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## Issue Brief

# Counter Terrorism

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The terror attack in Paris has once again highlighted the heated debates on the activities of ISIS and Islamophobia prevalent in Europe and elsewhere at every forum these days. The Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) hosted a delegation from Centro Studi Internazionali (Ce.S.I), Italy. The three member Italian delegation was led by the President of Ce.S.I. Mr. Andrea Margelletti and included Analyst coordinator of Ce.S.I., Dr. Gabriele Lacovino and Analyst in charge for Asia and Pacific affairs, Ms. Francesca Manenti.

The president of the Institute spoke candidly about the existing security threats from non-state actors, in general and IS in particular. While comparing Al Qaeda with ISIS, he differentiated the two by terming the former as an umbrella group and the latter as a non-state actor having its own territory, economy and its own identity, and hence, a real threat to global peace. The professor highlighted that these threats are not limited to Europe or United States, but endanger the rest of the world. In addition, it is a threat to Pakistan where their interest lies not in a few cities or FATA but in the state of Pakistan as a whole.

It is important to note that the rise of ISIS was linked to the failure of the Maliki government who marginalized Sunni minority. According to him, the West created a national army in Iraq but failed to create Iraqi national identity. Taking note of the radicalization of the Muslim youth, he highlighted the shortcomings of the Europe in fully integrating the Muslim immigrants into European society. This has become one of the reasons for their drift to join ISIS and other extremist groups.

The responses from the panel of researchers of the ISSI were also thought provoking; most of them were of the opinion that the West should seriously address the global issue of Islamophobia. They contended that the Europe sees hundreds of terror attacks each year. However, the media focuses only on those carried out by the so called Muslims and not the ones by ethno-nationalist or far right extremists. They were of the opinion that the past mistakes should not be repeated and practical steps need to be taken besides a meaningful dialogue, one in which Muslims are not marginalized, to counter the long term threat of ISIS.

While these and other interactive debates are fruitful for global peace and security, there are some pressing issues that need to be addressed which are most often overlooked and ignored by the concerned governments. The questions of 'when and how' of the emergence and rise of terrorist organization have been deliberated, but there is no answer to or viable solution for 'what are their

intentions'. The regime change and operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria have not curbed terrorism but have rather intensified the violence. The ISIS controls and holds power over a territory where it collects taxes, regulates prices and has its own courts. That is to say that the deeper answers to questions of 'if there is one territory under ISIS now; what diplomatic, political and military strategy is to be adopted to deal with their dream of Khilafa tomorrow' are yet come to the fore.

The twentieth century witnessed two major wars and the Cold War rivalry between the Capitalist and Communist blocs. The end of Cold war did not help resolve the conflicts in the Middle East or elsewhere, but left the world in a divided and conflictual ethno-religio-politico landscape, further aggravating the situation and bringing militant non-state actors against states.

It has become a cliché that poverty and illiteracy drive to religious extremism, which leads us to ignore the fact that in many instances of terrorism the perpetrators were highly educated and financially well off. The point to ponder is that these extremist groups have a toxic brew which they sell to elements who are frustrated with their governments' system or are plain psychopaths, as observed in recent attacks in Paris. They embrace on the narrative of the extremist groups who lure them into believing a better life here and in the Hereafter and entice them for violence for which there is no accountability.

Paris is the latest in a string of terror attacks since 9/11. Every time when such an attack is carried out by a handful of Islamic extremists, the entire Muslim community bears the brunt. We have to admit that the terrorist organizations are acting in the name of Islam, but they do not represent Islam. The West has to recognize that every Muslim is not a terrorist. Extremism creates more deaths, suffering and poverty and all types of extremism make things worst. Islamophobia in the West will lead to more violence in the name of religion. The West has to take a serious note of the right wing language of their leaders. In the recently presidential campaign in the US, some Republican candidates openly demonize Muslims and Islam. The anti-Islam rhetoric and the crackdown on Muslims after any terror attack in the West are only aiding the terrorist organizations in their cause to recruit more young people.

Finally, though ISIS did not receive warm response from jihadi outfits in Pakistan due to their differences with each other, their strong financial support base may attract many supporters from within Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP).The TTP leadership can help form links of ISIS with sectarian and other jihadi groups, which may help ISIS to carry out their activities in urban centres. Therefore, utmost vigilance is required.

Peace can be achieved and security maintained through constant dialogue among the opposing groups. The Western countries act as if they have been the main targets of the violent extremism. Very little is discussed about the fact that Muslims have been the major victims of religiously motivated terrorist attacks. Muslim Ummah condemns terrorist attacks but the Western media often ignores these sentiments in the Muslim world where Muslims, in very strong words showed solidarity with the nationals of all countries who became victim of terrorism.

The French President expressed his views after the recent Paris attack in these words:

“We must not make any confusion concerning these terrorists and fanatics that have nothing to do with the Muslim religion.”