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The image shows two flags flying against a clear blue sky. On the left is the flag of Pakistan, featuring a white vertical stripe on the left, a green field with a white crescent and star, and a black triangle at the top. On the right is the flag of Turkey, which is red with a white crescent and a five-pointed star. Both flags are waving in the wind.

# Turkey's Islamist Agenda in India

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# Turkey's Islamist Agenda in India

Post revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, India faced a month and a half long diplomatic ordeal at various multilateral diplomatic platforms. India successfully navigated the dire strategic straits with most of the countries either supporting its Kashmir move or refraining from a blatant opposition, except for a few including of course Pakistan and China, Turkey and Malaysia. However, it was only Turkey that came up as the most active supporter of Pakistan's agenda on the Kashmir issue.

President Erdogan, in his speech at the 74th session of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)<sup>1</sup> (Sept.24, 2019), said, "Despite the resolutions adopted, Kashmir is still besieged, and eight million people are stuck in Kashmir." He went on to criticise the international community for 'failing to pay attention to the Kashmir conflict.' While addressing an event, "Combating Hate Speech<sup>2</sup>," co-hosted by Pakistan and Turkey, on the sidelines of UNGA, President Erdogan, referring to J&K, said, "world should know the sufferings of Kashmir." He likened the situation of Kashmir to Palestine, adding that eight million Kashmiris were braving Indian atrocities in an open-air prison on their territory. Further, continuing to use rather strong words in diplomatic parlance, he denounced alleged violence by Hindu extremists against Muslims in India for beef-consumption, urging respect for freedom and faith. "Turkey is resolved to defend the rights of Muslims living in Jammu and Kashmir," said Erdogan. He urged international institutions, NGOs, technology companies, state institutions, media, and educational institutions to come forward and resolve the dispute.

Appreciating his blatantly pro-Pakistan stand on Kashmir at the UNGA, thousands of people from Pakistan and Turkey flooded social media with messages thanking him for the support. #OurVoiceErdogan<sup>3</sup> became the top trending hashtag on Twitter, garnering nearly 300,000 tweets within a few hours.

The majority in India's strategic and journalistic circles, in complete disregard of Turkey's penetration in Kashmir and its larger geostrategic ambitions in the sub-continent, tend to treat Erdogan's statements as mere plaintive diplomatic stand without much substance to it. Though Turkey<sup>4</sup> always supported Pakistan at the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) on the Kashmir issue and has been a key

instigator of resolutions against India, its more recent activism on Kashmir has much more devious and dangerous intent, ranging far beyond Kashmir. Turkey's interest in Kashmir seems to be directed towards realizing a much larger geostrategic objective in South Asia and the Middle East. To begin with, an expose on Erdogan's broader Islamist ambitions in South Asia can give a clearer picture of the threat which Turkey poses.

## **Demystifying Erdogan-Revival of the Caliphate**

"Caliph Erdogan? Why Turkey's President is quietly courting Indian Muslims," a disturbing article published by Haaretz,<sup>5</sup> discussed at length the grand Caliphate ambitions of Erdogan. For a detailed assessment and historical background of Erdogan's Islamist agenda and outreach in South Asia, under discussion in this paper, reference is invited to the Haaretz article mentioned above. It was argued that Turkey's current leadership wanted to revive the institution of Caliphate by 2023 when the country would be celebrating 100 years of becoming a republic. Erdogan would project himself as the spiritual, moral, religious, and political leader of the Muslims all over the world. His support for the Muslims in Kashmir, Palestine, Xinjiang and Myanmar needs to be understood in the backdrop of this agenda to strengthen his credibility and claim to Caliphate. He and his intellectual support system have repeatedly emphasized that the Muslim community needs a strong leader like him.

#Erdogan: #Turkey is the only country that can lead the #Muslim world (Headline<sup>6</sup> in a pro-government newspaper, Yeni Safak, 15 October 2018).

