

Threat of Urban Jihadism in South Asia

Abdul Basit

Using Theology to Legitimise Jihadist Radicalism

Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff

Analysing Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

C. Nna-Emeka Okereke



Emergence of Post-‘Islamic State’ (IS) Threat Environment

The continuing terrorist attacks in the West and different parts of Asia and Africa underscore the resilience, adaptability and regenerative nature of the prevailing global terrorist threat. With these attacks, the contours of the post-IS threat environment are now becoming increasingly clear. It entails four major issues: a decentralised threat landscape, the challenge of returning foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria, the emergence of new IS hotspots in the Philippines, Afghanistan and parts of Africa, and cyber radicalisation. This requires continued vigilance, collaborative responses and sharing of best practices between security institutions and intelligentsia.

In the context of continuing terrorist threat, the massacre of over 500 civilians in Eastern Ghouta in Syria by the Bashar Al-Assad regime is concerning for several reasons. The brutal use of violence will continue to fuel jihadist recruitment, strengthen the extremist narrative and create space for IS-linked and other militant groups to survive. Whether it is Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan, the absence of conflict stabilisation has undermined counter-terrorism efforts in these war-torn territories. The imagery of civilian killings in Ghouta plays right into the hands of groups like Al-Qaeda and IS as these groups continue to be the by-products of anarchy and lawlessness in active conflict zones.

Against this backdrop, the first article by **Abdul Basit** explores the urban footprint of pro-IS jihadists in South Asia. The author observes that the dissemination of IS ideology of Jihadi-Takfiri-Salafism has galvanised a new generation of South Asia jihadists, which

is narrowly sectarian, brutally violent and tech savvy. This pro-IS generation of jihadists uses various social media platforms for propaganda dissemination, recruitment and operational planning. In recent months, they have moved from open-end to encrypted social media applications. This development coupled with their segregated cell-formations makes their detection challenging. In conclusion, the author suggests that in addition to robust social media monitoring capabilities and operational preparedness, various South Asia governments would also require robust counter-ideological responses to overcome and neutralise IS appeal in this generation of South Asia jihadists.

Highlighting the threat from social media, **Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff** examines the trajectory of online radicalisation of a young Filipino girl, whose quest to atone herself from a ‘sinful’ past life exposed her to IS-recruiters online. The recruiters encouraged her to undertake the so-called ‘hijra’, after which she emerged as the head of IS’ female wing in Marawi (Mindanao, Philippines). Syed highlights the need for a proactive approach by the governments and mainstream Islamic scholars to impart correct interpretations of key Islamic concepts such as jihad, caliphate, hijra and takfir to Muslim youth. It is argued that these efforts will circumvent the exploitation of these concepts by violent-extremist groups.

Departing from the discussion on Islamist terrorist groups, this issue carries an article by **C. Nna-Emeka Okereke** focusing on the dynamics of the current indigenous Anglophone (English-speaking population)

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The Emergence of Post-‘Islamic State’ (IS) Threat Environment

crisis in Cameroon and the escalating violence between the community in the northwest and southwest and the government. The Anglophone community is resentful towards what is perceived to be their marginalisation and the erosion of their unique identity as a result of various government actions relating to issues such as the creation of a centralised state from a two-state federation, and status of the English language. A segment of the Anglophone community has resorted to violence to address its grievances, conducting arson attacks and bombings targeting schools, government and security personnel. The instability has resulted in the displacement of thousands of refugees into Nigeria and poses security challenges to the country as it goes into the Presidential elections, and to the entire Lake Chad Basin.

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Threat of Urban Jihadism in South Asia

Abdul Basit

With the ingress of IS Jihadi-Takfiri-Salafism ideology in South Asia, a new generation of educated jihadists from middle and upper middle-classes has emerged in the region, posing increased security threats. These militants use social media for recruitment, propaganda dissemination and operational planning. Unlike previous generations of jihadists which were pan-Islamist, these militants are overtly sectarian and unapologetically brutal and indiscriminate. Various South Asian governments will require robust counter-ideological capabilities to counter the threat of urban jihadism in the region.

Introduction

In the last few years, the traction of IS ideology in South Asia has mobilised a new generation of radicals among the educated youth of urban middle and upper-middle classes. This generation of educated jihadists operate in a de-centralised manner in cell formations or as lone-wolf actors making their detection and eradication a challenging task. Moreover, with improvements in surveillance capabilities of the security institutions to monitor the open-end social media platforms, these militants have moved to encrypted channels like Telegram and Whatsapp to avoid detection and disruption of their operations.

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the emergence of urban jihadists in South Asia along with outlining push and pull factors which have facilitated or hindered IS ingress in the region. The concluding part probes the implications of this trend for regional peace and security.

