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# **Al-Qaeda, IS and Lashkar-e-Taiba**

## **Modus Operandi in South Asia and Europe**

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### **Introduction**

Terrorism has emerged as one of the key features defining national and regional security discourses and practices in recent decades, reflecting the shift from ‘traditional’ security issues such as inter-State conflict and nuclear war to ‘non-traditional’ threats embodied by non-State actors, the impact of climate change and issues connected to economic and human development. Although States continue to play a pivotal role in processes of international security, the growing importance of non-State actors is exemplified by groups such as the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic State (IS), which have partially blurred the demarcations between State and non-State actors: the Taliban now negotiate directly with the Afghan and United States (US) government whilst the IS used to control vast swathes of territory in the self-proclaimed Caliphate in Iraq and Syria, enacting functions commonly associated with governmental authority and sovereignty such as collecting taxes and providing healthcare (Oosterveld & Bloem, 2017). The activities of now transnational groups such as IS as well as the counterterrorism operations against them fit into what Mary Kaldor (2013), Professor at the London School of Economics, famously described as constituting “new wars” that occur “in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened” and are characterized by the breakdown in “the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political” (p. 2).

Albeit the main activities of terrorist organizations such as IS and Al-Qaeda have been primarily based in the Middle East, the security threat embodied by them has taken on a transnational and global dimension since the 2001 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda had already established its profile as the world’s leading terrorist group prior to that, attacking the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, but it was specifically the 9/11 attacks in the US that struck the core of the American and Western psyche, exposing the West’s vulnerability to a terrorist threat that could strike the core of the western ‘homelands’ (Skitka et al., 2009). In the ensuing ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOT) of President Bush, the US invaded Afghanistan and Iraq; two conflicts that have further destabilized the Middle East and have contributed to rising anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in the region (Thrall & Goepner, 2017).

Allied to the US in its GWOT, some European countries too have become the target of large-scale terror attacks. The 2004 Madrid train attacks, the 2005 London bombings, the Bataclan theatre attacks in Paris in 2015, 2016 attacks in Berlin, Brussels, Istanbul and Paris, and the 2017 attacks in Istanbul and Manchester have shaped not just the European focus and rhetoric on counterterrorism but have also resulted in enhanced anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe (Abdelkader, 2017). Notably, Al-Qaeda’s claim as the globe’s leading terrorist organization has been contested by the IS, which has been the main perpetrator of attacks in Europe in the 2010s. Although the peak of the IS’ capacity to execute terror attacks in Europe appears to have ceased, its attacks have left scars in the heart of Europe, exposing countries’ vulnerability to attacks that have partially been committed by individuals that have been born

and raised in Europe. In conjunction with the increasing influx of Muslim migrants and refugees, this has raised serious questions concerning Europe's future security for regional policymakers, security professionals and the European public.

Security in South Asia has also been detrimentally impacted by the activities of non-State actors and terrorist organizations. Afghanistan has descended into violence following the re-rise of the Taliban, Pakistan faces terrorist as well as separatist violence (Behuria, 2007) whilst India has long battled a Pakistan-backed insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, with affiliates of Al-Qaeda and IS now making inroads into Kashmir as well. Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based group, has emerged as the region's leading terrorist organization, attacking the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in 2001 and executing a multi-level attack over four days in Mumbai in 2008, displaying an extremely high level of operational sophistication (Nayak & Krepon, 2012). Other South Asian countries (notably Bangladesh, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka) have all been witness to different extents and forms of extremist violence as well, ranging from small and large-scale attacks to more general issues connected to radicalization. While political violence in South Asia is a complex phenomenon that often correlates to distinctive local and regional grievances rather than fundamentalist affiliations, terrorism as such has begun to decisively define the regional discourses on national security.

This paper elaborates on the modus operandi of three transnational terrorist organizations: Al-Qaeda, IS and LeT, all of which have proven their capacity to perform large-scale terror attacks on a transnational level and intend to strike targets in both Europe and South Asia in their global jihad. Following a brief summary of the report's methodology, the paper discusses the three organizations in regard to their organizational structure, funding and operational tactics. Recognizing that terrorism is a multifaceted phenomenon that will require multifaceted and partially context-dependent responses, the paper then provides policy advice for national legislators and the criminal justice system more generally. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for enhanced regional integration to combat the organizational structure of terrorist organizations, especially in regard to terror financing.

## **Methodology**

All three cases have been selected based upon their inclusion in the Consolidated List of Terror Organizations, published by the United Nations Security Council on 8 September 2020 and recognizing them as transnationally active terror organizations. The groups under consideration have also been selected as they are active in various countries, have displayed their ability to hit targets in different countries, and derive (some of) the justification of their fight from the notion of jihad. The most relevant factors are the cross-border orientation and the potential for attacks beyond their geographical basis. The Afghan Taliban, albeit being a group that employs the operational tactics of a terrorist organization (Rubin, 2002), has a national/ethnic rather than transnational goal formulation and has subsequently not been included in the study (Dorrnsoro, 2009). Although AQ, IS and LeT have partially diverging conceptualizations of a Caliphate and how to achieve it, they are united by the non-recognition of the national borders imposed by the Sykes-Picot Agreement (Gelvin, 2016). The three

groups are partially highly heterogeneous: AQ and IS affiliated organizations even fought each other in Iraq and Syria (Byman & Williams, 2015). Despite this, all three groups have a transnational operational scope that is framed in the context of jihad, indicating intersections in the ideational framework. The report assesses them in three categories: (1) organizational structure, (2) funding patterns, and (3) operational strategy and tactics.

Both AQ and IS are decentralized and increasingly networked entities that rely on affiliate organizations, culminating in the widespread presence of both brands and their integration into new conflict theatres, ranging from Western Africa to the Philippines (Kalicharan, 2019). Some of these affiliates operate as stand-alone actors that are not integrated into a direct chain of command, and although this ‘networkification’ constitutes a key dimension of Al-Qaeda’s and IS’ capacity, it can make it difficult to assess the exact nature of hierarchical structures within these organizations. As such, the study will not refer to affiliates unless specifically stated, and conceptualizes Al-Qaeda and the IS as convoluted, ambiguous and non-monolithic entities consisting of smaller groups that are connected via operational aims and tactics to differing extents.

The paper employs a comparative perspective towards Al-Qaeda, IS and LeT, allowing for the determination of “suggestive similarities and contrasts amongst cases” (Collier, 1993, p. 105). Recognizing the often highly context-dependent character of terrorist organizations, a cross-case comparison allows to determine how policy responses can converge or diverge, allowing for the potential replicability or non-replicability of policy-responses in specific cases. The report derives its sources from a variety of academic works, news articles and databases. The Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), a research center at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, has been consulted throughout this report and proves a valuable resource for further research.

The following section initiates the report’s analysis, commencing with Al-Qaeda before moving on to IS and LeT.

## **Al-Qaeda**

### ***Organizational Structure***

Al-Qaeda, founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abdullah Azzam, is currently led by al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda’s Amir, who is responsible for operational, strategic, tactical, logistical and organizational planning as well as approving organizational plans and budgets (Gunaratna & Oreg, 2010). Al-Zawahiri is notably less present in the international coverage of AQ than his predecessor Osama bin Laden, who rose to global notoriety due to his involvement in the 9/11 attacks. Under Al-Zawahiri, who has taken over AQ following bin Laden’s death in 2011, AQ has proven particularly apt in modifying its role in the face of counterterrorism operations and newer, even more radical organizations such as the IS, rebranding itself as a more reliable and persistent jihadi group (Clarke & Mir, 2020). In lieu of the role of an Amir and his organizational function, AQ can be best characterized as “a networked transnational constituency [...] [without] a defined or identifiable control apparatus”

(Hoffman, 2004, p. 551) that modifies its tactics regarding the obtainment of arms, funding and recruitment to the conditions it is exposed to, advocating strategic and tactical innovation in the attainment of its political aims.

