

SPECIAL REPORT

| OCTOBER 2020.

Rise to Peace

<https://www.risetopeace.org>

The Rise of the Islamic State in Afghanistan

By Ahmad Shah Mohibi



ISIS is teaching in a local school outside of Kabul: Courtesy of Frontline News

Contents

Introduction	2
ISIS in Afghanistan.....	3
The Potential Rise of ISIS in South and Central Asia.....	5
Origins of ISIS.....	8
Conclusion.....	11

About US

A research and analysis organization focused on empowering peace, education and tolerance to prevent terrorism and extremism around the world. Although we live in dangerous times, rife with both international and domestic terrorism, there is hope and there is a clear path towards peace – that road is education and Rise to Peace helps to build that path one person at a time. Rise to Peace believes that one cause of extremist violence is the recruitment of vulnerable youth with hateful propaganda and misinformation as to why the “way of the gun” is the only option to succeed and find a meaningful life. Rise to Peace counteracts this propaganda with the “way of the word” as to why education and understanding other cultures, values, and religions is the only true path towards a peaceful and fulfilling lifestyle.

About the Author

Ahmad Shah Mohibi is the Founder and CEO of U.S.-based counter-terrorism non-profit Rise to Peace. At 16, he assisted the U.S. military in frontline operations, trained the Afghan National Army, and taught cultural, political and social sensitivity skills. Later, as an Advisor to the Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), he facilitated 350 terrorism trials of those detained by U.S., NATO and ISAF forces at the Afghan National Security Court in Bagram. In 2016, he founded Rise to Peace where he launched a terrorism database, hosts high-level events, publishes original research and continues to advise U.S. military and civilian personnel on Afghan and Middle East matters. Due to its authentic messaging, the organization drew public interest and achieved a vast worldwide network of scholars. Ahmad has an MA in International Policy and Practice from George Washington University and a BA in Government and International Politics from George Mason University. Among his accomplishments, Ahmad speaks five languages, a recipient of numerous certifications of appreciation, 18 letters of recommendation, nine medals of achievement from high-ranking U.S. military officers and U.S. ambassadors. He is a published author, news commentator and regular speaker at events.



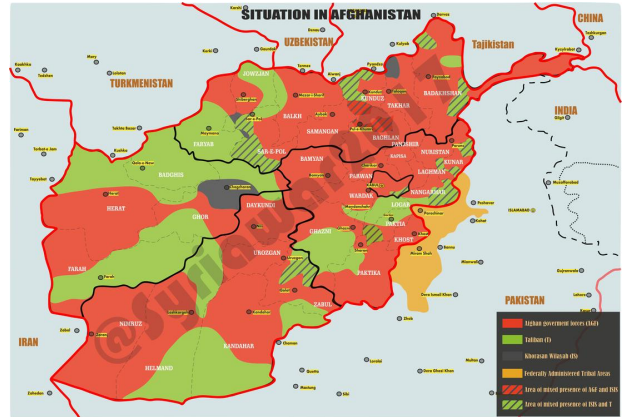
Above: The killing of Qari Hekmatullah, who is standing with a black flag to his left in this video still, led to immediate infighting among rival factions of insurgents, according to Afghan government officials. Credit: Via Defense Visual Information Distribution Service.

Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is one of the deadliest and most potent terror groups the world has ever known and has made its way to Afghanistan. It emerged due to interstate fragility, foreign policy failure and perennial instability in the Middle East. The 2003 United States' intervention in Iraq and the Arab Spring contributed to the creation of ISIS. The United States' removal of late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein — hardly the region's first socio-political convulsion — facilitated figurative tectonic shifts in political and religious realities. Sunni Muslims, who long ruled Iraq, suddenly found themselves overtaken and systematically oppressed by Shiites. ISIS capitalized on the subsequent Sunni grievance. Given the recent developments which have included President Trump dropping the “mother of all bombs” which targeted a network of tunnels used by ISIS in 2017,¹ the loss of territory in Syria and the continued battles with the Taliban, has led ISIS to look for new opportunities. This search has led ISIS to move toward Afghanistan as they are geographically strategic and currently the government is very fragile.