IS' Ideological Ingress in South Asia: Push and Pull Factors

Push Factors

Unlike Syria and Iraq where IS grew rapidly, the ground realities in South Asia are largely

different. The state sovereignty and territorial integrity of regional countries, barring Afghanistan, are intact. The presence of strong institutional structures, robust militaries and security institutions and syncretic culture will impede IS efforts to expand its presence in South Asia beyond its current footprint.¹ IS' so-called message of caliphate is over-simplistic in comparison with the complex socio-cultural and religious-political environment of the region.²

Moreover, the South Asian militant landscape is structured and highly competitive. The well-established militant groups such as the Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jasir-e-Muhammad and others will hinder efforts of IS-affiliates to encroach into their spheres of influence. The South Asian IS-affiliates have neither the numbers nor the resources to challenge these well-grounded and extensive militant groups.³

Also, IS is an outsider to South Asia; the impermissible barriers of language, culture, geography and distance will not allow the terror group to carve out a niche in the region.⁴ More importantly, IS is a *Salafi-Takfiri-Jihadi* group while most of the militant groups in South Asia follow Deobandi-Hanafism. As such, IS would not find much

¹ Maryam Nazir, "Daesh in South Asia," *Journal of Current Affairs*, (Islamabad Policy Research Institute), 1, no.1&2 (2016): pp-1-17, http://www.ipripak.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/11/Article1_Maryam-Nazir-17Nov2016.pdf.

² S.K. Chatterji, "Islamic State and a South Asian Caliphate," *The Diplomat*, November 23, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/islamic-state-and-a-south-asian-caliphate/>.

³ Ajai Shani, "Countering Daesh Extremism in South Asia," in *Countering Daesh Extremism: European and Asian Responses*, (ed.), Konard Adenauer Stiftung and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, p.30, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_46739-1522-2-30.pdf?161028042843.

⁴ Abdul Basit, "Is ISIS in South Asia?," *The News*, August 27, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/145594-Is-Isis-in-South-Asia>.

ideological traction given the limited appeal of Salafism in South Asia beyond attracting some disenfranchised elements and self-radicalised individuals.⁵

Pull Factors

However, there are deep-seated communal and sectarian fault-lines that IS can exploit to its advantage.⁶ IS divides its targets into *murtadeen* (apostates, the US-allied governments and security institutions), *rafideen* (deviants, Islamic and other religious minorities) and *taghoot* (imperialists, US and Western forces in Afghanistan).

The participation of Pakistani and Afghan Shias in the Syrian conflict gives IS another reason to target the Shia community in South Asia. Iran has been recruiting, training, and sending the Hazara Shias from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Syria.⁷ As many as 4,000 Shias from Afghanistan and Pakistan are currently fighting in Syria under the *Li Wa Al-Fatimiyun* (The Brigade of Fatima, named after Prophet Muhammad's youngest daughter),⁸ and Liwa Al Zainebiyoun (The Brigade of Zainab, named after Prophet Muhammad's grand-daughter and sister of Hussain) militant groups.⁹

Geographically, South Asia gives IS an opening to Central and Southeast Asia along with offering tremendous opportunities for hiding, recruiting, fundraising and training in different parts of the region.¹⁰ IS has

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Saneya Arif, "The Islamic State: Affecting Shia-Sunni Relations in India," *Institute of Peace of Conflict Studies*, September 3, 2014.

⁷ Ahmad Majidyar, "Iran's Recruitment of Afghan, Pakistani Shiites Feared to Aggravate Sectarian Tension in Middle East, South Asia," Middle East Institute, November 11, 2016, <http://www.mei.edu/content/is/iran-s-recruitment-afghan-pakistani-shiites-feared-aggravate-sectarian-tension-middle-east-south>.

⁸ Fariba Sahraei, "Syria war: The Afghans sent by Iran to fight for Assad," *BBC*, April 15, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36035095>.

⁹ Farhan Zahid, "The Zainabiyoun Brigade: A Pakistani Shiite Militia Amid the Syrian Conflict," *Terrorism Monitor*, James Town Foundation, May 27, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-zainabiyoun-brigade-a-pakistani-shiite-militia-amid-the-syrian-conflict/>.

¹⁰ Michael Kugelman, "How ISIS Could Become a Potent Force in South Asia," *Foreign Policy*, February 20, 2015,

mentioned the South Asia region as pivotal to its eastward expansion into Myanmar and Southeast Asia and Westward expansion into Central Asia and the Caucasus region.¹¹

Secondly, South Asia is home to 507 million Muslims with a sizable number of them possibly being vulnerable to radical recruitment; this gives IS an ideal opening.¹² The deep-seated communal and sectarian fault-lines, running Islamist insurgencies in Kashmir and Afghanistan, porous borders, informal economies and the ease of procuring weapons and funds, make South Asia an ideal place for IS. Moreover, the readily available ungoverned spaces (physical sanctuaries), an environment conducive to growth of extremist ideologies (social sanctuary), and a large youth cohort susceptible to militant recruitment (demographic sanctuary) make Pakistan naturally attractive for the IS.¹³

Thirdly, the return of South Asian self-radicalised individuals who went to join IS in Iraq and Syria would offer IS another opportunity to grow in the region. The returning South Asian foreign fighters can create their cells or link up with the existing regional IS-affiliates. Their inclusion will boost the operational and organisational capabilities of IS-affiliates.¹⁴

Finally, the unregulated cyber space in South Asia is another potential avenue which IS can exploit to further its ideological narrative. The 480 million internet users in South Asia

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/20/how-isis-could-become-a-potent-force-in-south-asia/>.

¹¹ Rohan Gunaratna, "As ISIS suffers in its heartland, South Asia is ripe for its rise," *CNN*, October 28, 2016,

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/27/opinions/isis-threat-pakistan-afghanistan-south-asia/>.

¹² Ahmed S. Hashim, "The Impact of Islamic State in Asia," *Policy Report*, February 2015, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, pp.4-5, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/PR150211_The_Impact_of_the_Islamic_State_in_Asia.pdf.

