



Combating Terrorism Center

AT WEST POINT



## ALLIED & LETHAL

ISLAMIC STATE KHORASAN'S NETWORK  
AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN  
AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Amira Jadoon | December 2018



# **Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan's Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

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The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, Department of Defense, or U.S. Government.

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Cover Photo: A photo released by Islamic State Khorasan in April 2018 showing its Muhammad Bin Maslamah Al-Ansari' Military Training Camp.

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## Executive Summary

When the Islamic State officially declared the formation of its province in Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak)—Wilayat Khorasan, or Islamic State Khorasan (ISK)—in January 2015, many global and regional policymakers dismissed the threat of an Islamic State affiliate in the AfPak theater. In the years following its formation, ISK unleashed some of the most devastating attacks in the AfPak region, persisting in the face of U.S. airstrikes, Pakistani military operations, and clashes with the Afghan Taliban. Although the potential threat of ISK is acknowledged today, questions about the nature of the nascent group and its efficacy, resilience, and trajectory remain unanswered. What are the broader contours of ISK's lethality, targets, and tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan?<sup>1</sup> How do ISK's operational trends compare and contrast across the two countries? How have ISK's alliances contributed to its overall capacity and resilience? More broadly, what explains ISK's demonstrated ability to survive and thrive in the AfPak region, and what do its operational trends and alliances collectively tell us about its future trajectory?

To shed light on the above questions, this report draws on open-source materials to uncover various facets of ISK's presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Part 1 of the report compares and contrasts the geography and operational trends of ISK attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan between January 2014 and July 2018. After establishing an overview of ISK's organizational capacity, Part 2 seeks to explain the source of ISK's demonstrated capacity and resilience. This part maps out the universe of ISK's alliances in the AfPak region, explaining various *types of cooperation* (ideological, logistical, and operational) and the *quality of cooperation* (high-end and low-end cooperation). Part 3 of the report analyzes the direct linkages between ISK and three of its alliances to show the extent to which ISK relies on operational cooperation to sustain its activity. This part focuses on jointly claimed attacks by ISK and its allies, their overlapping areas of operation, and seasonality trends. Part 4 offers an analysis of the similarities and differences in ISK's activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan and highlights the associated security implications of its alliance hub.

### Overall Argument and Findings

The findings of this report demonstrate that ISK has been successful in reinforcing its organizational capacity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan by fostering partnerships with regional militant groups. Moreover, various parallels in the nature and timing of ISK's attacks in both countries, as shown in this report, indicate that ISK activity is coordinated across the AfPak region to a certain degree. Taken together, these findings strongly suggest that ISK's continued ability to leverage and make effective use of a lethal, cross-border, and resourceful network in the Khorasan region will define the parameters of its future trajectory. A nuanced understanding of how ISK cultivates alliances, which facilitate its activity in AfPak, is imperative to successfully counter the group.

### ISK Operational Insights

An analysis of all ISK attacks (suspected or claimed) in Afghanistan (ISK-AFG dataset) and Pakistan (ISK-PK dataset)<sup>2</sup> between January 2014 and July 2018 provides the following insights:

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1 Limited ISK activity has been reported outside of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region; the Islamic State announced its Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) chapter in early 2016 and has released Kashmir-related propaganda, however the group has only claimed a couple of small-scaled attacks in that region. For more on ISJK, see Amira Jadoon, "An Idea or a Threat? Islamic State Jammu & Kashmir," CTC Perspectives, February 9, 2018.

2 This report is based on several original datasets compiled by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point using open-source data between January 2014 and July 2018.

### *Hitting Afghanistan Twice as Hard as Pakistan*

- ISK has been far more active and lethal in Afghanistan than in Pakistan, with more than double the number of attacks and individuals killed in the former than the latter. Between January 2014 and July 2018, ISK attacks in Afghanistan amounted to a total of 211 attacks and resulted in 1,511 deaths. In contrast, over the same time period, ISK attacks in Pakistan amounted to a total of 83 attacks and caused 706 deaths. Although ISK was less active in Pakistan, the number killed and injured per attack on average was higher in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.

### *Ramping Up Lethality*

- ISK attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have progressively killed and injured more people per attack since 2014; this indicates ISK's resilience in the face of U.S. airstrikes, ground operations, and clashes with the Taliban as well as the inadequacy of local security measures. For example, compared to 2015, total deaths and injuries due to ISK attacks in Afghanistan increased by over four times in 2016, and by over seven times in 2017.

### *Provoking the State*

- In both countries, ISK consistently focused on attacking state targets. In Pakistan, for example, 62% of all attacks between January 2014 and July 2018 were directed against state targets such as the local police, military, or government.

### *Sectarian Targets: Sufis in Pakistan and Shiites in Afghanistan*

- In both countries, ISK subscribed to the Islamic State's general tendency to instigate sectarian strife by actively targeting Muslim minority sects. Within Pakistan, ISK targeted minorities in at least 10 attacks, a majority of which were against Sufis and Zikri Balochis in Balochistan. In Afghanistan, a majority of attacks on religious institutions targeted Shiite communities.

### *Suicide Attacks Campaigns*

- ISK unleashed highly lethal suicide attack campaigns in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Balochistan, Pakistan; both regions provide ISK with a wide variety of targets, while Balochistan in particular offers the group safe havens and a permeable border. Between January 2014 and July 2018, each province experienced a higher level of suicide attacks compared to other regions in their respective countries. ISK-PK conducted 77% of all of its suicide attacks in Balochistan whereas ISK-AFG conducted 56% of all of its suicide attacks in Kabul.

### *Inverse Cycle of High and Low Activity Seasons in Afghanistan and Pakistan*

- ISK's attacks in Afghanistan, for the first nine months of each year, follow an almost inverse cycle to that of ISK-PK. This means that ISK's periods of high and low activity in each country alternate rather than overlap, suggesting coordination and cross-border movement of ISK militants.

## **ISK's Network**

Overall, an assessment of ISK's network in Afghanistan and Pakistan between January 2014 and December 2017 indicates that there are at least 11 groups operating in the region that have cooperated with ISK in one or more domains—i.e., ideological (publicly pledging allegiance), logistical (sharing resources), or operational (conducting joint attacks). The analysis in this report also shows that the

quality of cooperation between ISK and these groups varies between high-end (enduring) and low-end (temporary) cooperation.

### **The Effect of Alliances on ISK's Capacity**

An examination of ISK's operational links with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) shows that ISK relies heavily on attacks conducted jointly with these two groups to claim its high lethality in Pakistan.

- Collectively, 72% of all deaths and 84% of all injuries between January 2014 and July 2018 attributed to ISK attacks in Pakistan were a result of jointly claimed attacks with LeJ or JuA.
- In Pakistan, LeJ and JuA's areas of operations, especially post-alliance with ISK, overlap markedly with ISK's geographical focus.
- Lashkar-e-Islam and JuA's seasonal trends closely align with the seasonal trends of ISK-AFG and ISK-PK, respectively.

### **Strategic Implications**

Terrorist groups tend to operate within an intricate network of relationships with other actors. Once networks are established, disrupting them can be extremely difficult. The Islamic State, like other militant groups, has a history of exploiting cooperative ties with regional groups. Outside of South Asia, the Islamic State's ability to forge ties with groups across the Middle East and Africa has allowed it to project power and extend the influence of its brand, while its affiliates have reaped material and reputational benefits.<sup>3</sup> So far, it appears that ISK is embracing a similar strategy in the AfPak region. Based on the analysis of ISK's linkages with regional groups and its overall organizational capacity as measured by the metrics used in this report, ISK has strong incentives to continue to foster cooperation with other militant groups. Research shows that the benefits that terrorist groups can reap via alliances are even more pronounced when a core central group is involved in an alliance hub.<sup>4</sup> As such, alliance hubs are well positioned to endure in difficult environments. Viewed from this lens, the ISK alliance hub presents a grave threat to both regional and international security. For governments, eradicating terrorist networks is difficult if there is a lack of understanding in terms of how they form and function. An understanding of ISK's links with other groups is thus central to understanding the evolution of the group and the steps needed to thwart its progression.

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3 Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 4.

4 Tricia Bacon, "Is the Enemy of My Enemy my Friend? How Terrorist Groups Select Partners," *Security Studies* 27:3 (2018).

## Introduction

*“And in spite of the ongoing crusade ... we bring the mujahidin the good news of the Islamic State’s expansion to Khurasan. Indeed, the mujahidin from amongst the soldiers of the Khilafah have fulfilled the conditions and met the requirements for the declaration of Wilayat Khurasan. They have announced their bay’ah to Amirul-Mu’minin (may Allah preserve him) Khalifah Ibrahim, and he has accepted it and appointed the noble Shaykh Hafidh Said Khan (may Allah preserve him) as the Wali of Wilayat Khurasan, and appointed as his deputy the noble Shaykh Abdur-Ra’uf Khadim Abu Talhah (may Allah preserve him).”<sup>5</sup>*

The AfPak region is widely known to be one of most militant-saturated regions in the world. The notable presence of an Islamic State affiliate in the region has further complicated a multifaceted militant landscape, one with grave implications for regional conflict dynamics. The official announcement of the Islamic State Khorasan (ISK), also known as Daesh, was made in January 2015 via an audio recording by the Islamic State’s spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani. But the ambitious idea of the Islamic State’s Wilayat Khorasan began materializing prior to this announcement when a series of defections to the Islamic State took place in 2014. Nine former members of al-Qa`ida defected to the Islamic State in March 2014,<sup>6</sup> and six Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commanders from Pakistan’s various tribal agencies publicly pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2014.<sup>7</sup> The appointment of a former TTP leader in early 2015, Hafiz Saeed, as ISK’s first emir was an early indication that the chapter was intended to be a localized version of the Islamic State.

In the years following the official formation of ISK, the group launched some of the most devastating attacks in the AfPak region. In July 2018, ISK was responsible for the second-deadliest terrorist attack in Pakistan’s history when a suicide bomber targeted an election campaign rally in Balochistan, killing 149 people.<sup>8</sup> Two months prior, in April 2018, Afghanistan experienced one of the deadliest days ever for media professionals when two ISK attacks killed a total of 10 journalists.<sup>9</sup>

At the conclusion of its fourth year of operations in AfPak, ISK has assumed the status of a dangerous threat, both regionally and internationally. Yet, several questions about ISK’s lethality and resilience remain unanswered. What are the broader contours of ISK’s lethality, targets, and tactics in Afghanistan and Pakistan? How do ISK’s operational trends compare and contrast across the two countries? How have ISK’s alliances contributed to its overall capacity and resilience? More broadly, what explains ISK’s ability to survive and thrive in the AfPak region, and what do its operational trends tell us about its future trajectory?

## Objectives and Layout of the Report

In order to shed light on ISK’s overall capacity in the region, and the factors underlying its growing potency, the goals of this report are as follows:

- Provide a comparative assessment of ISK’s organizational capacity and operational trends in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Map and analyze ISK’s various alliances with regional militant groups, which underpin ISK’s capacity and resilience

5 “Say, ‘Die in Your Rage!’ An Address by the Spokesman for the Islamic State the Mujahid Shaykh Abu Muhammad al-Adnani ash-Shami,” Al-Hayat Media Center, 2015.

6 Don Ressler, “Situating the Emergence of the Islamic State of Khorasan,” *CTC Sentinel* 8:3 (2015).

7 Tim Craig and Haq Nawaz Khan, “Pakistani Taliban leaders pledge allegiance to Islamic Stat,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2014.

8 “Pakistan Mourns 149 Dead in Country’s Second Deadliest Terror Attack,” BBC, July 16, 2018.

9 James Mackenzie, “Deadliest Day for Afghan Journalists: 10 Killed in Two Attacks,” Reuters, April 30, 2018.

- Provide an assessment of the direct effects of ISK's operational alliances on its lethality and areas of operation

The analysis in this report draws on multiple original datasets, which cover the time period January 2014 to July 2018, and draw on open-source materials.<sup>10</sup> See the methodology section for details on the data collection and coding process, and limitations.

The report is organized in four parts. Using open-source data, Part 1 of the report compares and contrasts the geography, lethality, temporality, targets, tactics, and seasonality of ISK attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. A comparative assessment of ISK's activities in these neighboring countries allows for an examination of the similarities and differences in ISK's approach in each state, and the degree of trans-border coordination. Having established an overview of ISK's organizational capacity, Part 2 lays out how ISK has been able to build its capacity. This part maps out the universe of ISK's alliances in the AfPak region, explaining various *types of cooperation* across three domains (ideological, logistical, and operational) and the *quality of cooperation* (high-end and low-end cooperation). Part 3 of the report focuses on three key allies from ISK's broad network of alliances to show the extent to which ISK relies on its operational relationships to sustain its activity. This part focuses on jointly claimed attacks by ISK and its allies, as well as the overlap in their areas of operation and seasonality trends. In conclusion, Part 4 offers a strategic analysis of ISK's activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan and highlights the associated security implications.

The following sections provide a brief summary of the key findings from Parts 1, 2, and 3 of the report. Detailed analysis and additional discussion regarding the summary points below are provided within each part of the report.

## Key Findings

In sum, the findings of this report show that ISK has been effective in augmenting its organizational capacity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, as measured by the metrics used in this report. The source of ISK's lethality is rooted in the group's partnerships with regional militant groups. Moreover, various similarities and distinctions in the nature and timing of ISK's attacks in both countries indicate that ISK's activity is coordinated across the AfPak region to a substantial degree. Taken together, the findings strongly suggest that ISK's continued ability to leverage and make effective use of a cross-border resourceful network in the Khorasan region, will define the parameters of its future trajectory.<sup>11</sup> A nuanced understanding of how ISK fosters and maintains its key alliances, which facilitate its activity in AfPak, is imperative to tackle the group successfully. Below is a more detailed overview of the report's findings.

### Part 1: ISK Operational Insights

Drawing on an analysis of two datasets of all ISK-linked attacks (suspected or claimed) in Afghanistan (ISK-AFG dataset) and Pakistan (ISK-PK dataset) between January 2014 and July 2018, this report presents the most complete picture available to date on ISK activity in the AfPak region. An analysis of ISK's geography of attacks, temporal trends, lethality (deaths and injuries), target types, and tactics provides the following insights:

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10 The research team involved in the data collection process for this report includes Nakissa Jahanbani, Charmaine Willis, and Mikki Franklin.

11 Past research suggests that amongst other factors, the success of counterinsurgency (COIN) practices is often determined by whether COIN forces are able to disrupt tangible support to insurgents. For example, see Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clark, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, "Paths to Victory: Lessons from Modern Insurgencies," RAND Corporation, 2013.

### *Hitting Afghanistan Twice as Hard as Pakistan*

- ISK has been far more active and lethal in Afghanistan than in Pakistan, with more than double the number of attacks and individuals killed in the former than the latter. ISK's higher activity in Afghanistan is enabled by its more fragile internal security environment, compared to Pakistan. Between January 2014 and July 2018, ISK attacks amounted to a total of 211 attacks and resulted in 1,511 deaths and 3,220 injuries in Afghanistan. In contrast, over the same time period, ISK attacks in Pakistan amounted to a total of 83 attacks, 706 deaths, and 1,120 injuries. Although ISK was less active in Pakistan, the number killed and injured per ISK attack on average was higher in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.

### *Ramping Up Lethality*

- ISK attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have progressively killed and injured more people each year, indicating resilience in the face of U.S. airstrikes, Pakistani military operations, and clashes with the Taliban.
  - » In Afghanistan, compared to 2015, total deaths and injuries due to ISK attacks increased by over four times in 2016, and by over seven times in 2017.
  - » In Pakistan, compared to 2015, total deaths and injuries due to ISK attacks increased by over three times in 2016, and by over four times in 2017.
- During 2017, ISK managed to kill and injure a significantly large number of individuals per attack in Pakistan. In this year, ISK-PK's lethality per attack surpassed all other years across AfPak.

### *Provoking and Challenging the State*

- In both countries, ISK sustained its focus on attacking state targets throughout the years. In Pakistan, for example, 62% of its attacks were directed against state targets such as the local police, military, or government.
- In both countries, suicide attacks were most frequently directed against state targets. This is not surprising given that state targets are typically more difficult for terrorist groups to strike effectively as they are more likely to be hardened. In Pakistan, 61% of all suicide attacks were aimed at state targets, compared to 47% in Afghanistan.

### *Sectarian Targets: Sufis in Pakistan and Shiites in Afghanistan*

- ISK subscribed to the Islamic State's general tendency to instigate sectarian strife by actively targeting Muslim minority sects across Afghanistan and Pakistan. Within Pakistan, ISK targeted minorities in at least 10 attacks, a majority of which were against Sufis and Zikri Balochis in Balochistan. In Afghanistan, at least 11 of 22 attacks on religious institutions were against specific sects, a majority of which were Shiite communities.