ISIS in Afghanistan

The organization is already present in Afghanistan under the moniker of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – Khorasan Province (ISIS-KP). Their presence achieved worldwide attention when the Trump administration dropped a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (GBU-43), colloquially known as the ‘mother of all bombs,’². There is a palpable threat that they will expand deeper into the country, and it is from this point that analysts consider the development of a Caliphate in Central Asia as a possible ensuing development. This would alter the dynamics of the region and drastically shape its future.



It is thus apparent that misinterpretation of religious texts and manipulation of them to serve the purpose of a political authority links all Islamist extremist groups. *Hadith* — records of the Prophet Muhammad’s actions, proverbs and traditions often used as a source for moral instruction and religious law— are often taken out of context, especially those related to his conquests between 622-632 CE. Muhammad’s prowess as a military leader and related stories are used to inspire fighters to join the cause fight for the greater purpose of religion. Further, these *hadith* are used to justify numerous actions committed in the name of terrorist organizations that are considered unjustifiable in Islam, such as attacks and suicide bombings. The belief of being a part of a larger purpose in history is attractive to those individuals in Afghanistan with little hope for a prosperous future.

Afghanistan’s instability makes it a prime destination for terrorist organizations to expand and set up operations. Afghan civilians are often unaware of the concepts of modern extremism or how to confront it because those holding power typically use it to expand their own interests. A population deficient in educational opportunities, employment prospects and hope will undoubtedly seek their necessities filled by a willing party, even if that means engagement with a terrorist organization such as ISIS.

Recruitment of Youth into ISIS Ranks in Afghanistan

One of the reasons that ISIS is so successful in Afghanistan and the Middle East is their ability to appeal and recruit the populations' youth. They are teaching young children the message of *Jihad* in order to expand their network and create factions all over the world. Since 2015 there has been a steady increase of ISIS in Afghanistan as they are providing food and salaries to any person that joins. As pointed out in a Frontline documentary³ Afghanistan is a very poor country with limited access to foreign aid and assistance so the 700 plus USD a month from ISIS allows families to feed and care for their children. This however often comes with a heavy price. ISIS has integrated itself into everyday life in Afghanistan, from collecting taxes to running the local schools. For the youth this means that they are not exposed to any alternative doctrines and are taught to idolize ISIS and its leadership. From the early age of three these children are trained in all things per their own interpretation of Sharia law. Given this early indoctrination, the children living in ISIS controlled villages have little choices other than to join as an ISIS fighter.

In February 2019, I visited a juvenile detention center in Kabul where I spent the day observing and interviewing detainees. Youths between the ages of 8-17 captured for their involvement with terrorist organizations (55 ISIS and 77 Taliban) were housed at the facility, amongst others for criminal, civil and political infractions. Their statements provided insight into how children remain a vulnerable sector for recruitment.

A young offender held for a criminal conviction observed differences between those children recruited for ISIS and those of the Taliban. He stated that due to the friction between the different Islamic school of thoughts, there are numerous violent encounters between the two. The youth expressed that, "they do not like each other and if they see a moment, they will kill each other." ISIS captive children were described as more respectful towards those in positions of authority and kept to a structured regime in comparison to those children affiliated with the Taliban.

Further, it was revealed that most ISIS prisoners originate from northern provinces of Afghanistan. They were recruited at young ages and provided with immense training from their terrorist handlers. A detainee was once advised by a former ISIS recruit that he attended four years in a fundamental school and supported the organization due to their continued training and support for the youth. As many Afghan children come from poverty, support and attention remain unchallenged recruitment tactics. The young man told me,

“Once you join the group — they will give you so much training that you will forget your mom.”

One binding tie that links the stories of all children recruited to terrorist organizations is the use of manipulation. Their young minds are brain-washed to embrace an extremist ideology and motivated to engage in acts of violence under the name of *jihād* — a term that youth cannot totally comprehend. Tenets of the Islamic faith are taken out of context and further exploited by ill-informed religious leaders to suit other motives. Children are indoctrinated with a focus on death and sacrifice of their budding lives rather than directed towards pathways to prosperity. Heroic stories of prophets who gave their life for rewards in the hereafter are strategically applied to motivate youth.

Therefore, it is apparent that significant mental health and psychiatric services are required to counter the influence of terrorist propaganda. That is currently lacking in the Afghan system and it is a fair assumption the need will increase as ISIS recruits more youth to their ranks. For example, at the detention center, there were two prison doctors, three contracted from outside and five psychologists for a population of 315. Care is often inadequate as one detainee expressed; he was advised to relax despite suffering severe depression.

