

West Asia Dialogue Series

India's Role in Building a Counter Narrative to ISIS Propaganda

Tuesday, December 9, 2015

India International Centre,
40, Max Mueller Marg
New Delhi- 110003

10:00 AM-12:30 PMIST

Duration: 150 minutes



BACKGROUND

In the context of present international security scenario, the terror group IS (Islamic State) has been able to grow rapidly in its military momentum despite the military intervention by US and its allies in the Persian Gulf. Apart from these military gains, the group bears an immense strength in terms of its emotional appeal and has successfully managed to indoctrinate vulnerable and impressionable youths across the world to join their ranks in Syria, Iraq and now Libya, in their pursuit of a misinterpreted notion of Jihad. The IS has been able to garner support across the world through a very tactical and strategic exploitation of the social media space. According to a recent report by Quilliam Foundation, the almost ubiquitous presence of the terrorist outfit in the virtual space coupled with the sheer volume of the unique propaganda that is developed on a daily basis makes the very effort of building a counter narrative becomes redundant. The different propaganda techniques adopted by ISIS also ends up painting a picture of Jihad, wherein joining the group is not only restricted to the idea of indulging in a war but also becoming a member of the “Caliphate” to serve for “God’s project on Earth.” The Foundation’s report also observes that the use of brutality by the ISIS is a red herring and only serves to muzzle local dissent and gratify sympathizers on an international level whilst colouring a comprehensive understanding of its organizational and recruitment structure. Thus while the West is preoccupied by labelling the narrative of the outfit under the head of brutality, the most important narrative for ISIS’ propagandists that fuels its growth is the offering of an Islamic utopia. To this extent, failure to assess the ISIS theory of utopia will preclude any efforts to challenge the ideas of the outfit successfully.

Evidently, the social media has emerged as the ‘radical mosque’. Charlie Winters from the Quilliam Foundation has observed that “*While radicalization, for the most part begins offline, Islamic State, along with other groups, has nurtured a situation in which the curious are able to have direct contact with former or current fighters, hear first-hand accounts from the battlefield and swap logistical advice. In decades gone by, this was a function served by so-called ‘radical mosques’.* In the digital era, social media platforms are the space where this happens. Crucially, social media platforms are not the reason for radicalization or recruitment, just as ‘radical’ mosques and bookshops were never the reason.” Thus, it is evident that it is not simply the propaganda that is fuelling ISIS recruitment. It is a combination of external human influence and systematic radicalization process that has sustained the radicalization.

In the context of India, the national security agencies have already undertaken a number of measures that include individual counseling for detained potential recruits with participation of the family members of the detainee and patronizing of Islamic scholars from various sects and community based organizations to address their communities. Referring to a meeting note uploaded by Department of Homeland Security of US Federal Government on its public website, even though the current approach of Government of India may count as an ethical counter-narrative but several possible approaches of counter-narrative yet remains to be utilized by the government. In the current scenario, when ISIS is driven by an objective to build a radical anti-thesis to the contemporary global political and economic order, the need for India to build a counter-narrative is immediate when its own citizens today are attracted by the macabre theater of extremist narrative espoused by the ISIS. However to really develop an effective counter narrative, it is imperative to break down the ISIS propaganda techniques into its constituent parts for a more nuance understanding of its information war. In doing so, we will further inform the development of an alternative narrative that thwarts its growth.

The Oval Observer Foundation in collaboration with the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), will convene a roundtable dialogue on 9th December 2015 with members from the Government of India, strategic community and the diplomatic community to discuss how India can develop counter-terrorism policies that not only guard her domestic front from ISIS radicalism but also support the efforts of the international community through development of effective counter-narratives both on social media and through de-radicalization programs in conjunction with intelligence sharing. The report prepared by the Quilliam Foundation will serve as a background for understanding the reach of ISIS propaganda and will be used to steer the discussion in a direction that is solution oriented.

The Key Themes of the Dialogue will include:

- Identifying the element of external human influence in the radicalization process and evaluating policy responses for the same.
- Developing a dedicated digital media center based on a public-private partnership model to monitor the communication channels and to use modern digital technology to build the alternative narrative.
- Sources of Financing for Outreach and Operational Activities of ISIS and What India can do to control the same.
- Identifying the baseline of ISIS extremist narrative.

Registrations

There is no cost to participate in the Dialogue but registrations are required. To book your place for the Dialogue, [Click here.](#)

For additional queries please send an email to Rahul.jain@ovalobserver.org

Facts about ISIS Propaganda and Recruitment

>Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has estimated ISIS has 50,000 fighters in Syria alone. Others have put the size of the group's fighting force as high as 200,000. By comparison, Iraq's security forces are estimated to have approximately 84,000 between the military and federal police force combined, and Syria's army is thought to have 125,000 regulars in April, according to *The New York Times.*

> According to estimates released in May by the United Nations, 25,000 people have travelled to fight in Iraq and Syria, as well as in the conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen. That figure includes those who have joined ISIS, Al Qaeda and other militant groups, but the report noted that ISIS "currently attracts most global foreign terrorist fighters."

> There have been a total of 205 terrorist attacks by ISIS across the globe including the latest one in Paris and Beirut. These figures do not include attacks carried out by affiliates of the terror outfit.

> Intelligence Bureau (IB) reported in June that a total of 11 Indians, including the four youth from Kalyan in Maharashtra, had joined the global terror group, Islamic State (IS) and five Indians died in the Iraq-Syria war zone fighting for the jihadi group in its attempt to establish a caliphate.

About Oval Observer Foundation

Oval Observer Foundation is a strategic engagement and an action platform for economic, social and political issues related to emerging markets and high growth nations. Established in early 2014, the Foundation provides a continuous engagement platform to stakeholders interested in increased growth in emerging economies. In pursuance of its mandate Oval Observer explores trade and investment issues in emerging economies, as one of its core thematic research and engagement field. The Foundation is registered as a non-profit entity in both India and the U.K. and will soon expand its footprint to other emerging economies. For more information, kindly visit: www.ovalobserver.org

About IPCS

Founded in 1996 as an independent think tank, by former IAS officer **PR Chari** and Major General (Retd.) Dipankar Banerjee, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), is one of the premier research institutes and think tanks on South Asia. It continues to be one of the leading independent institutes in the region with no affiliation to a particular institution and/or ideology. The initial charter of the Institute focussed more on non-military security issues and threats to the region. However, the nuclear tests in 1998 and developments in the post 9/11 period in South Asia impinged on the focus of the Institute; and today, the Institute is again attempting to strike a fine balance between military and non-military security issues. Research at the Institute is carried out through its five programmes: The Nuclear Security Programme; SE Asia Research Programme; China Research Programme; Center for Internal and Regional Security; Armed Conflicts in South Asia.

About Oval West Asia Project

The West Asia project will evaluate the reasons in terms of India's approach towards the region that have helped her in maintaining cordial ties with most of the countries in the region. This will establish India's potential to emerge as a key player in ensuring stability in the region and how it will fit with India's vision for attaining a much more significant role on international affairs issues. As a key deliverable for the project, the Foundation will be formulating a comprehensive report on India's Foreign and Economic Policy Imperatives for West Asia. The report shall attempt to lay the roadmap for India's leadership role in maintaining peace and stability in the West Asian Region and fostering relations that complement her economic goals.