

ISIS Khorasan: Presence, affiliations and regional alliances with Russia

Muhammad Amin *, Muhammad Asif

University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan

Abstract: The eco-political instability of the Middle East gave birth to ISIS. It made the Middle Eastern region destabilized. ISIS has a large number of fighters from other regions of the world. Some of them belong to Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, Russia and Central Asia. The growth and revenue of ISIS influenced the Taliban and Al-Qaeda splinters to announce an affiliation with ISIS. It announced ISIS Wilayat Khorasan with the help of these splinters. The affiliates of ISIS Khorasan are attacking and killing many people of Pakistan and Afghanistan are being attacked by ISIS Khorasan. It also wants to spread its growth and launch attacks in other countries of this region. Russia, China and Pakistan want to form an alliance against ISIS. Therefore, they are organizing regular meetings on the issue. The entry of ISIS Khorasan in the region demands from the regional countries a comprehensive strategy to counter ISIS Khorasan. The analytical method has been used for this study and most of the data have been taken from secondary sources. It is argued that the threat of ISIS Khorasan is compelling the regional powers to have an alliance with Russia against ISIS.

Key words: *Region; Affiliates; Wilayat Khorasan; Alliance; Attack*

1. Introduction

Asia is the home of 106 billion Muslims which covers, 62% of the world population. In the 1980s, many Jihadist groups formed in Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet Union. These Jihadist groups were named as Taliban. Later on, these groups became ruler of Afghanistan under the leadership of Mula Umar. Usama bin Laden, head of Al-Qaeda took shelter in Afghanistan (Sokirianskaia, 2019). After the incident of 9/11 USA attacked Afghanistan to curb Al-Qaeda and Taliban. USA spent \$100 billion on war against terror in Afghanistan. The leadership of Taliban and Al-Qaeda has been killed in the war which has weakened the both organizations. USA and NATO left Afghanistan in December 2014, but the emergence of ISIS gave Taliban a very little time to rejoice.

Now, Taliban and ISIS are opponents in Afghanistan. Taliban are losing territorial grip. Its members are shifting towards ISIS. Al Jazeera News reported that Taliban had control of 70.5% area of Afghanistan in 2015, and it reduced to 65.5% in 2016. ISIS declared the region as a Wilayat Khorasan (Governorate). It is operating in Pakistan, Central Asia, Russia and China with the help of its affiliates from Afghanistan. ISIS Khorasan is a direct security threat to these regional countries. This study will probe that how these countries are making an alliance with Russia against ISIS Khorasan. Before discussing ISIS Khorasan, it is imperative to know how ISIS emerged (Rivera, 2019b).

2. Islamic state of Iraq and Syria

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi founded a militant group Jamaat al Tawhid wal Jihad against the Jordanian government in 1999. USA attacked Iraq in 2003, al Zarqawi pledged loyalty to Al-Qaeda. The name of the organization was also changed into Tanzim Qaidat al Jihad fi Bilad al Rafidayn. It started a resistance against USA. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi is an Iraqi citizen and he was the member of Shura Council of Al-Qaeda. He later became head of the Shura council. In 2010, he abandoned Al-Qaeda and created his own group which is known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS/ISIL). The said group soon started gaining territory in the Levant. It had control over Mosul, Tikrit, Raqqa, Manjib, Kobani and many other cities in Iraq and Syria where it declared Caliphate in June 2014. Abu Bakr al Baghdadi is its supreme leader (Keating & Kaczmarek, 2019). He designated himself as a Caliph and had deputies in Iraq and Syria. He further distributed its territory in 18 provinces. The Cabinet of the organization has departments like Shura, Sharia, Finance, Media, Military, Intelligence and Security. He called the Muslims to join ISIS. The common purpose of the organization is the establishment of Khilafat, Shria and revival of the Muslim rule in the world. The higher ranks militants of the organization are Ex-military persons of Saddam Hussein. Their experience is a major boost for the organization. The accurate number of the fighters is not available, Russia reported 71000 fighters, whereas USA Intelligence community reported that this organization has 20000 to 30000 fighters. It is the

* Corresponding Author.

