

GULSHAN HOSTAGE CRISIS 2016

Why the threat needs to be taken more seriously

ASM ALI ASHRAF

WHEN Italian citizen Cesare Tavella was shot dead in the Gulshan diplomatic zone of Dhaka City in late September 2015, and a Japanese citizen Kunio Hoshi was killed a few days later in a similar attack in the north-western Rangpur District, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed responsibility for both incidents. The terrorist group previously warned that "citizens of the [anti-ISIS] crusader coalition" would not be safe in Muslim countries. Bangladesh Government rejected concerns over ISIS presence in the country, and discarded western intelligence assessments that ISIS was planning for more sinister attacks. It thus came as no surprise that official investigations have never found any possible link between ISIS and the Tavella-Hoshi murders.

The assault on Gulshan's Holy Artisan Bakery on July 1, 2016, by self-declared ISIS militants, challenges the official threat assessment and brings forth the issue of why the ISIS danger needs to be taken more seriously in Bangladesh.

Time has come to revisit the ISIS threat for two compelling reasons: Since the 1990s, home-grown Islamist groups in Bangladesh have demonstrated varying level of connections with transnational terrorists; and Second, the Gulshan hostage crisis looks similar to some of the global attacks carried out by ISIS. These two factors deserves further

Regardless of ABT or JMB's participation in the recent hostage crisis, the ISIS threat appears to be real and much greater than anticipated.



Indian social activists light candles during a protest in Kolkata on Saturday, against a fatal attack on a restaurant in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka.

analysis.

Transnational connections of Bangladeshi militants

The reason why the ISIS threat needs to be taken more seriously requires one to recall Bangladeshi militant groups' past connections with global terrorist networks. After the First Afghan War (1979-1989) against the Soviet troops ended, nearly 2,000 emboldened Afghan War veterans of Bangladesh returned to the country in the 1990s. Those Afghan War veterans played an instrumental role in founding the Harkat ul Jihad al Islami (Huji) and Jamaat ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Huji and JMB began a spate of terrorist attacks in 1999 which lasted until 2005. They targeted secular activists, movie theatres, religious shrines, and mainstream political parties. Bangladesh-origin British High

Commissioner Anwar Chowdhury was also one of the high profile victims of Islamist militant attacks.

The militant activities of JMB have mostly reduced after counter-terrorism operations cracked down on the group and its top leaders were hanged to death. Despite that JMB has managed to re-surface in India and Bangladesh, and was praised by ISIS mouthpiece Dabiq Magazine in its November 2015 issue. There is a striking similarity between the two groups' hostility against religious minorities: In Bangladesh JMB has allegedly targeted Shia shrines and mosques, Christian priests, as well as the Bahai community, whereas the ISIS has targeted the Yazidis, Christians, Turkmen, and Shia minorities in Iraq, and Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya. If the JMB-ISIS connection proves to be a robust one,

this could mean that ISIS has found a strong affiliate and a recruitment pool among the home-grown terrorists in Bangladesh.

Similarities with global terrorist incidents

A second reason why the ISIS threat deserves more attention focuses on the similarities between the Dhaka hostage crisis with other ISIS offensives around the world. After the major terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015), Belgium (March 2016) and Istanbul (June 2016), ISIS claimed responsibility, released still pictures or video clips of attackers, and posted images of slain victims. Following the Gulshan attack, the same media strategy was adopted: six hours after storming into the restaurant ISIS claimed responsibility for the hostage crisis, and the killing of 20 civilians. Four of the five photos

of hostage takers published by Site Intelligence group also matched with the photos released by Bangladesh Police.

Despite these similarities in media campaign, the Gulshan hostage crisis looks different from other major global attacks carried out by the ISIS. Unlike the al Qaeda militias, who prefer to engage in gun fights such as the one in 2015 Radisson Blu Hotel attack in Mali, the ISIS operatives have mostly been suicide bombers as seen in Brussels, Istanbul and Paris. The fact that none of the Gulshan hostage takers had suicide vests, and instead they appeared to be battle-hardened fighters with the intent to fight against the government forces indicate that ISIS has either adapted its weapons and tactics to suit the needs of its global operations or it has co-opted some of the

Bangladesh-origin Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) or JMB operatives. Media reports indicate that all of the hostage takers in Dhaka were Bangladeshi citizens in their early to mid-20s, some of who attended renowned private universities—a trend most similar to ABT's recruitment strategy. This is in sharp contrast to the Brussels, Istanbul, and Paris attacks, where second generation immigrants or Russian and Central Asian citizens were main perpetrators.