### *Suicide Attack Campaigns*

- ISK conducted highly lethal suicide campaigns in Kabul, Afghanistan, and in Balochistan, Pakistan. These two regions experienced the most suicide attacks relative to other provinces in their respective countries. ISK-PK conducted 77% of all of its suicide attacks between January 2014 and July 2018 in Balochistan whereas ISK-AFG conducted 56% of all of its suicide attacks in Kabul.
- More generally, ISK relied heavily on the tactic of suicide bombing to maintain its lethality in each country. Across all years, ISK's suicide attacks in Pakistan accounted for 22% of its total

attacks, but accounted for an astounding 83% of all deaths. In comparison, ISK's suicide attacks in Afghanistan made up 32% of all attacks in the country, while accounting for 66% of all deaths.

### *Top Targets of Suicide Attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan*

- In terms of state targets, local police and military targets were hit the most frequently by suicide attacks in Pakistan, whereas in Afghanistan local government officials were the top targets.
- In terms of civilian targets, religious institutions were most frequently hit by ISK suicide attacks in both countries.

### *Inverse Cycle of High-Activity Period in Afghanistan Compared to Pakistan*

- ISK's attacks in Afghanistan, for the first nine months of each year, follow an almost inverse cycle to that of ISK-PK. This means that ISK-AFG and ISK-PK's periods of high and low activity tend to follow each other, rather than coincide. While January to April sees a slow-down of ISK activity in Pakistan, ISK-AFG attacks begin escalating during this period. In general, attacks in Pakistan remained low during the months of Ramadan and Moharram, but they appear to rise sharply in Afghanistan.

## **Part 2: ISK's Network**

What explains ISK's remarkable capacity to wage a highly violent campaign across AfPak? The data suggests that cooperation between ISK and its allies in various domains is critical in augmenting ISK's organizational capacity and, if sustained, will ultimately contribute to its survival and lethality in the region. Overall, an assessment of ISK's network in AfPak indicates that there are at least 11 groups operating in the region that have cooperated with ISK in one or more domains. The three domains of cooperation conceptualized in this report are ideological (publicly pledging *bay`a*), logistical (sharing resources), and operational (conducting joint attacks). These relationships are summarized in Table 1. As indicated in the table, two key metrics are used to assess ISK's alliances: *domains of cooperation* and *quality of cooperation*. The first metric indicates the type of domain(s) in which a group cooperated with ISK, while the second metric indicates the number of domains a group engaged in with ISK. Cooperation in two or more domains, or a merger with ISK is categorized as high-end cooperation. Cooperation in a single domain is categorized as low-end cooperation. Upon further investigation of all groups linked to ISK in any domain, some were identified as having potentially merged with ISK, where there was evidence of unification of leadership and members.<sup>12</sup> High-end cooperation between groups is generally expected to endure over time, while low-end cooperation is expected to be short-lived and tactical.

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12 Although all groups identified as having merged with ISK pledged allegiance to ISK, a pledge of allegiance on its own does not necessarily indicate a merger. A group is only considered to have merged with ISK where there is evidence that the group unified its leadership and members with ISK at some point, and ceased to conduct operations under its former organizational name. As such, Ansar al-Mujahideen is considered to be engaged in a low-end cooperative relationship with ISK, despite a pledge of allegiance, due to insufficient evidence of a complete merger or cooperation in another domain. Moreover, while the IMU and Jundullah-TTP both cooperated with ISK in all three domains, the research team only found evidence of a merger between IMU and ISK.

*Table 1: An Overview of ISK's Alliances in AfPak (January 2014 - December 2017)*

<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Ideological Cooperation</i>	<i>Logistical Cooperation</i>	<i>Operational Cooperation</i>	<i>Quality of Cooperation</i>
	<i>Pledge of Allegiance</i>	<i>Sharing Resources</i>	<i>Joint Attacks</i>	<i>High-End/Low-End</i>
<b>Bajaur Faction (TTP)</b>	√			High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Oraknzai Faction (TTP)</b>	√			High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</b>	√	√	√	High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Jundullah Faction (TTP)</b>	√	√	√	High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Ansar al-Mujahideen</b>	√			Low-End
<b>Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad</b>	√	√		High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan/ Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)</b>		√		Low-End
<b>Lashkar-e-Islam</b>		√	√	High-End
<b>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Al-Alami)</b>		√	√	High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Jamaat-ul-Ahrar</b>			√	Low-End
<b>Balochistan National Army</b>			√	Low-End

Out of the 11 groups listed, seven are categorized as high-end cooperative relationships; all of these groups are suspected to have cooperated with ISK in more than one of the three domains or potentially merged with ISK. Groups that have merged with ISK—i.e., TTP Bajaur, TTP Orakzai, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—have likely united their leadership and members with ISK. Groups engaged in high-end relationships—i.e., Jundallah-TTP, Lashkar-e-Islam, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad—are expected to have enduring relationships with ISK due to their cooperation with ISK in multiple domains. Four groups are identified as being engaged in low-end cooperation with ISK: Ansar al Mujahiddeen, Ahl-e- Sunnat Wal Jamaat, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and Baluchistan National Army. While there are suspected links between these groups and ISK, the cooperation reported thus far has been limited, and restricted to only one of the three cooperative domains.

What explains the varying degrees of cooperation amongst ISK's alliances? Why have some groups engaged in deeper relationships with ISK than others? An investigation into four characteristics (ideology, goals, targets, and subjection to counterterrorism operations) of the groups engaged in high-end cooperative relationships with ISK (cooperation in multiple operational domains or merger) shows that six out of the seven share common features that explain their willingness to align with ISK. Firstly, all groups share the goal of implementation of sharia law and secondly, subscribe to the Sunni Deobandi school of thought. Thirdly, their targets include the Pakistani state, minorities, and the Shiite com-

munity. Finally, the Pakistani Army has subjected all of the groups except one to military operations.<sup>13</sup> These four common characteristics seem to make groups suitable allies of ISK within the region. On the other hand, groups engaged in low-end cooperation (cooperation in a single domain) have ideology, goals, and/or targets distinct from ISK. For example, although the Balochistan National Army (BNA) shares a common enemy with ISK (i.e., the Pakistani state), it does not share ISK's ideology or long-term goals since BNA's long-term goal includes gaining autonomy in the province of Balochistan.

### Part 3: The Effect of Alliances on ISK's Capacity

ISK's diverse network of alliances with regional militant groups is clearly a core component of its efforts to embed itself within the AfPak region—but to what extent have these relationships bolstered ISK's operational capacity? A closer examination of ISK's operational links with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) shows that ISK relies heavily on attacks conducted jointly with these two groups to sustain its lethality in Pakistan. Collectively, ISK attacks linked to either LeJ or JuA account for 72% of all deaths and 84% of all injuries attributed to ISK attacks in Pakistan. Additionally, ISK's seasonal trends closely align with the seasonal trends of LeJ and Lashkar-e-Islam in Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively.

### A Bird's Eye View: ISK's Practical Approach

Terrorist groups frequently cooperate with each other to enhance their capacity and attain their political objectives.<sup>14</sup> As such, it is no surprise that ISK has pursued a strategy in the AfPak region that includes forming alliances with suitable partners. The Islamic State's goal of establishing Wilayat Khorasan is ambitious; the 'Khorasan' region not only includes the Afghanistan-Pakistan region but also extends to include parts of Iran, Central Asia, and China.<sup>15</sup> Establishing Wilayat Khorasan is a critical part of the Islamic State's quixotic plan; it is the *mujahedeen* of the Khorasan region who are expected to deliver a momentous defeat to the enemies of Islam, which will eventually result in the arrival of the judgment day.<sup>16</sup> In addition to such ambitious goals, the Khorasan region in general and the AfPak region in particular is inundated with an assortment of militant groups that have overlapping and competing ideologies and agendas. This characteristic of the region presents both obstacles and opportunities for the ISK brand, as it creates the potential to generate alliances as well as rivalries.

ISK organizational level strategy (i.e., its relationships with other groups) appears to vary according to the broader political environment within Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as the nature of the militant landscape. In Afghanistan, which is a much more fragile state than Pakistan, ISK has taken on the Afghan Taliban as a rival,<sup>17</sup> which it brands as "filthy nationalists"<sup>18</sup> while simultaneously engaging in conflict with the Afghan and coalition security forces. In Pakistan, however, ISK faces a much stronger state than in Afghanistan, and does not face a rival comparable in status to the Afghan Taliban. As such, ISK's strategy in Pakistan is more focused on building alliances and leveraging the capacity of its most lethal groups. The benefits derived from successful alliances within Pakistan can help advance ISK's goals in both countries as it facilitates cross-border activity and propaganda, and

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13 It is currently unknown whether the Pakistani state has taken any concerted action against the group Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad. At present, the group appears to have limited capacity (discussed in Part 2 of this report).

14 Moghadam.

15 John Hall, "The ISIS Map of the World," Daily Mail, June 30, 2014.

16 Abdul Basit, "IS Penetration in Afghanistan-Pakistan: Assessment, Impact and Implications," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11:3 (2017).

17 Amira Jadoon, Nakissa Jahanbani, and Charmaine Willis, "Challenging the ISK Brand in Afghanistan-Pakistan," *CTC Sentinel* 11:8 (2018).

18 Borhan Osman, "ISK's Battle for Minds: What are its Main Messages and Who Do They Attract?" Afghanistan Analysts Network, December 12, 2016.

contributes to recruitment across the region. Thus, building alliances in Pakistan can help ISK exert influence on both sides of the AfPak border and position itself as the preeminent terrorist/insurgent group in the broader area of operations. Practically, the success of such a strategy depends on whether ISK can maintain its alliances in the long term and survive a clash with the Taliban and an onslaught by Pakistani, Afghan, and international forces.

## Methodology and Definitions

The data collection process for this project was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, data was collected on ISK's relationships with other militant organizations for complete years between 2014 and 2017 in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the second phase, data was collected on ISK-linked attacks<sup>19</sup> in Afghanistan and Pakistan between January 2014 and July 2018. Although ISK's alliances with other groups were primarily tracked between 2014-2017, each ally identified in this period was further researched in 2018 to capture any major changes in their relationship with ISK.<sup>20</sup>

Data on the attacks of select allies of ISK was also collected for the time period between January 2012 and July 2018. The motivation behind using a longer time period for ISK's allies was to be able to compare these groups' behavior three years prior to ISK's arrival in 2015, and three years after. Insights from these datasets are referenced in this report to draw important parallels with ISK's activity, and to show direct links (such as joint attacks). A more comprehensive analysis of ISK's allies will be presented in a follow-up report.

### Data Sources

The data compiled on ISK attacks and characteristics of ISK's relationship with regional groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan relied on multiple sources. These included news reports, academic studies, and reports by field practitioners. LexisNexis was employed to obtain relevant news articles, using search strings for different variations of each group's name. For example, Islamic State Khorasan was also searched by its regional name of "Daesh" or "Daish."

### The ISK Network

Relying on open-source data, a concerted effort was made to develop a comprehensive list of AfPak organizations with any link to ISK, which were subsequently researched individually. This list was compiled by using existing overviews by other scholars and with the creation of relevant search strings in LexisNexis. An example of typical search strings to identify cooperating groups would be *Pakistan AND Islamic State OR Daesh AND link\* OR allegiance OR alliance OR support OR bay`a OR pledge*. This phase of the research included coding organizational and relational variables of a group with regard to ISK. The network database includes variables that define relationship characteristics of 25 groups and ISK over the time period 2014-2017. For each group, the research team coded the following variables:

1. *Date of Group Formation*
2. *Aliases*

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19 An incident was coded as an ISK-linked attack if it was either directly claimed by ISK and/or if authorities suspected it to be conducted by ISK.

20 The research team did not examine 2018 in the first phase, as the data collection process for the phase began in early 2018, and it was considered appropriate to exclude 2018 given the limited number of months in the year. However, during the writing of this report, all ISK alliances identified in the 2014-2017 period were researched further to capture any changes in their relationship with ISK in 2018, and these have been reflected in the report. If any new groups initiated cooperation with ISK in 2018, these have not been included in this report.

3. *Home Country*
4. *Sub-region of Group*
5. *Targets of Group*
6. *Group Goals*
7. *Group Ideology*
8. *Ideological Cooperation (public pledge of allegiance)*
9. *Date of Pledge*
10. *Formal Acceptance of Pledge by ISK/Islamic State*
11. *Logistical Cooperation with ISK (shared resources)*
12. *Operational Cooperation with ISK (joint attacks)*
13. *Clashes with ISK*
14. *Defections to ISK*

The data and analysis presented in this report is based on definitions developed to guide coding for this report specifically. The definitions for ideological, logistical, and operational cooperation are derived from works of various terrorism scholars.<sup>21</sup> Two key metrics are used to assess ISK's alliances: *domains of cooperation* and *quality of cooperation*. The first metric indicates the type of domain(s) in which a group is cooperating with ISK, while the second metric indicates the number of domains a group is engaged in with ISK. These two metrics are discussed in detail in Part 2 of the report.

### **Attack Data**

The ISK attack databases code several variables that measure the magnitude and nature of all ISK attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan between January 2014 and July 2018. An incident was coded as an ISK-linked attack if it was either directly claimed by ISK and/or if authorities suspected it to be conducted by ISK.<sup>22</sup> Attacks by ISK's allies were coded for the time period of January 2012 and July 2018. Again, ISK allies datasets employ a longer time period than the ISK attacks to capture changes in the allies' behavior after the arrival of ISK in the region. For ISK and each of its allies, the variables coded are listed below:<sup>23</sup>

- *Attack Location*
- *Attack Tactic*
- *Target Type*
- *Targeted Minority Sect*
- *Lethality (Killed and Wounded)*
- *Militants Involved/Killed*

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21 Works by Assaf Moghadam and Ely Karmon were relied upon heavily to develop definitions for different types and quality of cooperation.

22 The following incidents were excluded from the database: kidnappings and hostage takings where outcomes were unknown and events where authorities had varying suspicions about which groups were involved in an attack.

23 To create the most holistic dataset as possible for each group, the research team did not rely on other datasets such as GTD, which do not currently cover this report's timeline. Additionally, the research team captured other information such as infighting and information on participants, which other datasets do not capture. The dataset compiled for this report was cross-referenced with GTD to ensure that the research team produced the most comprehensive dataset to date.

- *Secondary Group Claiming Attack*

### **Caveats and Limitations**

There are various limitations when using open-source data in terms of reliability and depth of information. Reliance on open-source data can make it challenging to identify fully the exact nature of relationships between militant groups, especially since some groups may opt to cooperate outside of the public domain. The author is also mindful that at times, militant groups may falsely claim attacks that they have not in fact conducted and that information may be reported via biased sources. To mitigate this, coding for all variables used multiple sources to the greatest extent possible. To minimize the issue of false claims by groups, attacks with widely disputed claims were excluded. Having said that, the ISK attack data in this report is presented as attacks either claimed by ISK or linked to ISK by local officials, rather than attacks that have been proven to be conducted by ISK.

Due to reliance on newspaper sources accessed via LexisNexis, it is possible that the report's findings may have overlooked incidents that were reported in less widely circulated local newspapers in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Underreporting is also possible due to the political sensitivity of the region and international pressure on Pakistan to do more against militant groups based in its territory. While underreporting may be a concern, exaggerated reporting in most instances is unlikely to be an issue, meaning that the report's analysis is based on more conservative rather than inflated estimates.

To ensure quality control, secondary coders crosschecked all of the data collected. Finally, all attack-related data was cross-referenced with the Global Terrorism Database, which is current through to the end of 2017. Any events not captured by the report's methodology were individually researched and included in the databases to ensure completeness.

## Part 1. ISK in Afghanistan and Pakistan

This section of the report examines ISK attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It presents data analysis and key takeaways in three segments: (1.1) an overview of ISK attacks, (1.2) ISK's operational trends, and (1.3) ISK's lethality and resilience. Two datasets were compiled—one for each country—covering the time period January 2014 to July 2018. An incident was coded as an ISK attack if it was either directly claimed by ISK and/or if authorities suspected it to be conducted by ISK. Attacks in the Pakistan dataset are referred to as “ISK-PK,” and attacks in the Afghanistan dataset are referred to as “ISK-AFG.”

### 1.1 Overview of ISK Attacks

This section provides an overview of all ISK attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan by location, frequency, and lethality. Tables 2 and 3 provide a summary of all attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan, respectively, while Figures 1 and 2 map the location and intensity of these attacks.

#### ISK Afghanistan

The ISK-AFG dataset includes 211 ISK attacks in Afghanistan between January 2014 and July 2018, with the first attack in the database recorded in August 2015. This confirms the findings of other reports that indicate that ISK first became active in Afghanistan in 2015; in January 2015, Afghan army intelligence flagged the presence of 70 ISK members in Farah, and reports emerged about the dissemination of ISK propaganda in Kabul.<sup>24</sup> Overall, the ISK-AFG dataset aligns with general reports about ISK's consolidation of power in Nangarhar, and its ability to conduct highly lethal attacks in Kabul. The ISK-AFG data also shows that the group has limited capacity and presence in other districts and provinces such as Helmand or Kunar, with most of its activity concentrated in Nangarhar, Jawzjan, and Kabul.