¹³ Abdul Basit, "Is IS a Security Threat to Pakistan?," *Express Tribune*, February 28, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/845316/is-is-a-threat-to-pakistan/>.

¹⁴ Ramtanu Maitra, "Assessing ISIS's Emergence as a Prime Threat in SAARC Countries," *India Defence Review*, February 22, 2016, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/assessing-isis-emergence-as-a-prime-threat-in-saarc-countries/0/>.

are the second largest in the world. IS' multifaceted online media strategy has been instrumental in the spread of its extremist ideology.¹⁵ In areas where the terror group cannot grow physically, it can use the cyber space to expand its footprint. The decentralisation of information and government's inability to regulate the cyber space can potentially work to IS' advantage. Social media pages and Islamist forums have been the usual meeting place between the recruiters and the vulnerable youth.¹⁶ The threat of cyber radicalisation in South Asia is real.

South Asia's Urban Jihadists

One concerning trend of IS ingress in South Asia has been the emergence of educated militants from middle and upper-middle class of urban areas. The impact of IS' extremist message and social media propaganda has been felt more strongly in the cities than in the rural areas.¹⁷ Barring Afghanistan, the South Asian IS-affiliates have a very robust urban footprint. Whether it is the self-proclaimed IS-cell in Karachi, which targeted the bus of Ismaili Shias in September 2014¹⁸, the Gulshan café attacker in Dhaka¹⁹, the Kalyan Cell in India, all come from well-to-do families with university or college-level education.²⁰ This generational shift has created new themes, motivations, trends, and narratives. These urban militants hail

¹⁵ Maryam Nazir, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Bibhu Prasad Routray, "Islamic State: Patterns of Mobilisation in India," *Mantraya Analysis*, India, November 20, 2015, <http://mantraya.org/islamic-state-patterns-of-mobilisation-in-india/>.

¹⁷ Farhan Zahid and Muhammad Ismail Khan, "Prospects of the Islamic State in Pakistan," *The Hudson Institute*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.hudson.org/research/12453-prospects-of-the-islamic-state-in-pakistan>.

¹⁸ Hussai Nadim, "Pakistan's New Breed of Militants," *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/09/pakistans-new-breed-of-militants/>.

¹⁹ Saroj Kumar Rath, "Wolf-Pack Terrorism: Inspired by ISIS, Made in Bangladesh," *Yale Global* (Online), July 5, 2016, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/wolf-pack-terrorism-inspired-isis-made-bangladesh>.

²⁰ Nazia Sayed & Divyesh Singh, "Thane businessman radicalized Kalyan youth who joined ISIS, funded their Iraq trip," *Times of India*, July 16, 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Thane-businessman-radicalized-Kalyan-youth-who-joined-ISIS-funded-their-Iraq-trip/articleshow/38479927.cms>.

from mixed ethnic, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds.²¹

IS has combined the pan-Islamist narrative with an overt anti-Shia agenda, which equally appeals to the Islamist and sectarian militants in South Asia. Three main militant groups cooperating with IS in Pakistan include, Jandullah, Tehrik-i-Khilafat (TK) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-alamī (LeJA), are based in the country's settled areas.²² IS has fuelled recruitment in major South Asian cities like Lahore, Karachi, Dhaka, Mumbai, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Ahmedabad, Colombo and Malé, capital of Maldives.

This generation is tech and media savvy, overambitious, and compared to the other militant groups better aware of political and religious history that inspires their rhetoric and motivations. More importantly, they are aware of their religious and sectarian identities.²³ Generally, they have Salafi-Takfiri leanings. Most are between 18-30 years old and they have gone through a relatively short period of radicalization.²⁴ While the motivational factors may vary from individual-to-individual and area-to-area, they all seem to be obsessed with ideas of so-called Caliphate, hijrah and end-times narratives.²⁵

Arguably, this pro-IS South Asian breed of educated, urban militants constitutes the fourth generation of South Asian jihadists. In retrospect, the alumni of the 1980s Afghan jihad constitute the first generation like Hizb-e-Islami, Harkat-ul-Jihadi Al-Islami et al. The emergence of Al-Qaeda, the Kashmir-focused militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, and the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s are the second generation. Meanwhile, the post-9/11 pro-Al-Qaeda militant groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban

²¹ Zoha Waseem, "Daesh in Pakistan's Militant Landscape and the Allure of Urban Extremists," *Strife Journal*, May/June, 2016, pp.20-28, http://strifejournal.org/images/strifedata/issues/6/STRIFE_6_03_WASEEM_20_28.pdf.

²² Farhan Zahid, *ibid*.

²³ Muhammad Amir Rana, "ISIS's cascading effect," *Dawn*, July 13, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1118838>.

²⁴ Iftekhharul Bashar, "Islamist militancy on the rise in Bangladesh," *East Asia Forum*, August 8, 2015, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/08/08/islamist-militancy-on-the-rise-in-bangladesh/>.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

Pakistan (TTP), Jandullah, Punjabi Taliban, the Indian Mujahedeen (IM) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-ul-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B) are the third generation South Asian jihadists.

