

Deconstructing Daesh

Jaideep Saikia

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Asian Strategic Review 2016 may seem to be a particularly misleading title for a compendium dedicated exclusively to the phenomenon of terrorism, but as has been stated right in the *Foreword*, the conscious focus of the compilation of the twenty papers is to 'seek a greater comprehension of the nature and geographic spread of the present and future threats from terrorism'. Indeed there is no gainsaying the fact that the principal security dilemma and consequently the narrative of the present have been governed by the scourge of terror, and ways and means to decisively combat it.

While a surfeit of literature on terrorism has come to the fore in the last five decades or so, the theme of Islamist terror has been the dominant motif since the events of 9/11, 26/11 and of late *l'affaire Daesh*. As a matter of fact, the present volume, too, despite its attempts to venture beyond the discourse of Daesh is primarily a cornucopia of the manner in which the 'sentinel of the neo-caliphate' conducts itself in its agenda of anointing itself as the *primus inter pares* among the most puritanical of Salafists.

Within the covers of this book are four sections, divided into i) Ideology, Finance, Technology and Weapons of Mass Destruction ii) West and Central Asia iii) South Asia and iv) China and Southeast Asia. The demarcation is, however, somewhat unwieldy with only the first section dedicated to a paradigmatic examination. The delineation that knits the latter three sections and are examined geographically could well have had the enterprise of the first section woven into them, especially as a secure examination of Daesh exhibits not only a centralized metrics driven command and control mechanism with a three member *Al-Imara* (The Emirate) and a *Shura* (Council), which is not unlike al-Qaeda's Khorasan Group. It is, therefore, incorrect to state that tactics, strategy and modus operandi of both the groups are fundamentally different as has been proffered by Munish Sharma in his paper *Trigger to Tabs: ISIS and the Informative Age*.

As a matter of fact, one of the aspects that could have been studied is the concept of *taqiyya*, which according to the Sharia allows deception in Islam, and is even obligatory at times. In other words, feigning apostasy is permitted in Islam (Qur'an 4:29). For instance, Muslims who must choose between either disavowal of Islam or being put to death are not only permitted to lie by pretending to be apostatized, but many jurists have decreed that, according to the Qur'an, Muslims are obligated to lie in such instances. *Tawriya*, yet another form that allows Muslims to lie to non-believers, is the intentional creation of a false impression. The dissonance that appears apparent between Daesh and al-Qaeda to most, therefore, could well be a ruse. In reality, there has always been a strategic convergence of objective between al-Qaeda and Daesh (about both the establishment of a 'caliphate' and *Nizam-e-Mustafa*). It is quite clear that whereas al-Qaeda concentrates on the far-enemy, the immediate goal of Daesh is that of holding and expanding territory, which indeed it is doing in Iraq and Syria. Setbacks in the field—in recent times (including the fall of Fallujah)—that Daesh has been experiencing have led it to change tactics, including an implicit encouragement to undertake 'lone wolf' attacks across the globe as it has realized that the undertaking of the *hijrah* may no longer be as undemanding as earlier. A close reading of the latest issues of *Dabiq* indicates this.

The fact that the Orlando attacker, Omar Mateen (professedly a Daesh supporter) was lauded by al-Qaeda is also a matter that needs to be factored in. In this context, it would be of relevance to state that counter terrorism agencies are still mulling over aspects such as de-radicalization when it is clear that there is no such animal. The state must understand not only the well-defined differences between Islam and terrorism, but also the futility of pursuing a nonexistent de-radicalization programme. Research has shown that a number of Saudi

Guantanamo detainees that were 'de-radicalised' have returned to terrorism upon release. Although there have been arguments that de-radicalization creates a barrier to recidivism, there is really no way to fathom or evaluate whether a thorough cauterization has taken place. Or are there de-radicalized terrorists—disengaging because of purely instrumental reasons—who continue to harbour a radical worldview? Who determines whether the law-enforcer is erring or not by arranging theological correction of 'radicalised minds' that have never read the Qur'an? Counter radicalization and correct neuro-psychological profiling are the only ways to approach suppressed homosexuals and aggressive loners such as Omar Mateen and the Nice attacker, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel (Bouhlel, a 'certified' non-practising Muslim!). A deeper reading into what Byron might have understood in his immortal work *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as the 'wandering outlaw of his own dark mind' could well unearth much about the manner in which there is so much bloodletting of late. The so-called 'thought virus' that is reportedly being spread by people such as Zakir Naik only enforces the call of the wild in a deviant mind whose shrunken Amygdala or smaller ventromedial prefrontal cortex, abnormalities in the brain that propel aggressive conduct disorder. One of the *convenient* explanations which the sole survivor of the 1 July attack gave was that he was inspired by Naik's speeches.

The 'radical' not only finds an outlet which has sanction by an 'establishment' (in this case, Daesh), but deceives the counter terrorism apparatus and the world that it is the call of an Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi that drove her into a killing frenzy. Therefore, even as a counter radicalization programme is set in motion, the most important (initial) examination that must be conducted is to clinically unearth the real motivation of the perpetrator. The simplest explanation that abounds (particularly in media) is to term a killer 'a bad Muslim' because she has misinterpreted the Qur'an. The acceptable explanation could well have been to term her a psychopath who found a universe of discourse and a clear, unambiguous, audible paradigm where her behaviour not only is encouraged, but one which is glorified by recourse to prophetic injunctions. After all, in *Dabiq*, almost all acts of barbarism have instant 'endorsement' by recourse to a *Shura*. For instance, the burning alive of the Jordanian pilot Mu'adh Safi Yusuf al-Kasasibah—according to Daesh—is called 'equivalent response'. It quotes an *ayah* from An-Nahl thus: 'and if you punish (an enemy), punish with an equivalent of that with which you were harmed'. In other words, it says that in burning the Jordanian pilot alive and burying him under a pile of debris, Daesh carried out a just form of retaliation for his involvement in the bombing campaign which resulted in the killing of countless Muslims who, as a result of these airstrikes, are burned alive and buried under mountains of wreckage. Daesh cleverly makes use of the Qur'an to justify