wealthiest and a transnational organization of the world. It has fighters from more than 90 countries (Lushenko, Auken, & Stebbins, 2019). ISIS is far better than Al-Qaeda in terms of generating resources. It is earning money through a successful marketing of oil, extortion and kidnapping. The wealth of the ISIS attracted many militant groups or their splinters to announce affiliation. ISIS brutally targeted minorities in Iraq and Syria, especially Yazidi community. It is the well organized and advanced militant group. A strong structure makes the members ready to replace Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in case of death. It is using Amaq as its official news agency and Dabiq as online magazine. These two media organs are used for spreading propaganda of ISIS and claiming the responsibilities of the attacks. The organization also started Cyber-attacks. They attacked a renowned Television website in France on 9 April 2015. First of all, a Libyan group of militant announced its affiliation with ISIS. Ansar Beit al Maqdis Jihadist group from Sinai, Egypt and Boko Haram of Nigeria joined it in 2015. It has affiliates and supporters in Asia, Europe, America and Australian continents. It is actively operating in 18 countries. The International Community believes that the most moderate arms, well-organized structure, enough wealth, a proper news agency and a very strong propaganda system make ISIS a dangerous group than Al-Qaeda or Taliban. In 2014, when ISIS was on peak some 10 million people were living under its controlled area. At the beginning of 2016, ISIS had control over 78000 sq/km in Iraq and Syria but it lost 17600 sq/km in the same year. Many countries under USA and Russian leadership are fighting against it in Iraq and Syria (Mironova, 2019).

3. The Wilayat Khorasan

The word Khorasan was used by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in his saying that an army of Black flags will carry out a war from Khorasan and called it a Battle of Hind. Therefore, the word Khorasan is used by Jihadists. Khorasan was a province (Wilayat) under the Muslim rulers of Umayyad and Abbasid era. It had parts of Afghanistan, Central Asian States, Pakistan and China. In 2014, a group of 50 members in Syria first used the name of ISIS Khorasan. The members of this group were native of Pakistan, Chechnya and Afghanistan. Initially, ISIS started recruiting fighters for Syria in Afghanistan. It appointed Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost as Amir of Kunar and Nuristan for the same purpose in September 2014. The organization distributed pamphlets in Pakistan and Afghanistan; that we believe in victory or death, we believe in honor and liberty or death (Diamantis, 2019). We believe imprisonment as a worship and extradition as a vacation. An attack in Ghazani province of Afghanistan was the first terrorist attack of the ISIS in Afghanistan. In November 2013, after the death of Hakeem Ullah Mehsood, Hafiz Saeed Khan from Orakzai Agency became the leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. He announced an affiliation with

ISIS in October 2014. On 2 January 2015, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced Hafiz Saeed Khan as Amir of ISIS. On 26 January 2015, Abu Muhammad al Adnani spokesperson of ISIS also announced him as an Amir. Hafiz Saeed Khan was killed in an air strike on 26 July 2016. In January 2015, ISIS declared Afghanistan and Pakistan as its Wilayat Khorasan. It established Khorasan Council to look after operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The same kind of affiliation was made by Abu Bakr Shekau, leader of the Nigerian militant group Boko Haram on 7 March 2015. The leadership of ISIS celebrated the announcement but Nigeria was not declared as a Wilayat. It shows that ISIS has special plans for the so-called Khorasan region. The other commanders of Taliban like Hafiz Daulat Khan from Kurram Agency, Molana Gul Zaman (Killed in a drone attack) from Khyber Agency, Mufti Hassan from Peshawar, Khalid Mansoor from Hangu and Shahid Ullah Shahid a spokesperson of Tehrik e Taliban also announced affiliation with ISIS. Shahid Ullah Shahid was killed in a drone attack. The death of Mulla Umar created breaches in the ranks of Tehrik-e-Taliban on the issue of leadership (Ismail & Mishra, 2019).

Head of the Tehrik-Taliban Pakistan, Hafiz Saeed Khan was losing his control over different splinters and Pakistan Army was conducting a successful operation Khyber One on Pak-Afghan border (Rivera, 2019a). These are the main reasons of the affiliations with ISIS by the commanders of Tehrik-e-Taliban. On the other hand death of Mulla Umar created breaches in the ranks of Taliban, revenue and influences of ISIS are also the reasons of the affiliation. Royal United Services Institution reported in 2016 that ISIS has 2000 to 3000 fighters in Pakistan and 7000 to 8000 in Afghanistan. The Syrian based leadership of the ISIS is transferring money through Hawala (an illegal money transfer system) from Syria to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan, Afghanistan, USA and Taliban are currently fighting against so-called ISIS Wilayat Khorasan. This Wilayat is becoming a direct security threat to the following countries (Baev, 2019).

