Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title:	**THE *JIHAD* OF THE CALIPHATE: UNMAKING OF AL-QAEDA AND THE MAKING OF THE ISLAMIC STATE**
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ISIS has arguably emerged as the most brutal militant group ever, occupying territories in Iraq and Syria, and declaring itself as the governing power. Born out of the umbrella organisation of al Qaeda in Iraq, ISIS seized control of critical strongholds in both the countries and declared it a *caliphate.*

Modern terrorism is a culmination of the rise of the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, the rise of al Qaeda, and the rise of the Islamic State (IS), each pertaining to a different timeline. After the 9/11 attacks on American territory, al Qaeda emerged as the dominant terrorist group. In this context, 'dominance' has been defined by comparing the influence that one terrorist organisation exercises compared to others. This is then used by terrorist groups to create networks to achieve strategic success. Just as nations cooperate with one another in sharing common goals and ambitions, so too do terrorist organisations. It has been observed that the networks function on a structure commonly referred to as core-periphery. This was effectively seen in the case of al Qaeda. The emergence of allied networks became a defining element of modern international terrorism. The underlying

implication here is that the nature of the threat has multiplied because terrorist organisations are no longer acting in isolation.

Based on a comparative study of the two organisations - al Qaeda and ISIS - al Qaeda appears more focused on a strong ideological base that it has and continues to have and which has almost become a brand. This in turn paved the way for other terrorist groups at the periphery to use al Qaeda as a label to expound on the same existential ideologies. By association, this also allowed the other groups to have access to Al Qaeda's resources; and, al Qaeda could claim responsibility for local attacks. Given the series of events that led to the decline of al Qaeda, there was a shift of balance of the structure which moved towards ISIS. As the ISIS grew stronger, it was observed that al Qaeda's network faltered. With its "diplomatic missions," the ISIS has been following a *wilayat* (a province of the caliphate) model of expansion. It claims to manage 18 *wilayat* internationally in Libya, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Af-Pak, Nigeria, and the Russian North Caucasus.

Some of the inferences that can be drawn based on the above mentioned arguments are:

1. Alliances between terrorist organisations are based on pragmatic necessities.

2. By creating networks, the emergence of risks faced by terrorist groups diversifies. This enhances survival of the groups and the network(s).

3. Change of power dynamics affects the network. After Osama bin Laden's death, Ayman al Zawahiri took over, who proved to be a less charismatic leader. This was in stark contrast to Baghdadi's strong leadership skills.

4. The al Qaeda-IS rivalry is real and very much visible.

Presently, al Qaeda has become more of an ideology and the organisation remains only in name. IS is largely seen as a metamorphosis of al Qaeda's 'jihad'. In a way, the rise of IS is an evolution of al Qaeda's existence. A fundamental question comes about - Is the rise of IS a reflection of al Qaeda's decline? It is argued that IS' rise 'is not a cause for the decline of al

Qaeda, but rather, a reflection of a declining al Qaeda.' IS is presently holding strong ground in certain regions because al Qaeda lost its hold on its leaders and its network.