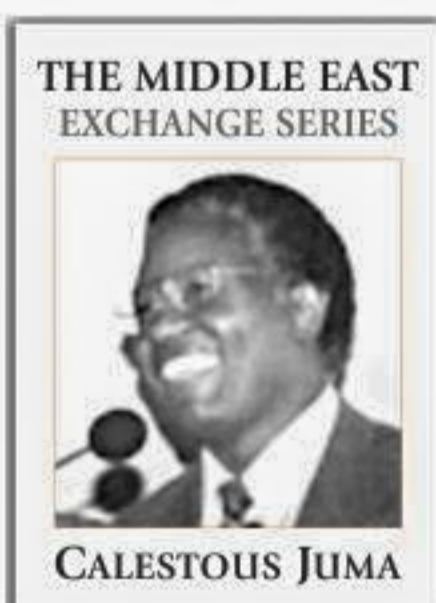
How do we factor in such differences in assessing the ISIS threat in Bangladesh? Two hypotheses come to our mind. First, it is worth exploring whether ABT has changed its tactics and expressed its allegiance to ISIS. Such speculations are based on the facts that the hostage takers not only carried pistols, AK 22 rifles, improvised explosives, but also sharp swords. In the past two years, ABT operatives used sharp swords or machetes to attack atheists, bloggers, and gay rights activists. Second, it is also quite likely that a new brand of JMB recruits has become fascinated with the global strategy of ISIS, and thus executed the Gulshan attacks in the name of Islamic State group. Regardless of ABT or JMB's participation in the recent hostage crisis, the ISIS threat appears to be real and much greater than anticipated.

In June 2016, the Bangladesh Government categorically said that it would send troops to protect the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina from any ISIS attack. Whether Bangladesh's military contribution to the anti-ISIS global coalition is merely rhetoric or has any substance will be tested in the coming days. Meanwhile, Dhaka has to take realistic steps to revamp its intelligence collection and analysis, and revitalise its counterterrorism strategy. While the government is likely to invest more in offensive capabilities to address future hostage scenarios, there is also a need for adopting a strategy to de-radicalise the disgruntled youth.

The writer is Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka. He is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London. Email: alishraf@du.ac.bd

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Innovation and Its Discontents



CALESTOUS JUMA

implementation, with governments sometimes banning new technologies outright – even those that could bring far-reaching benefits.

Consider the printing press. Among other things, the new technology was a boon to world religions, which suddenly had an efficient means of reproducing and disseminating sacred texts. Yet the Ottoman Empire forbade the printing of the Koran for nearly 400 years. In 1515, Sultan Selim I is said to have decreed that "occupying oneself with the science of printing was punishable by death."

Why oppose such a beneficial technology? As I argue in my book *Innovation and Its Enemies: Why People Resist New Technologies*, the answer is not simply that people are afraid of the unknown. Rather, resistance to technological progress is usually rooted in the fear that disruption of the status quo might bring losses in employment, income, power, and identity. Governments often end up deciding that it would be easier to prohibit the new technology than to adapt to it.

By banning the printing of the Koran, Ottoman leaders delayed employment losses for scribes and calligraphers (many of whom were women who were glorified for their mastery of the art). But protecting employment was not their main motivation; after all, beginning in 1727, they did allow non-religious texts to be printed, despite protests by calligraphers, who responded to the edict by putting their inkstands and pencils in coffins and marching to the High Porte in Istanbul.

Religious knowledge was a different matter. It was both the glue that held society together and a pillar of political power, so maintaining a monopoly over the dissemination of that knowledge was critical to maintaining the authority of Ottoman leaders. They feared going the way of the Catholic pope, who lost considerable authority during the Protestant Reformation, when the printing press played a key role in spreading new ideas to the faithful.

Of course, the erection of barriers to technological innovation does not always start with the government. Those with a vested

interest in the status quo may push their governments to impose bans. They may do so through protest, as the Ottoman calligraphers did, and as Irish opponents of genetically modified potatoes did in 2002, by marching in Dublin to express their opposition to the "death of good food."

Opponents of new technologies may also employ slander, misinformation, and even demonization – an approach that has certainly succeeded in the past. In 1674, English women issued a petition against coffee, alleging that it caused sterility and thus

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should be consumed only by people over 60 – a very small market at the time. The following year, King Charles II ordered the suppression of coffeehouses, though he was probably motivated more by the desire to protect the market share of local beverages, such as alcoholic drinks and then-newly introduced tea, than by the infertility rumours.

In the 1800s, the American dairy industry spearheaded a similar misinformation campaign about margarine, claiming that it caused sterility, stunted growth, and male baldness. Derided as "bull butter," opponents

claimed that margarine contained "diseased and putrid beef, dead horses, dead hogs, dead dogs, mad dogs, and downed sheep."

In response, the federal government introduced new restrictions on margarine, covering everything from labeling (as with genetically modified foods today), the use of artificial colouring, and interstate movement. New taxes reinforced butter's primacy further. In 1886, a Wisconsin congressman declared outright his "intent to destroy the manufacture of the noxious compound by taxing it out of existence."