4. Most affected countries

4.1. The Wilayat Khorasan in Afghanistan

There are two reasons which make Afghanistan an ideal place for ISIS. Firstly, the weak political and security system of Afghanistan and secondly, USA and NATO reduced their number of arm troops under a Bilateral Security Agreement signed with Afghanistan in December 2014. The first attack of ISIS which killed 100 people in Afghan province of Ghazni was on 26 September 2014. In the beginning, ISIS gathered in Nangarhar which is near Pak-Afghan border. General John F. Campbell said Afghan Government was informed about the activities of ISIS in Nangarhar University. In Helmand province, Mulla Abdul Rauf Khadim (who was killed in an airstrike by NATO in February 2015), was also recruiting for ISIS Khorasan. He was paying \$500 per

month to the militants. In Farah district, the Taliban Commanders recruited and trained 400 militants. Taliban resisted ISIS strongly in Farah district and Helmand province. In April 2015, ISIS and Taliban declared Jihad against each other. On 18 April 2015, ISIS was blamed for suicide attack in Jalalabad resulting 35 casualties. In September 2015, a report submitted in UNO on Afghanistan verified that ISIS is present in 25 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan. ISIS has partial hold in Helmand, Nangarhar, Achin, Spin Gar, Bati Kot and Nazyan. ISIS Khorasan generates revenue by Kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking, smuggling timber and collecting taxes. The Afghan National Army responded slowly towards the activities of ISIS Khorasan. Therefore, it started launching several attacks in Afghanistan. ISIS Khorasan has a radio channel "Voice of the Khilafat". The Radio channel helps it in recruitment. On 8 June 2015, ISIS killed 10 Afghan Taliban commanders in Nangarhar (Parker, 2019).

Since November 2015, Afghan National Army and Coalition forces are conducting air strikes on the ISIS held areas in Nangarhar province. The action against ISIS in Afghanistan is limited due to over stretched area, caves of Tora Bora and mountainous area. In January and February 2016, USA launched 70 to 80 air strikes against ISIS. Afghan National Army and USA are fighting against ISIS Khorasan. They are encouraging local militia for fighting against ISIS Khorasan. In March 2016, Ashraf Ghani the Afghan president in his speech accepted that ISIS is a threat to his country. He declared Afghanistan as a graveyard for ISIS. He requested Barack Obama the President of USA to use Afghanistan as a base to counter terrorism and ISIS in the region. The emergence of ISIS Khorasan increases the number of casualties in Afghanistan. An UNO report tells about increasing number of the Afghan civilians' casualties. In 2016, total 11418 con-combatants killed or wounded, as it was 11034 in 2015. This scenario made the Taliban and Afghan government to sit on one table for peace in Afghanistan. The death of Mula Mansoor Akhtar was a setback to the peace process (Borau & Wamba, 2019).

4.2. The Wilayat Khorasan in Pakistan

Pakistan is dealing with militancy for decades. Currently, more than 200 religious organizations are operating in the country. Pakistan became the victim of terrorism after the incident of 9/11. It lost more than 80000 people and \$100 billion. Pakistan deployed more than 180000 arm troops on Pak-Afghan border for its security. The operation Zarb-e-Azab was in progress against militants since 2014, when ISIS came on the scene. Initially, Pakistan denied the presence of ISIS in the country. The Pro-ISIS wall chalking, Graffiti, Pamphlets and Black flags have been seen in the provinces of KPK and Balochistan. The statements of provincial Police officers of Pakistan provide information about the arrest of ISIS affiliated persons in different parts of the country. Lieutenant General Hidayat ul Rehman,

who served as a first Corps Commander of Gilgit Balitistan for Pakistan Army said that there are many groups of Taliban working in the country (Vu & Van Orden, 2019). ISIS is the just change of name. Pakistan Army is well aware of the situation and knows how to tackle it. Pakistan banned the organization and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif called it a threat to the world peace during his address to UNO General Assembly. A statement of Balochistan Home and Tribal Affairs Department's officer have been published on many occasions that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Ahl-e-Sunnet Wal Jammata are recruiting for ISIS. These banned organizations call Shia sect of Muslims as infidels. They targeted Shia people and their religious places. Lashkar e Jhanvi sent fighters to Syria against Bashar al Assad in 2013. They had a training camp in Iraqi city of Erbil. They named the camp Ghazi Abdul Rasheed. Lashkar e Jhangvi al Alami is a new splinter of the old anti-Shia organization. Its leader Asif alias Chotu was recently killed by security forces. He was accused of many terrorist attacks (Akbari & Gabdulhakov, 2019).