Nonetheless, psychologists and case workers attempt to rehabilitate those in their care with available resources. Mental health professionals pinpointed two key factors that made children vulnerable targets for indoctrination: a lack of supervision by parents and coercion by peers to join ISIS. Parents are often largely distracted by their agricultural and livestock responsibilities to earn a decent income and are often unaware of their children’s actions. Moreover, as those involved with religious education are highly respected in communities, parents often do not question what their children are taught at school, even if it turns out to be extremist ideologies.

Through one-on-one interaction, group discussions and activities, the youth slowly release their anger towards authority and begin to listen to advice, as well as each other. Psychologists and caseworkers are reserved in their opinions about children who have received therapy and counselling. They conclude that those youth provided with stability and educational opportunities are at less risk to rejoin a terrorist organization like ISIS in comparison to their peers without such advantages. As one professional opined,

“Everything links back to reintegration and proper rehabilitation process which we do not have in Afghanistan.”

The Potential Rise of ISIS in South and Central Asia

ISIS in South Asia

As for IS-K, founded in 2015 in Eastern Nangarhar province (near the Pakistani border), its operational assets include underground tunnels and large stores of military equipment from heavy to light and technical weaponry.⁴ In 2014, Pakistani nationals Hafiz Saed Khan, a veteran with Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), was selected to forefront IS-K on Afghan territory. As the group started to expand, other extremist and Islamist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban group of Tahreek-e-Khilafat (the Caliphate Movement) joined. There, other influential commanders, including the TTPs spokesman Sheikh Maqbool, were recruited and pledged their allegiance to the then-Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Many other Pakistani militants and radical fighters who sought to evade security forces conducting counterterrorism operations then joined the group.⁵

The borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan have always been problematic regarding reining in terrorist groups and their movements. As depicted, IS-K has yet again exploited these provinces. Areas of Afghanistan like Kandahar and Helmand provinces and as well as Uruzgan and Herat act as transit points for nefarious purposes, such as the arming of some Taliban militants by way of Iranian support. Furthermore, highly impacted areas of Pakistan where the Pakistani government has no control, such as Waziristan, act as home bases where insurgents freely operate.

IS-K militants are linked to the Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, FATA was a strategic location for Pakistan’s then-military regime to support the Afghan Mujahideen. It was a center of mobilization for the group where they received advanced military training and later fought the Soviets in Afghanistan.⁶ This place has benefited the Mujahideen, the Taliban, and now IS-K.

One of the many reasons why the group was able to establish a presence in Afghanistan was the substantial withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops. In 2014, the United States and international partners from NATO significantly reduced their forces by the thousands. Their previous responsibilities were handed over to the Afghan authorities.

While the U.S. provided air support, they closed out their military bases across the country, except for those in key strategic points like Bagram and Kandahar Airfield. Afghans were not ready, and could not secure areas once supervised by the American and coalition partners.

ISIS in Afghanistan

The presence of IS-K in Afghanistan has already received global attention due to counter-terrorism operations against their bases. On April 15, 2017, the Trump administration dropped a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (GBU-43), The operation killed 94 IS-K militants and destroyed their entire underground facilities. After the MOAB event, IS-K moved to northern Afghanistan provinces, primarily in areas with no government or Taliban control to fundraise and receive other material support. Without a doubt, this was a wake-up call that the Islamic State was truly active in Afghanistan and proactive plans are needed to stifle any deeper infiltration.

IS-K does not hold a lot of territory as the Taliban claims to control over somewhere between 55-65 percent of Afghanistan, but they are operating strategically as they make their way to Central Asian countries. There is a palpable threat that they will expand deeper into the country, and it is from this point that analysts consider the development of a Caliphate in Afghanistan and later in Central Asia as a possible ensuing development. This would alter the dynamics of the region and drastically shape its future. It is assumed that IS-K has approximately 2,000-5000 fighters and will continue to grow as they recruit local Afghans and foreign fighters.⁷ Further, since the creation of the group, many Taliban fighters joined for higher pay and the grand vision of the creation of an Islamic State that encompassed the globe, rather than Afghanistan only. Division within the Taliban and grievances with leadership in Quetta Shura of Pakistan and Doha in Qatar also compelled some fighters to switch their allegiances to IS-K.

