



CENTRE FOR AIR POWER STUDIES

In Focus

New Delhi

CAPS InFocus: 43/2024

03 October 2024

Framing Fear: ISKP's Media Propaganda

Ms Priyadarshini Baruah

Research Associate, Centre for Air Power Studies



Source: [The Atlantic](#)



Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS]

This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution – Non-Commercial – No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

Keywords: ISIS, ISKP, Voice of Khorasan, Islamic State, South Asia, Media Propaganda

Just like its motherboard, Islamic State Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Levant, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) suffered the same fate of territorial decline after several highs in territorial conquests in Afghanistan. After the fall of Mosul in 2017, rebuilding the group and securing its global network became a priority for its Caliph, Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi. Baghdadi concurred that Islamic State (IS) does not require land to live and prosper; instead, they can expand digitally and set up a 'Virtual Caliphate' by encouraging lone wolf attacks in their home countries.¹ This phase marked the beginning of 'Networking Online', as ISIS shifted from being a proto-state to a transnational terrorist group and began rebranding itself as a 'Resurrected Caliphate' in the virtual world.

Similarly, since 2020, ISKP has revised its strategic direction to lone wolf attacks via online recruitment and propaganda. Today, ISKP's virtual reach has expanded to such an extent that it managed to come in contact with an 18-year-old Chechen man, who they instructed to plot an attack at the 2024 Paris Olympics.² While football fans were lucky to escape, ISKP managed to coordinate an attack in Moscow in March 2024, resulting in the deaths of nearly 145 individuals and injuring an additional 551.³ The Paris and Moscow plot highlights the gradual expansion of ISKP's scope from regionalism to internationalism. This has serious consequences for regional security in South Asia, particularly beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The digital blitzkrieg in IS' online propaganda appears to be linked to a well-organised sequence of IS publications. Some of these official media outlets include *Dabiq*, *Al Furqan*, *Al Hayat*, *Al Nab*, *Al Bayan*, *Maktab Al Hammah*, and *Ajnad*. Each has its own content to focus on.⁴ To coordinate its publications for non-Arabic speakers, IS established the *Al Hayat Media Centre*, which produces media content exclusively in non-Arabic languages, especially targeting younger audiences, in various forms, ranging from minute-long 'mujatweets' for X (formerly Twitter) to hour-long, Hollywood-style documentaries with special effects and action scenes.⁵

Taking a cue from its core group, ISKP, the regional tentacle of IS in South Asia, has also incorporated online propaganda as a central part of its operations, especially via its digital magazine *Voice of Khorasan*. Of late, its contents have begun engaging with larger audiences and diaspora communities beyond its core geographical scope.⁶ For example, in September 2024, the ISKP-affiliated *Al-Azaim* media outlet released a 47-page booklet in Persian, seeking to expand its operations beyond the *Khorasan* region while promoting lone-wolf terrorism. The booklet highlights Muslims seeking citizenship in non-Muslim countries, labelling all citizens of these nations as "infidels who should be fought against."⁷

Beyond the Battlefield: Media Propaganda in India

ISKP's outward look has meant that India has also seen its fault lines being pricked by ISKP digital publications to inflame social tensions. ISKP, in August 2023, published a prominent article in its *Voice of Khorasan* magazine calling on IS operatives and supporters to carry out attacks against the Hindu population in India.⁸ At present, IS has a small and brittle online presence in India. Some of the fledgling IS publications in India include *Risalah*, an English magazine that was renamed to *Sawt al-Hind (Voice of Hind)* following the transition from Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) to Islamic State Hind Province (ISHP).⁹ In February 2020, ISHP began publishing the *Voice of Hind* in both Urdu and English, predominantly directing its content towards the Muslim community in India. In 2022, ISHP took further measures to strengthen its media output with the establishment of *Nashir al-Hind* as its official news outlet.¹⁰ In January 2023, *Serat ul-Haq*—the inaugural edition of ISHP's English language magazine—was released by *al-Jauhar* Media Centre, a new media outlet.¹¹ India has so far withstood the IS's online barrage of propaganda; however, Indian security establishment should continue its tight vigil as ISKP's emergence and sustenance has been marked as the second wave of the Islamic State's expansion. New Delhi needs to be watchful of the ISKP's transnational agenda and outreach to guard its frontiers.

NOTES:

¹ Robin Wright, J.M. Berger, William Braniff et al., "The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Beyond", United States Institute of Peace, p. 13, January 2017, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/The-Jihadi-Threat-ISIS-Al-Qaeda-and-Beyond.pdf>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

² Jérémie Pham-Lê, Damien Delseny and Jean-Michel Décugis, "The Worrying Profile of Rokhman B., 18, Suspected of Planning an Attack During the 2024 Olympics", *Le Parisien*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.leparisien.fr/jo-paris-2024/linquietant-profil-de-rokhman-b-18-ans-soupconne-dun-projet-dattentat-pendant-les-jo-2024-31-05-2024-7VHAEX4FGVEXXDUGFCVH4SS4SM.php>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

³ "Moscow Crocus City Hall Attack: Death Toll Climbs to 134, 551 injured", *Business Standard*, March 31, 2024, https://www.business-standard.com/world-news/moscow-crocus-city-hall-attack-death-toll-climbs-to-134-551-injured-124033100032_1.html. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

⁴ Tantan Hermansah and Nofia Natasari, "The Khilafah Discourse in Online Magazine of ISIS: Dabiq", *International Journal of Progressive Sciences and Technologies*, Vol. 19, No.1, p. 134, February 2020, <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789/61913/3/The%20Khilafah%20Discourse%20in%20Online%20Magazine%20of%20ISIS%20DABIQ.pdf>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

⁵ Steve Rose, "The ISIS Propaganda War: A Hi-Tech Media Jihad", *The Guardian*, October 07, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/07/isis-media-machine-propaganda-war>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

⁶ Riccardo Valle and Lucas Webber, "The Growth and Internationalization of Islamic State Khurasan Province's Media Operations", *Militant Wire*, February 17, 2022, <https://www.militantwire.com/p/the-growth-and-internationalization>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

⁷ Afghan Analyst (@AfghanAnalyst2), "ISKP-Affiliated Media Releases Booklet on Muslims Seeking Citizenship in Non-Muslim Countries...", X (formerly Twitter), September 22, 2024, <https://x.com/afghananalyst2/status/1837881662794793194?s=48&t=sGopDVCp5GewVloGJfLzSA>. Accessed on September 30, 2024.

⁸ Priyadarshini Baruah, "Growing Threat of ISKP in Afghanistan", Centre for Air Power Studies, September 15, 2023, https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/CAPS_IB_PB_15_9_23.pdf. Accessed on September 30, 2024.

⁹ Abdul Sayed and Tore Refslund Hamming, "The Growing Threat of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and South Asia", United States Institute of Peace, No. 520, p. 4, June 2023, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/sr-520-growing-threat-islamic-state-afghanistan-south-asia.pdf>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

¹⁰ Riccardo Valle and Lucas Webber, "Islamic State Hind Province Amalgamates Media Branches; Pro-IS East Asia Group Claims Bombing in Thailand", *Militant Wire*, April 19, 2022, <https://www.militantwire.com/p/islamic-state-hind-province-amalgamates>. Accessed on September 29, 2024.

¹¹ Sayed and Hamming, n. 9, p. 8.