AQ's capacity to adapt its structure to changing conditions and the onslaught of counterterrorism operations has enabled the group to emerge as the central node in the networks of global Islamic terrorism (Coll, 2004). It is the lack of a coherent structure and Al-Qaeda's networked existence that has rendered it immensely difficult for the US and its allies to eliminate the group despite removing the Taliban from power. This fluidity in operations is also expressed by the absence of an official political headquarter, which distinguishes Al-Qaeda from organizations such as the Afghan Taliban, who have held an informal political representation in Doha, Qatar, since 2013 (Gul, 2019). The absence of a long-term organizational base beyond Afghanistan has enabled the group to recalibrate its operations into areas with a lack of comprehensive State authority, allowing AQ a freer realm of operations and explicating Al-Qaeda's disrupted but ultimately sustained presence in Afghanistan: Afghanistan's instability following the Soviet invasion in 1979 was sustained by the Soviet-Afghan war, the political violence and volatility following the Taliban's rise to power and the post-9/11 invasion of the country.

Al-Qaeda's networked structure generates significant organizational expenses necessary for maintaining an operational profile and ensuring organizational cohesion (Clarke, 2019). Its contemporary structure marks a stark divergence from AQ's operational framework of the early 2000s, a point at which the group had established a functioning internal bureaucracy with a high extent of centralized executive power (Hoffman, 2004). One key factor that has contributed to the decentralization of Al-Qaeda's internal structure has been the US invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent removal of the Taliban from power, and although the invasion did not eliminate Al-Qaeda's networks, it did challenge and constrain Al-Qaeda's comparative operational freedom whilst also eliminating its leader bin Laden in 2011 in Pakistan. In light of this, Al-Qaeda's transition to a more networked and less monolithic entity reflects the shifting strategic realities on the ground and epitomizes the group's capacity to modify its structure according to the politico-strategic conditions it is exposed to.

The diversification of Al-Qaeda into a networked structure, a process that could also be termed 'networkification', is expressed in the emergence of Al-Qaeda franchise groups and affiliates. As analyzed by Colin P. Clarke (2019), a political scientist employed at the RAND Corporation, Al-Qaeda has diversified its operations throughout Muslim countries either through internal expansion (establishing its own affiliate group) or a merger with a local group that then pledges allegiance to Al-Qaeda's cause (external expansion) (see Table 1). Clarke (2019) observes that expansion and affiliation can yield both advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand, Al-Qaeda can insert itself into more conflicts and expand its organizational outreach and footprint. However, the absence of centralized control mechanisms and the dependence on external, often more localized actors also means that Al-Qaeda's brand is associated with operations its core group may be opposed to. Moreover, the organizational expenses (e.g., human and financial resources) surge due to the increased demand for intra-group communication (Clarke, 2019). The potentially detrimental impact of such a set-up is

exemplified by the split between Al-Qaeda and its Iraq affiliate (AQI), the predecessor of ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) due to AQI’s sustained violence against Shiites, something the Al-Qaeda leadership disapproved of (Hassan, 2019).

**Figure 1: Al-Qaeda Franchises/Affiliates**

Year of establishment	Location	Name	Group Handle	Internal/External Expansion
2003	Saudi Arabia	Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula	AQAP	Internal
2004	Iraq	Al-Qaeda in Iraq	AQI	External
2006	Algeria	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	AQIM	External
2007	Yemen	Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula	AQAP	Internal
2010	Somalia	Shabaab	The Youth	External
2012	Syria	Jabhat al-Nusra	Al-Nusra Front	External
2014	Indian Subcontinent	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	AQIS	Internal

Source: ‘Al Qaeda.’ Center for International Security and Cooperation.

Everything considered, the most defining feature of AQ’s organizational structure is its ability to remain flexible in the face of adversity and counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, its networked approach has expanded the group’s effective political outreach by inserting its ideology and ties into conflicts all over the Muslim world. That said, the networkification of AQ has also undermined its grip over the operations associated with its name, and the emergence of ISIL exhibits how a networkification can culminate in strategic overreach and separation, ultimately imperiling AQ’s immediate strategic aims.

***Financing***

Prior to 9/11, AQ was heavily dependent on donations from the oil-rich Gulf states, with donors from the region donating more than \$30 million annually (Center for International Security and Cooperation). This financing structure presumably also correlated to the personal contacts of AQ’s original leadership. The post-9/11 GWOT brought with it an increased focus on terror financing and AQ in particular, resulting in a depletion of such donations. Private capital nevertheless continues to play a role in AQ’s financing: in recent years, especially Qatari nationals have contributed to AQ’s financing as Qatar views AQ as a more moderate counterweight to the IS and Bashar al-Assad’s regime in the Syrian civil war (Levitt & Bauer,

2017). As licit funds are harder to attain, AQ has also relied on ransom funds, accumulating more than \$125 million between 2008 and 2014 alone (Callimachi, 2014). In this context, AQ's insertion into more conflicts and regions enhances the scope of the organization and its affiliates to raise funds for its operations.

Financially, AQ affiliates/franchises operate increasingly independently from one another, predominantly organizing their own finances whilst communicating about 'best practices' in raising and/or extorting capital (Bauer, 2017). Some branches have become involved in organized crime: the Somali Shabaab branch, for instance, raised \$25 million by controlling sectors of the charcoal trade in Eritrea and Somalia, while Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) exploited the political volatility in Yemen in 2015 to rob \$100 million from the Yemeni Central Bank and establish a taxation regime on local oil trading, raising as much as \$2 million a day (Bauer, 2017). The turn towards organized crime in countries such as Somalia and Yemen reasserts AQ's strategic reliance on politically volatile conflict environments and reflects the group's pragmatic *modus operandi* when it comes to raising funds. Where required, illegal funds are then laundered through front businesses and organizations, with AQ's honey stores that are operated throughout the Middle East being a case in point (Comras, 2005). At the same time, a convergence in funding tactics between AQ and other terrorist organizations is observable, blurring the line between criminal and terrorist networks.

Similar to its organizational structure, AQ's financing patterns have changed according to the global exposure and pressure AQ has received and the environment it operates in: Surging attention has translated into increased scrutiny concerning private capital flows (although civil flows have not fully ceded), impairing the group's ability to raise large sums. AQ's increased reliance on extortion and 'common' criminal activity also capitalizes on and reflects the Middle East's shifting political environment that has increasingly enabled such operations, particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

### ***Operational Strategy and Tactics***

Deriving its ideological basis from seeking to expel the US and its allies from Muslim lands, AQ's main historical objective that found its ultimate expression in 9/11 was to kill Americans on US soil (Moghadam, 2013). The 9/11 attacks can hence be conceptualized as concurrently realizing an organizational obsession as well as two connected political goals: (1) an overt and highly symbolic aggression against the American imperialists, (2), and connected to (1), the provocation of an American overreaction that draws both parties in an ever-escalating conflict, incurring great financial and political strains on the State actor (Moghadam, 2005). Both goals were achieved by 9/11: the US invaded Afghanistan and Iraq but ultimately failed to attain a comprehensive victory, best embodied by the tacit acknowledgment of the Taliban as a major political actor in Afghanistan that the US must directly negotiate with. AQ also has not ceased to exist but has rather expanded its strategic outreach whilst the US weakened its regional image and validated AQ's image of the US as anti-Muslim crusaders.



The shock of 9/11 and the impulsive governmental need to retaliate was thus capitalized on, strengthening AQ in the long run rather than weakening it.