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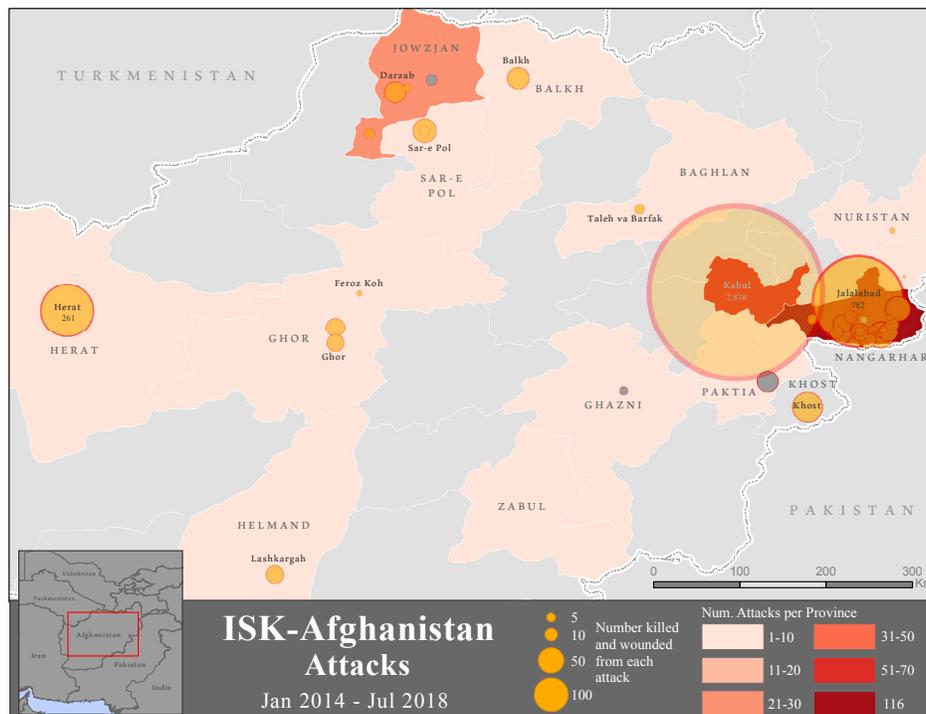
24 Antonia Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the New Central Asian Jihad* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018).

*Table 2: Summary of ISK-AFG Attacks (2014 - 2018)*

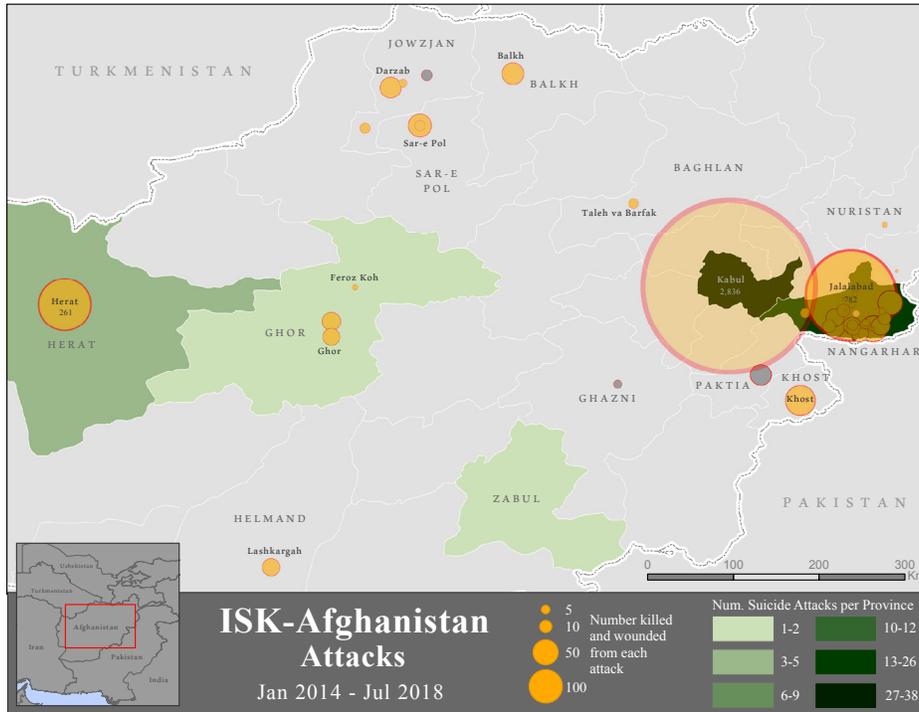
	Total Attacks	Suicide Attacks	Total Killed	Total Wounded
<b>Nangarhar</b>	119	25	437	785
<b>Kabul</b>	52	38	744	2,092
<b>Jawzjan</b>	20	0	39	28
<b>Herat</b>	4	3	92	169
<b>Paktia</b>	3	0	51	77
<b>Ghor</b>	2	1	36	0
<b>Sar-i-Pul</b>	2	0	56	3
<b>Baghlan</b>	1	0	9	0
<b>Balkh</b>	1	0	15	30
<b>Feroz Koh</b>	1	0	27	0
<b>Ghazni</b>	1	0	0	7
<b>Helmand</b>	1	0	1	29
<b>Kunar</b>	1	0	1	0
<b>Logar</b>	1	0	0	0
<b>Nuristan</b>	1	0	3	0
<b>Zabul</b>	1	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>1,511</b>	<b>3,220</b>

*Figure 1: Geography of ISK-AFG Attacks (2014 - 2018)*

(a) Number of Attacks Per Province



*(b) Number of Suicide Attacks Per Province*



ISK Pakistan

The ISK-Pakistan dataset tracks a total of 83 attacks between January 2014 and July 2018. ISK’s activity in Pakistan was first noticed in the form of propaganda materials, which appeared in the Afghan-Pakistan tribal belt in Urdu, Pahtu, and Dari languages; this included a 12-page booklet that announced the creation of the Khorasan chapter.<sup>25</sup> Aligning with this timeline, the ISK-PK dataset records the first attack by ISK in late 2014. Overall, ISK in Pakistan has focused its efforts in the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

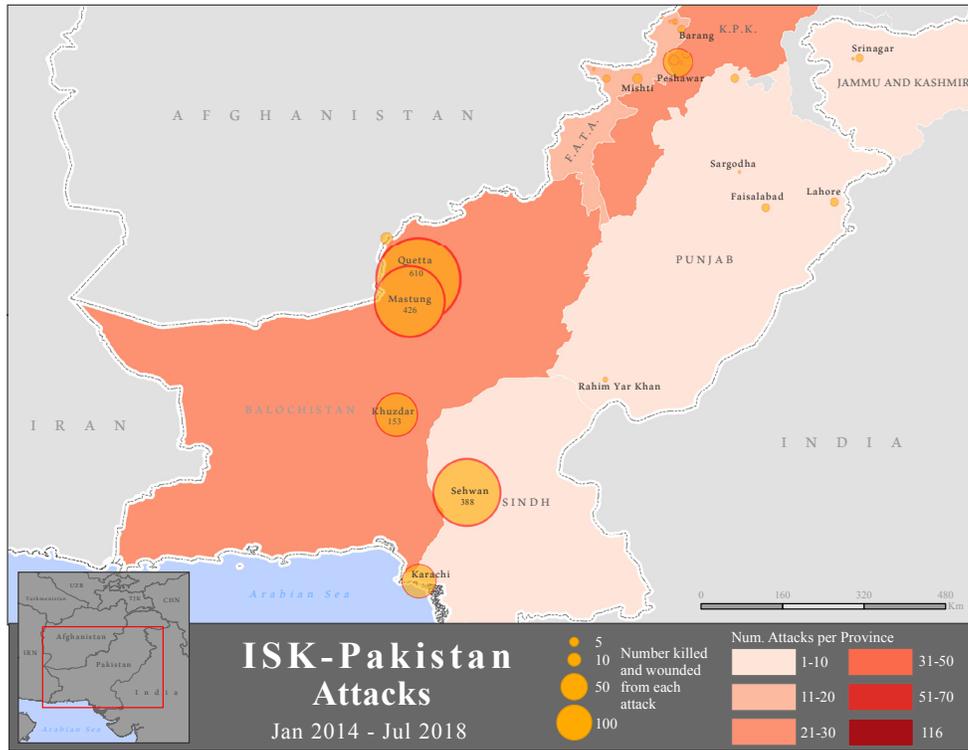
*Table 3: Summary of ISK-PK Attacks (2014 - 2018)*

	Total Attacks	Suicide Attacks	Total Deaths	Total Wounded
<b>Balochistan</b>	26	14	511	691
<b>KPK</b>	24	1	27	60
<b>Punjab</b>	9	2	7	14
<b>Sindh</b>	9	1	140	346
<b>Bajaur Agency</b>	7	0	9	2
<b>Kashmir (India)</b>	4	0	5	1
<b>Kurram Agency</b>	3	0	3	2
<b>Orakzai Agency</b>	1	0	4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>1,120</b>

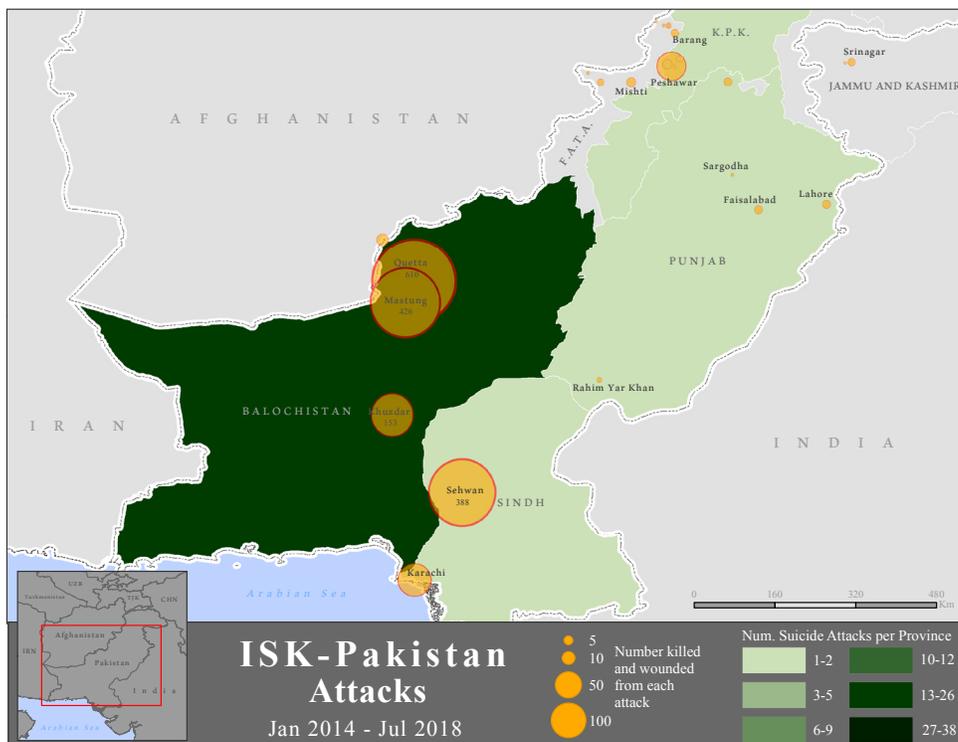
25 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "Islamic State Footprints Surface in Parts of Bannu," *Dawn*, November 13, 2014.

**Figure 2: Geography of ISK-PK Attacks (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Number of Attacks Per Province**



**(b) Number of Suicide Attacks Per Province**



**Takeaway 1: In Afghanistan, ISK was most active in Nangarhar and Kabul, whereas in Pakistan it was most active in Balochistan and KPK.**

In Afghanistan, the majority of ISK attacks took place in Nangarhar and Kabul, which collectively accounted for 80% of all of ISK-AFG attacks between 2015 and 2018. Interestingly, although Nangarhar was the location for over half of all ISK-AFG attacks, total deaths and injuries due to ISK attacks were far greater in Kabul. Across all years, Kabul made up 25% of all ISK-AFG attacks but accounted for 60% of all deaths and injuries.

In Pakistan, ISK focused much of its energy in Balochistan and KPK with an approximately equal number of attacks in each province. Collectively, these two provinces accounted for 60% of all ISK-PK attacks between 2014 and 2018. But ISK was not equally lethal in both provinces; the total deaths and injuries in Balochistan accounted for almost 66% of all deaths and injuries caused by ISK attacks. Sindh stands out as another province that experienced disproportionately high levels of deaths and injuries.

**Takeaway 2: ISK unleashed an intense suicide attack campaign in two provinces: Kabul, Afghanistan, and Balochistan, Pakistan.**

What explains the high levels of deaths and injuries in Kabul and Balochistan compared to other regions in their respective countries? In both provinces, the disproportionately high lethality is underpinned by ISK's high use of suicide attacks. In Afghanistan, of all suicide attacks conducted by ISK-AFG between 2015 and 2018, about 56% were conducted in Kabul. In parallel, ISK-PK conducted 77% of its total suicide attacks in the province of Balochistan; an astounding 1,157 of the total 1,202 (or 96% of deaths and injuries in Balochistan) were the result of suicide attacks.

ISK's focus on Kabul and Balochistan appears to be driven by various factors. On one hand, compared to other regions in Afghanistan, Kabul provides the group greater opportunities to strike both state and civilian targets. Not only is Kabul the most densely populated region in Afghanistan, it is also close to ISK's stronghold in Nangarhar. On the other hand, Balochistan's volatile security environment offers an attractive operating environment to a hub of militant groups in Pakistan including ISK, and has permeable borders with both Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>26</sup> Balochistan also offers a plethora of appealing targets for ISK; in addition to attacking state targets, the group has frequently conducted highly lethal attacks against local minorities.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the province's status as the nucleus of China's infrastructure investment in Pakistan provides additional opportunities to ISK to launch provocative attacks.<sup>28</sup>

ISK's suicide campaigns in both Kabul and Balochistan are likely to continue. For example, Pakistan experienced its second-deadliest terrorist attacks in Mastung, Balochistan, in July 2018 as the country prepared for national elections. A suicide bomber conducted his attack at an election rally, killing about 149 and injuring at least 186. The Islamic State claimed the attack, although local authorities identified the attacker as an LeJ operative who had been residing in Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Kabul experienced a series of suicide attacks during election season in October 2018.<sup>30</sup>

### Geographical Shifts

The geographical location of ISK's activity changed during the time period of analysis. Figures 3 and

26 Malik Siraj Akbar, "In Balochistan, Dying Hopes for Peace," *New York Times*, July 19, 2018.

27 Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "Quetta Attack a Gory Reminder of Islamic State's Presence in Balochistan," *Diplomat*, April 5, 2018.

28 Farhan Bokhari and Kiran Stacey, "China Woos Pakistan Militants to secure Belt and Road Projects," *Financial Times*, February 19, 2018.

29 Mohammad Zafar, "Mastung Suicide Bomber Identified as Hafeez Nawaz from Abbottabad," *Express Tribune*, July 19, 2018.

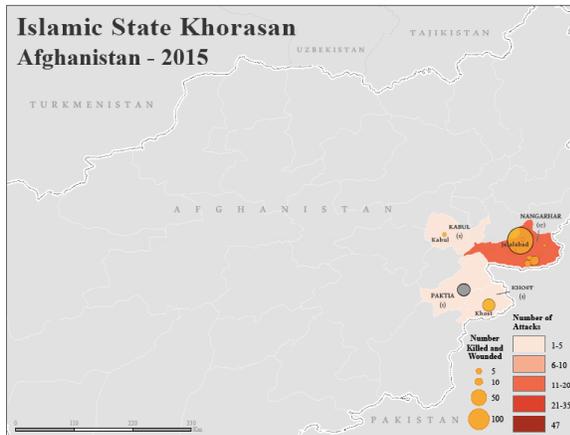
30 "Afghan Election Commission Officials Injured in Blast Near Kabul Headquarters," Reuters, October 29, 2018.

4 show how ISK activity shifted in Afghanistan and Pakistan every year between 2014 and 2018.

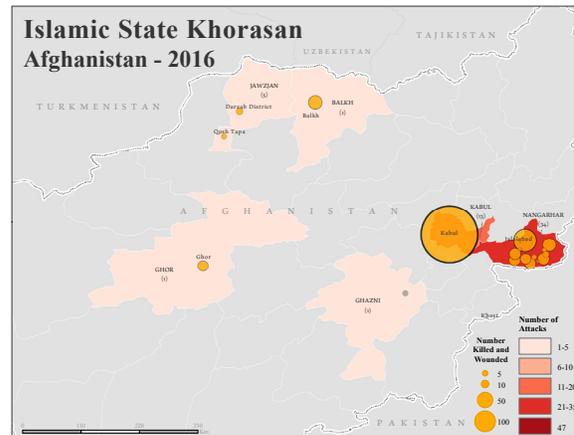
**Figure 3: Geographical Shifts in ISK-AFG Attacks Over Time (2015 - 2018)**

(Note: These maps have been reduced in size so the general progression over time can be seen side-by-side. Full-size versions of these maps are available in the appendix.)