Resistance to tractors in the early 1900s took a slightly different form. Producers and traders of draft animals feared mechanisation, which threatened their way of life. But they knew that they could not improve their product faster than engineers could improve theirs, and thus that blocking the spread of tractors would be impossible. Instead, they sought to prevent the displacement of farm animals, by pursuing a campaign touting their virtues. The Horse Association of America issued leaflets declaring that, "A mule is the only fool-proof tractor ever built." The group also pointed out that horses could reproduce themselves, whereas tractors depreciated.

People almost never reject technological progress out of sheer ignorance. Rather, they fight to protect their own interests and livelihoods, whether that be operating a dairy farm or running a government. As we continually attempt to apply new technologies to improve human and environmental wellbeing, this distinction is vital.

Avoiding barriers to technological progress requires understanding and addressing its downsides. For example, as machines become increasingly capable, robots are replacing a growing number of workers. It will not be long before those robots will be able not only to perform more complex tasks, but also to learn faster than workers can be trained. The notion that some workers will not go the way of the draft animal is irrational.

But if we recognise these losses and address them head-on, we can avoid a backlash against potentially beneficial technological innovations, including advances in robotics. The key will be to focus on "inclusive innovation," ensuring that those who are likely to lose from the displacement of old technologies are given ample opportunity to benefit from new ones. Only then can we make the most of human creativity.

The writer is Professor of the Practice of International Development at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He is the author of the forthcoming book *Innovation and Its Enemies: Why People Resist New Technologies*.

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bti's Perspective on 29th June 2016 Fire Incident at bti Premier Plaza, Uttar Badda

bti Premier Plaza is a modern establishment covering 68 kathas. Its 2nd floor to 4th floor contains shopping mall, the fifth floor consists of an atrium and residential apartments exist from 6th to 14th stories of the building. The residential part of the building is split into five towers.

The bti section (around 70,000sqft) of shopping mall comprised of home n décor which is a sister concern of bti. Home n décor, a modern shopping mall established by bti provided a world class shopping experience in Bangladesh. In the fire incident, valuable electronic equipment of home n décor and all of its products were completely destroyed, resulting in financial loss for the company around Tk. 100 crore.

Since bti's journey in 1984, it has established itself as a leading real estate developer in the country with its valuable years of experience, honesty and reputation. bti adheres to all rules and regulations of RAJUK/ CDA and other concerned organizations of Bangladesh.

The north and south side of bti Premier Plaza contains an internal driveway for car entry and exit. A fire hydrant exists in the entryway to supply water to fire service vans and through this water can be supplied to the inside of the building too. The water reservation area has a capacity of holding more than 80,000 gallons of water which was available during the fire incident. For residential water supply, there is also a separate water tank with capacity of storing 25,000 gallons of water and this too was available during the incident. Apart from these, the building also has its own deep tube well which is able to meet the requirements of fire service department constantly. During power outage this tube well is run by a generator for constant supply. Due to the high intensity of the fire, the fire service department had to collect water from the local area. To douse the fire, firefighters used 28 nozzles. Due to severe fire, the building's own water supply could not be accessed; as a result, fire fighters had to use water from outside resources. The building had around 250 fire extinguishers. During the initial stages of the fire outbreak, bti employees and local people tried to douse the fire using these in the south-east corner of the building.

The commercial space remained closed at night as a security measure which is very usual. The business organization locks the commercial space as a security measure during the night and opens it in the day. During the fire incident, all fire control activities were carried out after the building was unlocked.

bti Premier Plaza has been constructed following RAJUK's approved design and building construction rules- 1996. The building was handed over in 2011 with all the utility services and facilities. For emergency exit, the five towers of the building consist of two staircases each totaling to 10 staircases which extend up to the rooftop. Each of the rooftops is connected to each other too. The residents of the building can easily reach the rooftop using these stairs. Later, these stairs were utilized for safe passage of residents to get out of the building with the help of firefighters and others.

As soon as the incident of fire outbreak was received, all bti officials and employees rushed to the scene of the incident to help extinguish the fire. Till now, bti personnel are in regular contact with the building committee and apartment residents.

We express our utmost gratitude to the Almighty that no life was lost despite the gravity of the incident.

In fact, there were no occurrences of severe injury. We are thankful and grateful to the fire service department, media personnel, police, RAB, various social service organizations along with apartment residents, apartment owners' association, general public, neighbors and bti employees without whose relentless effort, support and timely initiatives, we could not have brought the fire under control.

Under these circumstances, permission to allow residents to live in the building will be granted after receiving BUET certification and other concerned official approvals according to RAJUK's instruction no.- RAJUK/ Pari- 4/Mohakhali/362/16/642 dated 30.06.2016.

We hope that in the upcoming days we will receive your love and support as always, so that with your love and support we can overcome this hurdle very soon and bti will continue to live on in your hearts.

Best Regards,
Managing Director, bti