The Chief Cleric of Lal Masjid Moulana Abdul Aziz said in a video that he would welcome ISIS and he believes that the children were killed in Army Public School are not martyrs. The Government of Pakistan kept him under house arrest. In February 2015, Director General of Intelligence Bureau said about the arrest of many ISIS affiliates. He also told that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba have soft corner for ISIS. The Commander of Tehrik-e-Taliban from Bajour also announced his affiliation with ISIS in February 2015. Later on, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) made the similar announcement. ISIS claims that it recruited nearly 12000 from Kurram and Hungu. In March 2015, Pakistan Army started operation Khyber II in Tirah Valley and ISIS affiliated groups started claiming responsibility of attacks in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. It shows that operation Khyber II forced these affiliates to leave Pakistan. Jamat ul Ahrar a militant wing of Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan joined ISIS under the leadership of Abdul Wali alias Khalid Umar Khorasani. This organization claimed responsibility of Wagah Border, Gulshan e Iqbal, Maal Road Lahore, Civil Hospital Quetta and Sehwan Sharif attacks in Pakistan. It was the first organization who took the name of Khorasan as an identity for showing affiliation to ISIS. Jundullah another ISIS Khorasan affiliated organization claimed that a delegation of ISIS visited Pakistan. On 13 May 2015, militants of Jundullah killed 43 and injured 30 people of Ismaili Community (Sect of Muslims) at Safoora Chowk, Karachi. Police found pamphlets on the crime scene calling them infidel and promise to purify Pakistan from them. ISIS claimed the responsibility of the incident. ISIS claims responsibilities of the attacks in Pakistan through Amaq. On 9 February 2017, ISIS Khorasan distributed pamphlets in Orakzai Agency and threatened Pakistan with attacks. Aizaz Chaudhary Secretary of Foreign Affairs said that members of ISIS are coming to Afghanistan from Syria and they will create difficulties for Pakistan.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and other Al-Qaeda affiliates are strongly dealt by Pakistan. After operation Zarb-e-Azab, Pakistan army started another operation "Rad-ul-Fasad (End of Feud)" (Walton, 2019).

Pakistan is the only state of the world standing strongly against militancy. Madrassas, and religious activities are under surveillance. Government is trying to curb the financiers of the terrorist organizations, especially ISIS Khorasan. But the problem is Afghanistan based leadership of ISIS Khorasan which is sending trained militants to attack in Pakistan. On 17 February 2017, ISPR's Major General Asif Ghafoor tweeted that his country handed over a list of 76 terrorists to Afghanistan. Pakistan is demanding strict action against TTP leader Mula Fazal Ullah, Jamaat ul Ahrar's leader Khalid Umar Khorasani, Leshkar e Jhangvi al Almi's Safdar Khorasani and leader of ISIS Haseeb Logri (Sultana, Afshan, & Fatima, 2019).

5. Least affected countries

5.1. China

The ISIS Khorasan is not active in China, yet China fears from ISIS Khorasan due to its supports in Muslim majority province of Xinjiang and from the area bordering Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Uighur a Xinjiang community had supported Al-Qaeda in the past. They lived in Pakistan and they were forced to leave. They went to Syria. China has a strict policy towards the province and its border management. Muslim Civil Servants and teachers are not allowed to participate in Islamic holidays, forbidden from fasting and religious activities. ISIS threatened China for seizing rights of Muslims, especially in Xinjiang province. East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is an active organization of the region and it has supporters in Xinjiang. In 2014, China faced many militant attacks in the province. The authorities reported that they soon took action and arrested 380 persons, broke 32 terrorist gangs and 13 persons were executed. They detonated 264 devices and recovered 3.15 tons explosives. China started several developments projects in the province. On 30 August 2016, a suicide bomber exploded himself in front of Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Smith, 2020).