Some of the recent deliberations in South Asia Strategic Research Center (GASAM<sup>7</sup>, in Turkish), a prominent Turkish think-tank active in creating an intellectual narrative in pursuance of Erdogan's Caliphate mission, suggest that he has significant revisionist plans to alter the geography of the Middle East by reviving the old Ottoman Empire, focusing on non-Arab Islamic nations like Iran, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia. He has enormous expectations from the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent because of Turkey's old historical ties with India. His supporters recall that in the aftermath of the revolt of 1857, many Muslim clerics had fled to Turkey to escape British persecution. Later, in 1919, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Khilafat movement against the British, for the restoration of the Ottoman caliphate. Though Gandhi's idea was to bring Hindus and Muslims together in the freedom movement against the colonial power, the movement laid a substantial edifice of Turkey's bonhomie with Indian Muslims, and the "edifice" was entirely religious in nature. Though Indian Muslims supported the movement in large numbers, it petered out because the Turkish nationalists under Kemal Ataturk abolished Ottoman Caliphate and sultanate. Allegedly, the Khilafat movement played an instrumental role in communalizing India's socio-political scenario. However, its role may be debatable (*Pandya, Abhinav, "Radicalization in India: An Exploration, Pg.28. Pentagon Press, 2019*).

Of course, most Arab Islamic countries led by the Saudi monarchy and the state Wahhabi clergy are likely to resist his claims to be the Caliph. Nevertheless, the fact remains that after the Khilafat movement; the Muslim politics in India took a sharp communal turn and maintained distance from Congress-led freedom movement. Post Khilafat, 1920s also witnessed bloody communal riots in various parts of India. Later, Ali Brothers, who were the prominent Khilafat leaders in Punjab, drifted towards communal politics and supported the Pakistan movement.

Interestingly, the regions from where Erdogan is receiving enthusiastic takers of his Islamist narrative, such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, Calcutta and Kerala are those which actively participated in the Khilafat movement (details discussed later in the paper).

### **Links with terrorist groups and Islamist organizations**

Turkey's links with various terrorist organizations such as Hamas<sup>8</sup>, Hezbollah, Al Shabab, Boko Haram<sup>9</sup>, Hayat Tahrir-Al-Sham<sup>10</sup> (Al Qaeda affiliate in Turkey), and ISIS have been brought out by various media persons and intelligence agencies time and again. An operative of Turkish Intelligence reportedly sent USD 600,000<sup>11</sup> to the Somalian terrorist group, Al Shabab. The Maarif Foundation, actively controlled by Erdogan<sup>12</sup>, gets its funding from the Education Ministry. It is allegedly encouraging teaching of radical Islamist curriculum through various schools run by it in the African countries. Reportedly, post-2016 coup, Turkey is pressuring the African governments to transfer the control of some schools to the Maarif Foundation<sup>13</sup>. It may be recalled that Fethullah Gulen, a well-known Islamic reformer and an educationist of Turkish origin, was accused of orchestrating the 2016 coup in Turkey.

Turkey's links with IS have been under debate for quite some time now. Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AVID)<sup>14</sup> had claimed that IS was using Turkey as a strategic base to reorganize threats to Europe. The AVID report also claimed that for a long time, Turkey was "a springboard for an unprecedented number of foreign fighters who traveled to Syria from all over the world."

Turkey's former chief of Counter-terrorism Unit, Ahmet Yayla<sup>15</sup>, in an interview<sup>16</sup> claimed that he had to resign because he refused to obey Erdogan's orders to allow the jihadis to pass through his city without investigation and scrutiny. As per Yayla, Jihadis of IS were buying explosive materials from Turkey, in addition to what MIT (Turkish intelligence) was allegedly supplying to them. He further revealed that a company 'Power Tracks' having links with the President's close relatives, was awarded a contract by the government to import oil from ISIS. The oil used to be sold as Turkish oil to Israel and many European countries. These linkages are an open secret.

US Democratic Presidential candidate, Tulsi Gabbard<sup>17</sup>, tweeted, "Erdogan has been helping ISIS and AQ for years. He has denied this but is now openly using militias of former ISIS/AQ terrorists



exposing him for what he is: a radical Islamist megalomaniac who wants to establish a caliphate with himself as a caliph-the supreme ruler”.

