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The Narco-Terrorism of Daesh Khorasan and its Security Problems in Relation to the Establishment of the Taliban State

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Extended Abstract

The term narco-terrorism was first introduced in 1983 by Peruvian President Fernando Belaúnde Terry to describe violent actions undertaken by drug traffickers against state institutions. Over time, the concept has evolved to capture the complex and increasingly intertwined relationship between terrorism and illicit drug economies. In contemporary security studies, terrorism is no longer understood solely as a state-centric or ideologically rigid phenomenon. Instead, it has assumed non-state, transnational, and hybrid forms shaped by globalization, political instability, economic inequality, and weak governance.

The convergence of terrorism and narcotics trafficking has transformed many extremist organizations into financially self-sustaining entities capable of conducting

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prolonged campaigns of violence. Afghanistan, due to decades of conflict, institutional fragility, and its major role in global narcotics production, has become one of the most prominent arenas for narcoterrorism. Within this context, ISIS-K has emerged as a critical destabilizing actor, challenging the Taliban's authority and complicating efforts toward state-building and governance consolidation.

Narco-terrorism is composed of two interdependent features: organized political violence and systematic engagement in the production, trafficking, or taxation of narcotics. Terrorist groups involved in narco-terrorism utilize drug revenues to finance recruitment, acquire weapons, sustain territorial presence, and exert coercive control over populations. As a result, narco-terrorism directly undermines state sovereignty, rule of law, and institutional legitimacy.

In Afghanistan, the narcotics economy has long flourished due to limited state capacity, widespread poverty, and persistent insecurity. Armed groups have repeatedly exploited this economy to secure financial resources. Although ISIS-K presents itself as ideologically distinct from other militant actors, it has demonstrated pragmatic engagement with narcotics-related activities, either through direct involvement or indirect cooperation with trafficking networks. This involvement has enabled ISIS-K to pose a challenge the Taliban not only through violence but also by weakening the important economic foundations for effective governance.

Existing literature identifies narco-terrorism as a multidimensional threat with far-reaching consequences. Studies focusing on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) illustrate how narcotics revenues sustain long-term insurgent campaigns and facilitate transnational criminal activities. Research on Central Asia highlights the role of narco-terrorist networks in undermining regional multilateralism and security cooperation, particularly in politically fragile environments.

Comparative analyses of the Middle East and Latin America identify groups such as ISIS, the Taliban, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as prominent examples of narco-terrorist organizations. These studies emphasize that narco-terrorism generates security, political, economic, and social challenges that extend beyond national borders. However, scholarly attention to ISIS-K's specific role in obstructing the Taliban's state-building process remains limited, underscoring the need for focused analysis.

This study draws upon the Frustration–Aggression Theory to explain the mechanisms of recruitment and violence within extremist organizations. Originally formulated by John Dollard in the late 1930s, the theory posits that persistent frustration arising from unmet expectations or perceived injustice produces aggressive behavior. When institutional mechanisms fail to address grievances, individuals may turn to violence as an alternative means of expression and redress.

In Afghanistan, prolonged conflict, economic deprivation, social marginalization, and political exclusion have created fertile ground for extremist recruitment. ISIS-K capitalizes on these conditions by offering financial incentives, ideological narratives, and a sense of purpose to disaffected individuals. This dynamic transforms individual frustration into organized violence and reinforces the group's capacity to challenge state-building efforts.

Narco-terrorism can be categorized into several forms. Genuine narco-terrorism involves direct participation by terrorist groups in drug trafficking to finance militant activities. Criminal narco-terrorism prioritizes profit, with drug syndicates employing terror tactics to intimidate governments and rivals. State-sponsored narco-terrorism emerges when governments support or tolerate terrorist groups engaged in narcotics trafficking to achieve strategic objectives.

Additionally, fabricated narco-terrorism refers to the political manipulation of narco-terrorist narratives, while instrumental narcoterrorism conceptualizes drug trafficking as a tool to weaken governance and social order. ISIS-K's activities in Afghanistan most closely resemble genuine and instrumental narco-terrorism, as the group exploits the narcotics economy to destabilize governance and undermine Taliban authority.

The Taliban's state-building project faces significant obstacles that are intensified by ISIS-K's narco-terrorist activities. From a security perspective, persistent attacks undermine public safety, erode public confidence, and stretch the Taliban's limited security capabilities. Economically, ISIS-K's involvement in narcotics trafficking distorts local economies, fuels corruption, and deprives the Taliban of potential revenues needed for governance and service provision.

Politically, ISIS-K challenges the Taliban's legitimacy by presenting itself as a more ideologically uncompromising alternative. This strategy has enabled the

group to attract dissatisfied Taliban members, particularly when financial incentives are offered. Socially, continued violence exacerbates ethnic and sectarian tensions, undermining social cohesion and complicating nation-building efforts. These dynamics collectively weaken the Taliban's capacity to consolidate authority and establish effective governance.

Although Afghanistan's instability has deep historical roots, its current intensification is closely linked to the U.S. military withdrawal and the resulting political plan. Within this context, the rivalry between ISIS-K and the Taliban represents a crucial security challenge with significant regional implications, extending to I.R of Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Despite the Taliban's claims for combating ISIS-K, persistent governance deficits and limited institutional capacity hinder effective counterterrorism efforts. ISIS-K's narco-terrorist activities continue to pose serious threats to the Taliban's state-building process and to regional stability more broadly. Prolonged delays in governance consolidation are likely to exacerbate security, political, economic, social, and environmental risks, increasing the likelihood of broader regional instability. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive strategies that extend beyond military responses to include economic development, political inclusion, and sustained regional cooperation.

Key words: ISIS-Khorasan, Taliban state-building, narcoterrorism, security challenges, Afghanistan.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.