



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

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**Title:** **THE DECLINE OF ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ & SYRIA AND THE RISE OF ISLAMIC STATE OF PAKISTAN**

**Chairperson:** Ms Radhika Halder, Research Associate, CAPS

**Speaker:** Mr Aersh Danish, Research Associate, CAPS

**Discussant:** Ms Shereya Talwar, Research Associate, CAPS

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1. In 2014 Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ IS), a Salafi Jihadist militant group gained its prominence. Kurds and other local militias joined hands with ISIS to gain legitimacy- it made ISIS a potent military group in the West Asian region.
2. However, by 2015 ISIS started losing ground in the home turf and started looking beyond Iraq and Syria.It lost several strategic territories such as oil fields and population centres after US forces attacked.
3. ISIS had two possible scenarios to ensure its survival- either gain leadership over core areas where it had lost its control or establish itself in the other parts of the world by disintegrating the group.

4. ISIS created 19 'wilayats' or provinces in several neighbouring countries including Libya, Egypt (Sinai Peninsula), Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and the North Caucasus to expand their reach and power.
5. On 26 January 2015, Khorasan Province (Wilayat Khorasan) was established, with Hafiz Saeed Khan named as Wāli (Governor) and Abdul Rauf as his deputy after both swore an oath of allegiance to ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The name Khorasan refers to a historical region that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and "other nearby lands".
6. Pakistan was chosen over Afghanistan by ISIS to re-establish itself for the following reasons-
  - a. Pakistan was home-turf of Al Qaeda and ISIS wanted to challenge it in its turf.
  - b. There is a pre-existing militant landscape in Pakistan with largest number of terrorists groups operating (approx. 35) in the country.
  - c. Geo-strategic location of Pakistan provides access to Afghanistan and Central Asian in the North and India on its East.
7. Afghanistan presents several impediments for ISIS establishment. They are:
  - a. There has been continuous presence of external players like US armed forces and Russia in the country.
  - b. Western states have their interests in Afghanistan and therefore will dissuade establishment of ISIS in Afghanistan
  - c. Local militant groups have stronghold in several tribal areas in the country and will not allow outsiders to operate.
  - d. The strong presence of Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan and its dislike of ISIS sectarian ideology imparted another challenge to ISIS
  - e. Afghanistan government does not allow ISIS to establish its base.

8. The speaker suggested that ISIS can target India and Afghanistan in the future. The Pakistani establishment will provide vacuoles to ISIS while presenting lucrative targets in both the countries.
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