As a trend within religious movement and religio-political organisations, the younger generation is unhappy and dissatisfied with the older generation.²⁶ The newer generation sees the older generation as status quo oriented and not doing enough. The younger generation is overambitious and driven by grander objectives. This rift between the new and old guard can result in dissension where the younger-generation forms their own group and leaves the older group.²⁷ The wave of IS allegiances in 2015 and 2016 from South Asian militant groups can be explained by a generational shift within these organisations. These highly motivated groups saw a new opportunity in the emergence and rise of IS in 2014 and jumped onto the IS bandwagon. The new generation is extreme in its methods, morally consequentialist and unapologetically brutal. For them, the ends justify the means.

They do not necessarily have ideological baggage or historical grievances. Al-Qaeda's pan-Islamist Jihadist traditions, Taliban's Afghan-centric approach, or the Kashmiri group's Kashmir-only-policy do not bind or restrict them, instead they are Sunni supremacists.²⁸ This new generation of dedicated and globally oriented militants do not subscribe to a narrow and parochial approach to jihadism. Rather than drawing inspiration from Al-Qaeda or the Taliban, they look towards IS for mentorship and legitimacy.²⁹ This generation is unapologetically brutal and savage in its modus operandi.

The grievances and resentment of the educated youth towards the state due to

unemployment and corruption, and the search for a strong ideological identity, need for excitement and an urge to belong allows IS to exploit them through its slick social media propaganda.³⁰

Characteristically this breed of South Asian militants is different from their predecessors and do not conform to the stereotypical profile of militants perceived to be from rural and poor backgrounds, educated in madrassas and radicalised during their religious education. Most of the fourth-generation jihadists are self-radicalised on internet, by their university fellows, through familial networks or modern religious institutions like Tanzeem-e-Islami (TI) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT).³¹ Recruiters penetrate religious organisations and groups like TI and HT to target young people and establish sub-groups. When a bond of trust has been established after starting off with discussions of spirituality and are then exposed to a more radical version of political Islam.³²

Implications

The IS ambition in South Asia is to enhance its prestige not territorial expansion. IS neither has the capability to capture territory nor will it try to do so in the near term. IS will continue to work with local militant groups to get recruits and enhance public relations. IS policies in South Asia are driven by pragmatic-realism rather than ideological-over ambition. It will work with the like-minded militant groups through marriages of convenience to maximise gains without provoking larger militant groups in South Asia. While the rhetoric and propaganda will remain hyperbolic, the intelligence community in South Asia will do well to keep an eye on the modus operandi rather than falling for the narrative, which could be misleading.

The South Asian governments are fully capable of managing the operational threat from IS. However, the bigger challenge will

²⁶ Interview with Rohan Gunaratna, Professor of Security Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, November 27, 2016.

²⁷ Irm Haleem, *The Essence of Islamist Extremism*, (London: Routledge, 2012), p.35.

²⁸ Abdul Basit, *ibid.*

²⁹ Ayaz Ahmed, "The Spectre of Daesh in South Asia, Dealing with the Lingering Threat," *Jahangir's World Times*, September 8, 2016, <http://worldtimes.com/jwt2015/magazine-archives/jwt2016/sepember2016/the-spectre-of-daesh-in-south-asia-dealing-with-the-lingering-threat/>

³⁰ Zoha Waseem, *ibid.*

³¹ Huma Yousaf, "University Radicalization: Pakistan's Next Counter-terrorism Challenge," *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 2, (2016): pp. 4-8, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CTC-SENTINEL-Vol9Iss29.pdf>.

³² Hussain Nadim, *ibid.*

be how to counter the ideological threat and wage an effective ‘war of ideas and narratives’. It would require ‘counter-ideology’ and ‘counter-narrative’ responses that cannot be addressed through traditional law-enforcement or operational responses. Ideas cannot be fought by bullets, but through better and stronger ideas.

Most of the self-radicalised pro-IS cells and individuals in South Asia are from the urban areas and they got influenced by private religious organisations and charities and mainstream movements like Tanzeem-e-Islami, Al-Huda and Islamic Research Foundation of Dr. Zakir Naik. A serious debate is needed: how to organize religious activism within these institutions without disturbing the overall equilibrium. Such religious institutes and organisations may not be directly involved in violent radicalisation of vulnerable individuals, but the worldview they construct through their teachings make the job of violent-extremist organisation easier.

Conclusion

There is a clear case for reformation to ensure that the slippages of Islamist activists towards violent-extremism are blocked. So a serious dialogue has to start on where to draw the line. The broader-goal of such a dialogue should be reformation; if the goals are security-centric then it is a recipe for disaster. However, this process of reformation should be internal and self-driven through dialogue and debate with the concerned state institutions. Anything imposed from outside will not only jeopardize the existing balance but will also further tilt the scale in favour of extremist organisations. While too much outside control and interference is bad, too much internal laxity and complacency is equally dangerous.

If these platforms of religious activism are banned, removed or meddled with externally, it will replace a protective layer from the society which is keeping religious activism within the acceptable limits, norms and values of the respective states. Where the line should be drawn should be decided through debate and mutual discussions between the stakeholders.

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Using Theology to Legitimise Jihadist Radicalism

Syed Huzaifah Bin Othman Alkaff

The onset of globalisation and the bottom up social strains, demands and the responses it has generated in the Islamic world has left a particular segment of Muslim youth vulnerable to violent radicalisation. The inability of these Muslim youths to adjust and strike a balance between the demands of the religion and the norms of modernity has allowed violent-extremist groups to recruit them by distorting certain theological doctrines and using them as recruitment and justification tools.