Conspiracy Theories about IS-K

There has been a conspiracy theory that the U.S. backs the Islamic State. Notably, the Russian foreign minister has claimed that locals have seen U.S. military helicopters dropping weapons for the group to use. While Pakistani, Russian and Afghan officials commented on this assertion, it must be noted that local populations have been persuaded

to mistrust any American actions, especially in their goal to build advance a political settlement in Afghanistan.

A conspiracy theory that the U.S. has made a secret deal with the Taliban to hand them power outright currently brews in Afghanistan. In fact, former president of Afghanistan — Western oriented and handpicked by the U.S. — Hamid Karzai went so far as to blame American and Russian powers for the creation of extremism. Further, he contends that the U.S. is currently using IS-K as a ‘tool’ to prolong military operations and find a way to stay in Afghanistan. He personally placed the blame of extremist groups active in the region at the feet of former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski — a hawkist strategist that strongly countered Soviet imperialism and expansionism.⁸

Accordingly, this transitions to the claim that the U.S. government does not want to make peace or end the war simply because they want to have a military presence in the region. For instance, a phrase common to Afghans is that, “Americans do not want peace, because if there is no war, there is no need for their troops.” There is a historical case to be made that the U.S. support for militants is an undoubtedly complex issue and it takes a certain regional expertise to understand why certain groups — like the Afghan Mujahideen — gained this support and were welcomed at the White House by then President Ronald Reagan. There is a lack of understanding of the differences between ‘freedom fighters’ like the Afghan Mujahideen and terrorist groups. As a result, conspiracy theories hide the facts and compels some to believe the U.S. is behind militancy. Pakistani interests have developed their own conspiracy theories about the Islamic State in Afghanistan as well. One theory describes a scenario where the U.S. airlifted ISIS into Afghan territory to build the next Caliphate there. In a similar vein, Iran blames the creation of every militant group in existence on U.S. interference.

Taliban versus IS-K

The Taliban and ISIS are notable examples of radical Islamist ideologies, but their desired objectives are different. As a result, each claim the other side is wrong and it is only through strict affiliation with one actor over the other that its fighters will attain truth. A significant example rests with the idea of the establishment of a Caliphate versus the Taliban’s hoped-for Emirate. In the theoretical case of a Caliphate extending from Afghanistan into Central Asia, ISIS seeks to unify all Muslims in a pan-Islamic state based

upon strict religious principles interpreted by the Caliph. On the other hand, the Emirate proposed by the Taliban would resemble an Afghan-centric political arrangement based on their military authority, as well as their flawed interpretations of Islamic teachings to support such a state.

The Taliban remain the dominant extremist group within Afghanistan and therefore, their clashes with ISIS create further insecurity in an already fragile state. It was through this destabilization that ISIS was able to recruit dissatisfied Taliban fighters and gain a foothold in Nangarhar Province on the border with Pakistan. However, the current clash between ISIS and the Taliban is not solely rooted in matters of geographical range, but it exposes ideological discrepancies as well.

Origins of ISIS

The Islamic State seized vast territory in the Middle East in 2013 and once commanded a tract of land as large as the size of the United Kingdom. They generated instant infamy from violent terror attacks and brutal public beheadings.

ISIS's origins date back to the 1980s when Jordanian founder Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi traveled to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan⁹. Hailing from Zarqa in Jordan, Zarqawi generated a well-earned reputation as a tattoo-covered street thug before prison added *radical extremist thinker* to his resume. In 1989, after leaving prison and fighting Soviet armed forces in the Hindu Kush, Zarqawi traveled to Pakistan where he met Islamic thinker and Salafi leader Muhammad al-Maqdisi. The *Bayat al-Imam* network was born. Zarqawi and Maqdisi returned to Jordan to rebel against the monarchy before Zarqawi was arrested and sentenced to prison for a second time¹⁰. He expanded his network during his second prison term, recruiting more followers and gaining supporters as far afield as Osama bin Laden. After release in 1999, Zarqawi traversed Pakistan to cross the border to meet with the notorious bin Laden in Afghanistan.