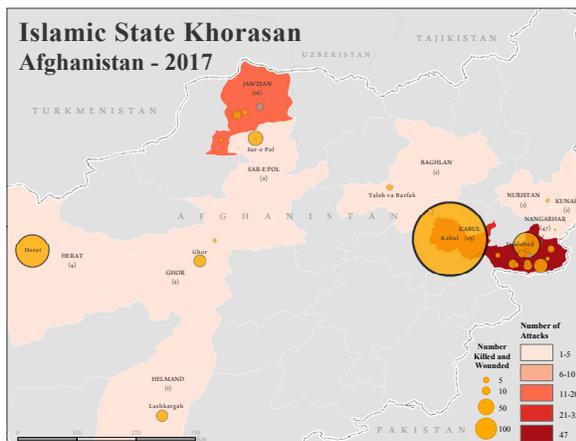
(a) 2015



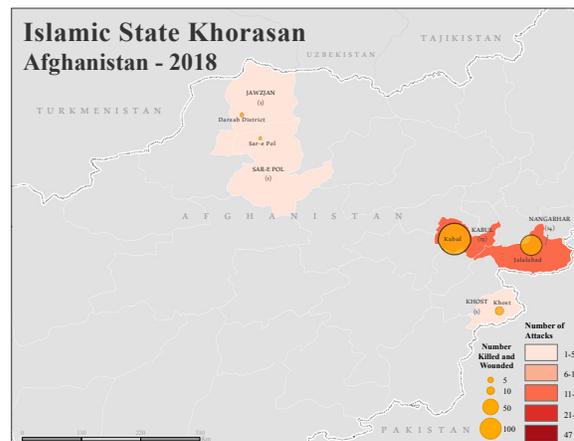
(b) 2016



(c) 2017



(d) 2018\*



\* Partial Year Data

**Takeaway 3: While ISK-AFG primarily set up camp in Nangarhar, it became active in locations beyond Nangarhar in 2016 and 2017.**

Figure 3 shows how the location of ISK’s attacks in Afghanistan shifted between 2015 and 2018. In 2015, attacks were mostly observed in the regions bordering Pakistan: there were 18 attacks in Nangarhar; one attack each in Logar, Kabul, and Zabol; and two attacks in Paktia. In 2016, while the major focus remained on Nangarhar and Kabul, there were additional attacks in Jawzjan, Ghazni, Balkh, and Feroz-Koh. In 2017, ISK-AFG attacks were observed in additional locations such as Sari-i-Pul, Baghlan, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, Kunar, and Nuristan. Clearly, while ISK attempted to expand its geographical reach between 2015 and 2017, by 2018 its attacks were restricted to Kabul, Nangarhar, and Jawzjan.

Of all the provinces in Afghanistan, Nangarhar has undoubtedly emerged as ISK-AFG’s stronghold in the country. Whether this was planned or accidental is still to be determined. A likely explanation for this is that many members of the TTP, who initially switched allegiance to ISK, were already based in

Nangarhar.<sup>31</sup> As discussed in Part 2 of the report, TTP's Orakzai and Bajaur factions have potentially merged with ISK. Members of the TTP from Orakzai, North Waziristan, and Khyber tribal agencies have long been suspected of residing in Achin, Nazyan, Kot, Deh Bala, Rodat, and Ghanikhel districts to escape Pakistani military operations.<sup>32</sup> If each of the defecting TTP leaders attracted followers in their footsteps, these would have likely settled in already established safe havens across the border in Afghanistan. In addition to TTP, several other militant groups are suspected of being based in Nangarhar, including the LeI and JuA, which have cooperated with ISK in some capacity.<sup>33</sup> A robust presence of militant groups in Nangarhar has shielded ISK from attacks by Afghan forces or the Afghan Taliban in the province, while also providing a highly fertile recruitment ground.<sup>34</sup> Thus, it appears natural for Nangarhar to have emerged as ISK's stronghold in Afghanistan. Moreover, Nangarhar also provides ISK with the potential to partake in its existing lucrative local industries. The province is known to have large deposits of talc, chromite, and marble, and connects to major smuggling routes. Indeed, in May 2018, it was reported that the Islamic State was making large amounts of money from illegal mining and export of talc.<sup>35</sup> Finally, its location close to the porous Afghan-Pakistan border allows ISK militants to easily access Orakzai in Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> These factors make Nangarhar an attractive base for ISK members.

While the ISK-AFG dataset only captures a single attack in Kunar in the Chawkay district in 2017, ISK fighters reportedly relocated to the nearby eastern province of Kunar by the end of 2016 to escape the U.S. bombing campaign.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, starting in late 2016, ISK conducted 20 attacks in the province of Jawzjan, with the last attack recorded in February 2018. However, ISK's position in Jawzjan seems precarious. Qari Hekmat, a defecting Taliban commander and the leader of the self-proclaimed ISK group in Jawzjan (specifically in Qush Tapa and Darzeb), was killed in a U.S. airstrike in April 2018.

In July 2018, the Taliban unleashed a new offensive against ISK militants in the province from the Qush Tapa and Darzeb districts, which eventually resulted in ISK's loss of its positions in Jawzjan by August 2018.<sup>38</sup> Subsequently, the Taliban announced that they had eliminated the threat of ISK from Jawzjan and about 150 ISK fighters reportedly surrendered to Afghan authorities.<sup>39</sup>

While it seems that the Taliban may have successfully repelled ISK's penetration into Jawzjan, currently, it remains unclear the extent to which ISK is embedded within Kunar and is able to use it as one of its safe havens. Recent reports indicate that Afghan Taliban and ISK fighters are engaged in heavy clashes in Kunar as well,<sup>40</sup> while U.S. airstrikes continue to target both sides in the province.<sup>41</sup>

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31 Lalit K. Jha, "Most TTP Fighters Join ISK in Nangarhar: Gen. Nicholson," Pajhwok Afghan News, September 24, 2016.

32 Borhan Osman, "The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it Began and Where it Stands Now in Nangarhar," Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 27, 2016.

33 Sarah Ashraf, "ISIS Khorasan: Presence and Potential in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Region," Henry Jackson Society, October 18, 2017.

34 Ibid.

35 James Mackenzie, "Baby Powder Helping Fund Islamic State in Afghanistan: Report," Reuters, May 22, 2018.

36 Giustozzi, *Islamic State in Khorasan*.

37 Mohammad Anwal, "Islamic State Fighters in Afghanistan Flee to Kunar Province," Reuters, March 24, 2016.

38 Obaid Ali, "Qari Hekmat's Island Overrun: Taleban defeat 'ISKP' in Jawzjan," Afghanistan Analysts Network, August 4, 2018.

39 Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Says IS 'Purged' From Northern Afghan Province," Voice of America, August 1, 2018.

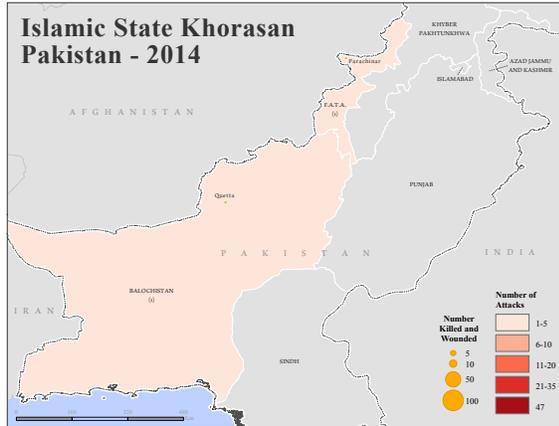
40 "Both sides suffer casualties as Taliban, Daesh clash in Kunar," Pajhwok Afghan News, October 6, 2018.

41 "26 insurgents killed in Kapisa, Kunar raids," Pajhwok Afghan News, September 23, 2018.

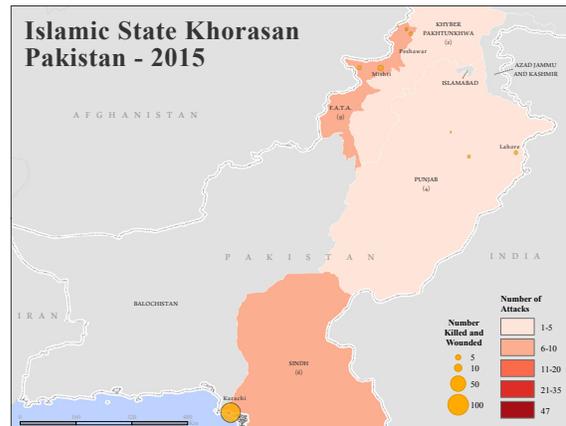
**Figure 4: Geographical Shifts in ISK-PK Attacks Over Time (2014 - 2018)**

(Note: These maps have been reduced in size so the general progression over time can be seen side-by-side. Full-size versions of these maps are available in the appendix.)

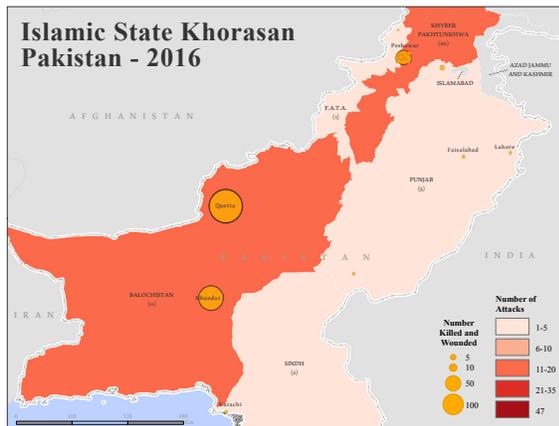
**(a) 2014**



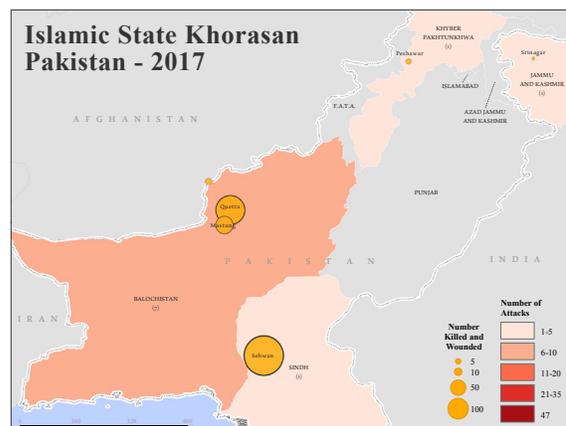
**(b) 2015**



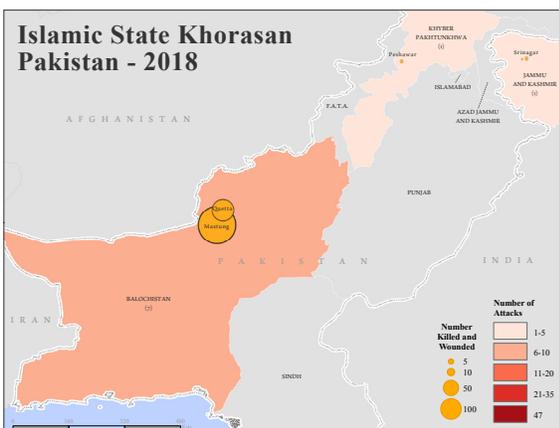
**(c) 2016**



**(d) 2017**



**(e) 2018\***



\* Partial Year Data

**Takeaway 4: ISK-PK retained its focus on Balochistan in all years except in 2015. In 2015 and 2016, ISK-PK launched attacks across Pakistan, and especially intensified its attacks in FATA and Sindh.**

The majority of ISK-PK attacks took place in Balochistan and KPK between 2014 and 2018, with the very first two attacks recorded in December 2014 in Balochistan and Kurram Agency. In 2015 and 2016, ISK expanded its geographical reach by launching attacks across Pakistan, especially intensifying its attacks in the FATA region and Sindh. ISK’s expansion to all provinces in 2016 was likely facilitated by its operational links with JuA, given the latter’s high level of activity in FATA and Sindh during that time period. ISK-PK’s geographical overlap with some of its key operational alliances is explored further in Part 3 of this report.

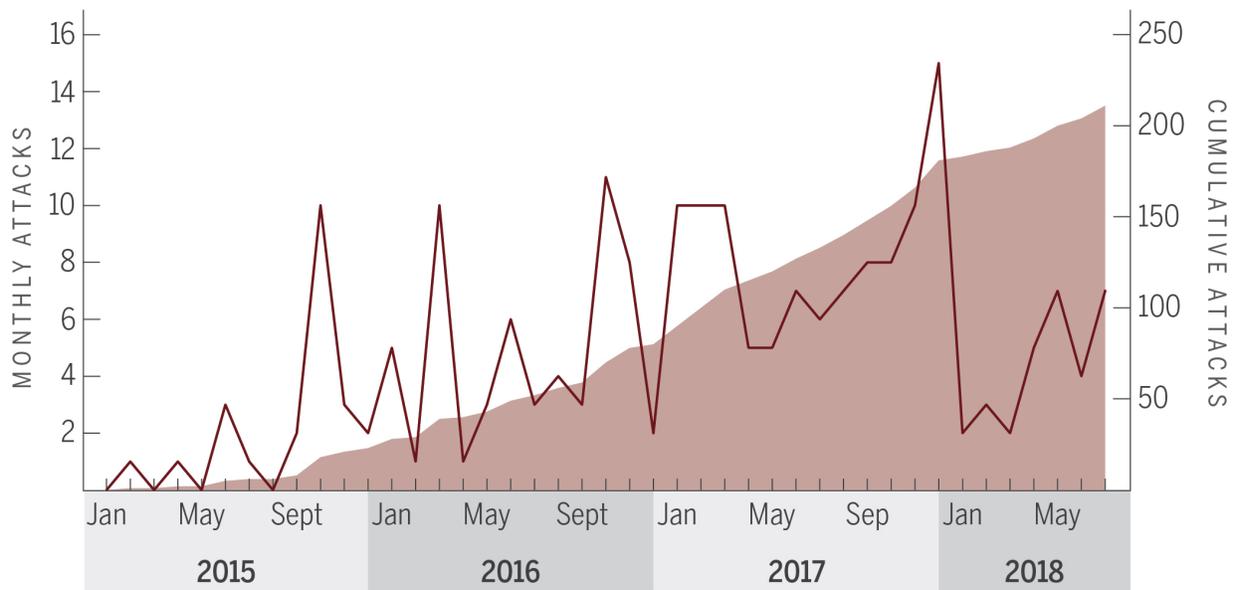
**1.2 Operational Trends**

This section of the report compares and contrasts the temporal and operational trends of ISK-AFG and ISK-PK attacks. Understanding the similarities and differences in ISK’s temporal trends, lethality, targets, and tactics can shed light on ISK’s overall organizational capacity, as well as the extent to which ISK’s activity is coordinated across the border.

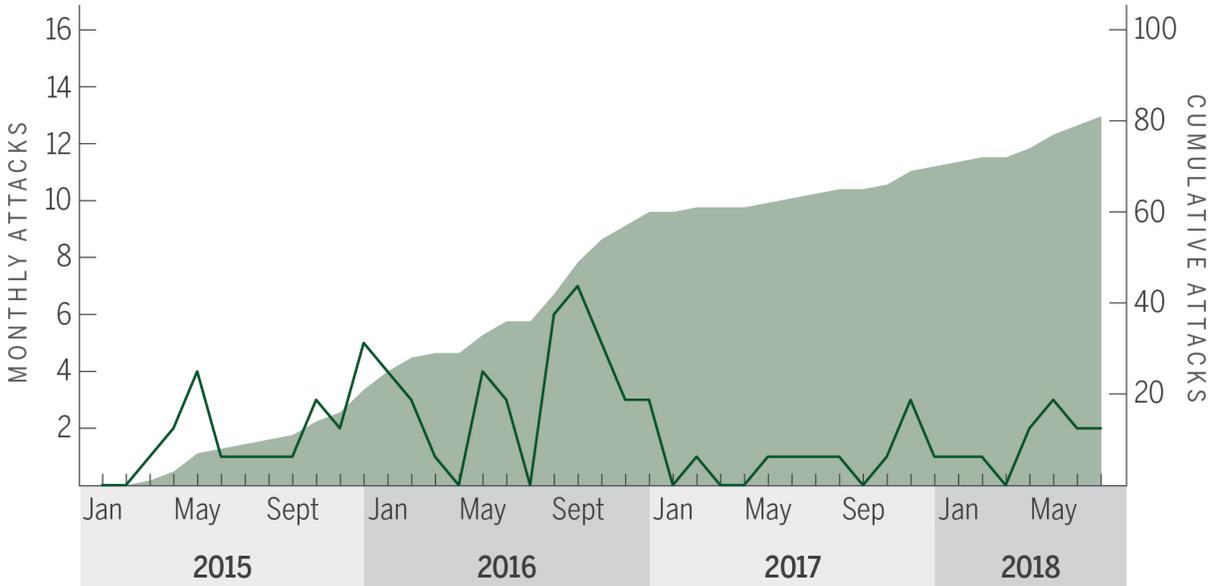
*Monthly Trends*

Figures 5-7 provide an overview of the monthly trends of ISK-AFG and ISK-PK attacks between January 2014 and July 2018. While Figures 5 and 6 show the overall temporal levels of activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Figure 7 graphs the trends in the two countries against each other.