In regard to other long-term objectives, which include the establishment of a Caliphate and a safe haven for AQ's operations (Hoffman, 2013), AQ has relied heavily on the existence of and interference in active conflict environments, primarily in the form of civil wars. In this context, AQ has capitalized on the social unrest and political violence of the Arab Spring, which generated a significant political vacuum by destabilizing previously authoritarian Middle Eastern and North African countries. AQ has begun to employ this tactic beyond the Middle East too, inserting itself into the activities of groups and contexts as diverse as the Philippines and the broader Sahel region (Zimmerer, 2019). As aforementioned, this expands the network of terrorist organizations that often share comparatively little in their broader political interests as grievances are often local rather than transnational (Clarke, 2017). By building inroads into these conflicts, however, AQ gradually expands its network and portrays local- regional struggles as part of a broader, global jihad, shaping the governmental responses in these differing contexts along those lines as well. Importantly, AQ emerges as the central node within this jihadi network. This more gradualist approach comes at the expense of the highly popularized strategic gains of the IS (Almohammad, 2014) and the IS' efforts of Islamic State-building (Clarke & Mir, 2020). Yet, AQ's relative subtlety compared to the IS remains a byproduct of its organizational tactics rather than an expression of organizational weakness or decline.

To commit attacks in Europe and North America, AQ has relied on recruiting young, often socioeconomically marginalized individuals from other regions to perpetrate attacks and suicide bombings in the countries/regions they have access to, and AQ has registered fighters from places as diverse as the Middle East, Central Asia, sub-Saharan and Northern Africa, Southeast Asia, the Balkans and Western Europe (Bacon, 2017). For attacks in Europe, AQ has specifically relied on smaller cells that are already based in the country: the 2005 London bombings, for instance, were committed by young Muslims, almost all of whom had been born and grown up in the United Kingdom (Kirby, 2007). AQ has been pragmatic in regard to upholding a command structure between AQ cells and the organizational core, encouraging individuals and/or foreign cells to act outside the operational boundaries of AQ proper and, if necessary, without communication to the group's core (Moghadam, 2013). This "self- starter" terrorism makes attacks less predictable and easier to organize whilst still promoting the brand of AQ, making the organization's networks appear more omnipresent than they actually are (Kirby, 2007). A variety of self-starter terrorism is constituted by "lone wolf" terrorists; individuals, mostly in Western countries, who commit acts of terrorism in the name of the group without being in contact with the leadership of the respective organization and without being integrated into a cell, raising significant issues for law enforcement agencies. As Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf (2010) from the International Centre for Counter Terrorism - The Hague argue: "Lone wolves are a nightmare for the police and intelligence community as they are extremely difficult to detect and to defend against. [...] lone operators have a critical advantage in avoiding identification and detection before and after their attacks, since most of them do not communicate with others with regard to their intentions" (p. 1). Although the IS



has arguably expanded the outreach of lone wolf attacks, AQ's initial attacks undoubtedly served as an operational blueprint for later attacks. The capacity to combine lone wolf attacks with coordinated large-scale attacks such as 9/11 and the London bombings illustrate AQ's ability to not just adapt its structure but also its tactics and strategy to its environment.

Conclusively, AQ employs a multifaceted strategy that mirrors its adaptive and fluid organizational structure in operational terms. AQ, in recent years, has been somewhat 'outperformed' by the terrorist attacks committed by the IS, especially in Europe, but suggestions that AQ faces organizational decline or even death appear vastly overstated: Rather, AQ has transitioned from one form into another, expanding its global outreach at the expense of a more centralized organizational structure. Whilst this has not been without internal strife, AQ must not be underestimated in its capacities and willingness to strike. In fact, its networked structure and its non-reliance on territory might make AQ more fit for survival than its main terrorist counter pole - the IS.

## **Islamic State (IS)**

### ***Organizational Structure***

As mentioned above, the IS initially emerged as AQI, the Iraqi AQ offshoot founded following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. In its early stages AQI was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a former member of the Mujahideen who had met bin Laden in 1999, and who, through his presence in Afghanistan, had established interpersonal ties with the AQ leadership more generally. However, according to Aaron Zelin (2014b), research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Zarqawi's relation with the AQ core was strained from the offset: "Zarqawi's criminal past [Zarqawi had been a petty criminal prior to joining the mujahideen] and extreme views on takfir (accusing another Muslim of heresy and thereby justifying his killing) created major friction and distrust with bin Laden when the two first met" (p. 1), a distrust and strategic divergence that would ultimately factor into the separation of AQ and AQI and the subsequent emergence of the IS.

Primarily concerned with fighting the Western presence in Iraq, AQI was hit hard by the increased US counterterrorism operations in the country, and Zarqawi died in a US airstrike in 2006. Zarqawi was replaced by the Egyptian Abu Ayub al-Masri, who sought to reframe AQI as more indigenously Iraqi by rebranding AQI as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI), which was led by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi from 2006 onwards. It is not well known how much executive control al-Baghdadi had at this point in time, and AQI and ISI effectively remained the same organization, merely altering AQI's public image (Kirdar, 2011). Both al-Masri and al-Baghdadi were killed in 2010 and al-Baghdadi was replaced by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (not to be confused with his predecessor), who was initially loyal to the AQ of Zawahiri but then expanded AQI/ISI into Syria in 2013, ultimately rebranding AQI/ISI as ISIL in 2013 to recognize the changing geographical realities of ISI's operational scope. Zawahiri and the AQ had shared bin Laden's resentment for AQI's anti-Shia violence and had opposed AQI's expansion into Syria, but the rebranding of AQI/ISI to ISIL generated an overt organizational

break between AQ and the IS, disconnecting the two entities from one another. Besides ideological factors, this split was also enabled by IS' success rate in the field: by 2014, the group had occupied large swaths of rural Iraq and Syria alongside major urban centers such as Mosul and Tikrit (Zelin, 2014). Al- Baghdadi declared himself Caliph in 2014 amidst these sustained successes, thereby launching the self-proclaimed Caliphate of the Islamic State.

IS' original leading ranks were recruited from the inmates of Camp Bucca, a military detention facility established by the US following the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had previously worked as a Muslim cleric, had been captured and detained in Camp Bucca in February 2004 alongside other Sunni military and militia leaders that had previously served under the Ba'athist and anti-Shia regime of Saddam Hussein. The concentration of leading Sunnis in Camp Bucca is widely believed to have further deepened the rampant anti-American and anti-Shia sentiment that had been regnant under the reign of Hussein and enabled the creation of a network of like-minded individuals who, upon release, reintegrated themselves into the anti-American struggle in various regional organizations. Having been classified as a low-risk detainee, al-Baghdadi was released in December 2004, after which he joined AQI/ISI and rose through its administrative ranks, ultimately establishing himself as the successor to Umar al-Baghdadi (Zelin, 2014a).

After he had detached AQI from AQ, al-Baghdadi installed a Leadership Council that advised him on a variety of policy matters such as the order of executions and how to sustain the IS' radical anti-Shia ideology in the field (New York Times, 2014). Organizationally below al- Baghdadi, who was killed in 2019, were two deputies responsible for Iraq and Syria respectively who oversaw the operations of local deputies in Iraq and Syria, many of which used to be military operatives in Hussein's armed forces and thus provided tactical military knowledge. Besides this security-centered Council, a separate Cabinet was divided into departments such as finance, media affairs, security and recruitment (New York Times, 2014), reflecting IS' ambition to be present on a large range of societal levels.

IS displays a networked and arguably more decentralized structure than AQ; However, its organizational structure reflects its diverging political aims and strategies relative to AQ. Unlike AQ, IS managed to establish a Caliphate and occupy and hold large territories, if only for a short period of time. The control over vast spaces of territories and urban spaces such as Mosul as well as the symbolic dimension of governing the only Caliphate required IS to create State-esque institutions and a functioning bureaucracy that could perform the functions of a 'normal' government, i.e. collecting taxes, providing healthcare and access to basics such as gas and food, conducting a census and requesting employment status. Its State- like ambitions and existence subsequently pressured IS to establish a much more sophisticated administrative control apparatus that went as far as providing medical expenses for fighters and their families and organizing leisure events for children in Mosul, elements of regular governance that AQ never had to perform (Clarke, 2019). To ensure this extent of governmental functioning in a smooth manner the IS relied on bureaucrats and technocrats in the areas it occupied, many of which were previous employees of the Assad regime (Davidson & Brooking). In this organizational regard, AQ and IS differ significantly: AQ has remained a networked terrorist

group whilst IS operated as a networked quasi-State for some time, a disposition that created different organizational-structural functions the organization had to perform.