Reportedly, in Libya<sup>18</sup>, Turkey supported groups associated with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey has also supported Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood<sup>19</sup> which has significant influence among most of the anti-Assad opposition groups like Free Syrian Army, and terrorist groups like Jahbat-Al-Nusra and Ahrar-al-Sham. Turkey-backed Islamist proxy group Free Syrian Army<sup>20</sup>, raided Kurdish areas in North Eastern Syria, killed unarmed civilians and deliberately released ISIS detainees, as told by two US officials to *Foreign Policy*.

The US Defense Secretary Esper blamed<sup>21</sup> Turkey for the “release of many dangerous ISIS detainees” in Syria following the invasion (Oct., 2019), also accusing Turkey of “possible war crimes.” French President Macron<sup>22</sup> alleged that Turkey’s October, 2019 offensive in Syria is helping IS in Caliphate. Though Erdogan<sup>23</sup> claims that 109 terrorists died in Turkish invasion on Syria, Kurdish authorities have reported that the Turkish invasion of Syria helped ISIS to escape and rebuild. The invasion has been condemned by the US and EU. Erdogan, in response, has threatened that if Turkish invasion is called an ‘occupation’, he would send 3.6 million refugees<sup>24</sup> to Europe. Calling on EU nations, he said<sup>25</sup>, “When bombs start to explode on your streets, the weapons of terrorists start to spill out death, vandals start to devastate your surroundings, you will, of course, come to realize your mistake.”

## **GASAM-a Dangerous Outreach**

GASAM, a Turkish think tank, was established by Ali Sahin, a Pakistani Islamist, now serving as deputy minister in the Turkish government. It functions as the leading platform to propagate thoughts on the revival of the Caliphate, among the South Asian Muslims. GASAM organizes conferences, regularly inviting Islamic clerics, Muslim politicians and community leaders from South Asia, to create an intellectual and religious narrative on the importance and necessity of the revival of the Turkish Caliphate (*Pandya, Abhinav, Radicalization in India: An Exploration*). GASAM generates several reports, papers and issue briefs on Kashmir and India in general.

An analysis of the published reports of GASAM and interviews with several knowledgeable interlocutors, it is assessed that GASAM’s Caliphate strategy for South Asia includes the following:-

- Raise political awareness among the Muslims and to motivate them to make a bid for political power. Though it has to be done within the framework of India’s constitution which allows freedom and protection to the minorities, the backbone of such an initiative will have to be the Islamic religious and cultural identity. For such an objective, some prominent politicians with desirable leadership qualities of constitutional and democratic methods and yet Islamist, have to be identified.
- Propagate a narrative that Muslims in India are going through a lean phase due to the domination of Hindu-nationalist forces in the country’s socio-political set-up. The idea is to

capitalize on the existing fears of the Muslim minority against the rising Hindu nationalism in the country and instill a fabricated sense of threat from the majority community.

- Erode the faith of Indian Muslims in the secular and democratic constitution of India. It is learnt that the Turkish media is increasingly trying to portray in the international media, RSS and other Hindu nationalist organizations as “mass murders, rapists and burners” of the Muslim community. This can be verified by the content and the title of the videos disseminated by TRT World (discussed later in the paper).
- Imbibe a sense of common political, cultural and religious purpose among the Muslims of South Asia-leading to jihadi radicalization in other parts of India on the lines of one witnessed in Kashmir and Pakistan
- Regularly raise the issues bothering the Indian Muslims like beef-lynching cases, Babri mosque demolition.
- Invite Muslim students and scholars to Turkey regularly. To avoid scrutiny, mostly ordinary or lesser known people are used to act as conduits and messengers.
- Use popular social media (WhatsApp, Facebook pages and other channels) to woo the young generation. The quality and content of the videos circulated, are highly professional and convincing.

## **Efforts to extend outreach in India**

Turkish leadership has been trying to establish a network in the Islamist organizations of South Asia. Its relations with Pakistan's Islamist organizations like Jama'at-i-Islami<sup>26</sup> are well known. In South Asia, money and weapons are provided to entities like Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army and Jama'at-i-Islami (Bangladesh), which believe in political Islam<sup>27</sup>. Its several leaders are facing trial in war crimes. When its chief Nizami was executed (2016) on charges of war crimes, Turkey, in protest, withdrew its Ambassador from Bangladesh<sup>28</sup>. Turkey is also running Maktabas, teaching a radical Islamism to Rohingya students so that they can go back and fight the “enemies of Allah<sup>29</sup>.”