China is investing a huge amount of money on (a) Pak China Economic Corridor, (b) China to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine, (c) China, Bangladesh, Myanmar and India Economic Corridor, (d) Nanning Singapore Route, (e) Trans-Siberian Railway, (f) Northern Sea Routes (g) Trans-Korean Railway. China is investing in Special Economic Zones in Central Asia. It has an investment in mobile phone, automobile manufacturing, cement, flat glass and textile sectors. The region is exporting 75% raw material like oil and gas and is turning into de-facto raw material colony for China. In 2000, China had investment of 1\$ billion in the region. In

2015, China and Uzbekistan had 3\$ billion of trade. It invested 23.6\$ billion in Kazakhstan. It is purchasing gas from Turkmenistan which worth of 30\$ billion. It is also building a Hydro power project in Kyrgyzstan. On 19 October 2014, China Central Asia Cooperation Forum's 4th meeting took place in China. The members of the forum discussed economic cooperation and integration. In March 2015, China published a plan for Cross border economic cooperation with Central Asia. China is investing in the mining sector of Afghanistan. Roads, Railways, Power lines, Tunnels and Oil refineries are built by Chinese companies in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia. This immense Chinese investment needs a peaceful region. Therefore, China is playing a pivotal role in Afghan government and Taliban dialogue process to counter ISIS Khorasan. China wants to maintain peace in the region for its economic development and trade (Blank, 2019).

5.2. Iran

Iran is supporting Bashar-al-Assad in Syria. It is providing financial and military support to him against ISIS. Many fighters of Iranian Revolutionary Guard are fighting in Syria for this purpose. A Member of Parliament's Defense and Security Committee of Russia, Andrei Kondratyev has recently appreciated the role of Iran in war against ISIS in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Therefore, Iran will be the target of ISIS. Iran is a Shia state and Jundullah an anti-Shia militant group conducted several attacks in Iran. This group is active in Iranian province of Sistan va Balochistan since 2009. Iran blames USA for supporting this insurgent group. It had links with Taliban's anti Shia wing. In future it could be possible with the help of Jundullah, ISIS Khorasan may start militant attacks in Iran. Jundullah targets Civilians and Revolutionary Guards in Iran. The Afghanistan bases ISIS Khorasan and drug trafficking are the two major concerns for Iran. According to UNO official report on Drug and Crime 2009, drug smugglers are using Iranian route for exporting 40% of the Afghan drug export to the world. Iran wants to stop drug trafficking because of it 130000 citizens are becoming drug addicted every year in the country (Hilali, 2019).

The entry of ISIS in Afghanistan changed the scenario of the battle ground. Taliban are opposing ISIS and they need a partner to get rid of it. Taliban decided to move towards Iran for support. In May 2015, Taliban delegation from Qatar visited Iran to discuss the policy to tackle ISIS in the region. Late Commander of Taliban Mullah Akhtar Mansoor visited Iran and Dubai on several occasions. Iran is supplying Rockets, Mortars and Surface to the Air missile to the anti USA elements in Afghanistan. The main beneficiary of the Iranian weapons is Ghulam Yahya. He was the former mayor of Herat and belongs to Tajik tribe. The Wall Street Journal reported that initially Iran was supporting Taliban with finance but later on it started providing them equipments and training as well. The training camps

are in Mashhad, Tehran and Zahedan. Iran wants to keep ISIS away from its territory. Therefore, it is supporting Taliban and it is the first occasion of the history that Iran is supporting a non-Shia group (Parker, 2019).

5.3. Russia

Russia has experience of fighting against modern insurgency. It fought against Taliban, Chechens and now it is part of Syrian Civil War. Russia defeated ISIS on many battle fields in Syria and changed the war in favour of Bashar al Assad. The Muslims are 20 million of the total population of Russia and their new generation believes in Islamic Ummah instead of Russian citizenship. It is really threatening to Russian security. Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan are the Muslim majority provinces. These states are not far away from the Middle East where ISIS has its so-called Islamic State. In 2014, rise of ISIS and its attacks became a serious threat to the world. Russia quickly responded towards the terrorist activities of this organization and banned it. It maintained a proper data base, DNA registration system, conducted raids, kept surveillance of Mosques and categorized the police registries. The Russian Federal Security Service detained 770 people and prevented 30 attacks in 2015. ISIS soon inspired the Russian citizens and they started traveling to Syria for fighting along with it. Jaish al Muhajreen wal Ansar is established by Chechens in Syria. Russian President Vladimir Putin estimated 7000 Russian and Central Asian fighters are fighting for ISIS and Jabhat ul Nasra in Syria and Iraq. According to the Director of the Russian Federal Security Service Alexander Bortnikov, 1700 fighters are Russian nationals. Russia's neighbors are Central Asian states. The militant groups have strong roots in this region. There are many Central Asian workers in Russia. In 2000, the number of these workers were 4501585 and in 2015 it was 4950593. The Moscow led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) frequently alarmed the government about the increasing influence of the ISIS in Central Asia. It also reported that the organization is trying to create an underground state in the region. Russian ambassador to the UNO expressed a same threat to the Security Council. On 19 April 2015, Ali Abu Muhammad al Dagestani an ISIS member was killed by Russia forces. In July 2015, during 15th Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Council in Russia, a member of the council discussed ISIS and considered it dangerous than Al-Qaeda. In October 2015, Chief of Staff of Putin Sergei Ivanov, accepted that many Russian citizens are coming back after fighting for ISIS in Syria. They are real threat to the security of his country. The same kind of threat was expressed by President Putin, in his speech to United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. He told the world that if these experienced militants come to their native countries, they will create difficulties there. On 17 February 2016, Federal Security Service of Russia charged seven persons for having links

