

# Peace Talks, ISKP and TTP--The Future in Question

Huzaifa Baloch



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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In my last article, I wrote about the resurgence of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan after Pakistan army operations in the tribal region as well as all over Pakistan, which led to the elimination of TTP's terror network spread all over Pakistan, hence resulting in eradication of its significant and robust structure which existed for more than a decade and resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians and officials of the armed forces. The attacks were indiscriminate and rampageous.

I also wrote about how FATA merger can play a defining role in eliminating the TTP elements and sympathisers in the tribal region. Although it's early to say if the steps taken by the Pakistani administration would result positively in reforming the tribal region and how the government of Pakistan would address the resentments and grievances of the people of ex-FATA who have seen nothing but war for the past almost 4 decades.

In December 2018, the Afghan Taliban announced their willingness to go for talks to find a peaceful end of the Afghan war, which has lasted for about 18 years now since starting in 2001. This might be a good omen for the region, which has seen war and conflict but the most recent developments include the entrance of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. In 2015 Islamic State announced its presence in the Khorasan Province of Afghanistan and this group of IS has been named as **an Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)**. The governments in Afghanistan and Pakistan initially rejected any presence of ISKP in their countries but the ISKP announced its arrival with attacks in Jalalabad in April, 2015 which killed 33 and an attack in May, 2015 in Karachi Pakistan (Safoora Goth Incident) which killed almost 45 innocent people. The attacks were proclamations by ISKP of their presence and their arrival in Afghanistan and Pakistan and this created more confusion in the already tangled puzzle for a region already hit severely by terrorist organizations with different ideologies and agendas that it's hard to comprehend what is it that they want other than bloodshed and terror.

The ISKP attacks went on and initially in Pakistan its first few attacks were so severe and tragic that one could think they have replaced or taken over TTP. Two attacks alone in August and October 2016 killed more than 150 people in Quetta, Pakistan. ISKP consists of the very same people who were formerly in TTP and Afghan Taliban but defected to ISKP when it announced its arrival. Six of the important commanders of TTP pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2015. ISKP claimed attacks throughout 2016 to 2018, the worst of the attacks being the Mastung election rally suicide bombing which killed more than 130 people and injured 300+ in July 2018.

Having ex-TTP commanders in command and at the helm made it easy for ISKP to penetrate deep into Pakistan to carry out attacks, likewise its penetration into Afghanistan was much easier after some of the senior Afghan Taliban commanders including Mullah Abdul Rauf Khadim defected to ISKP and pledged their allegiance to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Afghan Taliban has repeatedly warned ISKP from operating within Afghanistan and has had clashes with them since their inception.

The negotiations between Afghan Taliban and United States are on-going, no one knows what the future holds, as of yet Taliban are not ready to go into talks with the Afghan government. The presence of ISKP in the region could fill up the vacuum that might be created in case a settlement is reached and negotiations get successful between Afghan Taliban and the United States. It is for certain that ISKP would be looking for that vacuum to be filled and with that they could possibly join hands with Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in order to extend its support, base and manpower to carry out attacks more

frequently and deep into Pakistan. A merger or an alliance between ISKP and TTP is not totally out of the question, both the groups have their bases in Afghanistan and it's not far from now that they might announce their partnership as ISKP is facing fierce opposition from Afghan Taliban and other security agencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The steps that Pakistan is taking right now is fencing the border with Afghanistan to cease the influx of terrorists from border regions with Afghanistan. The border fencing teams have been attacked several times and are regularly targeted by terrorist snipers across the border. While writing this article there was a new development of border clashes between fencing teams and terrorists from Afghanistan on the 1st of May 2019. Three Pakistan Army soldiers lost their lives in the attack. Responding to the attacks Pakistan army made targeted artillery attacks on terrorist positions and for the first time used armed drones to carry out air strikes against terrorist elements in the border regions. Pakistan has to continue with the border fencing in order to curb the influx of terrorists into Pakistan and it also has to primitively operate against ISKP elements in the border regions while there is time to do so.

ISKP is a threat to both the nations of Pakistan and Afghanistan, having fought wars against terror they have to join together to counter the threat and the presence of ISKP which, if not countered would not take long to become another global menace just like the parent organisation, Islamic State. All the options are available to counter ISKP, joint military operations, intelligence sharing, and robust border management from both the sides is must in order to stop infiltration and spread of ISKP elements.

Afghanistan is at an important juncture of history where they could possibly end the decade long conflicts and wars, and they should not let any chance go by their hands in countering the growing threat of ISKP. As Pakistan is playing an important role in the talks between Afghan Taliban and the United States it would be the right time to call for all out action against the presence of ISKP as all other groups have regional agendas but ISKP like the Islamic State itself has a global agenda of establishing the Caliphate, spreading terror and their global agenda was evident with the recent attacks in Sri Lanka which were claimed by the Islamic State. Afghanistan and Pakistan both have to get the most out of this time for the betterment of both the countries in general and region in particular.

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