In India, selected Islamic clerics with extremist views are used as the primary conduits for establishing a support base among Indian Muslims. Sheikh Salman Nadwi, a controversial cleric of Lucknow who had earlier issued statements supporting al-Baghdadi but later withdrew it after a backlash, is one of them. Nadwi, previously, had written a letter to Saudi rulers, promising to raise an army of 500,000 Indian Muslims which could be deployed for Jihad anywhere (Pandya, Abhinav, “*Radicalization in India: An Exploration*”<sup>30</sup>). Another controversial Wahhabi preacher Zakir Naik, notorious for inspiring the Dhaka ISIS-terror attack in July 2016, and currently hiding in Malaysia and facing an arrest warrant issued by an Indian court, had also been received warmly in Turkey several times. He reportedly enjoys cordial relations with several Turkish Islamist clerics including prominent ones like Yildiz. He delivered a speech at TUGWA (Islamist group run by Erdogan's son Bilal) in 2017.

Turkey is also alleged to be funding selected NGOs and leading organizations for outreach among



Indian Muslims, which are likely to be used in the future on the lines of earlier initiatives with the Turkish diaspora in Germany and other EU countries (Pandya, Abhinav, “*Radicalization in India: An Exploration*”<sup>31</sup>).

Turkish establishments in India are laying the groundwork for outreach to Indian Muslims<sup>32</sup>. Reportedly, it is being done through prominent clerics, business people, community leaders, selected politicians, and bureaucrats<sup>33</sup>.

Turkish outreach programmes in India are assessed as serious. Since the approach, modus operandi, and execution are highly sophisticated, most of this work in India escapes sufficient scrutiny by the media and may be even the security apparatus.

In Kerala, prominent business and religious leaders, selected madrasas, NGO and politicians among the Muslim community, constitute the core of the Turkish efforts. Several students from Kerala are pursuing religious studies in Turkey on state scholarships. Reportedly, this year 80 students went to Turkey from Kerala alone, for higher education. Some members of the Indian Union Muslim League (Kerala), prominent political and business families were in direct or indirect contact with Turkish entities with a view to spread their network. Turkish officials and clerics are often approached to grace the important socio-cultural events like Jamia Nuraiyya convocation where more than a million people from the local Muslim community are expected to assemble.

In Hyderabad too, pro-Turkish elements are reportedly active in engaging with clerics, politicians, young scholars, media persons, and madrasas. The Hyderabad project includes setting up a foundation/trust. This is still in the pipeline.

In Bangalore and Aligarh also, Turkey has developed a strong network, including in the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). AMU awarded honorary doctorate to Erdogan. Turkish government has already donated USD 460 million<sup>34</sup> to Islamist foundations in the past; undoubtedly a large portion such funds would have filtered down to Islamic religious organizations in India.

### **Rising Popularity of Erdogan**

Overtly, such initiatives may come out as normal community outreach programs. However, the underlying geopolitical motives, if any, need to be carefully investigated. The worrying concern is that there are enough takers of Erdogan’s brand of Islamism in India. The jubilation over Erdogan’s return to the Presidency in June 2018 election, witnessed in the Muslim community across the country speaks volumes about his popularity and outreach in India<sup>35</sup>. Madhyamam, the third-largest Malayalam daily published by Jama’at-i-Islami controlled trust hailed his victory on the front page and with an opinion piece titled, “Turkey becomes powerful, Erdogan too.”<sup>36</sup>

Another example of Turkey’s penetration in India comes from the EU-mandated study of ISIS

IEDs by Conflict Armament Research<sup>37</sup>. The study revealed that 51 companies from 20 countries were supplying over 700 components used in making IEDs to ISIS. Turkey topped the list with 13 companies. Interestingly, India stood second with seven companies among other nations like Brazil and the US. Reportedly, all these components were legally exported under government-issued licenses to entities in Lebanon and Turkey.