with ISIS in Yekaterinburg a Russian city. On 31 October 2016, ISIS claimed the responsibility of targeting Russian airplane carrying 250 passengers is the major incident of terrorists attack on Russians. Hence, Russia has similar threats from ISIS as the regional countries of so-called Khorasan have (Akbari & Gabdulhakov, 2019).

5.4. Central Asia

ISIS is recruiting from Central Asian countries and it has its camps there, but, ISIS is not fully active in Central Asian countries. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are the Central Asian states. These states have borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The political system and border management by these states are feeble. The militants of Central Asia were part of Afghan war against Soviet Union. Russia considers them a direct security threat. The political situation of the region is similar to the Middle East and supportive for militancy. Nobody has the accurate figures of ISIS supporters in the region. Since 2012, nearly 4000 fighters of Central Asia joined the ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The international reports suggest that 2000 to 4000 fighter were fighting for the cause of the militant organization till 2015. They use Turkey as their route to reach Syria. Many of the Central Asian states have visa free agreements with Turkey which helps these fighters to reach Syrian Refugee Camps. A report from International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence tells that Central Asian region is the third largest producer of foreign fighters for ISIS. Tajikistan and Afghanistan have 1344 km long border. Tajik fighters had shown their brutality during the Civil War of 1990. Tajikistani Government forced its citizens for shaving beards and had maintained a strong surveillance on speeches in the mosques. Muhammad Umar Kunduz Sufi is active on Tajik-Afghan border for ISIS. Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov was a commander of Tajikistani Special Purpose Mobility Unit. He joined ISIS and appointed as a minister of War in September 2015. He was killed in an airstrike in July 2016. In January 2015, Tajikistani militant group announced Jihad against government through a video.

In the same month, the security forces arrested Uzbek militants in the country for planning to attack a police station (Srivastava, 2019). The official figures say that there are 110, but unofficial reports tell us about 200 Tajik fighters are with ISIS. The organization appointed a Tajik militant as an Amir of Raqqa. It suggests that ISIS has a proper plan for Tajikistan. ISIS offers \$500 to the Tajik fighter. This amount is more than the wages in the country. The government announced an amnesty for those who are returning from Syria and 22 fighters of ISIS benefited by this scheme (Akbari & Gabdulhakov, 2019).

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is the oldest among the militant organizations of Central Asia. It announced affiliation with ISIS under the

leadership of Usman Ghazi in September 2014. ISIS had appointed an Amir in Uzbekistan but his name is not known. The Uzbek are blamed for supporting terrorism in neighboring countries in the region as well. Abdullah Toshkandi (killed), Khalid Dagestani, Abu Hussein and Abu Usman are the prominent ISIS fighters from Uzbekistan.

There are reports of 200 to 300 persons especially from Fargana valley are fighting along with ISIS. The CENTCOM sponsored publication Central Asia reported in February 2015, 900 Uzbeks fighters have been killed for the cause of ISIS. Kazakhstan had a 30 days visa free agreement with Turkey. Its citizens are using this agreement for entering in Syria through Syrian refugees camps in Turkey. Kazakhstan on many occasions denied any radical activity in the country but the recent terrorist attacks in different parts of the country are not favoring the official statements. In October 2013, a video showed 150 Kazak fighters with Black flags. In August 2014, Abu Muaz gave a call to the Kazakhs to join ISIS for the cause of Jihad. There are reports of 250 fighters passing through Kazakhstan and trained in Russia.