Similar to AQ's franchise-like system, IS has sought to expand its global footprint in the pursuit of a Caliphate, creating 'provinces' of the IS in a large range of different conflict environments (see Figure 2). The main expansionist drive coincided with the peak of the Caliphate in 2014 and 2015, reflecting the symbolic importance of IS' strategic gains at that point in time. Depending on their respective environments, the affiliates employ different tactics that range from guerilla warfare to insurgency operations and terrorist attacks, with their modus operandi and internal structure not necessarily being classifiable into one coherent category, and respective capacities partially differ significantly (Clarke, 2019).

Figure 2: IS 'Provinces' and Affiliates

Year of Establishment	Location	Name(s) of Province(s)/Affiliate(s)	Group Handle
2014	Algeria	Algeria Province	IS-AP
2014	Egypt, Sinai Peninsula	Sinai Province	IS-SP
2014	Libya	Tripoli Province, Barqa Province, and Fezzan Province	No combined group handles
2014	Northern Caucasus	Caucasus Province	IS-CP
2015	The Philippines	Abu Sayyaf/IS in East Asia	ASG
2015	Afghanistan and Pakistan	Khorasan Province	IS-KP
2015	Israel and the Gaza Strip	Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade/IS in Gaza	No handle
2015	Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso	IS in the Greater Sahara	IS-GS
2015	Mainly Nigeria but also Cameroon, Chad and Niger	Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province	ISWAP
2015	Saudi Arabia	Najd Province	IS-NP
2015	Somalia	IS in Somalia	ISS
2015	Yemen	San'a Province	IS-YP
2018	DR Congo, Mozambique	Central Africa Province	IS-CAP

Source: 'ISIS.' Counter Extremism Project.

Similar to AQ, this province-based expansion scheme enables IS to move its brand beyond the Middle East and hijack localized struggles in the name of a global, IS-style jihad that seeks to establish a Caliphate. The expansionist drives of AQ and IS also foster a new ground for inter- group contestation as both organizations seek to establish themselves in new

conflict environments. Compared to AQ, the IS may have a tactical advantage in this regard as it is less concerned with killing other Muslims and could thus be less ‘picky’ in who it agrees to give its name to. In turn, other groups may also claim allegiance to the IS without actually being operationally connected to or accepted by the political core of the IS in Iraq and Syria, making it difficult to establish the direct lines of command and inter-group connections and indicating the heterogeneity of the organization.

Since 2018, IS has encountered an increased onslaught by counterterrorism forces that has culminated in the loss of most of its territory. This trajectory has informed both the strategies and the internal structures of the IS: Engaging a State-like bureaucracy is not feasible or practical anymore if no State-like territory is being held. Moreover, the death of al-Baghdadi in 2019 has resulted in a loss of face for the organization and might result in IS affiliates growing more independent from their parent organization (Clarke & Amarasingam, 2019). As such, IS is likely to undergo a transformation in terms of how it is organized, presumably taking on a role that is slightly more subdued as both resources and territory have grown increasingly scarce. As with AQ however, a recalibration of IS’ organizational structure must not be mistaken for a death of the organization.

### ***Financing***

The IS has proven highly innovative in ensuring revenue streams to fund its activities, amassing \$6 billion in funds at the height of its territorial power in 2015 (Clarke, 2019). IS’ financial success correlates on the one hand with the fact that it has been almost fully independent from external donations and revenue streams, hence avoiding the counterterrorism financing measures that initially depleted AQ (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy). In connection to its differing political aims and operational strategy, IS has employed different tactics compared to AQ in gathering funds.

One major source of revenue has been the control over the oil fields scattered across Iraq and Syria, which explains IS’ initial obsession with large territorial gains as gains in territory often translated into gaining control over oil and gas extraction sites. Once access over such sites was won, oil and gas could be extracted and sold, thus sustaining the IS’ petroleum-heavy infrastructure as well as creating a source of revenue. At its peak, IS raised \$1.2 million in funds from oil sales on a daily basis (Sanger & Davis, 2014), a hefty sum for any non-State actor that can be utilized to finance arms and the ‘social’ services provided in the occupied territories. For IS, gaining control over oil and gas extraction sites and territory as such renders the revenue stream of the organization independent from external sources such as donations, making IS able to sustain its struggle as long as it possesses the human and financial resources and the territory to do so. Gaining control over territory simultaneously meant gaining control over a taxable population, and the IS displayed rent-extractive behavior throughout its occupied territories. Whilst territorial control enables financial self-sustainability, it can also be an inhibiting factor: once control over territory is lost, the capacity to extract funds from that area is lost too, making IS less capable of financing its operations and its fighters. Furthermore, territorial control requires IS to police the area, creating administrative expenses, whilst control

over large urban centers also makes such spaces a welcome target for air raids by adversaries. According to this structure, IS' relative grip on power deteriorates once it starts losing spatial control, which has been the major trajectory since 2018, hence necessitating an organizational restructuring.

In spite of the immense wealth IS managed to amass through controlling hydrocarbon extraction sites, the group has also consistently engaged in regular criminal activity. Similar to the AQ affiliate AQAP, IS ransacked the bank in Mosul when it occupied the city, stealing more than \$400 million (Daragahi, 2014). IS has also been involved in kidnapping for ransom, extortion, smuggling, and robbery and theft (Clarke, 2016), which the IS is likely to be able to sustain regardless of its territorial losses. IS' effectively self-sufficient way of funding has important implications for policymakers as traditional reactions (such as sanctions) remain largely inefficient, ultimately requiring IS to be robbed of territory and resources, depleting the organization's finances and impairing IS' ability to operate freely. Despite this, the usage of illicit trade networks and criminal activity will allow the IS to sustain itself financially, even if at a lesser level. As with AQ, the increased diversification of IS in different regional contexts allows affiliates to exploit local conditions to their benefit. How and what kind of resources can be extracted consequently remains highly context dependent.

There is no doubt that the IS has grown less capable in recent years due to the continued onslaught of international actors against its operational bases in Iraq and Syria. The territory controlled by IS has diminished and alongside it has the organization's access to funds. Yet, this should not detract from the fact that IS remains capable of raising funds and thus sustain its operations at a smaller scale, and future funding mechanisms are likely to mirror the group's presumably less overt role in regional conflicts, potentially emulating the operations of AQ.

### ***Operational Strategy and Tactics***

The difference between AQ and the IS in operational terms is particularly expressed in its relations to the remainder of the Islamic community. As aforementioned, the differences between AQ and IS are partially ideological but predominantly tactical, with AQ employing a more restrained strategy. The IS' political violence against non-Sunni Muslims has been deeply ingrained in the structural identity of the group ever since its founding by Zarqawi, tying into the hatred against 'apostate' regimes that are targeted due to their alleged pro- Western tendencies. AQ does not possess this pronounced sectarian character: although Shias are perceived to be apostates, their murder is discerned as a waste of time and resources that ultimately detrimentally impacts the jihad rather than benefiting it (Byman, 2015). The ideology of IS, then, is more sectarianized and more violent, inevitably influencing the conduct and strategies chosen by the group and its fighters, with its most apparent epitome being the killing, rape and enslavement of fellow Muslims. Whilst such an approach helps to ensure the support of Sunni hard-liners, it also provokes increased political notoriety for the group in the international arena (which then results in counterterrorism operations) and draws condemnation from non-radical Muslims, thus impairing the long-term territorial gains of the group as international opinion is likely to rapidly swing against the IS.

