



# Terrorism Monitor

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## ISCAP's Congo Branch Changes Tactics to Targeting Civilians

*Jacob Zenn*

Although the nature of ties between the Islamic State's (IS) centralized leadership and the Islamic State in Central Africa Province's (ISCAP) Congo branch have been intensely debated among analysts, the Congo branch's changing tactics reveal a newfound, IS-like focus on targeting civilians in highly populated locations. On January 5, for example, the Congo branch detonated an improvised explosives device (IED) at a market in Oicha, Beni, injuring several shoppers ([Twitter.com/Africisorg](https://twitter.com/Africisorg), January 5).

Such an attack would not be unprecedented for the Congo branch, which conducted a suicide bombing at a restaurant in Beni on Christmas only two weeks earlier, killing six people ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com), December 25, 2021). These tactics contrast with al-Qaeda's and more moderate IS theologians' general tendencies in Africa to avoid mass killings of civilians in public places, with the exception of targeting foreigners. Some IS theologians who were formerly in al-Qaeda, for example, advised the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) to only conduct attacks in populated places in exceptional cases, such as when it was the only way to kill soldiers who posed a threat to ISWAP fighters ([Muasasat al-Turath](https://muasasat.al-turath.com), March 2015).

ISCAP's Congo branch, therefore, appears to be adopting the more extreme ideology

and tactics of IS. At the same, its attacks in Uganda in late 2021 also indicate the capability and willingness to expand into other countries from Congo ([majalla.com](http://majalla.com), December 10). While this might be expected to lead to increased intelligence pressure against the Congo branch, the Rwandan media alleges that the head of Ugandan military intelligence, Major General Abel Kandiho, met in South Africa with Kayumba Nyamwasa. This is problematic both because Nyamwasa is an alleged war criminal for his role in the Rwandan genocide, and because he is now the exiled opposition leader of the Rwandan National Congress, which seeks to overthrow the Rwandan government ([taarifa.rw](http://taarifa.rw), December 23, 2021). As a result, it is unlikely that Uganda and Rwanda will cooperate in countering the threat from the Congo branch due to mistrust between the two nations' governments.

The Congo branch, meanwhile, will benefit from the lack of coordination between Uganda and Rwanda, especially if it targets Rwanda next. IS supporters have noticed Rwanda's growing counter-terrorism presence in East Africa, including sending troops to Mozambique, and declaring war on and calling for IS to attack both Rwanda and Uganda in a video released on January 5 ([archive.org](http://archive.org), January 5). More broadly, the video highlights IS operations in Africa and emphasizes how the continent has become a main focus of IS operations now that other regional theaters, such as North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe, have witnessed a reduction in IS activity.

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## **Southeast Asian Nations See Mixed Counter-Terrorism Success**

*Jacob Zenn*

Southeast Asian nations have been grappling with Islamist insurgencies consistently since even before 9/11. However, in recent years the tempo of these insurgencies has slowed in Indonesia, the Philippines, and, to some extent, Thailand, with the notable exception of Myanmar. In Indonesia, for example, the security forces tracked down and killed the Mujahidin Indonesia Timor (MIT) militant, Ahmad Gazali ([benarnews.org](http://benarnews.org), January 4).

According to Indonesian authorities, there are now only three MIT members left in the entire country, which represents a major setback for Islamic State (IS) in Indonesia. In 2013, MIT had emerged as a lethal force in Sulawesi and by 2016, its then leader, Santoso, had pledged loyalty to IS ([Terrorism Monitor](http://Terrorism Monitor), May 20, 2013; [Jakarta Post](http://Jakarta Post), December 1, 2015). However, the current group is essentially defunct. This represents a victory for Indonesia's war against pro-IS elements, and parallels successful counter-terrorism operations against the remaining Jemaah Islamiya (JI) militants, which have been carried out by the Indonesian elite counter-terrorism operatives in Detachment 88 ([abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au), September 13, 2021).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the security forces announced the killing of Zukarno Gulil (alias "Motorola") on December 27, 2021, in Maguindano, Mindanao. He had allegedly been involved in arson and murders for the Bangamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) ([inquirer.net](http://inquirer.net), December 27, 2021). BIFF itself has declared its loyalty to IS, meaning that both Gulil's elimination and the overall

downturn of BIFF attacks in the Philippines represents a setback for IS itself. Indeed, nothing resembling the 2017 conquest of Marawi by IS-loyal militants in the Philippines has recurred in the five years since that dramatic battle.