Al Hayat media wing of ISIS is used to urge the people to join Jihad. Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are sharing 750 km border. The government of Turkmenistan quickly responded to the issue of ISIS. It dug ditches of 6 meter depth and installed serves wires with 2 meter height on Afghan-Turkmen border. The reports estimated that 360 Turkmen are in Syria. The poor governance of Kyrgyzstan is suitable for ISIS. The Kyrgyzstan interior ministry accepted that 30 out of 200 citizens fighting for ISIS had been killed. The arrest of Nadir Zhavliev after crossing Kyrgyz-Uzbek border is a clear evidence that the militants can use the Kyrgyzstan as a gateway to Uzbekistan. Nadir told the Uzbekistan TV that he is member of ISIS and had participated in its operations in Iraq and Syria. The organization assigned him task of recruitment when he was arrested (Lushenko et al., 2019).

According to P Stobdan a former Ambassador, Spirit of Jihad, Bigotry, employment and ignorance are the factors driving Central Asians to join militant groups. It will hurt the region in future. Russia never wants to see any militancy in its territory. It is supporting different governments of the region. Russia provides army training to the officers of Central Asian states and they are preferred for promotion in their countries. In December 2015, Russian President Putin visited Uzbekistan. The president of Uzbekistan requested him for help against terrorism. Kyrgyzstan received \$1.2 million of arms and military equipments. Russia placed \$200 million for modernization of Tajikistan Army. Russia and Central Asian states are part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The purpose of the organizations is to enhance cooperation in terms of security and economy (Schulze & Hwang, 2019).

6. Regional alliances against ISIS

ISIS is losing territory in Iraq and Syria. USA intelligence officers reported that the territorial loss by ISIS does not mean that the organization is being weak. The fighters of ISIS are moving towards Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Since January 2015, ISIS has called this region Wilayat Khorasan. These states are part of different pacts and treaties like, Shanghai Cooperation Council, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Commonwealth of Independent States, and Regional Cooperation for Development and Counter Terrorism Alliance. These organizations and treaties have different tasks to be achieved. The changing scenario of the war on terrorism and militancy is demanding multipotent alliances. To counter ISIS in the region, the regional countries invited Taliban for dialogues. On 07 July 2015, representatives of Pakistan, Taliban, Afghan Government, USA and China gathered at Murree in Pakistan. It was a breakthrough meeting for peace and to control the spread of ISIS in the region. The second meeting was cancelled due to attack on Mula Akhtar Mansoor. Taliban delegations visited China in November 2014, May 2015 and in July 2016. Taliban showed their willingness on China's role in peace process. Russia is also willing to participate in this peace process due to the threats of ISIS Khorasan. Moreover, Russia is inching closer towards Pakistan. It offered Helicopter and support for Gwadar port to Pakistan. Pakistan and Russia had joint military exercises. Russian Ambassador to Pakistan offered his support to the projects and hoped for linking CPEC with Economic Corridor to Eurasian Economic Union project. In December 2016, Russia and Iran admitted that they have relations with Taliban in Afghanistan. They described that they want to bring Taliban in peace process. Russia also accepted that its representatives and Taliban have met in Moscow and other countries on many occasions for the last two years (Ryan, 2019).

Russia's interest in regional security and Chinese interest in regional trade brought them closer to Pakistan on the issue of militancy. In April 2013, the representative of China, Russia and Pakistan met for the first time in Beijing. The next meeting held on 20 November 2013 at Islamabad. On 27 December 2016, they met for the third time in Moscow. They showed their concerns about the rising influence of ISIS Khorasan and suggested using Taliban as a tool against it. Maria Zakharova Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman of Russia said that they decided a flexible approach towards few Taliban to remove their names from UNO sanctions list. It was Taliban's pre-dialogue condition. A few days after the meeting of 27 December, UNO lifted sanctions from Gulbaddin Hikmatyar, a leader of Hizb e Islami fighter group in Afghanistan and fought against Soviet Union. The Afghan government reacted strongly against the meeting and called that any peace process without Afghanistan will be fruitless. It also asked UNO to keep Molvi Haibatullah in the sanction list in December 2016. Russia, China and

Pakistan expressed their will to include Afghanistan soon. Iran also wants to be part of this process. USA is another main actor in the region. It invited India and Afghanistan for a meeting on peace in Afghanistan in September 2016 at New York. Russia and USA are not on the same table against ISIS Khorasan (Belcastro, 2019).