*Figure 5: ISK Monthly Attacks in Afghanistan (2015 - 2018)*



**Figure 6: ISK Monthly Attacks in Pakistan (2015 - 2018)**



**Takeaway 5: ISK-AFG was the most active during December 2017 when it conducted 15 attacks in a single month. ISK-PK’s most active month was September 2016, with a total of eight attacks.**

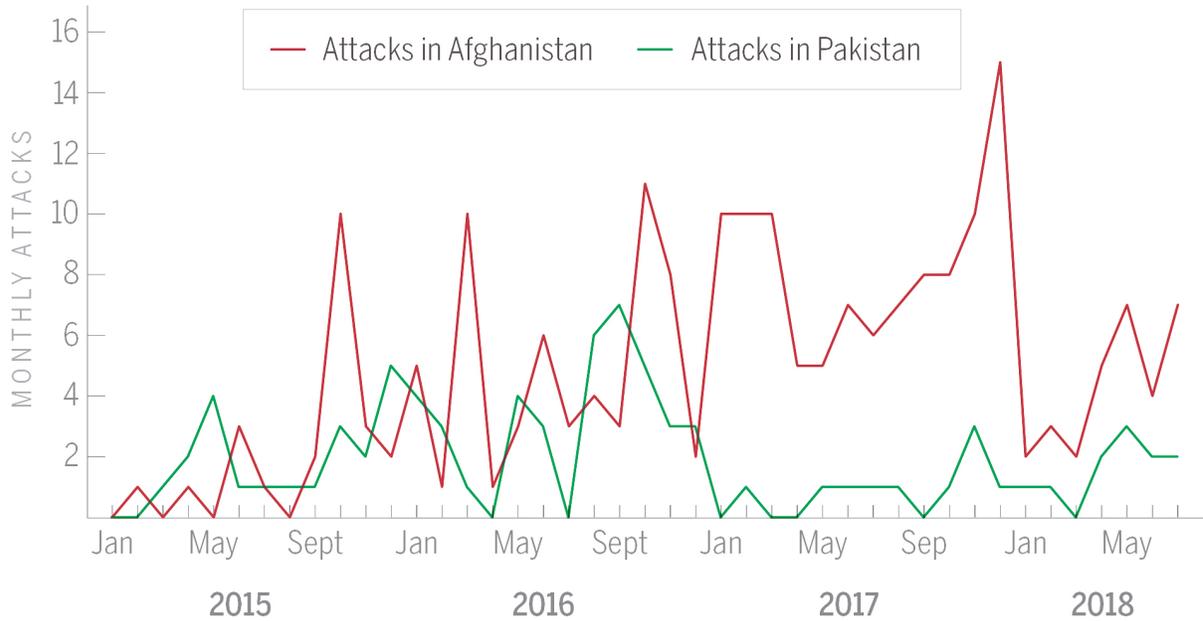
An examination of ISK-AFG monthly attacks between January 2015 and July 2018 shows a general upward trend until the end of 2017. December 2017 stands out as ISK-AFG’s most active month, when it conducted 15 attacks in a single month. The bulk of these attacks took place in Kabul and Nangarhar. During 2015 and 2016, there were at least three months during which ISK-AFG attacks fell in the range of 10-12 attacks within a month.

Figure 6 shows that ISK-PK attacks have not followed any consistent pattern; the group’s most active month in Pakistan was September 2016 when it conducted a total of eight attacks in a single month. After September 2016, ISK-PK attacks dipped significantly and remained below four attacks per month until July 2018. The year 2017 was a particularly low-key year for ISK-PK, which may be linked to the launch of the Pakistani army’s Khyber 4 Operation in mid-2016 that specifically targeted the ISK in Rajgal Valley.<sup>42</sup> Another nationwide military operation called Radd-ul-Fasaad was launched following several major terrorist attacks in Lahore, Punjab, and in Sehwan, Sindh, in 2017.<sup>43</sup> Although ISK-PK attacks subsided in 2017 amidst increased state efforts to contain the group, it still managed to claim high-casualty attacks; both ISK and JuA claimed the Sehwan suicide attack in February 2017 that killed 75 people and injured more than 200 at a Sufi shrine. Similar to ISK-AFG, ISK’s persistence in Pakistan despite military operations demonstrates the group’s resiliency.

42 “Pakistan Launches Offensive Against IS Near Afghan Border,” BBC, July 16, 2017.

43 Sophia Saifi, “Pakistan Launches Terrorism Crackdown After Spate of Bloody Attacks,” CNN, February 24, 2017.

**Figure 7: Comparison of ISK Monthly Attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan (2015 - 2018)**



**Takeaway 6: Peaks and troughs in ISK’s activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan appear to alternate rather than coincide. In 2017, as Pakistani military operations suppressed ISK-PK attacks drastically, there was a near simultaneous upsurge in ISK attacks in Afghanistan.**

Figure 7 compares the monthly trends of ISK-PK and ISK-AFG attacks between 2015 and 2018. The total number of monthly attacks in Afghanistan generally exceeds attacks in Pakistan. Interestingly, Figure 7 shows that ISK’s total activity in each month never peaks or drops simultaneously in both countries, but rather seems to rise and drop alternatively between 2015 and 2017.

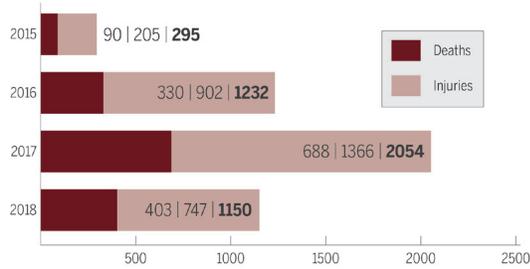
In 2017, the gap in the magnitude of ISK-AFG and ISK-PK attacks is striking; while ISK-PK attacks fell significantly and remained low during 2017, ISK-AFG attacks rose sharply in January and steadfastly increased every month thereafter, peaking in December 2017. The suppression of ISK-PK attacks in 2017, as mentioned above, is likely a result of increased military operations launched by the Pakistani state in 2016 and 2017. A potential outcome of these military operations may be movement of ISK fighters operating in Pakistan across the porous border.

*Deaths and Injuries per Year*

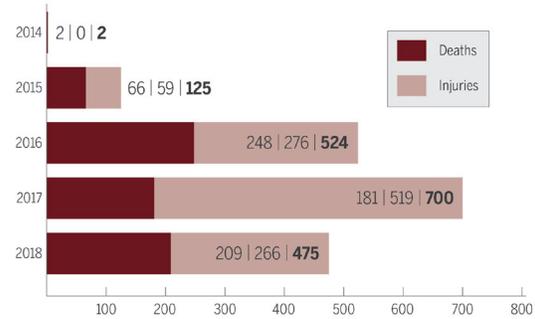
Figure 8 shows the total number of deaths and injuries associated with ISK attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan each year. In general, the figure shows that in both countries, ISK managed to kill and injure more people every year between January 2014 and July 2018.

**Figure 8: Deaths and Injuries due to ISK Attacks (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**



**(b) Pakistan**



**Takeaway 7: Since its arrival in AfPak, ISK progressively ramped up the total numbers killed and injured per year in both countries, indicating rising operational capacity.**

Despite fluctuations in their total numbers of attacks each year (see Figures 5 and 6), ISK consistently increased its ability to kill and injure by large margins each year after its initial emergence.

Compared to 2015, ISK-AFG attacks in 2016 increased by 2.5 times, and by 4.4 times in 2017. The yearly increase in total attacks resulted in much death and destruction.

As shown in Figure 8, compared to 2015, deaths and injuries due to ISK-AFG increased by over four times in 2016, and by almost seven times in 2017. The total deaths and injuries caused by ISK-AFG in the first seven months alone of 2018 were almost four times the amount in 2015. These data trends strongly indicate ISK’s capability to not only maintain but also escalate the level of harm inflicted within Afghanistan.

ISK first became active in Pakistan in 2014 when it conducted single attacks in Balochistan and Kurram Agency in December. In 2015, its activity ramped up to a total of 21 attacks, and to 39 in 2016 before dropping to 10 attacks in 2017. But even though ISK-PK attacks fell in terms of absolute numbers in 2017 compared to 2015, the total lethality of attacks (deaths and injuries) per year increased consistently between 2015 and 2017.

As shown in Figure 8, compared to 2015, total deaths and injuries due to ISK-PK increased by over four times in 2016, and by over five times in 2017. In the first seven months of 2018, ISK remained highly lethal, causing about 475 deaths and injuries.

**ISK AFGHANISTAN**  
Deaths and injuries from ISK attacks increased by

**4X** in 2016 and **7X** in 2017

compared to attacks in 2015.

**ISK PAKISTAN**  
Deaths and injuries from ISK attacks increased by

**4X** in 2016 and **5X** in 2017

compared to attacks in 2015.

**Takeaway 8: Afghanistan was hit much harder than Pakistan, with twice as many deaths and injuries each year compared to Pakistan.**

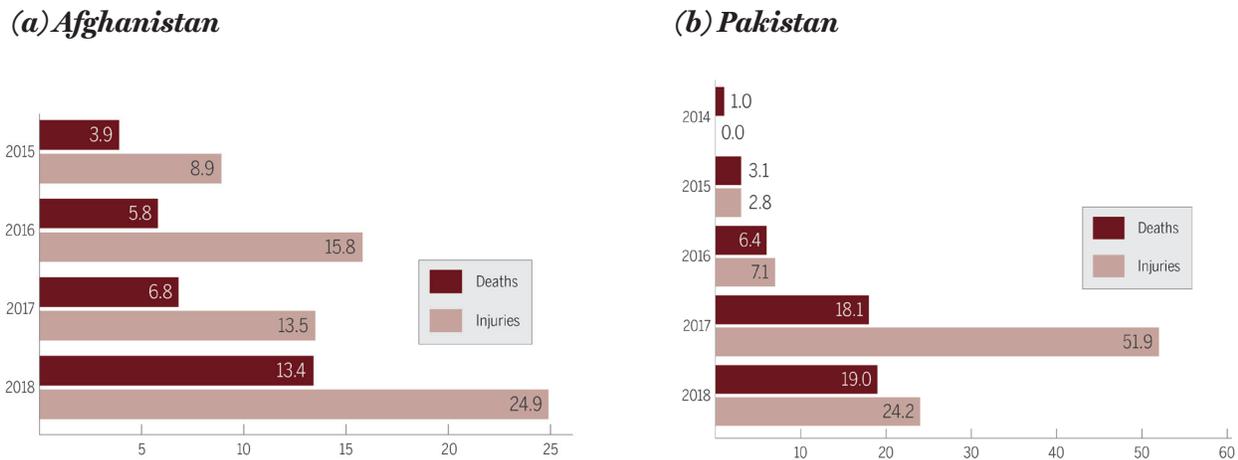
Comparing the overall numbers killed and injured in each country in a given year, the dataset shows

that ISK-AFG attacks resulted in almost twice as many deaths and injuries in each year compared to ISK-PK. This is not surprising, given that ISK’s attacks in Afghanistan at 211 are more than double than they are in Pakistan, where it conducted a total of 83 attacks between 2014 and 2018. It has been argued that part of ISK’s intended strategy is to base itself in the weakest state in the Khorasan region (i.e., Afghanistan), which also provides access to Central Asia, and to use Pakistan as a logistical hub.<sup>44</sup> In other words, ISK’s goal at the outset was to apply the greatest pressure in areas where counter action would be the weakest;<sup>45</sup> Pakistan’s military would be difficult to counter given its ongoing operations and presence in the FATA regions. The data supports this partially; ISK has indeed directed much of its capacity in conducting attacks in Afghanistan, but it has also continually launched lethal attacks in Pakistan.

*Lethality per Attack*

To gain further insights into ISK’s potential to inflict harm, this report examines trends in ISK’s lethality per attack each year (i.e., the average number of individuals killed and injured per attack in a given year), as shown in Figure 9.<sup>46</sup>

**Figure 9: ISK Lethality per Attack (2014 - 2018)**



**Takeaway 9: ISK’s lethality per attack increased steadily between 2015 and 2018 in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.**

Figure 9 shows that in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, ISK managed to increase its lethality per attack every year, indicating a dangerous trend in both countries. The data highlights that the group is becoming more capable of unleashing high-lethality attacks with the passage of time. After 2016, ISK-PK’s lethality per attack remains at par or higher than its rate in Afghanistan.

Despite having approximately half of the total number of deaths and injuries in Pakistan in each year, ISK-PK’s lethality in 2017 not only surpassed all prior years in Pakistan, but it also outdid the lethality rate of ISK-AFG across all years. In 2017, ISK-PK managed to kill approximately 18 and injure 52 per attack on average, showing its tendency to conduct fewer but more lethal attacks. What explains ISK-

44 Giustozzi, *Islamic State in Khorasan*.

45 Ibid.

46 Each country’s timeline begins in the year when ISK activity was first reported; for Afghanistan, ISK attacks were first reported in 2015, whereas in Pakistan, ISK attacks were first reported at the end of 2014.

PK’s astoundingly high lethality rate in 2017, the year in which it also launched the least number of total attacks? In 2017, out of ISK-PK’s total of 10 attacks, eight were suicide attacks. One of the deadliest attacks in this year was a suicide attack in February on a crowded Sufi shrine in Sehwan, Sindh, which claimed over 80 lives and injured 300. While the attack was claimed by ISK, authorities suspected the involvement of JuA, believed to be operating from Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

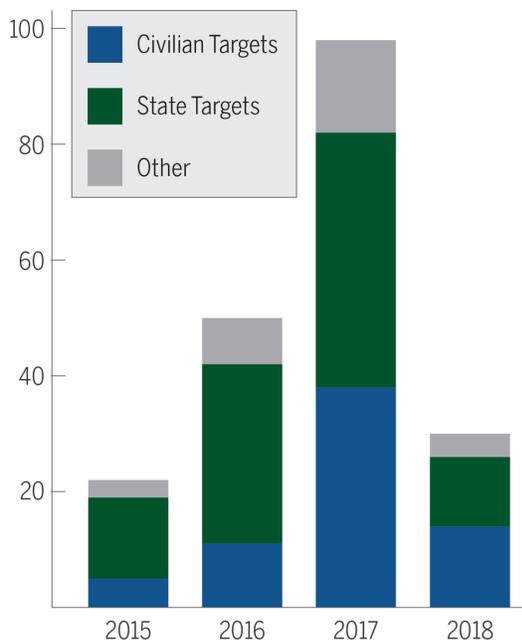
**The lethality rate  
(deaths+injuries per attack)  
of ISK-Pakistan  
WAS HIGHER  
IN 2017 THAN  
ANY PRIOR YEAR  
and higher than  
ISK-Afghanistan  
across all years.**

*Attacks and Lethality by Target Type*

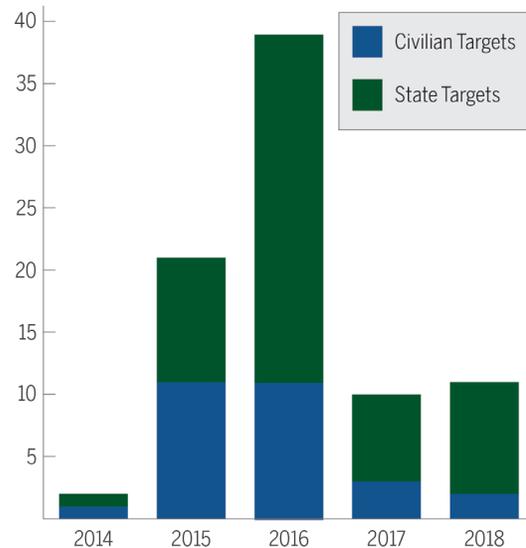
This section shows data on ISK’s top target choices in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and how its lethality varied by target type. Figure 10 shows the overall proportions of attacks against civilian versus state targets, while Figure 11 shows the number of attacks against each type of civilian and state target. Figure 12 compares the lethality according to target type.

**Figure 10: ISK Civilian and State Target Proportions (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**



**(b) Pakistan**



**Takeaway 10: In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, ISK did not shy away from provoking the state; a majority of its attacks in both countries were directed against state targets rather than civilian targets.**

The proportion of attacks against state targets versus civilian targets by ISK-PK and ISK-AFG appear to be largely similar, reflecting a coordinated high-level strategy with regard to target selection. In both countries, about one-third of all attacks were against civilian targets (Figure 10). Of all ISK-PK attacks

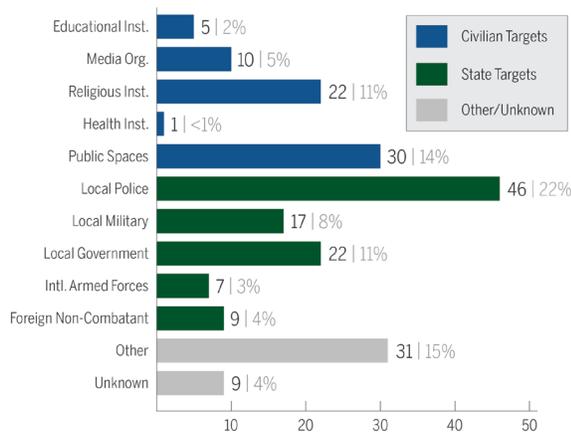
47 Raza Hassan, “Pakistan Says Kills 100 ‘Terrorists’ After Suicide Shrine Attack,” Reuters, February 17, 2017.

between 2014 and 2018, 62% were directed against state targets such as the local police, military, or government. For ISK-AFG, 48% were directed toward state targets.