Zarqawi recruited more than 3,000 Iranian, Afghan, Syrian and Palestinian fighters for his terrorist operations. In 2000 and in 2001 he culled adherents from refugee camps in Herat. He briefly joined the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, upon whom the United States had just declared war. Working with some independence, Zarqawi withheld pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda. He feared its fighters were insufficiently serious towards the cause. Wounded

during an American air-strike, Zarqawi chose *not* to hole up in Tora Bora, Kunar Afghanistan's safest mountain redoubt, where bin Laden and his most trusted personnel hid for years.

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq marked the period where Zarqawi sought safe-haven in Iran and he made constructive use of his time by meeting bin Laden's chief military advisor Muhammad Ibrahim Makawai. Makawai requested Zarqawi's help transporting Al-Qaeda operatives through Syria into Iraq — countries where nothing happens without the approval of their iron-fisted dictators — and thus triggered U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to pronounce Zarqawi the operational link between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. In an example that 'there's no such thing as bad publicity', Powell's endorsement gained Zarqawi worldwide recognition as fighters flocked to join his network. As his terror outfit gained steam, and while passing from Iran to the battlefield, Zarqawi ravaged sections of northern Kurdish Iraq, importing punitive forms of fundamentalist Islam¹¹.

While living in Sunni areas in Iraq, Zarqawi targeted military compounds, embassies and most famously — Shia places of worship. On August 7th and 9th in 2003, Zarqawi turned his attention towards his home country and carried out unprecedented deadly attacks on the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, as well as a Shia religious gathering in Najaf, killing 130 and leaving dozens maimed. Zarqawi's tactical and strategic successes stoked fear just as much as his targets were not only foreign forces, but also those he considered puppet regimes. His public beheadings added a pulp quality to the hideous grotesquerie of what had become, by 2004, the U.S.'s most wanted man. Pledging allegiance to Al-Qaeda and supporting bin Laden's fighters in Iraq made the new affiliate and ISIS antecedent Al-Qaeda in Iraq¹² a *fait accompli*, even if his tactics did not always align with those of Al-Qaeda.

Zarqawi was killed in a 2006 U.S. airstrike. His successor Abud Ayyub al-Masri dissolved Al-Qaeda in Iraq and re-formed the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Masri himself was killed by a U.S.-Iraqi operation in 2010 and thereafter, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ascended to the group's leadership post. In the wake of Arab Spring protests and civil war, with a Syrian genocide brewing, the ISI took an antagonistic position against Syrian government forces. However, it was immediately apparent that in addition to having the most skilled fighters, ISI's goals diverged dramatically with those who aimed to create a modern Syria and wrest control away from Bashar al-Assad and his Latakian Allawite kin. The ISI usurped

significant portions of Syria and territorially, combined with Iraq, it declared itself ISIS. Following noteworthy victories in Fallujah, Mosul, and Tikrit it anointed itself The Caliphate¹³.

What is this Caliphate concept which ISIS aimed to exploit?

A caliphate is a form of Muslim government ruled by an Islamic Caliph, or leader of the religio-state. Muslims believe in four Caliphs from history, referred to as the al-Khulafa ur-Rashidun (Rightly Guided Caliphs) who led Muslims following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The Caliphs' mission was to follow the Prophet Muhammad's Islamic path including submission to God and belief in the Quran. In entreating emperors to devote themselves to Islam the Caliphs spread its message and expanded the religion from Saudi Arabia to the rest of the world.

Who were the Caliphs?

Caliphs date back to the 7th century and in common parlance the word generally refers to Muslim leaders who protected Muslim lands from outside incursions. The term is widely used and it occasionally generates controversy since there is no commonly accepted definition. There have been warrior Caliphs, intellectual Caliphs, poet Caliphs, spiritual Caliphs, and tyrant Caliphs. Drivers in Afghanistan are called Khalifa and the term has been used to describe heroes as far-flung as the Kurdish Sultan Saladin from the 11th century crusades¹⁴.

Is ISIS an Islamic Caliphate?'

No. Islam is a religion of peace. It condemns violence. See this tenet spelled out in *The Quran* al-Maidah 5.32:

“We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person – unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land – it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the whole people.”

It is common for Westerners to mistakenly believe the Islamic State is associated with Islam writ large, and that the religion provides some sanction to kill. Muslims, often as not, are the chief victims of such self-interested and violent distortions of Islam.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

ISIS remains one of the deadliest terrorist groups the world has even known. The Taliban however, remains the most prominent terrorist organization in Afghanistan and the rise of ISIS in the region presents a threat to both the safety and stability. ISIS and IS-K have developed strategies to broaden their ranks by manipulating children putting them through rigorous training camps which has resulted in increased recruitment.