Like AQ, the IS seeks to establish a Caliphate that is governed by a Sunni-dominated interpretation of Sharia law. To establish a Caliphate, the IS employed a “remain and expand” strategy in the early stages of the Syrian civil war, which involved a three-step model: (1) occupying a territory, (2) consolidating the control over the area for the means of resource and rent extraction, (3) expand the political position to new areas IS can remain in and expand from. In what was a strategy of traditional territorial expansion, at least in the early stages, the IS relied on ‘traditional’ heavy military equipment such as artillery, mass attacks and tanks, some of which were captured from fleeing Iraqi and Syrian forces (Byman, 2015). Access to such machinery allowed IS to stage large-scale sieges of cities that would otherwise not have been feasible for non-State actors. Territorial gains and control remained vital for the self- image of IS as a State-esque institution, with the sustenance of control epitomizing the apparent feasibility of the Caliphate and hence motivating foreigners (especially from non- Arab countries) to live in and defend the Caliphate. In its early stages, territorial expansion was thus also a key tenet of IS’ strategy to ensure the sustenance of resources and personnel.

Sustained control over territory and large urban settlements such as Mosul, besides allowing IS to extract resources from the local population, also required IS to provide governance in the area. Due to IS’ extreme sectarian orientation, this often translated into a reign of terror for non-Sunnis or residents unwilling to cooperate. Daniel L. Byman (2015), Professor at Georgetown University, contends that the “Islamic State uses mass executions, public beheadings, rape, and symbolic crucifixion displays to terrorize the population into submission and “purify” the community [in the territories it controls], and at the same time provides basic (if minimal) services: the mix earns them some support, or at least acquiescence due to fear, from the population”. This carrot-and-stick pattern of ruling hereby exhibits the Sunni-extremism that is at the core of the organization and that is not present in this form or extent in AQ. The public display of executions also exhibits the emphasis on shock value frequently used by the IS, also observable in its online presence, for instance the heavily publicized videos of beheadings which sought to almost out-perform the previous atrocity in the pursuit of ever-more global publicity (Cottee, 2015).

As with the funding model, counterterrorism efforts and territorial losses have undermined the IS’ brutalizing approach to territorial governance. Indeed, increased US airstrikes from 2014 onwards undermined IS’ territorial stronghold (Ashour, 2016) and IS can no longer perform its occupational brutality as it has lost control over most of its territory. What is more is that the continued military offenses against the group by a variety of international actors have decimated the IS ranks and destroyed much of the group’s military equipment, thus rendering the group significantly less capable of waging large-scale attacks or controlling vast spaces of territory, which has also made it more difficult to smuggle foreign fighters into the region. Despite these strategic losses, which drove IS from a strategy of “remain and expand” to one of “survive and persist”, the short-lived reality of an Islamic Caliphate has legitimized the political narrative thereof, inspiring future jihadi generations (Clarke, 2019).

Reacting to its decline in relative power, IS is likely to shift its tactics to more conventional forms of terrorism that do not require significant manpower, territory or arms, pointing towards strategies such as suicide attacks and bombings/shootings. A perspective on



IS in Europe and South Asia could be instructive in this regard: by 2015, IS had somewhat modified its strategic approach to one that also focused on terror attacks in Europe (i.e., in Brussels, Manchester and Paris). Many of these attacks either used fighters that had previously fought for the IS in the Middle East or Western-born individuals that were radicalized without travelling to Iraq and Syria. Like AQ, IS appeals to the marginalized (Muslim) youth both in Europe and South Asia, thus capitalizing on the terrorist self-starter potential (Chandak, 2017). The weapons of choice in IS-related attacks included assault rifles, knives, as well as IEDs (improvised explosive devices) and VIEDs (vehicle improvised explosive devices). Vehicles as such were also used as weapons, for instance in the attack in Nice, France in 2016. Similar to AQ, the use of lone wolf terrorists, small cells and weapons that are comparatively readily accessible, coupled with IS' savvy use of modern use of communication technologies, makes it extremely hard for law enforcement services to defend against such attacks, concurrently contributing to anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe that in turn helps to radicalize young Muslims. A similar trend is observable in South Asia, where terror attacks perpetrated by Muslims (such as the easter bombings in Sri Lanka in 2019, which was claimed by the IS) add to anti-Muslim strife (Desai & Amarasingam, 2020). Here too, a mixture of bomb attacks, IEDs, shootings and stabbings appears as the method of choice. The tactical upsides of this are obvious, enabling frequent attacks without sophisticated prior planning (Desai & Amarasingam, 2020).

Although the IS does not seem to be as capable of planning and executing such attacks anymore, it will retain some capacity to do so regardless of the territorial losses inflicted on the group. Both in Europe and South Asia, defeating IS will ultimately require defeating the extremist ideology on which it is based.

## **Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)**

### ***Organizational Structure***

The Lashkar-e-Taiba ('Army of the Good') retraces its origins to the jihad of the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviets in the Afghan-Soviet war. LeT was founded in 1987 by the Pakistani terrorist Hafiz Saeed as the armed wing of Markaz Dawat-ul Irshad (MDI), itself a merger between an anti-Soviet militia and the Jama'at-ud-Da'wah (JuD), a proselyte organization intent on spreading the Ahl-i-Hadith doctrine, a branch of Islam that claims to maintain the faith's 'purest' form. The LeT was supported by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the intelligence wing of Pakistan's military establishment, and initially fought alongside the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviets. Saeed, who knew bin Laden personally, still is LeT's Emir today and is supported by his brother-in-law, Abdul Rehman Makki, LeT's second-in-command, and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, LeT's chief of operations (CISAC). The LeT is organized in a quasi-military structure that mirrors that of IS and AQ prior to the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq: the military wing is led by the Supreme Commander and his Deputy, both of which report directly to Saeed (Ishfaq, 2019). The Supreme Commander and Deputy Supreme Commander oversee the activities of regional Divisional Commanders that are in turn responsible for subregional District Commanders, engendering a vertical command structure in which Saeed retains a high level of centralized

executive control over the group's operations (Ishfaq, 2019). Compared to AQ and IS, LeT's structure is thus significantly less networked.

Following the end of the Afghan-Soviet war, LeT shifted its main operational space to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), supporting the ISI's campaign to launch an insurgency in Kashmir that was underpinned with a jihad-narrative. LeT's close connection to the ISI signifies a key difference of LeT relative to AQ and IS: LeT's organizational existence and emergence is inherently connected with its relations to the activities and goals of the Pakistani State (or at least institutions within the State, most notably the ISI). Whilst this does not mean that the LeT would disappear entirely if (informal) State-support ceded, its ability to operate would be constrained significantly. Unlike AQ and IS, LeT is an exemplification of State-sponsored terrorism, and its link with parts of the military establishment blurs the exact character of internal hierarchies between the LeT and the ISI.

After the LeT was designated as a terrorist organization by the US in 2001 and Pakistan in 2002, Saeed increasingly focused on the activities of the JuD, which coordinates a vast network of social services in Pakistan, including operations such as providing disaster relief and refuge for intra-Pakistani refugees (Kambere et. al). The JuD maintains a variety of facilities in Pakistan, ranging from training camps and Islamic schools to medical clinics, thereby inserting itself into the social fabric of the country and legitimizing the LeT's ideology, especially in the most marginalized strata of Pakistani society (US National Counterterrorism Centre). This social function leads Steve Coll (2008) from Columbia University to compare LeT to groups like Hamas and Hezbollah as LeT is "a three-dimensional political and social movement with an armed wing, not merely a terrorist or paramilitary outfit". LeT's structure and social impact thus positions LeT closer to peak IS than AQ, performing social functions in the community rather than being an underground terrorist organization that strikes when the moment is opportune.