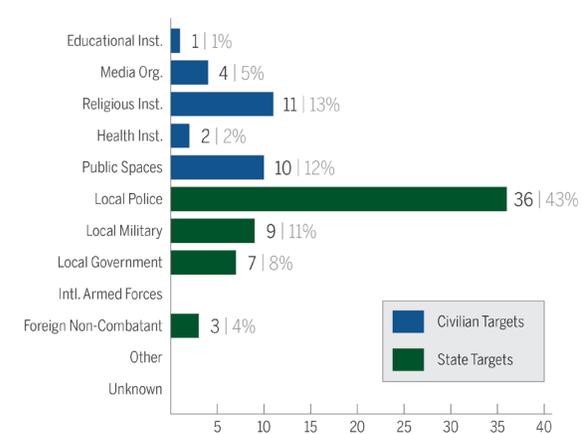
Past research on terrorist groups’ target selection suggests that a group’s ideology can play an important role in shaping their target selection.<sup>48</sup> Per ISK’s ideological stance, the goal of establishing a caliphate and eliminating national boundaries necessitates adopting an uncompromising stance toward national governments. Direct attacks against the Afghan and Pakistani states serve to delegitimize and undermine the governments that ISK ultimately seeks to replace.

**Figure 11: ISK Attacks by Target Type (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**



**(b) Pakistan**



**Takeaway 11: Amongst state targets, ISK launched the most attacks against local police in both countries.**

Across both countries, state targets included five key categories that were coded for ISK attacks: local police, military, government, international armed forces, and foreign non-combatants such as foreign diplomats. As shown in Figure 11, in terms of state targets, both ISK-PK and ISK-AFG datasets indicate that ISK launched the most attacks against local police in both countries, although this made up a higher percentage of all attacks in Pakistan. In the ISK-PK dataset, 36 attacks targeted the local police, whereas in the ISK-AFG data, 46 attacks were directed toward local police forces.

Why target the police? In both Pakistan and Afghanistan, local police and law enforcement are riddled with weak capacity and corruption, which makes them an easy target. In Pakistan, for example, ISK attacks against the military only made up 11% of all attacks, compared to 43% of attacks on the local police. Attacking the police is less difficult than attacking the army, yet it delivers a message to the state. The ISK-AFG data includes a wider range of state attacks as it includes international armed forces as an additional target. Amongst state targets in Afghanistan, international armed forces were hit the least frequently, as they are likely to be the hardest targets.

**Takeaway 12: Amongst civilian targets, the top two targets were religious institutions and public spaces.**

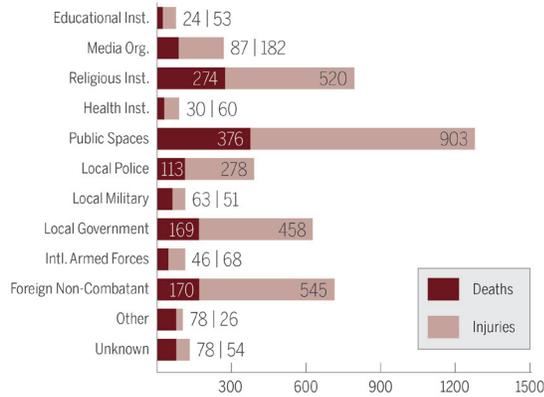
In both countries, the top two civilian targets were religious institutions and public spaces, as shown in Figure 11. In the ISK-PK dataset, attacks on religious institutions slightly exceeded the total attacks

48 C.J.M Drake, "The Role of Ideology in Terrorists' Target Selection," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10:2 (1998). See also Victor Asal, Karl Rethemeyer, Ian Anderson, Allyson Stein, Jeffrey Rizzo, and Mathew Rozea, "The Softest of Targets: A Study on Terrorist Target Selection," *Journal of Applied Security Research* 4:3 (2009).

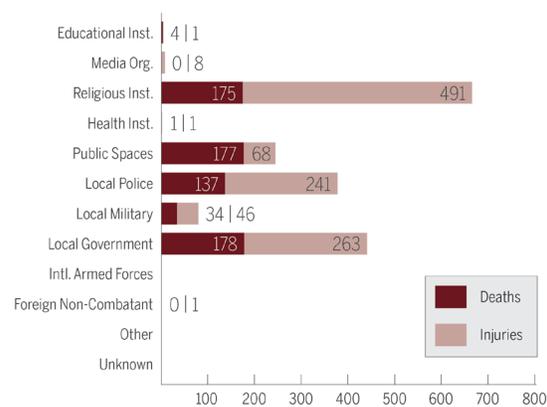
on public spaces, whereas the reverse was true in Afghanistan. Such attacks indicate ISK’s intentions to launch mass-casualty attacks, as well as to instigate sectarian strife. In both datasets, there was a comparable percentage of attacks on educational, media, and health institutions, which were targeted infrequently in both countries.

**Figure 12: ISK Lethality by Target Type (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**



**(b) Pakistan**



**Takeaway 13: In Afghanistan, attacks in public spaces were the most lethal, whereas in Pakistan attacks on religious institutions were the most lethal.**

As shown in Figure 12, ISK’s most lethal attacks were in public spaces (such as open-market areas) in Afghanistan, and against religious institutions in Pakistan. ISK-AFG attacks conducted in public spaces made up 14% of all attacks between 2015 and 2018 while accounting for 27% of all deaths and injuries. While ISK-PK attacks on religious institutions account for only 13% of all ISK’s attacks in Pakistan between 2014 and 2018, they accounted for 36% of all deaths and injuries in that time period. (This high lethality is partially explained by the use of suicide bombing against religious institutions as discussed further below.) These figures make sense as most attacks on religious institutions such as mosques and shrines are conducted during busy periods when a large number of people congregate. In comparison, ISK attacks directed at local police and military targets usually targeted specific individuals, official convoys, or security checkpoints, and thus yielded lower numbers of deaths and injuries.

A key difference amongst the high-lethality categories of ISK-PK and ISK-AFG are attacks against foreign non-combatants. The foreign non-combatant category captures any attacks on foreign government officials or diplomats. In Afghanistan, this category accounted for only 4% of all targets, but made up for 15% of all deaths and injuries at a total of 715. For example, an attack claimed by ISK targeted the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad city, the capital of Nangarhar, during January 2016,<sup>49</sup> which was subsequently shut down in September 2018 due to security and political issues.<sup>50</sup> Six months after the attack on the Pakistani consulate, ISK militants conducted a suicide attack targeting the Canadian embassy in Kabul.<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to note that ISK-PK has thus far refrained from targeting foreign officials in Pakistan. This could be a result of more stringent security measures within Pakistan, but could also be driven by the agenda of ISK in each country.

49 Khalid Alokzay and Mujib Mashal, “ISIS Claims Assault that Killed 7 Near Pakistani Consulate in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2016.

50 “Pakistan Closes Jalalabad Consulate in Afghanistan Over Security Concerns,” *New Indian Express*, September 1, 2018.

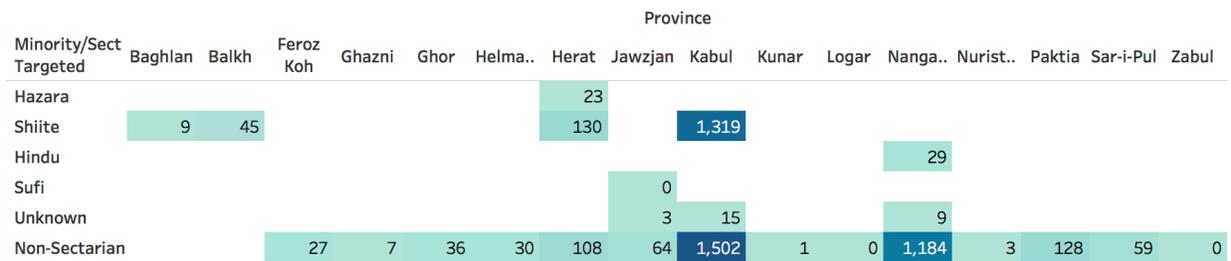
51 Ghanizada, “ISIS in Afghanistan Claims Attacks on Canadian Embassy Guards in Kabul,” *Khaama Press*, June 20, 2016.

Sectarian Attacks

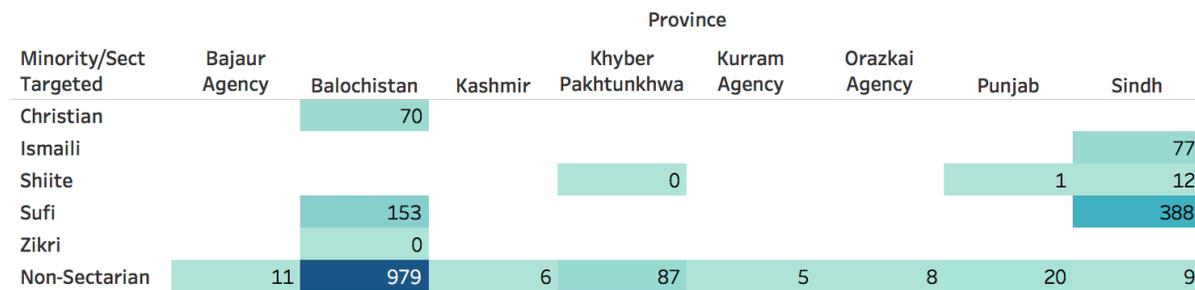
In general, the Islamic State’s takfiri ideology propagates attacks on Muslim minority sects, which do not adhere to the Islamic State’s strict interpretation of Islam.<sup>52</sup> Figure 13 shows ISK’s lethality (total killed and injured) in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in terms of its sectarian and non-sectarian attacks.

Figure 13: ISK Lethality by Sect/Minority (2014 - 2018)

(a) Afghanistan



(b) Pakistan



**Takeaway 14: In Afghanistan, ISK’s sectarian attacks targeted Shiites the most frequently, whereas in Pakistan, Sufis were the most frequent victims.**

Figure 13 shows the total number of deaths and injuries in ISK attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan, per sect or minority across various provinces. The data shows that ISK focused its efforts against different Muslim minority sects in each country. In Afghanistan, at least 11 of the 22 attacks on religious institutions were against specific sects, and 90% of these targeted Shiite communities. Within Pakistan, ISK chose to target minority Muslim sects and other non-Muslim minorities in at least 10 attacks. Sixty percent of these attacks were conducted in the province of Balochistan against Sufis and Zikri Baluchis. The Zikri Baloch are heavily influenced by Indian Sufi teachings.<sup>53</sup> Per the ISK-PK dataset, two of ISK’s most lethal attacks on Sufi communities in Balochistan were also claimed by JuA and LeJ.

Why has ISK-PK targeted the Sufi community more frequently than Shiites, given ISK’s aggression against the latter in other theaters such as Iraq and Syria? One reason could be that ISK’s operational partner LeJ (discussed further in Parts 2 and 3 of the report) has remained focused on targeting

52 Muhammad Haniff Hassan, “The Danger of Takfir (Excommunication): Exposing IS’ Takfiri Ideology,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 9:4 (2017). For a discussion about how jihadis use the concept of *takfir*, see Nelly Lahoud, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Jihadist Ideology,” *CTC Sentinel* 3:10 (2010).

53 “Pakistan: Reports of ill-treatment of members of the Zikri sect in Lahore, Islamabad and Quetta, including whether state protection is available; whether there is an affiliation between Sufism and Zikri (2008 - July 2010),” Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, August 25, 2010.

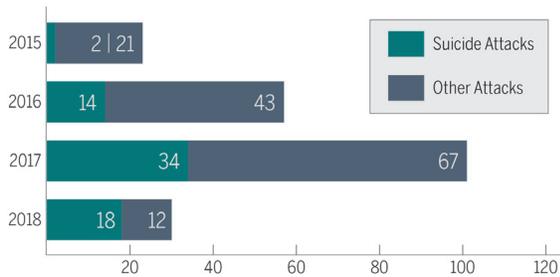
Shiites; thus ISK’s focus on Sufis in Pakistan could be an intentional effort to target a wider range of Muslim minority sects to maximize sectarian friction.

*Attacks and Lethality by Tactic*

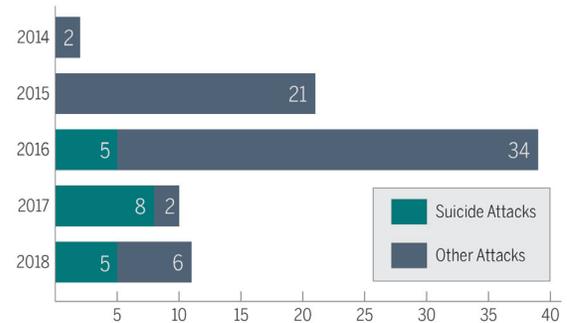
The ISK-PK and ISK-AFG datasets indicate that ISK ramped up its total number of suicide attacks in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, as shown in Figure 14. Figure 15 shows the proportion of all deaths in each country attributable to suicide attacks. For a yearly breakdown of lethality by suicide attacks, see Figures A1 in the Appendix. Figure A2 in the Appendix provides a high-level overview of other tactics used by ISK.

**Figure 14: ISK Suicide Attacks vs Non-Suicide Attacks (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**

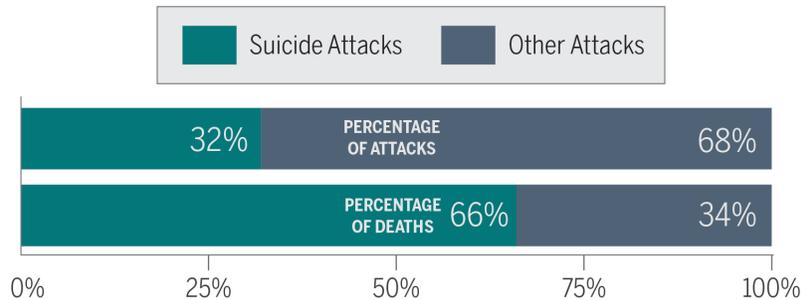


**(b) Pakistan**

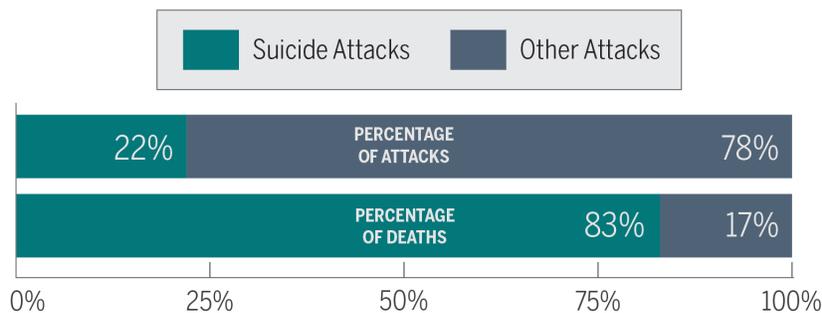


**Figure 15: ISK Proportion of Deaths due to Suicide Attacks (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Afghanistan**



**(b) Pakistan**



**Takeaway 15: There was a steady increase in the number of suicide attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan between 2016 and 2018.**

ISK steadily increased its use of suicide attacks in both countries, as shown in Figure 14. As expected, the magnitude of suicide attacks is at least three times higher in each year since 2016 in Afghanistan compared to Pakistan. The marked increase in ISK’s use of suicide attacks in both countries runs parallel to the Islamic State’s use of suicide attacks in Iraq and Syria. During 2016, ISK-AFG suicide attacks amounted to 25% of all attacks. This percentage increased to approximately 34% of all attacks in 2017 and to 56% of all attacks in the first seven months of 2018. ISK-PK suicide attacks also increased progressively between 2016 and 2018, albeit in lower absolute numbers. In 2017, ISK-PK suicide attacks comprised about 80% of all attacks.

While ISK has relied on its use of suicide attacks in both countries, ISK’s overall lethality in Pakistan seems more contingent upon its use of suicide attacks, as shown in Figure 15. Across all years between 2014 and 2018, ISK’s suicide attacks in Pakistan only accounted for 22% of its overall attacks. Astoundingly, these attacks accounted for 83% of all deaths claimed by ISK attacks within Pakistan.

**Takeaway 16: Amongst civilian targets, religious institutions were hit the most frequently by suicide attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.**

The targets against whom ISK chooses to deploy suicide terrorist in each country has some divergent and similar aspects. Within Pakistan, suicide attacks are heavily used to undermine the state, whereas in Afghanistan, they are used more toward non-state targets. In Pakistan, 61% of all suicide attacks targeted state targets, compared to Afghanistan where 47% of all of ISK’s suicide attacks (excluding the unknown category) were against state targets.

