**IS will be the hindrance for the Afghan peace**

[Manish Rai](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/manish-rai/)

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Islamic State claimed responsibility for some major attacks in Afghanistan recently including Kabul University and rocket attacks in the capital Kabul. The terror outfit has carried out some of the most gruesome attacks in recent time, including the infamous complex attack on a Kabul maternity ward in May this year. The Islamic State’s local arm has repeatedly targeted both official and civilian facilities, as well as religious gatherings across the country.

The Afghan affiliate of IS, commonly known as Islamic State Khorasan (ISK), has been active in the war-torn country since 2015, fighting the Taliban as well as Afghan security forces.

But recently as the Afghan government and Taliban are on the verge of entering into a power-sharing agreement. ISK has carried out some bold attacks to make their presence felt. Even without large swaths of territory under its control, ISK retains a robust cadre of committed fighters dispersed throughout Afghanistan. ISKP has focused less on holding physical territory and more on spectacular attacks designed to destabilize Afghanistan. This helps in drawing attention to the group, to improve the morale of its cadres, and keep its name in the headlines.

It is widely believed that the Taliban insurgency remains the Afghanistan pre-eminent problem. Which is up to some extent true also as the Taliban is the biggest armed group but any arrangement with the Taliban only is no guarantee of complete peace. As there is another major obstacle for peace in Afghanistan that is ISK which works independently.

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Islamic State is pushing hard to expand into a country that has hosted both Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds for decades. In order to establish a foothold in Afghanistan, ISK is challenging both the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Rather than attempting to co-opt these groups, as it did with groups like Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt and Boko Haram in Nigeria, Islamic State leaders instead tried to discredit the local dominant groups in Afghanistan. This has led to many deadly clashes in past with Taliban in which both sides have lost hundreds of fighters. For sure Islamic State won’t enter into any accommodation with the largest insurgent group Taliban. Islamic State Khorasan main selling point is to portray the Taliban as an Afghan-centric force that wants to restore its government in Afghanistan rather than fighting for Islam. The message they want to convey is that the Afghan Taliban should be seen as a political rather than an Islamic force.

Definitely, at this point in time, the Islamic State is not as powerful as the Taliban nor it can take control of significant swaths of Afghanistan as it once did in Iraq and Syria. But that’s also true that ISIS has the potential to wreak plenty of havoc in the country which is clearly evident from some of the recent attacks it carried out. Any potential peace agreement with the Taliban could result in the strengthening of ISK, as it is poised to attract many Taliban and foreign fighters and exploit the shifting dynamics in its favour. It is ready to absorb a good number of Taliban fighters who would undoubtedly wish to continue to fight for reasons of ideology, employment, profit from the illicit economy, or personal and tribal enmity. It&#39;s next to impossible that Islamic State can be part of any political arrangement as its ideology revolves around regional and global agendas. Unlike the Taliban, whose ideology is as much about the Afghan Pashtunwali code and whose objectives are limited to Afghanistan. ISP follows a strictly Salafi-jihadi ideology and has a global outlook.

Islamic State Khorasan growing presence could even complicate any peace deal with the Taliban, which has pledged to prevent any terrorist group from using Afghan soil as a haven to plot foreign attacks against the west. Afghanistan is struggling to reach political settlements with its insurgent groups for decades. The Islamic State seemingly emerged as a new dangerous threat in Afghanistan, one that could grow to overshadow the Taliban if not checked in time. Hence the United States and the Afghan government should ensure that the Islamic State is prevented from carving its own significant space in the war-torn country.

This can be done by carefully planning and executing a dedicated military campaign against ISK. Because If IS-Khorasan cannot be effectively countered, then the political landscape of an already complex country stands to become even more complicated and ugly. Not only strong IS in Afghanistan is a threat to the region but to the whole international community.

We know ISIS is hostile to any arrangement with the West and its allies in many ways it&#39;s deadlier than Taliban and Al-Qaeda. As its sole focus on global jihad motivates them to launch attacks on the West as soon, they get a fertile ground for themselves. So, it becomes important to tackle them in Afghanistan otherwise IS will use Afghan soil as a launching pad for their global operations.

*Author is a columnist for the Middle East and Af-Pak region and Editor of geo-political news agency Viewsaround*