LeT's sustained presence in Pakistan following the 2002 designation indicates the more covert but nevertheless sustained links between LeT and the ISI, often described as a "State within a State" (Shams, 2013). Despite being designated a leading terrorist and the US putting a bounty of \$10 million on him, Saeed openly lived in Lahore, even running for public office in 2017 (Zahra-Malik, 2017). Saeed was only charged with terror financing in 2019, just after Pakistan was threatened to be blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for its broader role in terror financing. Although the intricacies of the LeT-ISI relations remain hazy, the most defining aspect of LeT's organizational identity is its blurry but sustained linkage to the ISI and Pakistani politics more generally.

Whilst LeT has remained under the radar in the West, where AQ and IS have dominated the conversation on terrorism, the group has emerged as the key terrorist organizations in South Asia and especially in India. LeT became known to Indian intelligence circles when LeT militants killed sixteen Hindus in Kashmir in 1996 and, following this, LeT was implicated in the New Delhi attacks in 2001 and 2005, the 2006 Bangalore, Nagpur and Varanasi attacks, the 2007 train bombings in Mumbai, and, ultimately, the 2008 Mumbai attacks (Tellis, 2012). Based on its pan-Islamic militant framework, LeT seeks to not just merge Kashmir with

Pakistan, but also to integrate Indian Muslim majority areas such as Hyderabad into Pakistan (Tellis, 2012). For India in particular, the sustained ISI-LeT links have evoked grave security concerns as the ISI's subvert support exacerbates LeT's capacity to strike targets in India, intensifying the Indian distrust towards Pakistan.

Although LeT's operations have thus far mainly been constrained to the subcontinent, it has sought to expand its organizational footprint beyond India and Pakistan, liaising with other terrorist outfits in the Middle East and Central- and Southeast Asia, conducting fundraising operations in Australia, Europe and the US, facilitating terrorist attacks elsewhere (i.e. by recruiting suicide bombers), creating sleeper cells in Western countries, and partaking in active combat operations in Afghanistan, India, Iraq and Pakistan (Tellis, 2012). With Saeed at the helm, who previously stipulated that the LeT aims to "plant the flag of Islam in Washington, Tel Aviv and New Delhi", LeT, like AQ, perceives the world to be organized along Muslim/non-Muslim lines, with Muslims being oppressed by the 'crusader axis' embodied by Israel, the US, and increasingly also India (Tellis, 2012). This binarily structured conception of the world, buttressed by the Islamic revanchism that is also present in AQ's ideology, renders India the most feasible target for attacks, at least for now. The organizational preoccupation with Kashmir/India is thus only partially ideological: if the opportunity arises, LeT can be expected to strike targets in the West, and its organizational approach of branching out embodies attempts of scoping out the possibilities of doing so.

LeT's connection to the ISI and the Pakistani State cloaks the organization in a cloud of secrecy that is hard to penetrate, rendering the exact links and structures organizing the ISI-LeT relations largely unclear. What is apparent, however, is that LeT and its affiliated organizations have deeply penetrated Pakistani society and have a large support base that can be utilized for LeT's political aims.

### ***Financing***

LeT's existence as an organization that has been either directly sponsored or indirectly enabled by the Pakistani State has inevitably shaped its funding mechanisms. Although the exact size of capital flows remains impossible to determine as long as the State does not release information regarding this, the ISI has historically provided the funds for LeT's operations (a charge the ISI has consistently rejected). Whilst active financial support is likely to have decreased as a result of 9/11 and the 2002 designation of LeT as a terror outfit, the military establishment has generated conditions in which the LeT could thrive and ensure organizational growth: after 2002, LeT sustained its revenue streams through front organizations spearheaded by the JuD. The existence of partially legal LeT-affiliated entities allows LeT supporters (including private donors, nongovernmental organizations, local/transnational businesses and organized crime networks) to funnel funds into LeT-affiliated bodies, therewith creating a funding structure that remains connected to the ISI but is increasingly independent thereof (Tellis, 2012). LeT's funding is also supported by private donations from the Gulf States, indicating the sustained presence of capital flows from Wahhabi financing networks (Coll, 2008), whilst Pakistani communities abroad, for instance in the UK, are also targeted for private

funds (Kambere et al.). LeT's integration into both licit and illicit activities/networks and the use of illicit funds for licit activities (such as agricultural production) creates a tactical overlap with AQ and IS as the LeT has managed to deeply anchor itself in the economic networks in the areas it operates in. In the case of Pakistan, it is both the active support by the ISI as well as the ensuing passivity from the political establishment that has facilitated the rise of the LeT as an increasingly independent terror group. Any comprehensive response to LeT must therefore not just target LeT as such but also its affiliated businesses and organizations. Similar to AQ and IS, LeT relies on a weak (or at least weakened) State presence to conduct its operations without seeking to establish the same extent of State-like structures as IS.

LeT's networked and diversified funding mechanisms will require a multifaceted approach that depletes LeT's various revenue streams. The first step would need to involve an immediate ceasing of all ties between the ISI and the LeT, a development that is unlikely to transpire given their sustained mutual strategic dependence. National and international regulatory bodies can nevertheless target business entities affiliated to LeT and the recent FATF investigation and the prospect of financial sanctions has highlighted how the Pakistani government and its institutions can be effectively pressurized into, some, action. In the long term, however, only sustainably improved governance will help to undermine the LeT and its entrenchment in Pakistan's social fabric.

### ***Operational Strategy and Tactics***

As discussed above, LeT's strategic preoccupation with India is both ideological and practical: LeT remains an almost exclusively Pakistani-Punjabi organization that views itself as addressing the national grievances that much of Pakistan associates with the Kashmir conflict. LeT's involvement in Kashmir subsequently has a local-regional ideological dimension (namely merging Kashmir with Pakistan and hence 'liberating' Kashmir) as well as a transnationally ideological one (Kashmir is another part of the Muslim Ummah that is oppressed by the infidels) that is compounded by Pakistan's geographical proximity to India/Kashmir. Additionally, as Ashley J. Tellis (2012), senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, observes: "India's achievement in becoming an economically dynamic, multiethnic, and secular democracy remains an affront to LeT's vision of a universal Islamic caliphate", an orientation that can be presumed to be exacerbated by the influence of anti-India elements in the ISI. This regionalized ideological context of LeT's operations must hereby be recognized when its attacks against India are considered, yet LeT's preoccupation with India also exhibits its contemporary operational constraints: LeT appears not yet capable of executing large-scale attacks beyond its immediate neighborhood. However, Saeed's emphasis on the India-Israel-US axis widens LeT's (aspired) operational scope to one that seeks to strike targets outside of the Indian subcontinent as well.

Similar to AQ's 9/11 attacks or the IS attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, LeT's attacks against Indian targets are often highly symbolic. The 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament was a direct affront against India's democratic institutions, an operational choice that cannot be understated in its metaphorical dimension. Especially the 2008 Mumbai attacks,

however, exhibited the group's potential, spanning from Wednesday night to Saturday morning and involving bombings and shootings in a variety of crowded locations (such as bars, hotels and train stations), revealing LeT's ability to spread chaos and hysteria whilst humiliating the Indian security forces. As Jonah Blank (2013) from the RAND Corporation argued in front of the US House Homeland Security Committee: "the terrorists had succeeded in throwing India's largest city into chaos. They humiliated the municipal, state and national governments, and showed that the police and military were unable to maintain control even over the country's financial and cultural center. Mumbai is sometimes referred to as the "New York" of India - and Lashkar-e Taiba executed the equivalent of capturing and holding the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and Grand Central Station all at once". This is supported by Tellis (2012), who suggests that targets are predominantly institutions or bodies that embody India as a State and/or society, seeking to inflict maximum human damage as well as maximum symbolic trauma that then shapes public imagination. Such an analysis encompasses the highly iconographic dimension of the Mumbai attacks, designed to instill symbolic fear and humiliation onto those it targets - non-Muslim Indians and India as a whole.