Hence, the question arises as to what channels are being used to carry Erdogan's message to far-off places. Very recently (Nov.11, 2019), overseas unit of India's main opposition party announced its decision to open an office in Turkey<sup>38</sup>. Traditionally, the party commands significant electoral support in the community, and its decision to open an office in Turkey could possibly be aimed at reviving its support base here. Given Erdogan's recent anti-India 'quasi alliance' with Pakistan, and an Islamist agenda in the Indian subcontinent, such developments need to be monitored and critically analysed from the standpoint of India's internal and external security.

Such outlets can serve multiple purposes such as platform for intelligence collection, act as conduit for hawala transactions and for facilitating the meetings of the local coordinators of anti-India activities with the operatives of global jihadist forces. In the future, Turkey is likely to use its linkages with a firmly entrenched political party for its Islamist agenda in India.

## **Mission Kashmir**

Based on the analysis of reports and documents of GASAM, the possibility of pro-Turkish elements in India, especially in J&K, contributing to the Kashmir agenda, cannot be ruled in areas such as -:

- Playing mediatory role between India and Pakistan, overtly projecting itself as a peacemaker, obviously with a hidden Islamist agenda,
- Capturing hearts and minds of the Kashmiri people, projecting Turkey as their genuine leader-spiritually and politically. To this end, Turkey may be visualising the creation of an organisation genuinely representing Kashmiri interests. It could consist of representatives from the local politicians, NGOs, scholars, business world, diaspora, religious groups,
- Disseminating a narrative that J&K should be immediately de-militarised and popularizing the cause of the return of Kashmiri refugees to their homeland,
- Supporting the idea of setting-up a multi-functional peace force for the security of the region,
- Projecting Kashmir as grave international security issue, not a bilateral issue, thereby involve international powers into the efforts to resolve the crises

## Capturing the Young Minds in Kashmir

Turkish project in Kashmir is directed at targeting young minds. Several Kashmiri students visit Turkey at Hurriyat's recommendations to study medicine, engineering, Human rights, International Relations, and Islamic Studies on scholarships funded by ISI. Turkey's universities, think tanks, educational institutions, and religious institutions also organize seminars, conferences, and discussions on Kashmir-related issues and other useful Muslim issues, in general.

Besides the social media, TV channels and the mainstream online media are critical instruments for brainwashing young minds. Random online research reveals how active Turkey is in publicising distorted stories on the Kashmir situation. Turkey's official broadcasting service "TRT World" carries a heavy focus on Kashmir's social, political, and security scenario; most of the writers being young Kashmiri scholars.

The videos broadcasts of TRT World are very sophisticated and professionally done. In terms of content, presentation and graphics, they are comparable to some of the best in the world. TRT World, in reality, is a state-run broadcasting service and the propaganda arm of the state. As regards Kashmir, the TRT World is a factory of lies delivering the most impressive performance in spin-doctoring. For instance, to appeal to the global human rights activist community and diplomats, the TRT World highlights fabricated stories of alleged HR violations by the Security Forces (SFs) in Kashmir by showing provocative pictures of girls hit with pellet guns.

However, the TRT World hardly ever mentions the fact that Kashmir is undergoing an intense jihadi radicalization. It also ignores the fact that most of such protests where people, including young children, are pelting stones on SFs to disrupt legitimate counter-terror operations, are mostly organised by Pakistan's deep state and its proxies-extremist clerics, Jama'at-i-Islami (JI) cadres and leaders, Hurriyat members and the local mainstream politicians. The participants in these protests are paid and get explicit instructions from Pakistan's deep state. For example, in 2016, after the encounter death of militant commander Burhan Wani, ISI allegedly pumped in INR 450 crores in Kashmir to orchestrate massive civil unrest and try to create a revolt-like situation. This was revealed in a sting operation done by India Today on a separatist leader Nayeem Khan<sup>39</sup> (Assad, Bashir, K-File).