Despite the successes of Indonesia and the Philippines, Thailand, and especially Myanmar, have been struggling to put down their own insurgencies. In Yala, southern Thailand, there were three bombings of power lines, which caused blackouts, but no deaths, on New Year's Eve ([thestar.com](http://thestar.com), January 3). However, there is hope for improvement. The violence has abated since a peak from 2004 to 2014, and with peace talks expected in Kuala Lumpur in January, it is possible tensions will remain calm in the near-term future.

In the meantime, Thailand has been exploring non-lethal means to crack down on insurgents and their supporters, including intensifying surveillance of communications through smart phones or SIM cards and even suspending mobile service altogether at times in southern Thailand ([chiangraitimes.com](http://chiangraitimes.com), December 15, 2021). What remains to be seen is the degree of blowback such approaches may cause, as some Muslim Malays suspect this surveillance specifically focuses on them. In turn, even if Thailand has benign intentions, they will almost certainly increase grievances against the state and fuel greater opposition.

Finally, since its February 2021 military coup, Myanmar's long standing militant opposition movements have been revitalized, with anti-coup protestors and military and police defectors joining their ranks. The latest in the long string of violent conflict includes reports that the army massacred 35 members of the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF)([myanmar-now.org](http://myanmar-now.org), December 25, 2021). Operations such as these appear to

have been attempts to eliminate the army's adversaries. However, extrajudicial killings and other rights abuses by the army are reportedly leading to defections, increasing the strength of militant groups ([Twitter.com/@IrrawaddyNews](https://twitter.com/IrrawaddyNews), December 28, 2021). Whether or not the army can successfully quell their enemies and re-establish their hold over the nation remains to be seen.

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## **The Islamic State Gains New Operational Foothold in Iraq's Hamrin Mountains**

*Isaac Ahmed*

Diyala is located 60 kilometers northeast of Baghdad, and is considered a "road-knot" between four Iraqi provinces, including Diyala and Sulaymaniyah, Wasit, and Salah al-Din. In addition, roads which pass through Diyala can lead to Anbar province or Mosul. Therefore, any militant group that wants to impose its control over those areas must have a presence in Diyala.

Except for Salah Al-Din, all of these four provinces are adjacent to Iran, and they share with Diyala a similarly rugged geographical terrain. These natural features make Diyala an important place for jihadists to gain a foothold, especially in the Hamrin Mountains. The range extends northwest from Diyala's border with Iran to the Tigris River, crossing northern Salah al-Din and southern Kirkuk.

Diyala's inhabitants are Sunni and Shiite Muslims; primarily Arabs and Kurds. As a consequence, the province witnessed

sectarian war during conflicts between Shiite militias and al-Qaeda (Sunni) from 2006 to 2008, as well as the birth of the first generation of al-Qaeda in Iraq, whose militants were trained in Diyala's rugged mountains and valleys. Diyala was also unsurprisingly the last cache for al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi ([aljazeera.net](http://aljazeera.net), June 8, 2006). He was killed in an American airstrike in an isolated safe house north of Baghdad in June 2006.

### **Why Diyala? The Case of Islamic State**

The Hamrin Mountains have an estimated height of 500 meters and extend along the Iraq-Iran border. They are also situated between the disputed territories of Baghdad and Erbil. Taken together, this means they play a role in shaping Iraq's security landscape ([kirkuknow.com](http://kirkuknow.com), November 5). No militant group has taken advantage of this geography more than the Islamic State (IS).

The Hamrin Mountains have also served as a base for IS to launch operations against the Iraqi security forces. This positioning has aided IS in carrying out attacks against the outskirts of Baghdad ([al-Hurra](http://al-Hurra), December 9, 2021). In September 2021 alone ([al-Madapaper.net](http://al-Madapaper.net), September 8, 2021), IS conducted more than five attacks targeting different villages in Diyala in November. More recently, on December 17, 2021, IS killed three Iraqi soldiers near Diyala's Hamrin Lake ([Shujaatnewsagency.com](http://Shujaatnewsagency.com), December 17, 2021). IS further announced on December 17, 2021 that it killed the director of Adhamiya Passports in Baghdad, Colonel Yasser Ali Al-Jourani, who had been kidnapped four days earlier along with three others near Hamrin Lake ([Rudaw](http://Rudaw), December 13, 2021).

