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Issue Brief

Terrorism: Common Enemy of China and Pakistan

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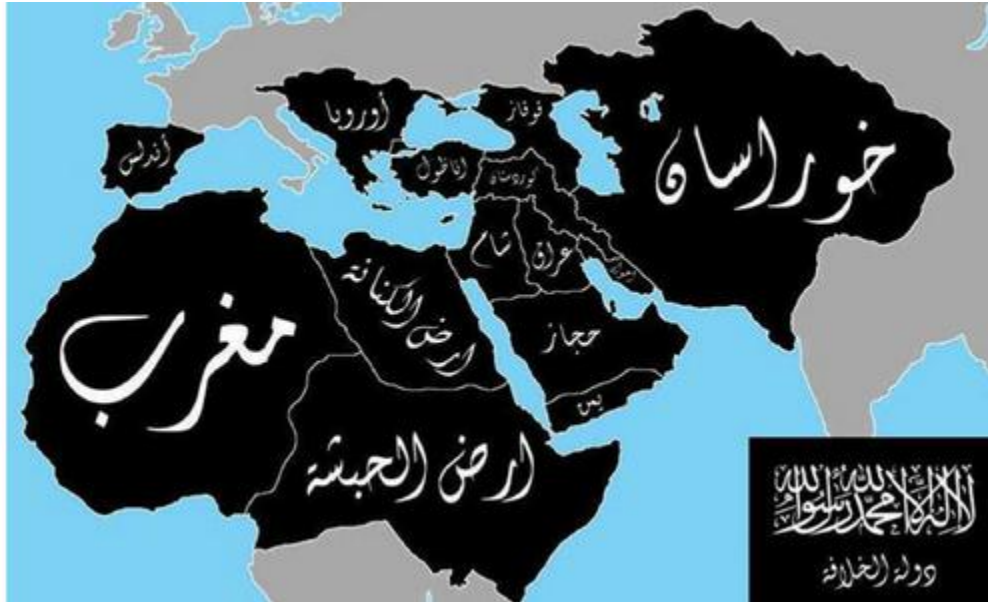
Last week was a tragic one for Pakistan. There were deadly terrorist attacks across the country that claimed lives of hundreds of innocents civilians as well as military personnel in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. The recent spell of terrorist activities has raised serious concerns amongst the society, armed forces and government officials regarding the resurgence of these attacks in the country once again. The deadliest of these attacks took place at Sehwan Sharif on February 16, 2017, killing more than 80 people. The Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for this barbaric incident.

Pakistan's week of violence



Shrines and cultural sites have come under regular IS attacks in Middle East, and now, they have managed to strike these in Pakistan as well. Pakistan has long denied the presence of IS on its territory, however, many local outfits have pledged allegiance to IS while its recruiters continue to approach individuals through social media. Despite the international offensive against IS, the terrorist network has kept spreading and now threatens even more countries.

In 2014, the head of IS, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, threatened China and called on Uighur militants to join his organization.¹ Furthermore, the expansion plan of IS includes significant part of China's Xinjiang province. Last year, a report stated that more than 100 militants from Xinjiang joined the IS.²



Roadmap of IS

Pakistan has been fighting against terrorism for more than a decade, but there is still a long way to go before this menace is eliminated from the country. Pakistani soldiers are not only defending their motherland, but also protecting Pakistan's allies from terrorists. Other than local militant organizations, they have been involved in countering threats from foreign militants operating within the country. In the Operation Zarb-i-Azb, Pakistan's armed forces were also successful in eradicating elements of the Uighur militant group, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM).³

China has been calling out the international community for support against ETIM for some years. During the G20 summit in Turkey in 2015, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi raised this issue by saying, "China is also a victim of terrorism, and cracking down on ETIM should become an important part of the international fight against terrorism."⁴ Unlike many countries, Pakistan has assured full cooperation to China in its efforts to counter militancy.

Pakistan and China treat each other as close allies and many of their interests are intertwined. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) signifies this special relationship. Peace and stability across their borders is in the national interest of both sides. A formidable military force has been established to

provide security to those working on CPEC related projects, and so far no major terror activity has taken place on project sites. By bringing economic prosperity, CPEC is expected to stabilize the security environment in Pakistan and also in Western China. However, terrorist incidents targeting civilians are offsetting the positive developments.

Pakistan realizes that it has to engage with regional powers to tackle terrorism. In this regard, Pakistani soldiers participated in joint military exercises hosted by Pakistan Army with their Russian and Chinese counterparts. On the other hand, China has joined hands with its allies to fight terrorism in Middle East as it is concerned about the rising influence of that region's terrorist organizations in Xinjiang.⁵ In the wake of last week's attacks, Pakistan has to further its level of cooperation with China, and both sides should carry out joint operations against their common enemy. Pakistan should also look towards China for diplomatic support against hostile actors in the region. China's dominant role in regional order and Pakistan's prowess in fighting militancy has the potential to form another win-win strategy for both countries.

Notes and References:

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- ¹ <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/610286/China-preparing-to-team-up-with-Russia-in-Syria-Boost-for-Putin-in-battle-against-ISIS>
 - ² <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1992418/beijing-policies-xinjiang-driving-chinese-muslims-join>
 - ³ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1204443>
 - ⁴ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/992300/china-says-global-war-on-terror-should-also-target-ughur-militants/>
 - ⁵ <http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/whats-are-chinas-stakes-in-syria>