The Mumbai attacks are instructive regarding the group's operational tactics and capacities. The attackers used AK-47 assault rifles, hand grenades and smaller firearms, arms that are comparatively easy to acquire and smuggle and, importantly, do not require thorough prior military training. The attacks, organized in two-to-four man squads, also used IEDs that can be constructed without sophisticated prior bomb-building knowledge (Blank, 2013). The combination of light firearms and IEDs enabled LeT to swiftly hit 'soft' targets such as bars under minimal risk for the lives of the attackers, guaranteeing a high number of civilian casualties without meeting significant opposition by civilians or security forces. Upon sophisticated planning, multiple soft targets can be hit concurrently by the differing squads, thereby instilling maximum fear in the population and making the terrorist threat appear omnipresent, contributing to public hysteria and lack of coordination in the security apparatus. Moreover, the radicalized ideological background of the attackers implies their ultimate sacrifice/martyrdom: the terrorists are likely to seek to inflict maximum damage regardless of the personal harm caused to them, making the mission suicidal without suicide being the operational aim (Tellis, 2012). Because of its radicalized ideology, LeT does not need to provide the attackers' exfiltration from their space of operations either, only their infiltration, and entering India remains easy given the country's long and often porous border to neighboring States such as Bangladesh and Nepal. Everything considered, LeT can inflict maximum damage with minimal organizational and human expenses.

Conclusively, LeT has developed a highly sophisticated operational footprint that can inflict immense damage in South Asia and reflects its constrained but growing organizational capacities. True, LeT has not yet managed to expand its operations beyond the subcontinent and it is unlikely that LeT would be immediately successful in Europe - if its activities in Europe and South Asia go unchecked, however, the group has the potential to grow into a highly threatening global terrorist organization.



## **Policy Recommendations**

All three groups discussed in this report display similarities as well as differences in regard to how they are organized, financed, and strategically operated. Given the existence of such differences and the groups' operations in various conflict theatres, a one-fits-all political response to the threat embodied by them is unlikely to yield satisfactory results: limiting LeT's capacity to strike in India will require different measures compared to, say, reducing the IS threat in Europe. Policy responses by lawmakers and the criminal justice system are informed by a variety of domestic and regional variables, including the exact character of the operations of the respective terror organizations, existing legal frameworks, extents of supra-national cooperation and integration and the operational cultures, capabilities, structures and budgetary constraints of local law enforcement and security forces. These differing preconditions notwithstanding, the similarities between the groups also indicates that there are responses and/or frameworks that are not entirely context-dependent, for instance the necessity to tackle the financial flows that allow organizations to maintain their operations. National policymakers and legislators obtain a key relevance in this regard as they shape the legal and operational counterterrorism frameworks under which their respective countries operate. For legislators, the main challenge will be to implement measures that both enhance the security of their countries whilst safeguarding the human rights of the individual. The significance of this aspect cannot be understated: counterterrorism responses must be in compliance with the law and must respect the human and civil rights of those accused of terrorist activities. If the application of laws appears arbitrary or politically motivated, this will undermine the government's current and future counterterrorism measures, ultimately delegitimizing the government and its incentives. What, then, are steps national lawmakers can take to limit the capacity of global/transnational terror organizations?

An initial step must be the criminalization of terrorism as such and non-terrorist activities that can help to facilitate terrorist operations, for instance financing-related mechanisms. The criminalization of terrorism and associated activities is paramount for a legal challenge against terrorism as such, generating court-based mechanisms and precedents that can be employed for targeting domestic terrorist activities. Besides terror financing, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2009) has delineated four other activities that must be criminalized and penalized accordingly by national criminal justice systems: (1) civil aviation violations, (2) offences based on the status of the victim (e.g. matters such as hostage-taking), (3) offences related to dangerous materials (i.e. materials that could be used for the construction of IEDs), and (4) offences related to vessels, harbour installations and infrastructure facilities more generally. Criminalizing such activities in compliance with domestic and international law and/or modifying the existing legal frameworks will allow national administrations to prosecute those suspected of violations and terrorist activities and enables the criminal justice system to tackle terrorism-related activities before an attack occurs, herewith contributing to the preventive security of the State and its inhabitants.

An important facet of this pertains to the matter of terror financing, which has been complicated by the financialization of the global economy and the internationalization of national banking sectors, making it harder for national administrations to monitor and limit



financial flows coming in and out of the country. Moreover, the cases of AQ, IS and LeT have showcased how terrorist organizations have proven savvy and apt in modifying their funding and laundering schemes to ultimately make their illegal funds tradable and internationally available. To be sure, the post-9/11 international order has had an increasing focus on private and public terror financing and has made remarkable advances in this regard, with the aforementioned FATF investigation into Pakistan being a prime example of this. Such investigations by multilateral policing bodies must be supported and enhanced in their scope: as flows are no longer bound to national borders, neither should be the bodies investigating them, and a nationalized focus might indeed very much restrain the potential of such investigations. It is hereby imperative that the bodies leading these investigations are given political power to enact measures with direct implications, for instance in the form of sanctions, or are backed by political actors that can implement fitting sanctions. This approach will not eliminate terror financing as such but generates significant pressures on governments that have so far supported and/or enabled terror financing, thus robbing the terrorist organization of structural support. Saeed's arrest in 2019 exemplifies this: although LeT will continue to exist regardless of Saeed's detainment, the prospect of sanctions increases the political costs for Pakistan and the ISI to maintain its ties to LeT, thereby incentivizing a decrease in activities or at least a more covert and thus more cost-intensive approach.

Legislation regarding terror financing and terror organizations more generally should not merely be a domestic enterprise but one that is maintained in communication and, ideally, coordination with other domestic and supranational legislators. Similar or identical legal frameworks ensure legal compatibility in inter-State relations and thus facilitate legal cross-border prosecution of crimes. Policymakers can also move to make terror financing legislation a priority of their governments' foreign policy through internal discussions and pressures, a process that could be facilitated by the omnipresent role of terrorism in contemporary political discourse.

Ideally, coordination is to be achieved through the usage of supranational bodies that can help to facilitate a streamlining of national legislation. The extent to which this is feasible depends highly on the mechanisms that are already in place in intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union (EU) and the extent of legal-political integration such bodies exhibit. Regional cooperation can also be initiated through the establishment of transnational expert forums and/or task forces that focus on the development and sharing of best practices and advise respective governments. This approach would be more pertinent in geographies in which regional integration remains limited as of now and would again aid in streamlining domestic legislation. Policy responses concerned with terror financing must focus on not just blocking financial flows but also freezing and seizing the assets of legitimate and illegitimate businesses and individuals connected to terror financing. In compliance with international law, legislation must be proactive and must not pre-require a terrorist attack to take place before criminal law and the criminal justice system can intervene. One way of achieving this would be to improve the transparency available over business ownership and improve governmental oversight over private capital flows to countries that are designated as 'risky' in terms of terror financing, a policy the EU has pursued in recent years. Both mechanisms would be enhanced

in effectiveness through regional integration and coordination and find backing in international law according to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 (1999) and 1333 (2000), which targeted the Taliban and AQ respectively. Through the European Commission, the EU can also enact multilateral financial sanctions against both individuals and organizations, improving the collective buy-in from the bloc. Such measures would negatively impair the size of flows and the volume of capital that is laundered by front organizations, thus constraining the organization's ability to operate.

