponsored by Saudi Arabia with an aim to promote Wahhabism, are the centres for these radical groups.

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Ms. Rao also emphasised the impact of social media on radicalisation. Nowadays, such groups are using social media as an active medium for recruiting and training people. She said that Indian state agencies have identified around 350 people from the country who are associated with radical groups in one or other way. The government is addressing this complicated issue at three levels. First, at the macro level, counter-terrorism measures are implemented by the government. Second, at the intermediate level, there is a focus on community level programmes and policies. Finally, at the micro level where individual centric policies are being planned. Ms. Rao identified two types of radicalisation; cognitive and behavioural. She felt that the rehabilitation of radicalised people is difficult, and there is no roadmap yet on how to proceed with it.

### Session III: Country Studies of Counter-Terrorist Initiatives

**Chair: Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar (Retd)**

**Panellists: Dr. Yan Shuai, Assistant Professor, CICIR (Beijing), Dr. Ashok Behuria, Senior Fellow, IDSA.**

Commodore C Uday Bhaskar (Retd) initiated the discussion by highlighting the challenge of identifying the contours of a 'counter-punch' needed to nullify the threat of jihadism. He argued that a collective endeavour of individual countries and institutions is needed to achieve this objective.

Dr. Yan Shuai highlighted the three broad contours of his presentation:

- Understanding the ongoing radical ideology, especially the Islamic State's (IS).
- China's initiatives to combat radical ideology.
- The lessons that can be drawn from the Chinese experience.

In this light, Dr. Shuai outlined four key features of radical ideology:

- Extreme in nature.
- Opposition to everything that is different from itself.
- Recourse to radical ways to get rid of the opposition (elimination of the infidels). This leads to violence.
- Use of religion, by distorting its true meaning, to gain strength.

Dr. Shuai argued that radical ideology remains anti-human, anti-societal and anti-civilisational. It also goes against the basic principles of nationalism, democracy and secularism. Its underlying goal is to create a new world order.

Dr. Shuai pointed out that internet has become a major platform for the spread of radical propaganda. Given its speed, efficiency and cost effectiveness, it is difficult to control the spread of radicalisation.

Throwing light on the situation in China, Dr. Shuai dwelled on the political motivation of terror groups in Xinjiang whose objective is to establish an independent state. As such, Xinjiang remains the hub of China's radical activities. Dr. Shuai elaborated on the increasing number of young impressionable Chinese Muslims who have been radicalised by the IS, Al-Qaeda, and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). This is reflected in the series of high profile terror attacks, including the 2013 car bomb blast in Tiananmen Square. ETIM's activities in cyber space also include a periodic digital magazine.

Dr. Shuai highlighted China's counter terror strategy that has been in practice since 2014. Its key pillar is the 'strike hard campaign'. The results have been visible, as reflected in the declining number of terror attacks. He observed that China's anti-terror strategy also encompasses the need to tackle propaganda

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through elaborate information campaigns. This involves encouraging religious figures to speak up, educating the youth on the tenets of Islam, and improving people's living standards by tackling poverty and unemployment. Dr. Shuai pointed out that Xinjiang's GDP in 2015 stood at 900 billion RMB when compared to 400 billion RMB in 2009.

A key plan also involves tackling online radical propaganda. In December 2015, China passed the national counter terrorism law with specific provisions to tackle the online threats. Dr. Shuai pointed out that the local government of Xinjiang has also passed its own laws and regulations. This includes the systematic de-radicalisation of prisoners. Its three broad contours involve encouraging an interaction with the religious leaders, employing family connections to de-radicalise, and ensuring state support in their employment after their release from prisons.

Dr. Shuai argued that a new concerted effort is now needed, given the lack of visible results from the 15 year U.S. led global war on terror. This requires a coordinated approach of all regional stake holders, including India and China, and should involve their cooperation in the fields of education, law enforcement, internet, religion and finance.