Background

A few months before Islamic State (IS)-affiliated terrorists attacked Marawi City on 23 May 2017, a young Muslim girl from Manila, Siti (not her real name), in a bid to atone for her 'sinful life', fell prey to IS' social media groups called "da'wa" (preaching) which are responsible for spreading IS militant ideology online. Siti reached out to an IS recruiter on Facebook, Abu Yaqeen, who shared her story on his Facebook page as a testimony of his work.

Before radicalisation, Siti had held mainstream views about *jihad*; she did not believe that *jihad* – in the IS-jihadist sense of the word i.e. armed militancy – was mandatory in Islam. This frustrated her recruiter who then took advantage of Siti's lack of religious knowledge by inculcating in her a militant-exclusivist mindset. Eventually, she was convinced into believing that the Philippines society was un-Islamic and unfit for her to live in, and that she needed to make the so-called *hijrah* (migrate) from such a life and to fight alongside terrorist groups to attain a so-called Islamic life.

Siti's isolation from her community, friends, and family manifests her desire to repent and to distance herself from 'her previous [sinful] life'. She went into isolation for about a year and resurfaced online in October 2017, when

she communicated with her recruiter to thank him for guiding her. By then, Siti had become the leader of IS' female wing in Marawi. Abu Yaqeen and other IS supporters and sympathisers shared her story on Facebook, glorifying her as an ideal for other females to follow.

Radicalisation of the 'Guilty'

Siti's pathway to online radicalisation is a common trend in Islamist militancy today. Vulnerable young Muslims who feel the need to repent from an 'un-Islamic' lifestyle have a tendency to blame secularism and the modern urban environments, whether it is Manila or any other city in the United States, Europe or elsewhere. They overlook Islam's emphasis on mercy and forgiveness and the wide latitudes Muslims have in practising their faith. Out of a sense of guilt, they despise themselves and their community and society, believing them to be in gross error, and that they therefore have to socially isolate themselves to truly repent and change. In contrast, many young Muslims find the guidance they need from mainstream and widely recognised and legitimate sources. They are able to reconcile Islam with modernity and are confident in expressing their identity and practising their religion.

Without sufficient religious knowledge and guidance, radical ideologues would push vulnerable youths to reject their contemporary moderate Islamic life. Since the 1980s, Islamists have been propagating the idea that Islam has to be practised, as it was in 7th Century Arabia in literal terms. They argue that Muslims have to revive classical Islamic institutions of governance to achieve social justice. To them, present-day, secular institutions are at odds with Islamic teachings, and a source of inequality, socio-political backwardness and various social ills.

These ideas continue to permeate the imagination of some common Muslims.

In addition, terrorist ideologues have been arguing that the only source of salvation for Muslims like Siti is armed jihad. Lost, and without the means to differentiate militant ideology from mainstream religious knowledge, they become vulnerable to exclusivist teachings and terrorist recruitment.

Using Theology for Ideology

Before and after 9/11, jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Jema'ah Islamiyah (JI) showed videos of Muslims suffering in conflict zones to elicit an emotional response and a commitment to 'jihad'. Since the Syrian civil war, terrorist groups have learned to capitalise on the vulnerabilities of Muslim youths, particularly their naivety and lack of religious understanding. Prior to the Syrian conflict, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) realised the potential of sectarian tensions in the Middle East to grow and mobilise its supporters. To normalise violence among Muslims, the group, which eventually became the so-called Islamic State (IS), began indoctrination of new recruits through classes on their version of Islamic theology prior to any other training.

Terrorists manipulate Islamic theology, using theological frames that classify 'truths' in black-and-white terms – right vs wrong, Dar-ul-Aman vs Dar-ul-Harb, Muslim vs non-Muslim. Terrorists use these categories – Muslim/non-Muslim – to demarcate their enemies along theological lines. By labelling fellow Muslims and the religious 'other' as a kafir (disbeliever), murtad (apostate), taghut (transgressor), or ahl al-bid'ah (blasphemer), terrorists morally disengage and dehumanise their victims. Through these theological frames, terrorists believe they have a divine mandate to commit acts that are morally forbidden in their own religion such as suicide attacks, burning people alive, and disfiguring dead bodies.

Way Forward

In response to global terrorism, many governments have funded institutions to counter radical, so-called-religious ideologies. Such efforts are useful to

understand how terrorists think and provide insights into their rehabilitation. However, providing counter-points and debating with terrorist ideologues may not be enough. Prospective terrorist recruits are not concerned with what such institutions have to say about religion and terrorism. Sometimes, these institutions are undermined as authoritative sources of counter-ideology by being overtly associated with governments.

Social intervention efforts should also focus on providing adequate opportunities to allow youths to access religious resources as well as programmes that cater to their needs and the challenges they face in modern life. On one hand, counselling alone would be insufficient as these youths are looking for religious guidance as a solution to their problems. On the contrary, many youths feel that some religious institutions fail to contextualise religion to modern and contemporary settings as they may overemphasise Islamic rituals or be rigid in some Islamic doctrines. Hence, there is a need to rethink religious education programmes that are specialised for the youth and can cater to their contemporary needs. These programmes have to be based on evidence-based research that would aim to understand the challenges they face in their lives. Otherwise, terrorist recruiters may fill this gap.

