

## TERRORISM

## 2015: The Global Terror



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AS 2015 draws to a close, we stand witness to another year of world-wide terrorist activities threatening peace and security. Throughout history, terrorist organisations have adopted violence as a means to secure political, economic or ethnic rights. It is said, "A terrorist in someone's eyes might be a

Taliban, which had been operating in the Afghan-Pakistan border regions, besides occasional forays into urban areas, is also fractured and weakened since the death of their leader Mullah Omar in 2013. Besides these, there are many other Islamic militant groups, such as Abu Sayyaf of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) operating in Southern Philippines, Jemaah Islamiah in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Pakistan, Indian Mujahedin in India etc. In Bangladesh, too, we have organisations such as Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh (HUJI-B) among others.

increasing military pressure all along its border – Kurdish Peshmarga advancing from the north, reorganised Iraqi Army pushing from the south, a revitalised Syrian Army attacking from the southwest, and a sustained air campaign since 2014 by the US-led coalition, now joined by the Russians since September 2015. Amidst this pressure, Al-Baghdadi has issued a call to his sympathisers around the world to carry out attacks on western and other partner nations. Thus, in the later part of 2015, we saw a spike in the IS-inspired attacks in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, France and lastly in the USA. The two most recent IS inspired terrorist attacks that shook the

were taken by both the governments to normalise their relations and initiate new confidence building measures. It is hoped that in 2016, Pakistan and Afghanistan will work out a joint military strategy to fight the Talibans. If the terrorists do not get sanctuary and their flow of arms and finance are disrupted, militancy is bound to die down.

Here in Bangladesh, we witnessed targeted killing of five blogger-writers who opposed fundamentalists and religious extremists. All the attacks were claimed by Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) as a part of their 'jihad' against what they claimed was 'apostasy'. ABT was also named in the killing of a blogger in February 2011. The group published a hit-list that carried names of many top writers, intellectuals and rights activists of Bangladesh. It was also involved in April this year in a spectacular bank heist outside Dhaka. Another group that has been active for a long time is Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB). It was reportedly involved in the killing of a number of foreigners and attacks on priests and temples. There had also been attacks on Shia religious sites, an unprecedented occurrence in Bangladesh. The attack on the Friday congregation inside the naval base in Chittagong on December 19 signals the looming danger of religious extremism and terrorism in Bangladesh.

As the year drew to a close, there was a greater realisation than ever before that the dangers of Islamic extremism leading to terrorism could no longer be denied or ignored. Terrorists are trying to hijack Islam. While we fight them with all the forces that we can muster, our long-term strategy would be to fight the evil on the ideological front. This must be a coordinated effort nationally, regionally and globally. This, unfortunately, is easier said than done. The call by the Saudi government on December 16 to set up a Saudi-led Islamic Anti-IS coalition could be interpreted as a step in that direction, but there remains many uncertainties about the coalition. For example, Saudi Arabia is often blamed for aiding, abetting and financing Islamic extremists groups around the world. Turkey, one of the members of this coalition, has also been blamed for aiding the IS in its global recruitment process. They were accused of stabbing the Kurds in the back by attacking them from the air while they were fighting the ISIS forces on the ground. Most importantly, the announced coalition appears to be a "Sunni coalition", devoid of a single Shia-majority country. It would be too early to predict the outcome, if any, from the Saudi initiative.

As we bid farewell to 2015, let us usher in the New Year with renewed hope for a world where people of different faith, culture, and ethnicity can live in peace and harmony.

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freedom fighter in another's eyes." However, a fundamental difference between Muslim militant organisations and others is that while the rest fight for worldly objectives such as gaining political rights, seeking economic emancipation and securing cultural and ethnic identity, the aim of the Muslim militants are avowedly spiritual in nature, which is the establishment of a global Islamic state with a Khalifa at its head, who runs the state on the basis of Islamic religious code known as the Sharia.

The most dangerous terrorist organisation in the world today is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or simply the Islamic State (IS). ISIS has replaced Al-Qaeda, which has been in decline since the death of Osama Bin Laden in September 2011. Boko Haram, a terrorist group that originated in Nigeria, has now expanded its operations to neighbouring Central African states. Al-Shabab, which originated from Somalia, now operates throughout East Africa.

Throughout the year we witnessed Islamic State's continued suppression of all opposition through highly publicised acts of brutalities. Mass beheading and crucifixion of men, women and even children and stoning women to death were some of the horrific "justice" meted out by the IS. They continued to kill Christian and Yezidi men and enslave their women and children. Despite these despicable acts, the IS continued to attract young Muslim men and even some women from across the world. Young Muslims responded to the call of Jihad by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed Khalifa of the Islamic State. Teenage girls are running away from their homes in the West to be the Jihadi bride. To the vast majority of Muslims around the world, these acts were nothing but an abomination of Islam and, indeed, of humanity, yet the rest of the world views Muslims as silent partners in the crime because of their inaction and passivity. At the end of 2015, the IS faces

world were: the November 13 attack in Paris when gunmen and suicide bombers killed more than 100, and on December 2, when a couple with alleged ISIS ties killed 14 people in San Bernardino, CA, USA. These two incidents further galvanised public opinion in the West against the IS and Islamic militancy.

Meanwhile in Africa, the Boko Haram occupied a large part of the Northern Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa -- kidnapping girls and selling them as sex slaves, burning down villages, bombing Christian churches and so on. Its leader, Abubakar Shekau, who was previously linked with Al-Qaeda, pledged his allegiance to the IS in March 2015. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, Taliban forces continue to regroup and rearm. Despite repeated attempts, Pakistan and Afghanistan could not coordinate their anti-terrorist efforts; in fact, the mistrust is so deep that a joint anti-Taliban operation could never be launched. However, throughout the year, repeated initiatives