Dr. Ashok Behuria, elaborated on the radical propaganda prevalent in Pakistan. He argued that the gulf between principal sects over Islam in the country has widened. This has had a massive impact on the overall Islamisation in the country, which is also characterised by the 'continued romance' of the Pakistani state with militant Islam. As a result, the State, with its overemphasis on Islam, has created a Frankenstein monster. This is aptly reflected in the evolution of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that is now trying to devour the country.

Dr. Behuria argued that Pakistan's Zarb-e-Azb anti-terror operation has been partially successful in so far as it has pushed back the radicals to the other side of the Durand Line. However, the radicals remain active with their propaganda machinations being as strong as ever. The TTP has tried to cultivate the sectarian divide by stressing on Pakistan being created by Shias (Jinnah and Raja Sahib of Mahmudabad) who 'stooped to imperial conspiracy'. It has also referred to the Pakistani army as the 'Peshawar Katil Army', comprising of Kayani, Musharraf and Raheel Sharif, that is anti-Islam and therefore needs to be eliminated.

Dr. Behuria emphasised on the importance of charting out the evolution of Pakistan's current state of affairs. The country has had a romance with "Islam" since its inception. However, there are several complexities which have to be taken into account - since Islam is not a monolith, it has been as much a divisive factor in Pakistan as it has been a uniting factor, keeping in mind the differences in outlook amongst the different sects of Islam. The various sobriquets associated with Pakistan - hard country, a country of magnificent delusions, on the brink and toxic jelly state - aptly highlight the nation's current state of affairs.

Dr. Behuria elaborated on the four ideological and political traditions prevalent in Pakistan:



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- Centrist liberal
- Rightist liberal
- Rightist conservative
- Left-wing radical secular fringe

He argued that over the years the rightist conservatives have held sway. He highlighted several phrases from Jinnah's speech of October 31, 1947 - that 'each Pakistani should take a vow and be prepared to sacrifice everything necessary for Pakistan and in the cause of Islam....They should develop the spirit of mujahids.... Pakistan should be built up as a bulwark of Islam.... They should be unafraid of death because our religion teaches us to be always prepared for death.... We should face it bravely to save the honour of Pakistan and Islam.... There is no better salvation for a Muslim than the death of a martyr for a righteous cause' - and noted the prevalence of several fault lines right from its conceptualisation. This practice has been followed by the military leaders - from Ayub Khan to Raheel Sharif.

The latest to join the beeline for Islamisation is the judiciary. Iftikar Husan Choudhary, who played a critical role in restoring democracy in Pakistan, has been quoted as saying, "Should we accept tomorrow if the Parliament passes a legislation asking Pakistan to be a secular state? We are not going to allow Pakistan to be a secular state'. Dr. Behuria argued that this trend highlights the joining of ranks of the political judiciary and military elites to sell the idea of a nation committed to Islam. However, the emphasis on Islam has further divided the country rather than unite it. This is evident in the way the Ahmadiyyas, Shias and even the Barelvīs have been branded as un-Islamic. As such, the Pakistani elite have not been able to relate themselves to this larger socio-cultural and political reality. This has been the bane of Pakistan. However, dealing with this problem through force alone is unlikely to succeed.

Dr. Behuria also raised the question of whether Pakistan can transform itself. He argued that it can, due to the fact that Islam was not monolithic. The diversity within Islam can rescue it. As such, conditions need to be created by the state and the international community to let this diversity survive and sustain itself. Herein lies the answer to militant Islam.

Commodore Bhaskar concluded the session by arguing that the idea of a coherent and synergised regional counter-terror strategy is an 'oxymoron'. This is largely because of the presence of key players like India, China, Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics and Pakistan, and unless there exists a political consensus on reconciliation, and the approach to ideology and the violence one associates with it, it is unlikely that a strategy can be formulated. Commodore Bhaskar also highlighted India's unique position of diversity in Islam wherein its five streams co-exist in a relatively 'benign' manner. This includes the Islam one associates with Mecca, and the Islam that has come to the country from Central Asia, Iran, Turkey and Maghreb. Geographic India, from peninsula upwards, has differently internalised this diversity.