(Link to the YouTube page on TRT world's videos on Kashmir. [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=story+of+kashmir+in+5+min+trt+world](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=story+of+kashmir+in+5+min+trt+world))

One casual glance will reveal at least 28 videos on Kashmir. The titles of most of the videos will show their biased and propagandist nature, creating and disseminating one-sided narrative on Kashmir. For instance, many of them have titles like- "Is Kashmir becoming Palestine?", "Is India using Hindu pilgrimages to tighten its grip around Kashmir?", "You can watch this video, but millions of Kashmiris

cannot”, “13,000 boys detained in Kashmir”, “India will rule Pakistan-administered Kashmir- India’s foreign minister” and “Indian forces conduct night raids, mass detentions and torture in Kashmir- Activist”.

One of the videos, “Kashmir Conflict in under four minutes<sup>40</sup>” (1, 51,112 views) alleges that in 1947, RSS massacred Muslims in Kashmir with the figure ranging anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000. One can discern a deliberate attempt to internationalize the Kashmir issue by making unwarranted comparisons in videos like “Is Kashmir becoming Palestine? (64,000 views)<sup>41</sup>”. The video predicts the possibility of India creating West-Bank like settlements of Hindus in Kashmir. In the video, “Kashmir off-grid- fault-lines in the valley<sup>42</sup>”(32,729 views). Humiliation by SFs is mentioned as the most critical factor pushing people towards militancy, conveniently disregarding the Jihadi radicalization and the role of Pakistan in promoting and sustaining militancy in the state. Further, it also has intellectually convincing videos with false and one-sided stories on Babri Mosque demolition and other issues concerning Muslims in India.

What should be a matter of concern is that the TRT World is considered a serious and prestigious portal, and whatever narrative it builds and circulates, do make an impact on Muslim minds or the constituency which Erdogan wants to address. TRT World is very popular in Kashmir.

## **Popularity with the Separatist leadership**

Erdogan has made deep inroads among the separatist leadership, business groups, religious clerics and organizations like Jama’at-i-Islami. Hailing his election victory (2018), separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farookh<sup>43</sup> called him, “an ardent supporter of Kashmir’s right to self-determination.” Further, he observed, “be it Palestine or Kashmir, Erdogan has raised a voice in support of the suppressed people.” Jama’at-i-Islami Kashmir<sup>44</sup> described him as a “great leader of the Muslim world and Turkey as the “hope of Ummah.” *Greater Kashmir*, a powerful and pro-separatist media outlet of Kashmir commented that Erdogan’s victory was a “win for all oppressed people in the world<sup>45</sup>.” Recently, Turkish official media also severely criticized India’s decision to ban Jama’at-i-Islami<sup>46</sup>, an extremist organization functioning as an intellectual and religious arm of pro-Pak terrorist organization Hizbul Mujahidin<sup>47</sup>. Turkey has historical linkages with JI Pakistan. JI leaders from POK<sup>48</sup> are regularly invited to Turkey for seminars and conferences on religious matters and Kashmir issue.

## **Changing Attitudes**

Over the last decade, in Kashmir, the attitudes, culture, and religious beliefs have substantially changed under the influence of Pan-Islamism due to the impact of the Arab Spring, Islamic state’s caliphate ideology, social media, Saudi-funded Wahhabi radicalization and alienation from the ineffective state administration. The global forces of Islamism are now touching every aspect of life in Kashmir. Even

the secular intellectuals see Kashmir through the prism of Palestine and Gaza. For religious-minded people, the line of comparison is of global Jihad. For secular and relatively liberal-minded people, the search for similarities lies on the edges of humanitarian issues. Turkey is capturing both these groups.

## **Takeaways**

The recent developments like the Triple Talaq legislation, abolition of Article 370, and the SC judgment on Ayodhya, the more recent developments relating to Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Population Register (NPR) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) will be most effectively used by Turkey to cultivate fear psychosis among Muslims by peddling false narratives of Islam being in danger and Muslims being persecuted. After the recent judgment on the Ayodhya Ram temple, TRT World had published explosive articles titled, “Babri Mosque Case- Indian Court Rules in Favour of Hindus<sup>49</sup>” and “Ayodhya Verdict is a Blow to India’s Muslims and its Secular Constitution.<sup>50</sup>” With such titles, one can easily discern the target audience and the devious objective. In the past also Turkey had used Babri-mosque demolition to incite extremist sentiments among the Muslims.