As many Afghan children come from poverty this serves to gain support and attention from people within their community. In addition, they are taught that their fight and potential death is what will lead them to prosperity. These aggressive manipulation tactics are like those used by the Taliban even as their ideology remains very different. This is just one of many tools that ISIS and IS-K are using to broaden their ranks through Afghanistan and Central Asia.

As discussed in the origins of ISIS, ISIS dates to the early 1980s and as such leaders such as Zarqawi have had numerous opportunities to expand and exploit the Middle East and Asia. Moving forward, in order to protect the people of Afghanistan and South and Central Asia there must be a holistic approach to combating terrorism in which humanitarian aid, governments and community leaders strive to protect the youth in the communities that are most targeted. Only with a united front can Afghanistan protect itself from ISIS and move forward with the peace talks within the state.

In terms of combating ISIS in Afghanistan there are several policies and approaches the Afghan government can take. The first would be youth outreach within the smaller ISIS controlled villages. Without youth recruitment there would be a limited future development. This could take the approach of centralized education that moves away from Sharia Law and encompasses trade and vocational training, as this would give the next generation an alternative to joining ISIS. In addition, as previously pointed out Afghanistan is a poor country and many of its peoples struggle to provide basic needs for their families, making the 700 dollars a month from ISIS very tempting.

If the Afghan government were to work on reducing the corruption of humanitarian aid and focus on a localized approach to help families escape poverty it would remove one incentive to join ISIS. Furthermore, if the government were to reduce corruption and work

with other government and non-government organizations, they would be able to create a country that is prosperous as individuals would have ways to innovate and create a life for themselves. Lastly there must be a continuation by the Afghan government to work with other factions with the country such as tribal groups. Legitimizing the various tribes and engaging in power sharing is a positive step to creating a more stable government. Overall, a reduction in corruption and increase in cooperation between governments and tribal groups is necessary in conjunction with increased aid and centralized education to combat the growing threat of ISIS in Afghanistan.

¹ Cooper, Helene, and Mujib Mashal. "U.S. Drops 'Mother of All Bombs' on ISIS Caves in Afghanistan." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Apr. 2017.

² Cooper, H., & Mashal, M. (2017, April 13). U.S. Drops 'Mother of All Bombs' on ISIS Caves in Afghanistan. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/world/asia/moab-mother-of-all-bombs-afghanistan.html>

³ PBS, FRONTLINE. (2016). ISIS in Afghanistan | Watch S2015 E18 | FRONTLINE | PBS, from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/isis-in-afghanistan>

⁴ "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan - United States Department of State." *U.S. Department of State*, U.S. Department of State, 8 July 2019.

⁵ Diamond, Caleb. "Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)." *Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) | Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2018.

⁶ Mirahmadi, Hedieh, et al. "Empowering Pakistan's Civil Society to Counter Global Violent Extremism." *Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World U.S.-Islamic World Forum Papers 2014*, 2015.

⁷ Jadoon, Amira, and Andrew Mines. ISK Losses in Afghanistan. Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, 2020, pp. 13â53, Broken, but Not Defeated: An Examination of State-Led Operations against Islamic State Khorasan in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015-2018)

⁸ Mohibi, Ahmad. "US-Taliban Peace Talks: An Opportunity for Peace?" *Rise to Peace*, Rise to Peace, 3 Oct. 2018.

⁹ Weaver, M. (2015, August 24). The Short, Violent Life of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Retrieved September 14, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-short-violent-life-of-abu-musab-al-zarqawi/304983/>

¹⁰ NY Times Staff. (2006, June 08). Key Events in the Life of al-Zarqawi. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/08timeline-zarqawi.html>

¹¹ Breslow, J. M. (2016, May 17). Nada Bakos: How Zarqawi Went From "Thug" To ISIS Founder. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/nada-bakos-how-zarqawi-went-from-thug-to-isis-founder/>

¹² History.com Editors. (2017, July 10). ISIS. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/isis>

¹³ Muir, J. (2017, October 17). 'Islamic State': Raqqa's loss seals rapid rise and fall. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35695648>

¹⁴ History.com Editors. (2012, April 02). Saladin. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/saladin>