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Issue Brief

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

ISIS – Moving towards its End

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Middle East as a whole has been home to a series of violent extremism. A new wave of extremism erupted after the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the announcement of caliphate by Abu Bakar Al



Baghdadi in June 2014. ISIS has emerged as highly fanatical, as well as militarily efficient and under tight direction by top leaders. Its tactics have been to make a surprise attack, inflict maximum casualties and spread fear before withdrawing.

However, ISIS which once vowed to fight till death is now witnessing a shift in its strategy. Earlier this month in September 2017, ISIS was defeated in a battle at the Lebanese-Syrian border that lasted for six days against the combined Syrian and Lebanese Army and Hezbollah. Battered after the defeat and the wounds of Mosul fall still fresh, surviving ISIS fighters, a total of a little over 300, did something that has never been done by the organization in the past. The ISIS fighters; all 300 of them along with their families negotiated a safe passage for themselves to the town of Deir al-Zour in Syria – the last strong hold of ISIS, in exchange for the dead bodies of Lebanese soldiers.¹ This shift in strategy from fight till death, to surrendering and demanding a safe passage marks a strategic shift in the policy of ISIS. The group is heavily battered from the onslaught it has been facing for months. The group had survived similar onslaughts in 2007 and 2011 through the use of similar tactics, but this time it was different.

The group which carried out 140 attacks in 29 countries killing nearly 2,043 people no longer seems oriented anymore and is now caught in a struggle to survive. This recent deal marks a new chapter in the history of the Middle East and brings ISIS one step closer to elimination. The deal has also given hopes to the forces that are engaged against the group that it can now finally be defeated.

¹ <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-08-29/isis-negotiates-safe-exit-lebanese-border-air-conditioned-buses>

Learning from their mistakes in the past, the Americans became furious over this deal. They see this deal as a means of transporting terrorism instead of putting an end to it. As a result, the Americans have bombed the road ahead of the convoy carrying ISIS fighters and their families. This put a temporary halt to the convoy as it was stranded in the middle of nowhere. Only after the Russian request, the Americans have ended surveillance of the convoy. However, the Americans are determined to ensure that no buses make it to the militant controlled areas.²

There are reports in the media that the Russians have also bombed the road ahead of the convoy after the ISIS fighters tried to escape in civilian vehicles.³ This Russian-American partnership against ISIS comes as a surprise and has brought the two parties on the same side. This partnership, if carried out over a long-term, can ensure the elimination of ISIS from the region.

The shift of ISIS strategy from fighting till death to negotiating a deal for safe passage is a clear indicator that the group is in its twilight. However, no such deals should be made with ISIS which is responsible for killing hundreds and thousands of innocent people. If allowed to restructure, the group might come back again with a more brutal force. To stop such incidents and as a prerequisite to peace, ISIS needs to be eliminated altogether. The dwindling flame of self-proclaimed caliphate needs to be extinguished and after this negotiation, the end seems to be finally in sight.

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-warplanes-call-off-surveillance-of-an-isis-convoy-at-russias-request/2017/09/08/9a51ca4c-94d9-11e7-8482-8dc9a7af29f9_story.html?utm_term=.0775721552ea

³ <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/world-news/642069/Russia-ISIS-Vladimir-Putin-Syria-Islamic-State-Jihad-Airstrike-Bombers-Deir-Ez-Zor-Assad>