That said, the possibility of vulnerable Muslim minds getting swayed by Turkey’s Islamist agenda towards violent or soft extremism cannot be ruled out. Hence, one needs to be extremely cautious and accommodative at this juncture, where one witnesses the rapid penetration of global Islamist forces among the Indian Muslims. Perceived majoritarianism charged with hyper-nationalism can be a significant threat to communal harmony and hence, national security.

## **Threat to India**

The release of ISIS prisoners in the Turkish invasion of Syria mentioned above, according to analysts, also poses threat to India. With the American withdrawal from Afghanistan on the cards and in view of the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) having established a foothold in the Af-Pak region, the area is once again likely to emerge as the epicenter of global jihadism. Many Indians from Kerala have already joined ISKP in Afghanistan<sup>51</sup>. There is a possibility of a segment of these released IS prisoners being shifted to the Af-Pak region which abuts Kashmir. It is pertinent to mention here that after the abrogation of Article 370, Pakistan is desperate to reassert its relevance in Kashmir affairs. Recent intelligence inputs suggest that Pakistan may be infiltrating battle-hardened Taliban jihadis<sup>52</sup> into Kashmir, renewing its preference for foreign terrorists, with due deniability.

Also, in Kashmir, due to years of radicalization efforts, a fertile ground has gradually emerged in favour of the IS-styled caliphate mindset. Some of the recent celebrity militants in Kashmir, such as Burhan Wani and Zakir Musa<sup>53</sup>, both now liquidated by the security forces, had affirmed their belief in establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Kashmir. That said, ISIS fighters may find a congenial atmosphere to establish a larger foot-hold and act as powerful catalysts in the Kashmir’s militancy-scenario.

## **Security Implications**

It is assessed that Turkish efforts to make inroads into the Indian Muslim community can have security implications. Given Turkey's known links with trans-national terror groups, strategic experts view such penetration in India with suspicion. From a purely security prism, it can facilitate the entrenchment of terrorist outfits like ISIS and AQ in India. Possible implications of this can be in terms of accentuating communal divide, creating false narratives to influence popular perception, launching cyber-attacks, executing terrorist acts, encouraging civil unrest and sabotaging the country's economy and communication lines. Further, through its growing influence among selected politicians, businessmen, scholars, socio-cultural and religious organizations, Turkey can also try to influence mainstream politics and economic life of India.

## **Recommendations**

Timely understanding of the threat that Turkey's Islamist agenda can pose to India, will be very helpful in charting out a multipronged effective response. Once the essence of the above narrative is assessed as real possibilities, some of the logical policy initiatives for India to contemplate could be built around developing a robust counter-narrative against radicalisation through a sophisticated psywar campaign highlighting India's abiding commitment to democratic governance, secular social order and community outreach. Obviously, the campaign would have to include the established print and electronic media network but greater emphasis will have to be placed on the use of the vast social media network to building credible counter-narrative to Islamism by highlighting India's centuries of co-existence between Hinduism and other faiths, evolution of liberal and tolerant variety of Islam, links between Sufi Islam and elements of Vedantic mysticism.

Encouraging schools, madrassas and seminaries in the affected and sensitive areas, persuading clerics and religious scholars to explain how the idea of Pan-Islamism being motivated by political ambitions, is irrelevant in today's world and runs contrary to the spiritual essence of Islam.

While so doing, the security establishments would necessarily be required to use their professional skills to closely monitor the 'beyond the normal' Turkish outreach to the community members, NGOs, media, clerics, and Islamist groups, and the intellectual class need. Since availability of finances constitutes a critical component of such activities, monitoring of flow of overseas money through different route and modes should form an integral part of the counter-strategy.

In brief, an aggressive security approach backed by accommodative, reform-oriented, and progressive agenda aimed at addressing the alienation of minorities is needed. Notably, young minds need to be engaged. Muslims' participation in the mainstream political and economic processes has to be rooted in an identity which is in harmony with India's religious and cultural diversity, rather than on the basis of an extremist and a narrow perception of their religious and communal identity. Growth, employment and educational opportunities and helpful in resolving the trust-deficit with the young generation.



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