Increased regional integration would also immensely benefit the transnational capacity to prosecute finance and organization-related activities, for instance in the form of a joint police force investigating regional criminal activities. The EU is a pioneer in this context through Europol, which allows EU member States to coordinate their investigations and consequently gives investigations a regional rather than merely national character and scope. Europol has recently launched the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC), which aims to “enhance the operational support provided to the EU Member States and EU bodies in the fields of financial and economic crime and promote the systematic use of financial investigations” (Europol, 2020), indicating the growing awareness for investigating the link between criminal activity and terror financing. A successful EFECC could set a welcome precedent for other supranational organizations that share the EU's concerns regarding radicalization and terrorism. The EU could hereby take a leading role in cooperation with organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through joint activities, training programs and inter-body communication regarding best practices and ongoing investigations. By increasing cooperation and dialogue, the EU could also widen its geographical scope of oversight and could use organizations such as Interpol as a means of enhancing communication and enforcement mechanisms. International and regional cooperation will also be required to monitor and intercept the illicit trade in high-value goods such as oil, again highlighting the urgent need to instill respective legislation on a national level and encourage governments to pursue such measures in their foreign policy as well.

Similar mechanisms would immensely benefit countries and their law enforcement systems in South Asia, where regional integration in various forms has been notoriously limited (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2018). That said, South Asia too has forums and bodies facilitating regional dialogue, most notably BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), which could be utilized for further investigative integration and targeted financial sanctions against both individuals and entities connected to terror financing. Further integration would aid smaller regional parties such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka in countering terrorist threats more effectively and would mitigate terrorist groups' capacity to use one country as a base for attacks against another regional actor. Integration in South Asia has been historically limited for a variety of historical reasons, and comprehensive integrative mechanisms are unlikely to emerge anytime soon. Although moves towards increased integration are not likely to include all regional actors given their partially strained relations, countries could focus on a ‘coalition of the willing’ that

emphasizes coordination and integration and converges on the shared security threats of terrorism and radicalization. In this case, any enhanced extent of integration would translate into progress in regular policing matters, counterterrorist security operations as well as terror financing. One way of attaining this would be the increased usage of joint investigation teams, a method that is often restrained by the absence of streamlined protocols and procedures and insufficient communication frameworks between national agencies. Establishing a legal framework for such joint teams would immensely benefit the ability of regional actors to respond to shared security threats and could be facilitated by bodies such as SAARC. Although this appears as a pipe dream as of now, South Asian countries should ultimately also seek to enhance their coordination with multilateral regional bodies such as ASEAN, the EU, the GCC and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), many of which share security threats that are similar to that of South Asia.

In South Asia in particular, improved security coordination on a national and regional level must be accompanied by legal mechanisms ensuring the maintenance of civil and human rights in the criminal justice system. Systemic abuse from police and security forces in the form of forced disappearances, rapes and extrajudicial killings are a recurring phenomenon in a region in which police and security forces have historically served an often-oppressive function (Subramanian, 2009). Endemic human rights abuses by State forces must be ceded immediately as they undermine the legitimacy of the security forces and therefore also that of the government and its counterterrorism measures.

In line with this, counterterrorism legislation must be constructed and practiced in a way that is subject to legal checks and balances and hence cannot be applied arbitrarily. There have been myriad instances in the past where legislation targeting ‘terrorists’ has been abused for political gain and has resulted in widespread human rights violations of civilians and the systemic denial of civil rights (Mendoza & Romano, 2020). In other instances, counterterrorism legislation appears to serve political goals and/or is structured in a draconian manner: After LeT’s 2001 attacks on the Indian Parliament, the Indian government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which “allowed for 180-day detentions without charge, presumptions of guilt, sketchy review procedures, summary trials and trials in absentia” (Gagné, 2005, p. 261). The legal framework of POTA can thus make arrests seem arbitrary and is not subjected to adequate legal or practical scrutiny, allowing for abuse of authority. As such, administrations have an active responsibility as well as interest to maintain an oversight over the operations of its security forces and to legislate in a manner that prevents behavior that could undermine the future legitimacy of the legislation (e.g., via use of torture and the procurement of forced confessions). In the long term, this will necessitate improved investment into the social and professional training of security professionals involved in counterterrorism operations of any sort as well as the institutional and regulatory oversight over them. In the short term, compliance with international human rights law could be ensured through the increased use of external investigation teams and thoroughly organized and digitalized complaint mechanisms holding the violators of rights accountable. Access to a lawyer, a translator (if necessary) and a fair trial must all be prerequisites for a charge brought against an individual that has been accused of terrorist activities, regardless of whether that individual is guilty or not. If these

aspects are not provided, the charges as well as the measures preceding the charges will lose their political legitimacy.

In regard to criminal law, governments must ensure that the national and supranational legislation in place reflects the systemic pressures and (funding) mechanisms that are prevalent at that point in time. As discussed above, the funding patterns of terrorist organizations are fluid and are likely to be adapted to the circumstances the group operates in. Moreover, terrorist organizations have proven apt at exploiting technological innovation for their strategic gain: AQ and IS, for instance, have started using crypto currencies as a means of concealing their financial activities (Dion-Schwarz et al., 2019). As such, an organization like AQ is likely to be financed in a different way ten years from now and legislation must consequently reflect and address this alteration in mechanisms. It is subsequently important for administrators to periodically review their legislation in potential coordination with external experts specializing in the respective field to keep legislation up to date and modify it, if necessary. This, in combination with the upholding of human rights law, will be imperative for ensuring the legislation's internal and external validity and relevance.

The suggestions made in this section have primarily focused on combating the organizational structures and funding mechanisms that operationally allow terrorist groups to strike targets in Europe and South Asia. Such a structural approach does not address the ideological and fundamentally social dimension of terrorism, namely the motivation for the joining of a terrorist organization and the execution of an attack. Defeating AQ, IS and LeT will require beating both their organizational structure as well as the ideology that motivates continued support for them - anything else will be nothing but a short-term fix that does not address the root issues. Addressing such matters will be a highly complex undertaking that necessitates a variety of social, economic, political and security-related responses that cannot be assessed in their entirety here. This multifaceted and ultimately social endeavor must nevertheless be compounded with a structural approach targeting the group's fundamentals: finances, the obtainment of arms and the general recruitment process. Focusing counterterrorism responses on policies that target financial flows (and by implication organizational abilities) must thus be paramount for any counterterrorism policy by European and South Asian governments.

## **Conclusion**

This report set out to shed light onto the modus operandi of three international terrorist organizations, AQ, IS and LeT, in regard to their organizational structure, funding mechanisms and operational strategy. All three aspects are inextricably interconnected: the organizational form shapes both the way in which funds are acquired and what tactics are chosen in the field, while financing patterns shape the structure of the organization as well as what kind of operations the organization is capable of sustaining. In the same vein, the operational strategy and setting directly informs how funds of what size can be acquired and what sort of structure is maintainable given the differing systemic pressures. In this context, all three groups partially vary significantly: IS used to operate similar to a State whereas LeT facilitates a complex

network of social institutions in Pakistan and AQ reframes itself as a more liberal alternative to IS. The world of global jihadism, then, is a complex one that remains in constant flux and develops according to internal processes (such as ideological and interpersonal conflicts and contestations) as well as external pressures (i.e., increased exposure and increased counterterrorism operations and wavering State-support). The Islamic terrorist landscape is consequently likely to look very different in five years to how it does now. In lieu of this fluidity, some factors remain constant: relying on weak State presence and performance, engaging in different forms of criminal activity and seeking to expand the own organizational footprint are aspects that fundamentally connect AQ, IS and LeT. As such, the next main hotbed for terrorist activity is likely to be in a space in which State-presence grows weaker by the day and in which criminal activity is facilitated. While this has historically been the case in the Middle East, recent developments would also indicate an increased focus on North Africa (especially in Libya), West Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both

European and South Asian countries will have to keep terror organizations such as the ones discussed in this brief in check to avoid a further deterioration of regional security conditions. Buttressed by a strong ideological challenge against Islamic fundamentalism, these countries must improve their structural challenge against the organizational formations that threaten lives throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

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