Notions such as Islam requires Muslim youth to engage in armed jihad for salvation, or that repenting requires them to isolate themselves and reject the social and political realities of modernity are false. Islam – as well as other religions, traditions and philosophies – has vast resources to help their followers to achieve the good life in any temporal context or socio-political setting. Religious institutions and communities need to communicate this well to the present generation to counter radicalisation now and in the future.

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Analysing Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

C. Nna-Emeka Okereke

The Analysing Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

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The Anglophone crisis has introduced a new element in the understanding of terrorism in Africa as the local population in the English-speaking regions of Northwest and Southwest Cameroon flee from military and security operations while embracing individuals designated by the state as terrorists. The escalating violence has displaced thousands of refugees to neighbouring Nigeria and could jeopardise Cameroon's upcoming Presidential election while stimulating new security challenges for the country and entire Lake Chad Basin area.

History of the Current Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

To appreciate the dynamics of the current political crisis and violence, it is necessary to know the genesis of the Anglophone question, which began in October 2016 with demands for the restoration of a two-state federation. The British-administered Southern Cameroon (Trustee Territory) had voted to join the French-administered La Republic du Cameroon through the United Nations (UN)-organised plebiscite in February 1961. Consequently, after attaining independence in October 1961, Southern Cameroon entered into a two-state federation with La Republic as West and East Cameroon respectively.

In 1972, however, former President Ahidjo altered the structure of the union by abandoning federalism and transforming the country into a unitary state known as the United Republic of Cameroon. By 1984, President Paul Biya changed the name to La Republic du Cameroon, which was the original name of the French-administered East-Cameroon. Some opposition

Anglophone elites interpreted this change of name as an act of secession from the spirit of the Union between the two Cameroons, and amounted to forced assimilation of Anglophone identity.

Several attempts by sections of the Anglophone population to resist what they considered to be the erosion of their unique identity have lingered on since the 1972 alteration of the political structures and processes and especially since the 1984 change of name, which was contested in the courts by leading Anglophone elites. Generally, the Anglophone constitutes about 8 million out of Cameroon's estimated 20 million population.

Abiem a Tchoyi identified the causes of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon to include:

- a. Criticisms of the centralised state.
- b. Transfer of decision-making centres to Yaoundé, far from the Anglophone population and their problems.
- c. Failure to respect commitments to equitably take into account the institutional, legal and administrative cultures and traditions inherited from the former administering powers.
- d. Non-compliance to the solemn promises made during the referendum campaigns (referring to 1961 plebiscite and 1972 referendum).
- e. The change of the name of the State, from the "United Republic of Cameroon" to the "Republic of Cameroon" and
- f. Disrespect of bilingualism in the public sector, although the Constitution makes French and English two official languages of equal status.¹

¹ Abiem a Tchoyi, "Anglophone Marginalisation: Cold Hard Facts," *The Rambler*, edition No. 0037, 18 January 2017.

Dynamics of the Current Anglophone Crisis

The current Anglophone crisis is an extension of the historical resistance to the alleged assimilation of the indigenous English-speaking population. It began with the unprovoked harassment of Anglophone lawyers engaged in peaceful protest marches in September 2016 to vent their grievances over the perceived marginalisation of the Anglophone Common Law practice in the country. In October 2016, they went on strike, and in November, the Anglophone Teachers Trade Union also staged a solidarity strike to protest against the distortions confronting the educational system in the Anglophone regions.²

The targeting of the University of Buea and National Polytechnic Bamblé in November 2016 by military and other security agencies, culminating in the arrest and torture of students also aggravated the present crisis. Likewise, the arrest, torture and killing of some youths engaged in peaceful protest in Bamenda and Kumba by security agencies.³

In December 2016, activist lawyer Felix Agbor Balla formed the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), which championed the initial demands of the Anglophone community that included:

- a. An end to the marginalisation and annexationist disposition of Yaounde.
- b. A return to the two-state federation in the management of public affairs in Cameroon that was the basis of the union entered in 1961.
- c. Preservation of the cherished legal and education systems of Anglophone Cameroon.
- d. Unconditional release of over 100 bona-fide Cameroonians arrested in connection with the protests in the Northwest and Southwest regions since September 2016, and

- e. Immediate restoration of internet services throughout the Anglophone regions.⁴

Following failed attempts to address the demands of the Anglophone population, President Biya described the agitators as “a group of manipulated and exploited extremist rioters whose activities have led to the loss of lives, destruction of public and private buildings, crippling of economic activities and the desecration of sacred national symbols.”⁵ This tone in Biya's 2016 New Year eve national address to the nation set the stage for the repression of the pro-federalism aspirations of the Anglophone population.

President Biya's resolve to crush the opposition was met with civil disobedience. On 9 January 2017, Agbor Balla declared Operation Ghost Town Resistance (OGTR), which is chiefly characterised by strict compliance to a sit-at-home ritual every Monday and Tuesday or any other day declared by the CACSC leadership. During this period, the inhabitants of the two Anglophone regions in Cameroon stayed away from the offices and business premises thereby bringing all political and economic activities to a halt.

The Biya regime responded to OGTR with the proscription of the CACSC including the arrest and detention of its leaders notably Agbor Balla, Mancho Bibixy (leader of the coffin protest in Bamenda), Aforneka Fortem Neba (lecturer at the University of Buea), and Paul Ayah Abine (Justice of the Supreme Court).⁶ Other leaders such as Bobga Harmony Mbuton, Wilfred Tassary and Elias Eyambe Ebai fled from Cameroon. The Biya regime further severed internet access in the two Anglophone dominated regions of Northwest and Southwest Cameroon. This measure, which was interpreted by the Anglophone population as a redefinition of Cameroon territory, escalated the grievances against Yaounde.