The Iraqi security forces have not been efficient in rooting out IS from the Hamrin Mountains, despite claims by the Iraqi

security forces that counter-terrorism operations against IS are ongoing ([Iraqi news agency](http://Iraqi news agency), December 8, 2021). Local villagers in the Hamrin Mountains have reported that the al-Nada village is out of Iraqi government control and still under IS influence. As a result of this influence, women leave the house wearing the burqa, knowing that otherwise they risk retribution from IS, and farmers are forced to pay a monthly tribute to IS of around \$50 in order to avoid retaliation. [1]

The attacks carried out by IS and reports of their ongoing influence in the mountains are indicative of weak security coordination between Baghdad and Erbil in these territories. Recognizing this, despite their political rifts, Baghdad and Erbil have renewed dialogue to improve their security coordination ([Iraq News Agency](http://Iraq News Agency), December 4, 2021). Iraqi and Kurdish forces have also begun cooperating to find civilians captured by IS in Diyala ([Esta Media Network](http://Esta Media Network), December 16, 2021).

### **Diyala's Enduring Sectarianism**

Part of the problem in Diyala has been that Shiites use pro-Shiite militias to retaliate against Sunni villages after Shiite village are attacked by Islamic State forces. This was clear when the Shiite village, al-Rashad, lost more than 47 of their inhabitants during an IS attack on the village on October 28 (al-Aawsat, October 28, 2021). Reprisals were then carried out by pro-Shiite militias against the villages of Nahr al-Imam and al-Ameriya, which are majority Sunni populations ([al-Jazeera.net](http://al-Jazeera.net), October 28, 2021).

Two months later, in December, U.S. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie indicated that both IS and the Shiite militias were working on imposing their power in Iraq and that U.S. troops would remain in the country ([Military Times](http://Military Times), December 9,

2021). This further demonstrates the importance of the Diyala border with Iran for the pro-Shiite militias, which are working on a demographic change agenda in the province for their own benefit. IS, however, desires the same, but in favor of the local Sunnis, which ensures the sectarian war will continue in Diyala.

The Iraqi government, therefore, must restore the confidence of Diyala locals by stepping back from their use of pro-Shiite militias, taking control of Diyala, and eliminating IS, while also solving problems with the Kurdistan Region by negotiating territorial disputes with the Kurdish authorities.

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## Note

[1] Author's interviews with local villagers, December 2021.

## **Pakistani Taliban to Benefit from Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Fencing Dispute**

*Syed Fazl-e-Haider*

On December 18, 2021, Afghan Taliban soldiers disrupted the erection of a security fence by the Pakistani military along the two countries' mutual border and seized spools of barbed wire ([Express Tribune](#), January 3). Defending his government's move to disrupt the fencing

work, the Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman, Enayatullah Khwarazm, declared the fencing of the border by Pakistan "illegal" ([Dawn](#), December 23, 2021). In the past four years around 94 percent of the fencing of the border has been completed, and the Pakistani army is fully determined to complete the rest of the fencing work. In a press statement, Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Major General Babar Iftikhar, stated, "The blood of our martyrs was spilled in erecting this fence. It is a fence of peace and will be completed and remain [in place]" ([Dawn](#), January 5).

The conflict stems from disagreements over the legitimacy of the Durand Line, which is a boundary demarcation created when Afghanistan's King Abdul Rahman Kahn and British India's Foreign Secretary Sir Mortimer Durand signed an agreement in 1893. Since then, the 2,600-kilometer border has largely been a lawless, porous, mountainous border with largely unfrequented routes. However, the border is not without controversy. Like the previous Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan Taliban have also been against the fencing of the border along the Durand Line.

If the fencing issue is not resolved diplomatically between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban government, then escalating tensions on border could eventually lead to a clash between the two sides.

## **Border Fencing and Souring Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations**

While the Afghan government sees the Durand Line as divisive because it splits the families and tribes on either side of the border, Pakistan considers it an internationally recognized border between the two countries. Pakistan has thus far shown maximum restraint over provocative moves by local Taliban

commanders on the border. The country, for example, talked to the highest levels in the Afghan government to convey its concerns over the incidents on the border and beefed up security on its Western border with Afghanistan without employing lethal force ([Express Tribune](#), January 3).