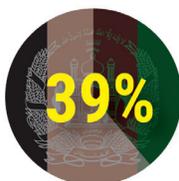
Who does ISK target the most frequently with its suicide attacks within the state and civilian categories? Amongst state targets, local police and military targets were hit the most frequently in Pakistan, and in comparison, local government officials were ISK’s top targets in Afghanistan (comprising 82% and 42% of all state attacks, respectively). In terms of civilian targets, religious institutions have been hit the most frequently by ISK suicide attacks in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, making up a total of 57% and 39% of all civilian attacks, respectively.



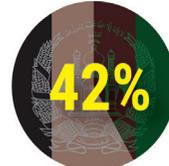
**In both PAKISTAN and AFGHANISTAN, RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS were the most frequent civilian targets of ISK’S SUICIDE ATTACKS, although at a higher percentage in the former country than the latter.**



**In PAKISTAN, LOCAL POLICE AND MILITARY were the most frequent state targets of ISK’S SUICIDE ATTACKS.**



**But in AFGHANISTAN, the group’s suicide attacks targeted officials of the LOCAL GOVERNMENT more often.**



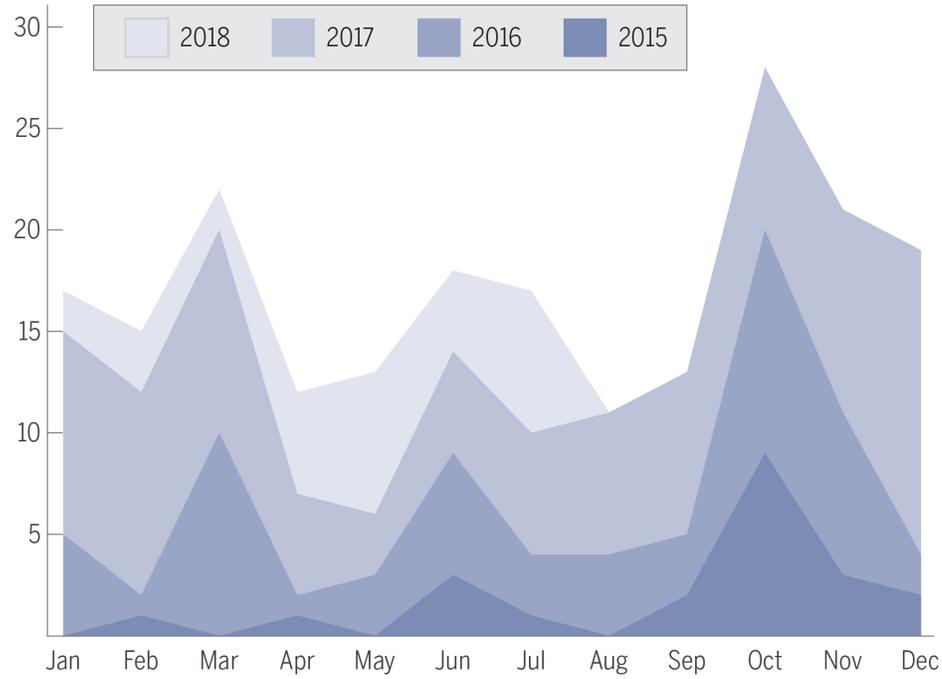
**But in AFGHANISTAN, the group’s suicide attacks targeted officials of the LOCAL GOVERNMENT more often.**

*Seasonal Trends*

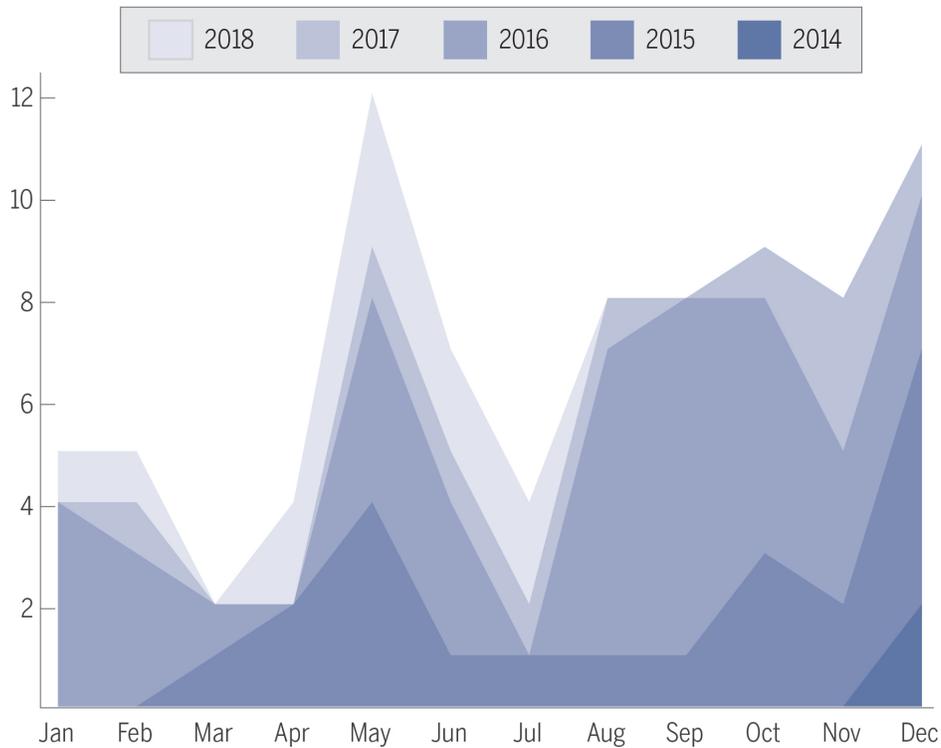
Figure 16 compares the seasonal trends of ISK’s activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan. An examination of these trends provides insights into the busiest and least active months for ISK in either country, and the extent to which these overlap across Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Figure 16: ISK Attacks Seasonal Trends (2014 - 2018)

(a) Afghanistan



(b) Pakistan



**Takeaway 17: Inverse cycle of high-activity period in Afghanistan compared to Pakistan suggests coordinated activity across the border.**

Comparing ISK's attacks in Afghanistan, the first nine months of the year follow an almost inverse cycle to that of ISK-PK, as shown in Figure 16. While the months between January and April see a slowing down of activity in Pakistan, ISK-AFG attacks begin increasing in February and March. The alternating cycle continues in subsequent months; the drop in ISK-AFG activity between July and September, for example, is matched with a notable increase in attacks within Pakistan.

While the extent to which attacks between the two countries are coordinated is not clear, the inverse seasonal cycle of these attacks suggests that there may be some pooling of fighters and resources in conducting ISK-AFG and ISK-PK attacks, as well as cross-border movement of ISK militants.

In general, it appears that ISK-PK's activity tends to weaken in both the months of Ramadan and during Moharram. Ramadan has primarily fallen in the months of June and July in the time period 2014-2018, whereas Moharram has typically fallen in the months between end of October and end of November. The slight slowdown in activity during Moharram is notable since during this month, the Shiite community frequently congregates to mourn the historic massacre of Hussain, the son of Ali in Karbala, Iraq.

**ISK's Lethality and Resilience**

A close examination of the data presented in this part of the report clearly indicates ISK's rising lethality and resilience in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The data reveals a series of dangerous trends that characterize ISK's presence in the region. Most notably, since its initial emergence, ISK has demonstrated its ability to persevere and unleash a wave of terrorism in the face of multiple counterterrorism efforts. Not only has it managed to successfully attack state and civilian targets, it has become demonstrably more efficacious in carrying out its attacks in a difficult operating environment. Moreover, the parallels in the composition and timing of ISK's attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan suggest a high-level strategy that is coordinated across the border. These insights beg the following question: what explains ISK's remarkable ability to execute a destructive campaign in a challenging environment such as the AfPak region? Part 2 of the report explores the answer to this compelling question by investigating ISK's various alliances with militant groups in the region, and Part 3 draws out the direct effects of ISK's operational alliances on its lethality and geographical reach.

## Part 2: The ISK Network: Explaining ISK's Organizational Capacity

Part 1 of this report presented ISK's geographical reach and capacity to unleash terror in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, with a seemingly coordinated approach across the region. Taken together, the data trends indicate ISK's growing organizational capacity and its ability to withstand difficult circumstances.

What explains ISK's destructive capability and resilience in the AfPak region? Arguably, amongst other factors, ISK's ability to foster and exploit relationships with local militant groups has been a critical source of its success thus far. This part of the report maps the ISK alliance hub that consists of myriad regional militant groups. The analysis employs a framework consisting of two metrics to assess relationships between ISK and various AfPak militant groups between 2014 and 2017: *types of cooperation* (ideological, logistical, or operational) as well as the *quality of cooperation* (high-end or low-end cooperation).<sup>54</sup> In assessing the quality of cooperation, this report examines the underlying factors driving the variation in groups' cooperation with ISK. The metrics used to evaluate the type and qualities of cooperation are defined below.

### 2.1 The Drivers and Effects of Terrorist Cooperation

Militant groups frequently cooperate with other groups at a regional or international level. Moghadam defines terrorist cooperation as "formal or informal collaborative arrangements between two or more actors who employ terrorist tactics in the pursuit of joint interests."<sup>55</sup> But why do terrorist groups cooperate? Terrorist groups may choose to cooperate for a number of reasons that they deem important to their short or long-term survival. Groups may work together to boost organizational capacity or to achieve ideological goals. Indeed, cooperation between groups has been shown to increase the lethality of groups,<sup>56</sup> which helps them overcome capability limitations.<sup>57</sup> Groups embedded in alliances are also more likely to seek or acquire chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) weapons.<sup>58</sup>

In order to engage in violence, terrorist groups require willing recruits, access to materials, and the necessary know-how to navigate a new terrain. A distinction between terrorist groups' need for tacit versus explicit knowledge is important here. Whereas explicit knowledge usually pertains to knowledge about weapons or plans, tacit knowledge usually includes nontransferable expertise such as knowledge about the local terrain.<sup>59</sup> Situational and experiential knowledge compared to technical knowledge has been shown to be critical for terrorist groups such as al-Qa`ida to execute their operations on the ground.<sup>60</sup> Inter-group cooperation can be especially useful for groups to acquire valuable tacit knowledge, and is often a key driver of cooperation between militant groups.<sup>61</sup> Regardless of underlying motivations, groups usually need some common goal, ideological stance, or overlapping

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54 While the ISK attacks dataset spans the period between January 2014 and July 2018, data on ISK's relationships was collected for complete years between 2014 and 2017. However, for each group identified as in alliance of ISK between these years, the research team discusses the status of their relationship in 2018 as well.

55 Moghadam, p. 8.

56 Victor Asal and R.K. Rethemeyer, "The nature of the beast: Organizational structures and the lethality of terrorist attacks," *Journal of Politics* 70:2 (2008): pp. 437-449.

57 Brian J. Phillips, "Terrorist Group Cooperation and Longevity," *International Studies Quarterly* 58:2 (2014).

58 Victor Asal, Gary Ackerman, and R. Karl Rethemeyer, "Connections Can be Toxic: Terrorist Organizational Factors and the Pursuit of CBRN Weapons," *Studies of Conflict & Terrorism* (February 2012): pp. 229-254.

59 Moghadam.

60 Michael Kenney, "Beyond the Internet: Metis, Techne, and the Limitations of Online Artifacts for Islamist Terrorists," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22:2 (2010).

61 See Brian A. Jackson, John C. Baker, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, John V. Parachini, and Horacio R. Trujillo, "Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 2," RAND Corporation, 2005.

target to be able to cooperate effectively within some domain.

The Islamic State, arriving as a foreign brand in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2014, has had an ongoing need for material resources as well as local knowledge and expertise. The very process of creating a franchised jihadi brand necessitates the need to cooperate with local groups. Relying on recruits from outside of the AfPak region would likely have a detrimental impact on ISK's attempt to brand itself as a local movement. From ISK's perspective, it makes sense to identify groups with intersecting goals, targets, and/or ideological stances to engage in cooperative relationships. Conversely, groups willing to associate with ISK face varying incentives to do so, ranging from financial rewards to increased political relevance. It is no surprise then that in 2014, before the official announcement of ISK, Islamic State leaders met with members of the Pakistani Taliban, who were amongst the first to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>62</sup> As this section of the report highlights, linkages with other groups appear to be a core pathway adopted by ISK to create space for itself in the AfPak region.

## 2.2 Defining Domains and Quality of Cooperation

The nature of ISK's alliances is measured by two distinct metrics: first, using open-source data, it is examined whether a group cooperated with ISK in the ideological, operational, or logistical realm, and second, whether the cooperation constitutes a high-end or a low-end relationship. These two metrics are defined in detail below.

### *Three Domains of Cooperation*

The work of Ely Karmon<sup>63</sup> on three types of cooperation (ideological, logistical, and operational cooperation) is drawn upon to establish the domains in which individual groups cooperated with ISK.

#### (a) Ideological Cooperation

In general, ideological cooperation takes place when one group expresses support for another group's mission. For the purposes of this report, this variable captures whether the leadership of one group made a public pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State or ISK between 2014 and 2017. Instances where groups expressed support informally were excluded, as groups may make general statements about supporting other groups with varying seriousness of intent.

#### (b) Logistical Cooperation

Logistical cooperation between groups encompasses a wide variety of activities, ranging from sharing propaganda materials to weapons. In this report, logistical cooperation denotes a group's cooperation with ISK by sharing material and/or non-material resources. Material logistical cooperation includes sharing items such as weapons, finances, and training whereas non-material logistical cooperation includes leadership consultations or facilitating ISK propaganda.

#### (c) Operational Cooperation

Operational cooperation essentially entails groups cooperating in any stage of conducting terrorist attacks, ranging from the planning stage to the execution stage.<sup>64</sup> Where groups are reported to have conducted joint attacks, or claim attacks jointly without disputing each other's claims, the research

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62 Ashraf.

63 Ely Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff, 2005), p. 307.

64 Moghadam, p. 36.

team code this as operational cooperation. At times, there may be some overlap in the operational and logistical cooperation categories at least conceptually. For this reason, operational support is only coded when reports clearly indicate that both parties were involved in conducting a particular attack.

### *Quality of Cooperation: High-End and Low-End Cooperation*

Simply understanding the domains in which groups cooperated with ISK does not necessarily allow an evaluation of the depth of these relationships. Distinguishing between high- and low-end cooperation allows the development of reasonable expectations of the extent of integration of groups, and the expected duration of their relationship. By identifying various groups' cooperation with ISK in the three domains listed above, this author draws on Moghadam's conceptualization of high-end cooperation (which includes both mergers and strategic alliances between groups) and low-end cooperation (which includes marriages of convenience). High-end cooperation can be and often is a long-lasting strategic relationship between groups, whereas low-end cooperation typically includes short-term tactical cooperation between groups.<sup>65</sup>

#### (a) High-End Cooperation: Mergers and Strategic Alliances

**Mergers** take place when one group is fully absorbed into another group, essentially pooling all resources and members, while dissolving its own independent identity. The Lebanese group Hezbollah, for example, emerged as a result of a merger between various groups.<sup>66</sup> For this report, mergers were identified where there were reports and/or evidence of a group's fighters assuming the ISK brand and the subsumed group did not autonomously claim attacks following its merger with ISK.

**Strategic Alliances** occur when groups share some information and resources, but do not completely combine their command and control structures. Strategic alliances are similar to mergers in that groups' ideological and operational agendas overlap, but in strategic alliances, neither group is absorbed into the other. Strategic alliances are generally expected to endure over time. Some Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan factions, for example, have long maintained a strategic alliance with al-Qa`ida; the two groups maintain both operational and ideological links.<sup>67</sup> For this report, strategic alliances were identified when a group and ISK cooperated in two or more of the three domains identified above.

#### (b) Low-End Cooperation: Marriages of Convenience

**Marriages of Convenience** are the primary type of low-end cooperation, and occur when groups decide to work together toward achieving a limited goal (such as smuggling goods or attacking a specific target), despite having ideological differences from one another. Low-end cooperation is thus deemed to be a tactical rather than a strategic relationship. Importantly, low-end cooperation between groups tends to have a short-lived and narrow focus compared to high-end cooperation, and is driven by practical rather than ideological goals. Al-Qa`ida, for example, has often engaged in low-end cooperation with others by providing funding or training to groups in exchange for safe houses.<sup>68</sup> For this report, low-end cooperation was identified when a group cooperated with ISK in only one of the three domains identified above.

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65 Ibid., p. 105.

66 Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

67 Ayesha Siddiqi, "Pakistan's Counterterrorism Strategy: Separating Friends from Enemies," *Washington Quarterly* 32:1 (2011). See also Elias Groll, "In Battle of Jihadi Groups, Pakistani Taliban Prefers Al Qaeda Over ISIS," *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2015, and Benn Brumfield and Naomi Ng, "Who are the Pakistani Taliban," CNN, December 17, 2014, and Sheikh.

