



# Down, but definitely not out

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## **On the verge of being wiped out territorially, the Islamic State still poses a big challenge to intelligence apparatuses**

- As the fight against the dreaded terrorist group, the Islamic State (IS) is drawing to a close, issues such as the future of terrorism in West Asia and beyond and concerns about the human rights of those who had been wittingly or unwittingly drawn into the vortex of such movements offer food for thought.

### **Lost sheen**

- Credible reports point to the IS nearing extinction.
- What was once described as a formidable 'Caliphate' of enormous wealth and with huge potential for expansion is now just a dot on the soil of Syria and Iraq.
- Ever since it lost control last year over two major cities, Raqqa (Syria) and Mosul (Iraq), it has lost its sheen. For once the U.S.'s strategy of forming a coalition of forces, styled the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), seemed to have paid off.
- Added to this was the master stroke of drawing substantially on the talent of determined and dedicated Kurdish fighters.
- A small number of hardened IS men is likely to be still hiding in the Baghouz area of Syria to offer a semblance of resistance.
- The temptation, however, to dismiss the IS as one of those upstarts which make an appearance once in a while in modern history and offer no lessons for the future has to be resisted.
- This is because the pull internationally for the IS was undeniably greater than for al-Qaeda.
- However powerful the message of violence and savagery that the IS sent during the past few years may be, there are facets of individual tragedy intertwined with the sordid movement that cannot be lost sight of.

### **No re-entry**

- Begum is one of several IS followers in Syria and Iraq who are anxious to return to their respective home countries, but cannot do so because of the hard stance of their governments against their repatriation.
- These governments, mostly in Europe and nations with a Muslim minority, such as Germany, France and Belgium, believe that there is no place for mercy for their citizens who left their homes consciously in order to join terror organisations.
- This uncompromising stand seems cruel against the backdrop of credible accounts of IS women volunteers being subjected to slavery and sexual abuse.
- In the final analysis, the IS saga provides a case study of how the draw of terrorist ideology can gain strength, expand and then evaporate at equally fast speed.

### **Shadow in the background**

- It is too soon to conclude that the IS is past history.
- Governments are quite conscious of the gaps in their border control measures which have enabled some IS cadres to sneak back into their home countries.
- The infiltration, even if it is a trickle, could be extremely dangerous if one considers the insidious nature of the sleeper cells of many terror groups which remain undetected for several years but come to notice only after their involvement in deadly operations.
- The presence, however, of sleeper cells alone may not be sufficient for terror groups to gain ground.
- Experience in West Asia is that an unstable internal security situation contributes greatly to the growth of terrorism.
- It is this scenario that cautions against any optimism with regard to the IS and its future.
- That organisation, in its present format, may not rear its head in the future.
- But its followers who have exited Iraq and Syria can find ready acceptance elsewhere.
- This is a real challenge to intelligence apparatuses the world over.