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi is confident that the border fencing issue can be resolved diplomatically with the Afghan government. However, Afghanistan sees the Durand Line an issue yet to be resolved. Taliban spokesman and Afghanistan's current Information Minister, Zabihullah Mujahid, for example, asserted, "As this issue is still unresolved, there was no need for fencing at all" ([Dawn](#), January 3).

The Afghan government has vowed not only to stop the fencing of the border by Pakistan, but to also build 30 outposts alongside the Durand Line. Maulvi Sanaulah Sangin, the Afghan Taliban commander of its border forces, declared, "We will never, ever allow any form of fencing. Whatever [Pakistan] did earlier, they have done it. Now we will not allow it any longer. Now there will be no fencing" ([TOLO News](#), January 5).

### **The Pakistani Taliban's Exploitation of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Tensions**

While the armed forces of Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan are currently locked in a border standoff over the issue of fencing, the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or Pakistani Taliban, are prepared to exploit any escalation in the situation. There are also anti-Pakistan factions within the Afghan Taliban's interim government that have been acting as the spoilers to mar relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan ([Economic Times](#), September 6). These spoilers are close to the TTP and fiercely oppose any

Pakistani presence in Afghanistan. Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi has already accused, "certain miscreants," for blowing incidents, such as the uprooting of the fence by Taliban fighters on December 18, out of proportion ([Dawn](#), January 3).

In December, the TTP declared an end to a month-long ceasefire, which was agreed to during Pakistan-TTP peace talks mediated by Afghanistan. The TTP blamed the Pakistani government for violating negotiation terms and not releasing its prisoners ([Pakistan Today](#), December 11). Following the end of the ceasefire with the TTP, Pakistan's security forces expedited counter-terrorism operations in the country's northwestern tribal areas along the border with Afghanistan. On January 4, the security forces conducted two separate intelligence-based operations in the South Waziristan and Dera Ismail Khan areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in which two TTP fighters were killed and many others were detained by the security forces. Two Pakistani soldiers also lost their lives in exchange of fire with the terrorists ([Dawn](#), January 5).

For Pakistan, the fencing of the border with Afghanistan is of vital national interest. Without a fenced border, Pakistan will not be able to regulate security, border crossings and trade. Most importantly, the country hoped the security fence would stop the infiltration of TTP fighters from Afghanistan. The fact that Afghanistan's Taliban government has refused to address the use of Afghan soil by the TTP for terrorist attacks in Pakistan – a fact that contradicts the Afghan Taliban's claims that it has not become a launch-pad for terrorist attacks against a third country – has further incentivized Pakistan to fence the border ([Dawn](#), January 5).

## Conclusion

The TTP is set to exploit the souring Pakistan-Afghanistan relations over the fencing issue. The Afghan Taliban were already reluctant to launch a crackdown on the TTP and now, given the border situation, there will be absolutely no check on TTP militant activities against Pakistan. Therefore, the TTP have the most to gain from any continued conflict between the Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nevertheless, for security concerns, Pakistan will continue to fence the rest of the border with Afghanistan and, by diplomacy or by force, attempt to check the cross-border movements of TTP fighters.

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## Islamic State's Anti-Russia Propaganda Campaign and Criticism of Taliban-Russian Relations

*Lucas Webber*

In his first speech following the official declaration of the Islamic State's (IS) caliphate in 2014, the new caliph, Abubakr al-Baghdadi, delivered his famous audio statement titled, "A Message to the Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan." In the speech, al-Baghdadi divided the world into, "two camps," that were in violent and irreconcilable opposition to each other, including the, "Muslims and the mujahidin," on one end, and the, "Jews, the crusaders, [and] their allies," on the

other end. The latter camp, he declared, was, "being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews" ([Jihadology](#), July 1, 2014). This designation of Russia as a top priority enemy by IS's sole leader would set the tone for the organization's media warfare campaign against the country for years to come.

IS criticism of Russia is centered on a select set of Russian policy actions, including its controversial military intervention in Syria, its strong support for Bashar al-Assad, its alliance with Iran, its relationships with the Iraqi government and the PKK, and its influence as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Other stated grievances included Russia's role in drawing borders in the Middle East (the Sykes-Picot Agreement), its ties with China and Israel, and its accused involvement in the war against IS forces in the Philippines ([Jihadology](#), November 18, 2015; [Jihadology](#), June 7, 2017). Domestically, IS also scorns Russia for harshly oppressing and imprisoning Muslims in regions such as Dagestan, and for its counter-terrorism operations against IS cells and supporters. IS propaganda often places historical emphasis on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the wars in Chechnya to illuminate Russia's record of aggression against Islam and its alleged desire to occupy Muslim lands ([Jihadology](#), November 4, 2021).