7. Conclusion

After Middle East, ISIS Khorasan has a strong hold in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has plans to target Russia, China, Iran and Central Asia. The leadership of ISIS Khorasan is based in Afghanistan. Currently, ISIS Khorasan with the help of its affiliates is conducting major attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This organization is capable to launch attacks in other regional countries as well. The presence of ISIS Khorasan in the region may not only deteriorate the peace in the region but it will also be dangerous to the peace of the world. As it has affiliates in Africa, Europe and Asia. The priority of the regional and western powers should be to counter or stop the flow of ISIS Khorasan. Russia is the leading country against ISIS and China is the leading investor in this region. They should play their due role in the eradication of ISIS Khorasan and should form a strong alliance. Both Russia and China along with Pakistan started a process of meeting against militants especially ISIS Khorasan. It is an encouraging step. As these countries are trying to establish a platform against ISIS, but the process is slow. They want to give a special role to Taliban against ISIS Khorasan. The situation created by the rise of ISIS Khorasan shows that the regional states are willing to make an alliance with Russia despite the influence of USA. It is suggested that Russia, China and Pakistan should include Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian states in this process because these countries have threats from ISIS Khorasan. Their inclusion in this process will produce positive results.

References

- Akbari, A., & Gabdulhakov, R. (2019). Platform Surveillance and Resistance in Iran and Russia: The Case of Telegram. *Surveillance & Society*, 17(1/2), 223-231.
- Baev, P. K. (2019). 3 Turkey's ambiguous strategic rapprochement with Russia. *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*, 48.
- Belcastro, F. (2019). *Syrian Foreign Policy: The Alliances of a Regional Power*: Routledge.
- Blank, S. (2019). Triangularism old and new: China, Russia, and the United States Sino-Russian relations in the 21st century (pp. 215-241): Springer.
- Borau, S., & Wamba, S. F. (2019). Social Media, Evolutionary Psychology, and ISIS: A Literature Review and Future Research Directions. Paper presented at the World Conference on Information Systems and Technologies.
- Diamantis, A. (2019). Setting an Example: The International Criminal Court Must Prosecute Chechnya, Russia and the Members of ISIS for Committing Crimes Against Humanity Against LGBTQ+ Persons1.
- Hilali, A. (2019). Iran against Islamic State (Daesh): Political Impacts on Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 26(1), 229-239.
- Ismail, A., & Mishra, S. (2019). Configuring terrorism in the age of ISIS: The New York Times' coverage of the 2015 Beirut and Paris attacks. *Global Media and Communication*, 1742766519846643.
- Keating, V. C., & Kaczmarek, K. (2019). Conservative soft power: Liberal soft power bias and the 'hidden' attraction of Russia. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22(1), 1-27.
- Lushenko, P., Auken, L. V., & Stebbins, G. (2019). ISIS-K: deadly nuisance or strategic threat? *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30(2), 265-278.
- Mironova, V. (2019). Who are the ISIS people? *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 13(1), 32-39.
- Parker, J. W. (2019). Between Russia and Iran: Room to Pursue American Interests in Syria.
- Rivera, W. (2019a). The Future of ISIS: Regional and International Implications ed. by Feisal al-Istrabadi and Sumit Ganguly. *The Middle East Journal*, 73(1), 172-174.
- Rivera, W. (2019b). MODERN HISTORY AND POLITICS-The Future of ISIS: Regional and International Implications. *The Middle East Journal*, 73(1), 172-174.
- Ryan, C. R. (2019). Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East. *Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East*, 7.
- Schulze, K. E., & Hwang, J. C. (2019). Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: new insights into jihad in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 41(1), 1-13.
- Smith, N. R. (2020). The Technological Dimension of US-Russia Relations A New Cold War? (pp. 67-79): Springer.
- Sokirianskaia, E. (2019). Russia and ISIS: A New Phase of the Old Conflict? *Terrorism, Radicalisation & Countering Violent Extremism* (pp. 101-114): Springer.
- Srivastava, R. (2019). Terrorism in Central Asia. *research journal of social sciences*, 10(7).
- Sultana, T., Afshan, S., & Fatima, Z. (2019). PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS IN THE EMERGING GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT. *Journal of European Studies*, 35(1), 36-53.
- Vu, T., & Van Orden, P. (2019). Revolution and world order: the case of the Islamic State (ISIS). *International Politics*, 1-22.
- Walton, K. (2019). Leaving Home for Jihad: Predicting ISIS Foreign Fighters in the West.