

REVIEW OF ISIS THREAT IN INDIA & RESPONSES

Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams or Syria (ISIS) also known variously as the Islamic State, ISIL or Daesh has had a major impact on the terrorist threat spectrum across the globe in the past two years. While ISIS is on the decline in the core area in West Asia recent terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Bangladesh and parts of South East Asia highlight the potential of this group which goes beyond physical presence and traditional profile to include a range of smaller affiliates and indoctrinates willing to carry out Lone Ranger attacks. The overall impact of the ISIS in India has been negligible so far, but there is a concern over potential of this group given a number of cells which have been exposed in the recent past and reports of a number of youth suspected to be affiliated with ISIS and fighting in Syria and Iraq. More over the type of extreme violence perpetrated by the group underlines need for enhanced vigil for even a single attack can cause great harm. Thus a review of the ISIS threat and responses is necessary.

Aim

The aim of this Paper is to review the ISIS threat in India and envisage appropriate response to meet the same.

ISIS Threat in India

The ISIS does not have any organizational presence in India. The threat is the potential to carry out attacks through affiliates, cells of indoctrinated youth, returnees from the wars in West Asia and possible Lone Rangers. Each of these is covered as per succeeding paragraphs:-

Affiliates. The Indian affiliate of the ISIS is a group named as the 'Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind' (the army of Caliph) that was formed at the instance of Yusuf al-Hindi, who Indian security agencies believe is Shafi Armar, a resident of Bhatkal in Karnataka. Reports indicate that he may have been killed in a recent air raid. 'Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind' has reportedly held many meetings in India at places like Tumkur and Bengaluru in Karnataka; Pune and Mumbai in Maharashtra; Tonk in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh capital Lucknow and Telangana capital Hyderabad. The 'Janood-ul-Khalifa-e-Hind' is a metamorphosis of the Ansar-ul-Tawhid (AuT). The AuT in turn was formed by radical elements of the Indian Mujahideen (IM). Radical Bangladeshi organisation Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) is another affiliate which has some presence in India. Thus cells of the IM or JMB could carry out terrorist attacks which would be claimed by the ISIS.

Organised Cells of Indoctrinated Youth. Three cells of youth indoctrinated by the ISIS have been exposed by Indian investigation agencies so far as follows:-

→ Special Cell of the Delhi Police arrested suspected terrorists from Roorkee in Uttarakhand in January 2016 on suspicion of plans to carry out terrorist attacks on the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar.

→ 14 youth were arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on 22 and 23 January from six cities viz. Bangalore, Tumkur, Mangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Lucknow with the support of local

police forces. The group in Mumbai was reported planning to acquire arms and explosives with a view to carry out a terrorist attack.

→ In end June, a joint task force of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Telangana police picked up 11 youths in Hyderabad. Five were arrested the next day, following raids at 10 places in the city. The module reportedly planned to set off a series of improvised explosive devices (IED) blasts across the city.

Returnees from West Asia. Returnees from West Asia could pose a potent threat. Estimates of number of Indians in West Asia vary from 25 to 100. Reports of 25 youth from Kerala missing for long revealed in July indicates that the numbers could be more and are difficult to estimate. The returnees are likely to possess high degree of expertise in carrying out bomb attacks and armed assaults, thus identification of these earliest on return is necessary.

Lone Rangers. While various intelligence agencies have identified this as a possible threat, this remains low given difficulty in India for an individual to acquire a weapon or explosives. However preventive and deterrence measures against these are essential.

Recommendations for Security Guarding Companies

Security guarding companies are deployed in the frontline however these have neither a mandate nor capabilities to counter a terrorist attack which is the task of specialist police and counter terrorism agencies. At the same time effective security guarding can act as deterrence and prevent attacks for which the following measures are suggested:-

→ Prompt action on advisories issued by intelligence agencies apart from those generated by integral command centres and specialist consultancies in this field.

→ Security upgrades based on threat particularly at high footfall locations which are considered most vulnerable such as shopping malls, restaurants frequented by foreigners, bazaars, religious places and transportation hubs.

→ Adoption of standoff access control measures by creating additional space between the assets protected and a possible terrorist strike.

→ Multiple access control measures to defeat designs of determined terrorists from approaching intended targets.

→ Effective coordination with the local police and counter terrorism agencies.

→ Periodic rehearsals in conjunction with asset managers and local authorities.

→ Monitoring of employees for possible indoctrination or inklings of affiliation towards extremist propaganda.

Recommendations for Corporate

Analysis of the youth apprehended by the NIA and Anti Terrorist Squads (ATS) of State police indicates that ISIS is able to attract technically qualified and well educated youth. Thus business enterprises particularly in the technical engineering, IT and BPO sectors are seen vulnerable due to indoctrination of

some of the employees. Corporate can thus be exposed to reputational risk as well as a threat of physical attack such as Lone Ranger strike.

As a preventive apart from physical security measures which are required to be taken in conjunction with nominated security guarding companies, corporate also need to undertake stringent employee verification, monitoring and awareness programmes. Special surveillance programmes in consultation with experts in this domain along with the norms of privacy need to be undertaken to avoid any employee falling in the ISIS propaganda trap particularly through social media. Where there is a suspicion reports to local police should be made so that intensive surveillance can be undertaken by specialist agencies.

Conclusion

While presently the threat of a physical attack by ISIS cells or inspired terrorists in India appears low, however as the attack in Bangladesh on 1 July shows, given penetration through propaganda on the internet of the group, manifestation can be sudden and disruptive, thus sustained vigilance is necessary. Measures towards the same are underlined which need to be undertaken based on the local organizational and environmental assessments.