When IS expanded into Afghanistan and came into conflict with the Taliban, the former began to develop new lines of rhetorical attack against the latter in conjunction with the broader IS global war effort. Supported by central IS propaganda organs in Iraq and Syria, the regional and local South Asian media ecosystem of pro-IS and official IS propaganda outlets and online supporters began to take aim at the Taliban's growing diplomatic relations with Russia. That is to say that IS sought to kill two birds — Russia and the Taliban — with one

stone through its propaganda.

### **IS Media Warfare Against Russia**

IS's founding father, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had cut his teeth in Afghanistan in the late 1980s during the war with the Soviet Union ([US Department of the Treasury](#), April 13, 2006). This era of triumphalism over the Soviet Red Army helped shape al-Zarqawi, and provides a deep conceptual framing mechanism for IS to vilify Russia. That is why IS leveraged its domestic Iraqi insurgency against Russia.

In 2006, militants linked to the IS predecessor, al-Qaeda in Iraq, claimed responsibility for the killing of a Russian national and the kidnapping of four Russian embassy employees. The alleged perpetrators from the Mujahidin Shura Council released an initial statement demanding that Russia withdraw from Chechnya and free the Muslim prisoners, or else Russia would have to, "accept the consequences" ([RFERL](#), June 19, 2006). Moscow refused to negotiate, however, and the hostages were executed, after which the group released a video proclaiming their actions were taken, "in revenge for the torture, killing, and expulsion of our brothers and sisters by the infidel Russian government" ([RFERL](#), June 26, 2006).

IS's anti-Russia propaganda intensified with the establishment of the caliphate in 2014 and drastically accelerated following Russia's 2015 military intervention in Syria ([Terrorism and Political Violence](#), September 13, 2019). In the mid-2010s, IS grew links to Russian jihadists through the integration of central leadership figures and foreign fighters, and by gaining the allegiance of jihadist elements in the Caucasus ([Jihadology](#), June 21, 2015). The group produced Russian-language propaganda materials, such as al-Hayat Media Center's Istok magazine, provided translations of its video productions print publications in the

Russian language, and promoted the cause of IS militants fighting on Russian soil ([Jihadology](#), May 26, 2015).

In 2015, IS declared Russia the leader of the "Crusader East," and the controversial Russian military intervention in Syria prompted the organization to increasingly direct and encourage attacks against Russian nationals and interests around the world ([Jihadology](#), November 18, 2015). This hostile sentiment manifested in the official IS Sinai branch blowing a Russian passenger plane out of Egyptian skies in October 2015, killing 224 people ([Haaretz](#), November 4, 2015; [Jihadology](#), November 18, 2015). The IS incitement machine, spearheaded by spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, painted a target on Moscow and urged aggressive militant action as revenge for Russia's aerial bombing campaigns in Syria ([Militant Wire](#), October 26, 2021). IS elements have seemingly answered the call and have conducted a protracted series of attacks on Russian soil ([Jihadology](#), April 5, 2021).

### **South Asian Islamic State Branches Target Taliban-Russia Relations**

Having been absent from Afghanistan for some time after ceding ground to the Taliban, in 2015 IS formally returned to Afghanistan, establishing the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). Given that Afghanistan is so prominent in the telling of IS organizational history, the return has resonated deeply with the group, feeding its determination to prevail over the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Predictably, the formal IS footprint in Afghanistan has brought the group into direct conflict with the Taliban. To bolster its war efforts, IS central media organs and robust South Asian propaganda networks have sought to craft and weaponize narratives to discredit and undermine the Taliban as a religious authority. One of the primary ways IS has gone about this is to portray the Taliban

as proxies and puppets controlled by foreign nations, most frequently linking the Taliban to great powers such as Russia, the US, and China, and to regional players such as Pakistan and Iran ([Militant Wire](#), September 27, 2021; [Terrorism Monitor](#), September 7, 2021). For instance, IS and its supporters have commonly focused on visuals of Taliban representatives shaking hands and socializing with Russian officials, especially Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov ([Eurasianet](#), December 9, 2021).