² J.D., Pefok, “The Anglophone Crisis Causes Indefinite Delay of Bar Elections,” *The Post*, No. 01793, Friday, 3 February 2017.

³ International Crisis Group (2017) “Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads,” Report No 250, Africa, 2 August 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-camerons-anglophone-crisis-crossroads> (accessed 25 February 2018).

⁴ Abiem a Tchoyi, “Anglophone Marginalisation: Cold Hard Facts,” in *The Rambler*, edition No. 0037, 18 January 2017.

⁵ Paul Biya, New Year Message to the Nation on 30 November 2016.

⁶ Ateki Seta Caxton, “The Anglophone Dilemma in Cameroon: The Need for Comprehensive Dialogue and Reform,” *Conflict Trends* 2, 2017.

The Anglophone diaspora took over the leadership of the struggle, following the arrest and detention of the CACSC leadership. The Anglophone diaspora substituted the initial quest for the restoration of two-state federalism with the demand for a separate State of Ambazonia. Several groups emerged, mobilising Anglophone nationalism within Cameroon and beyond towards the attainment of Ambazonia. Prominent among these groups include the CACSC, Southern Cameroon Peoples Organisation (SCAPO), Southern Cameroons South Africa Forum (SCSAF), Movement for the Restoration of Independence in Southern Cameroon (MoRISC) and Southern Cameroonians in Nigeria (SCINGA). Others are the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), Republic of Ambazonia (RoA), Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC) and the Southern Cameroon Youth League (SCYL). Other similar groups projecting Anglophone nationalism and aspirations were also formed in Europe and America. The Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF) under the leadership of Sisiku Julius Ayuktebe emerged as the umbrella organisation for all these groups. The SCACUF established the Southern Cameroon Broadcasting Corporation (SCBC) to sustain Anglophone aspirations through its propaganda. Presently, the Ambazonia Governing Council has been renamed the Interim Government (IG) of Ambazonia.

Operational Tactics of the Anglophone Activists

To achieve its political goal, the SCACUF has employed a vast array of tactics, which include industrial actions by Anglophone lawyers, and teachers that had persisted since October and November 2016 respectively, to civil disobedience through OGTR and mass protests. It also appealed to diplomatic measures including protest marches to various Embassies and High Commissions of Cameroon in Africa, Europe and America and hiring a consortium of international legal practitioners for the pursuit of its objectives. These measures have been useful for mobilising and sustaining the genuine aspirations of Anglophone Cameroonians worldwide.

Beginning from September 2017, the nature of the Anglophone nationalism in Cameroon gradually became violent. Terrorist attacks using arson against schools, bombings and attacks on critical infrastructures and security personnel were recorded while public protests intensified.

The attacks on military and security personnel by militants and aggrieved persons in the Anglophone region have continued into March 2018. Earlier in August 2017, the arrest of five persons resulted in the discovery and seizure of firearms, bipods and tripods for precision weapons, explosive charge containers, a shielding fire episcope, laser range finders and Night vision equipment with laser rangefinder.⁷

On 22 September 2017, mass protests were staged throughout towns and villages of Northwest and Southwest regions with protesters demanding separation from Cameroon. Public protests were also conducted in major capitals across the world including the UN Headquarters in New York to coincide with President Paul Biya's address to the 72nd Summit of World Leaders at the UN.

The protests were also part of the activities designed by the SCACUF to precede the eventual declaration of the independence of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia by Sisiku Julius Ayuktebe on 1 October 2017. This event was characterised by pulling down Cameroon national flags in several offices and buildings in the Northwest and Southwest and the hoisting of the Ambazonia flag; this opened a wave of sustained official repression and mild war in the regions.

The decision to restore the independence of Ambazonia was part of the resolutions reached at the Conclave of SCACUF purportedly held on 10 July 2017 at Buea, capital of the Southwest region. This Conclave also established the Southern Cameroon Ambazonia Education Board (SCAEB) with mandate to, among other things, draft a new school curriculum that is consistent with the Anglo-Saxon education

⁷ Issa Bakary TChiroma, "Terrorist Acts in Bamenda" Press Statement, Friday, 22 September 2017.

system. It also established a governing body consisting of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial arms of government including the Southern Cameroon Self-Defence Committee to protect the lives and property of armless Southern Cameroonians.

The Executive was tasked to work towards restoring the independence of Southern Cameroon within the shortest timeframe. It was the compliance to this mandate that led to the declaration of the independence of Ambazonia on 1 October 2017, an event that significantly altered the dynamics of the Anglophone question in Cameroon's national politics. By extension, it sought to violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cameroon and was vehemently resisted by the Biya administration, which deployed its elite military known as Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and other security and administrative apparatuses to suppress the threat. Sustained military and security operations to crush the Ambazonia threat stimulated a spillover effect beyond Cameroon with thousands of Anglophones fleeing to Nigeria as refugees. The escalation of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon in the last quarter of 2017 transformed it into one of the greatest national security threats confronting the Biya administration.