The propaganda emphasis on Taliban-Russia relations emerged during the Taliban's peace talks with the US and intensified after the fall of Kabul in August. ISKP's anti-Russia narratives are now spread by prominent figures, in a diverse range of media outlets. Some media are then translated into different languages to reach a wider audience.

Moreover, the IS critique, alleges that the Taliban had righteous beginnings but lost its way and deviated from the true path of Islam ([Jihadology](#), March 25, 2020). The "new" Taliban, IS argues, is a secular Pashtun ethno-nationalist group, and IS sometimes describes them as Hanafi-centric and politically democratic. IS propaganda further contrasts the early leadership of Mullah Omar with the contemporary Taliban commanders, portraying this new generation as religiously and morally corrupt.

The Anfaal, a pro-IS media producer, for example, dubs the debased modern movement as "Taliban 2.0" and impugns them as promising, "security to the enemies of Allah like Russia ... from any attacks by the Islamic State in Afghanistan." [1] To illustrate the Taliban's degeneration, a specific clip of Mullah Dadullah Akhund is frequently shared by IS supporters and spliced into ISKP videos, wherein he states that, "only a shameless person ... would negotiate with the Kabul government," and asks,

"how could anyone talk to the Americans" ([Jihadology](#), February 21, 2021)? Of course, the Taliban ended up doing exactly those things.

### **ISKP's Targeting of Russia in Anti-Taliban Propaganda**

ISKP uses visual methods to paint the Taliban leadership as a cosmopolitan, jet-setting class. There are photos of Taliban delegates lounging on private jets and in luxury hotels in foreign capitals, while the Afghan population starves and struggles to acquire the bare necessities of life. This moral degradation is likewise displayed in the Taliban's cordial relations with the alleged enemies of Islam, such as Russia.

ISKP accuses the Taliban of inviting the "Russian Bear" back over the mountain by pursuing stronger ties with Moscow and encouraging greater Russian influence in Afghanistan through trade, investment, foreign aid, and security coordination. In the eyes of IS, the Taliban and Russia are close allies actively working together in the fight against the organization. This media campaign targeting Taliban-Russia relations is backed by IS central media branches, but the efforts are ultimately driven by the more proximate regional and local IS elements throughout South Asia.

The official IS media network further produced a number of ISKP videos, and featured the Pakistan and Afghanistan branches in its "Makers of Epic Battles" series. Through the Al-Furqan Media Foundation, prominent IS figures, such as the caliph Abubakr al-Baghdadi, spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, and al-Adnani's successor, Abu al-Hassan al-Muhajir, have sharply criticized Russia. Likewise, on multiple occasions, IS has published official videos through its central media network showing ISKP military commanders threatening Russia ([Twitter.com/@Javidforever](#), June 29,

2019; [Twitter.com/@Natsecjeff](https://twitter.com/Natsecjeff), July 7, 2019).

Additionally, in print statements, ISKP figures have chided the Taliban for serving the interests of Russia, the US, China, Pakistan, and Iran ([Terrorism Monitor](#), September 7, 2021). Such narratives have traditionally been crafted and pushed out by ISKP media outlets, including Al-Millat, Khalid Media, Al-Azaim Foundation, Khurasan Ghag Radio, and Akhbar Wilayah Khorasan ([Terrorism Monitor](#), December 16, 2021). The Islamic State in Hind Province's (ISHP) *Voice of Hind* magazine has also been active on this front. For instance, one issue includes a passage alleging that the, "Taliban ... just like their masters, the Murdad ISI, lick the boots of the crusaders and now Russia and China as well" ([Jihadology](#), September 18, 2021).

## Conclusion

IS is pursuing a whole-of-movement strategy to frame Russia both as an imperialist global power and as a

nefarious leader of regional security blocs in the Middle East and Central Asia. The media warfare effort is driven by IS' central media organs, its branches in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, and is further buttressed by pro-IS content creators. The South Asian IS networks provide platforms on social media and messaging applications for grassroots supporters to holistically develop a discourse about Taliban-Russia relations. In sum, these networks are signaling their hostile intent, which indicates that IS will continue to fight the Taliban for the foreseeable future and look to target Russian interests and nationals around the world.

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## Note

[1] This statement comes from a series of materials collected from IS Telegram channels.