In the wake of the escalation of the crisis in October, the Governing Council of the SCACUF was replaced by the Ambazonia Interim Government (AIG) following the outcome of the Fourth Conclave of the SCACUF held at Zaria (Nigeria) between 27-31 October 2017. Sisiku Julius Ayuktebe emerged as the AIG Interim President. At Cameroon Parliament in Yaoundé, the refusal of the Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement (CPDM) dominated parliament to discuss the Anglophone crisis has led to disruptions of parliamentary proceedings by the opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF) parliamentarians since October 2017.

Official Responses to the Anglophone Crisis

The Biya administration's response to the Anglophone crisis has been through the use of soft and hard measures. For instance, in January 2017, the Government approved the establishment of the National Commission on the Promotion of Bilingualism and

Multiculturalism. In March 2017, the Biya administration launched the recruitment of 1,000 Special Bilingual Teachers with competencies in technical and scientific subjects to address the demands of Anglophone teachers. It also embarked on two failed attempts at dialogue condemned largely as non-inclusive.

Generally, however, the weight of state apparatus has defined the official responses towards the Anglophone crisis. This has been characterised by the redeployment of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) to the two Anglophone regions to strengthen the operations of the police and gendarmerie. Various administrative structures in both regions issued strict guidelines on freedom of movement and public conduct. In addition, the Biya administration have also sought diplomatic support to Nigeria and beyond while also accommodating the visits of high level UN diplomats and the Commonwealth in its bid to garner international support to address the Anglophone question. The crisis however still persists in the form of low-level armed resistance and criminality.

Prior to the declaration of independence of Ambazonia in October 2017, the government had arrested and detained over 100 Anglophone activists it had labelled extremists. Many of them are facing various charges including terrorism-related cases under military tribunals. Some of these detainees such as Paul Ayah Abine and Felix Agbor Balla were released in August 2017 and the charges against them dropped.

It is important to note that the released persons were among the leading activists that spearheaded the Anglophone crisis in 2016. It was their arrest and detention that created the leadership vacuum, which the Anglophone diaspora took over. Reports by the International Crisis Group and Amnesty International stated that torture and dehumanisation of detainees were a frequent occurrence, while allegations of genocide have been levelled against the Yaounde regime by the SCACUF and vocal Anglophone voices.

The response of the Biya administration to the Anglophone crisis changed tremendously following the declaration of the independence of Ambazonia. Initial official response was

the deployment of more security forces to the Northwest and Southwest regions and intensification of the crackdown of separatist elements. The escalation of tensions and violence created opportunities for guerrilla attacks from separatist/restorationists within the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF). So far, there has been the abduction and killing of security personnel including the military by the militant ADF. These attacks have resulted in the sustained internal security operations especially in the Manyu Division close to Cameroon's border with Nigeria.

In his response to the deteriorating security situation, President Biya declared war on the separatists. In a statement in November 2017, Biya stated, "it is now clear that Cameroon was at war and under attack by terrorists masking [themselves] as secessionists." Subsequently, he declared that that all security measures will be taken to restore peace and order.⁸

The intensified military and security operations of the Cameroonian government have led to the flight of over 30,000 refugees fleeing Cameroon to the Nigeria-Cameroon border areas in Akwa Ibom, Benue, Cross River and Taraba States. These states share contiguous borders with the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. As at 3 February 2018, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had successfully registered 14,057 asylum seekers from Cameroon.⁹ So far, there have been some recorded incidences of cross border violations of Nigerian territory by Cameroon security forces in pursuit of ADF militants. The Cameroon security forces have argued that Anglophone militants operate from some Nigerian border areas and then launch attacks targeting the military and security forces of Cameroon. As such, this trend could have dangerous consequences for bilateral relations between both countries.

The heavy deployment of military arsenals at Besongabang under Manyu Division, a

border community within Cameroon-Nigeria border areas in December 2017 is an indication that the Government of Cameroon anticipates further escalation and is taking basic security measures to contain further decline into chaos and insurgency.

Looking Ahead

This paper therefore makes the following informed projections:

- a. The violence in the Manyu Division could escalate leading to major military offensives and confrontations;
- b. There could be more refugees fleeing to Nigeria for safety;
- c. Inclusive dialogue remains fundamental to resolving the Anglophone question in the short term; and
- d. Unless the international community especially the African Union, Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), United Nations (UN) among others shows genuine and closer commitment to resolving the Anglophone crisis, it could emerge as another major humanitarian disaster in Central Africa.

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⁸ Paul Biya, Pronouncements at Nsimalen-Yaounde Airport on 30 November 2017 following his return from the AU-EU Summit at Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (as translated)

⁹ United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), *Nigeria: Update on Cameroon Arrival 6*, 6 February 2018.

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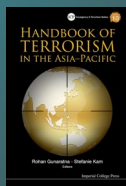
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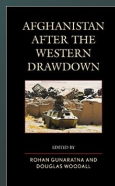


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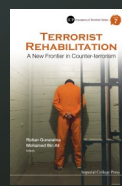
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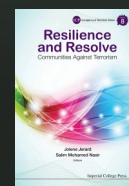
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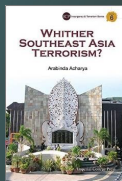
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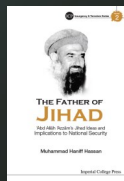
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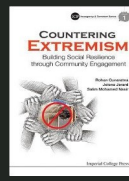
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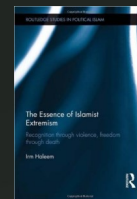
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