68 Moghadam, p. 114.

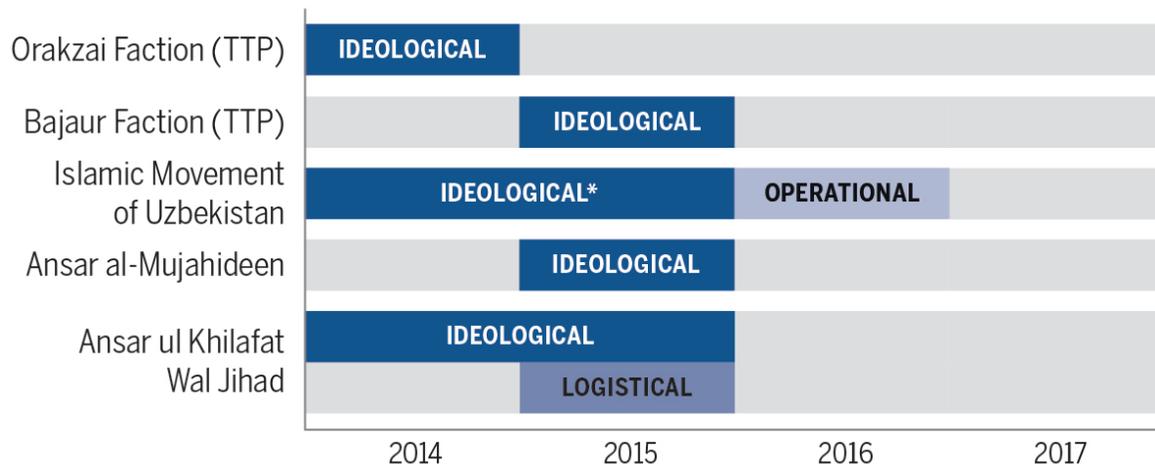
### 2.3 ISK Alliances Metric #1: Domains of Cooperation

This section identifies the domains in which various militant groups cooperated with ISK. The author first examines and discusses the groups that initiated their cooperation with ISK by publicly pledging *bay`a* to ISK, or in other words, engaged with ISK in the ideological domain. The author then proceeds to analyze the groups which cooperated with ISK without publicly pledging *bay`a*. Parsing the militant groups into these two categories is helpful because it allows an examination of which groups are willing to be associated with ISK publicly, which may signal a stronger ideological commitment than general statements of support.

#### *Cooperation with a Public Pledge of Allegiance*

Figure 17 shows the groups whose leadership officially pledged allegiance to ISK between 2014 and 2017.<sup>69</sup> These include two TTP factions (Orakzai and Bajaur), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Ansar ul Mujahideen (AuM), and Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad (AKWJ), all of which pledged allegiance in 2014 and/or 2015.<sup>70</sup> For ideological cooperation, the figure indicates the year in which a group pledged *bay`a* to al-Baghdadi and initiated cooperation in the ideological domain. Interestingly, out of the five groups that pledged allegiance to ISK, only two groups cooperated in another domain. AKWJ were noted to be engaged in logistical cooperation (i.e., sharing of material or intangible resources) while IMU was reported to be cooperating with ISK in the operational domain in 2016. As discussed further below, the IMU leadership was initially divided in its support for ISK. Each of these relationships is explored in more detail below.

**Figure 17: Cooperation with a Public Pledge of Allegiance (2014 - 2017)**



*Note 1: Ideological cooperation indicates the year(s) in which groups publicly extended their bay`a to ISK*

*Note 2: Logistical and Operational cooperation indicate the years in which there were media reports of cooperation*

69 The report’s data in this section covers only complete years (i.e., 2014 to 2017). Any groups that initiated cooperation with ISK in 2018 are not captured here. However, all groups identified in the 2014-2017 period were researched up until July 2018 to align with the attacks data.

70 For the purposes of this report, pledges of allegiance are only noted for groups where the pledge was made publicly. Thus, groups that may have pledged allegiance to ISK outside of the public domain are not included here.

## Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan Factions (Taliban Movement of Pakistan)

The TTP first became prominent as a militant umbrella organization when various militant factions combined under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud in 2007.<sup>71</sup> TTP's stated goals are to overthrow the Pakistani government, establish sharia in Pakistan, and combat coalition forces in Afghanistan.<sup>72</sup> Although originally based in Pakistan, military operations by the Pakistani state forced the TTP to move its headquarters to Afghanistan in 2017.<sup>73</sup>

The chief spokesman for the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan along with five other regional commanders were amongst the first to pledge allegiance to ISK. These included Hafiz Saeed of Orakzai, Hafiz Quran of Kurram agency, Gul Zaman of Khyber Agency, Mufti Hassan of Peshawar, and Khalid Mansoor of the Hangu district.<sup>74</sup> However, it remained unclear at the time whether the entirety of these TTP factions were defecting to ISK or whether these leaders defected independently. In 2015, TTP spokesperson Umer Khorasani denied the defection of the complete group to ISK, reaffirmed TTP's allegiance to Mullah Omar, and subsequently released a 60-page statement in May 2015 that criticized al-Baghdadi.<sup>75</sup> While the overall position of the TTP is far from clear, at the very least, specific factions that defected from the TTP have voiced their alliance with ISK in the ideological domain.

In 2015, the TTP chief of the Orakzai Agency, Hafiz Saeed Khan,<sup>76</sup> was appointed as the leader of Islamic State Khorasan,<sup>77</sup> which potentially meant that ISK received the support of the entire Orakzai faction. Since TTP Orakzai's leader essentially assumed a leadership role within ISK, it can be argued that the Orakzai faction likely merged with ISK. This possibility was reinforced by U.S. General John Nicholson's remarks in August 2016, where he confirmed that a majority of ISK's fighters in Afghanistan, especially in southern Nangarhar, belonged to the Orakzai Agency.<sup>78</sup>

The Bajaur faction of the TTP issued a statement in April 2015, pledging allegiance to the Islamic State and its leader in the Khorasan region, Hafiz Saeed.<sup>79</sup> Similar to the Orakzai faction, there are strong indications that the Bajaur faction (which operates from Afghanistan's border regions) merged with ISK, uniting their leaders and fighters.<sup>80</sup> For both the Orakzai and Bajaur factions, there were no reports of logistical or operational cooperation between 2014 and 2017, which suggests that these factions began to operate under the ISK label after pledging allegiance.

Why did some factions of TTP feel compelled to join ISK, given their predominant goal of fighting the Pakistani state rather than creating a transnational caliphate? The TTP, with its loose internal structure, is highly vulnerable to internal disagreements and splintering. The umbrella group consists of about 40 Islamic and tribal factions primarily from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas<sup>81</sup> (FATA) and KPK areas.<sup>82</sup> The group came under intense pressure in 2014 when the Pakistani military launched a coordinated operation against it, Operation Zarb-e-Azab, which resulted in the dispersion

71 Hassan Abbas, "A Profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan," *CTC Sentinel* 1:2 (2008).

72 Ibid.

73 "Pakistan Taliban reject ISIS leader's claim to be 'caliph,'" Reuters, December 19, 2015.

74 Amir Mir, "Pakistan Now has a Native Daesh Amir," *News*, January 13, 2015.

75 Thomas Joscelyn, "Pakistani Taliban rejects Islamic State's self-professed caliphate," *FDD's Long War Journal*, May 27, 2015.

76 Hafiz Saeed Khan was, however, killed in July 2016.

77 Casey Garret Johnson, Masood Karokhail, and Rahmatullah Amiri, "The Islamic State in Afghanistan," *United States Institute of Peace*, April 7, 2016.

78 "Department of Defense Press Briefing by General Nicholson via teleconference from Afghanistan," *Department of Defense*, July 28, 2016.

79 Tahir Khan, "TTP Bajaur declares allegiance to Islamic State," *Express Tribune*, April 9, 2015.

80 Ibid.

81 A bill was passed by the Pakistani Parliament in May 2018 to merge the Federally Administered Tribal Areas with KPK province.

82 Sana Jamal and M Ahsan, "TTP – Analyzing the Network of Terror," *International Relations Insights and Analysis* 6 (2015).

of TTP members throughout Pakistan as well as across the border into Afghanistan. The combination of internal disputes and intensified operations by the Pakistani state against the TTP likely provided some TTP leaders with the impetus to pledge allegiance to ISK. In contrast to a weakened TTP, frustrated anti-state factions have turned to ISK's aggressive sectarian jihad, and welcomed the opportunity to join an ascendant group.

An examination of all attacks attributable to the Orakzai and Bajaur factions during the time period 2012 – 2018 shows a limited number of attacks directly conducted by the Bajaur faction in 2012, 2013, and 2014, and none in subsequent years. For the Orakzai faction, three attacks were linked to the group directly in 2010 and 2012, but none in subsequent years. The lack of any activity directly linked to the Bajaur and Orakzai factions again indicates that the two factions have likely merged their leadership and members with ISK.

### **Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad (Helpers of the Caliphate and Jihad)**

The Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad (AKWJ), previously known as the Tehrik-e-Khilafat-o-Jihad,<sup>83</sup> was one of the first Pakistani groups to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi in mid-2014, and then to the ISK leader Hafiz Khan Saeed in 2015.<sup>84</sup> Little is known about AKWJ, which is believed to be a small group active in Hyderabad and Karachi since May 2014.<sup>85</sup>

No reports were found with regard to AKWJ's operational cooperation with ISK, although there is some evidence of cooperation in the logistical domain. Per AKWJ's own statements in 2014, the group seeks to conduct operations to help the caliphate. The group also announced a series of operations, under the title "Operation Helping the Caliphate," in an online statement in November 2014 in which it also congratulated other groups for pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi.<sup>86</sup>

In an interview of two AKWJ members by Antonio Giustozzi and Silab Mangal, one of the commanders claimed that many Pakistani militants returning from Syria in 2014 had joined the group.<sup>87</sup> The commander also claimed that al-Baghdadi had endorsed the group's formation in private. The interviewees emphasized that in addition to conducting attacks, their role was to lobby other groups to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>88</sup>

Overall, it presently remains unclear the extent to which AKWJ has received any material or non-material assistance from ISK, but at the very least, the group appears eager to embrace the Islamic State brand and its mission. An analysis of attacks claimed by AKWJ suggests that the group has limited capacity; data collected by the report's research team amounts to 15 attacks, most of which took place during 2014 in Karachi. About 94% of these attacks were direct assaults targeting the Pakistani police, with a total of 36 killed and injured. Given AKWJ's relatively low capacity, it is possible that the group pledged allegiance to ISK in an attempt to reinforce its reputation by being associated with a transnational brand.

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83 "Pakistan: Dawat-e-Haq Posts images of Pro-ISIL Graffiti," Government Open Source Enterprise, translated from post on Dawat-e-Haw in Urdu, April 2015.

84 Rassler.

85 Ibid.

86 "1 December 2014 OSC Summary," Open Source Enterprise Summary.

87 "Taking shape: The Islamic State expands into Pakistan with Tehrik-e-Khilafat," *Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor*, January 30, 2015. Interviews by Antonio Giustozzi and Silab Mangal.

88 Ibid.

### **Ansar-ul-Mujahideen (Movement of Mujahideen)**

The Ansar-ul-Mujahideen, which has existed since March 2013, is affiliated with the TTP and includes Uzbek fighters amongst its ranks.<sup>89</sup> While not much is known about the group, AuM appears to focus largely on retaliatory attacks against Pakistani security forces, particularly in North Waziristan.<sup>90</sup> In 2014, when factions of the TTP agreed to negotiations with the Pakistani government, AuM was one of the groups to carry out spoiler attacks in Islamabad and Hangu.<sup>91</sup> When Shahidullah, TTP's former spokesman, introduced Hafez Saeed Khan as the leader of ISK in a video in January 2015, he listed pledges of allegiance from a number of other groups that could not be present in person, including Ansar-ul-Mujahideen.<sup>92</sup> However, outside of this, there have been no reports of logistical or tactical cooperation. It is possible that AuM fighters operate under the ISK label and have merged with ISK. At the time of this report, however, the precise nature of the relationship between ISK and AuM remains uncertain.

An examination of the AuM dataset compiled by the research team shows the group to be primarily active in the KPK and FATA regions. However, between 2012 and 2018, only six key attacks were reported. One of the most prominent attacks claimed by AuM was a suicide attack on a Shiite mosque in Kurram Agency in July 2013, which killed at least 57 and wounded 180 individuals.<sup>93</sup> Five of the attacks recorded for AuM took place in 2013, and only one in 2015. Thus, the limited AuM activity reported in mainstream media outlets suggests that currently, the group either lacks the capacity to launch independent attacks or that the group has merged with ISK.

### **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan**

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan stemmed from an organization formed in 1991 with the goals of overthrowing the government of President Karimov and implementing sharia law. After expulsion from Uzbekistan, the IMU was officially formed in 1998 and eventually developed closer relations with al-Qa`ida and the Taliban. Although the IMU generally retained its regional agenda, some of its members began to develop a broader goal of waging a transnational jihad against the West.<sup>94</sup> The IMU was also suspected to have forged close ties with the TTP in the mid- to late 2000s,<sup>95</sup> and in 2008, IMU leader Yuldashev called for jihad against Pakistani security forces.<sup>96</sup>

IMU's leader Usman Ghazi came to power in 2012, when its leader Abu Usman Adil was killed that year.<sup>97</sup> In August 2015, Usman Ghazi pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi, soon after the confirmation of Mullah Omar's death.<sup>98</sup> This appeared to be an attempt to merge Ghazi's faction with ISK; Ghazi took hundreds of defecting IMU members with him, and stated in a 2015 video that they should be described as ISK fighters.<sup>99</sup> Prior to this, in September 2014, Ghazi had already announced that IMU was siding with the Islamic State.<sup>100</sup> However, Ghazi's faction suffered major setbacks during clashes

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89 Zia Ur Rehman, "A Profile of Ahrar-ul-Hind and Ansar-ul-Mujahidin in Pakistan," *CTC Sentinel* 7:5 (2014).

90 Bill Roggio, "Ansarul Muhajideen suicide bomber kills 2 Pakistani troops," *FDD's Long War Journal*, November 20, 2013.

91 Ibid.

92 "Pakistani Taliban splinter group again pledges allegiance to Islamic State," *FDD'S Long War Journal*, January 13, 2015.

93 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "'Anti-drone' militant group claims Parachinar twin blasts," *Dawn*, July 27, 2013.

94 "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)," Mackenzie Institute, January 7, 2016.

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Bill Roggio, "IMU announces Death of Emir, Announces New Leader," *FDD's Long War Journal*, August 4, 2012.

98 "IMU Pledges Allegiance to IS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," *SITE Intelligence Group*, August 6, 2015.

99 Merhat Sharipzhan, "IMU Declares It Is Now Part Of The Islamic State," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, August 6, 2015.

100 Ibid.

with the Taliban in November 2015.<sup>101</sup> In August 2016, General Nicholson noted that several IMU members had joined ISK, but some had returned to their “original colors.”<sup>102</sup> Upon Ghazi’s death, commanders who had defected regrouped once again under the label of IMU,<sup>103</sup> and by June 2016, this new group reaffirmed its loyalty to the Taliban and al-Qa`ida.<sup>104</sup>

As evidenced by the above information, the IMU-ISK relationship is complex; while some IMU members may well have realigned with the Taliban and al-Qa`ida, several factors indicate that much of IMU has merged with ISK. Firstly, IMU has several reasons to be drawn to ISK; given IMU members’ migrant status within the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, a borderless jihad like the one propagated by the ISK is well suited to IMU’s goals. ISK’s hostility toward the Pakistani state also aligns well with IMU’s broader agenda. Moreover, the Islamic State’s active recruitment campaigns inside Uzbekistan can potentially revive IMU’s influence within Uzbekistan.<sup>105</sup> Overall, IMU’s merger with ISK makes sense strategically as it provides IMU commanders with an enduring political platform that extends beyond the nationalistic goals of groups like the Taliban. Secondly, recent media reports suggest that a potential merger has indeed taken place between ISK and IMU. In early to mid-2017, several sources reported that Abdul Rahman Yuldash, the son of deceased IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev, was leading efforts to expand ISK’s presence in Afghanistan.<sup>106</sup> By mid-2018, more reports indicated that the Islamic State’s ranks had swelled with IMU fighters, especially in Northern Afghanistan, and that they were actively recruiting for ISK.<sup>107</sup>

These events explain why, despite ideological cooperation between IMU and ISK (see Figure 17) in 2014 and 2015, reports of operational cooperation were only observed in 2016. It appears highly likely that post 2016, a majority of IMU members began operating under the banner of ISK. An examination of IMU-linked attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan suggests declining capacity of the group as an autonomous entity. The IMU dataset compiled by the report’s research team for the time period 2012 to 2018 finds a total of 12 attacks by the group, of which 11 took place between 2012 and 2014 in Pakistan. Five of these 11 attacks were also linked to the TTP. The remaining one attack, which took place in 2015, was an abduction of 30 Hazara men in Zabul, Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> While the attack was claimed by the IMU, local authorities suspected the involvement of ISK.

Overall, given IMU’s strong strategic incentives to join ISK, on an organizational level IMU appears to have largely merged with ISK in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, even if a minority faction remains aligned with the Taliban and al-Qa`ida.

### Cooperation Without a Public Pledge of Allegiance (2014 - 2017)

The previous section examined the relationship between ISK and those groups that cooperated with it in the ideological realm. In contrast, this section focuses on groups that have not publicly pledged *bay`a* to ISK, but have cooperated with ISK in other domains. Six groups were identified as having suspected logistical and/or operational links with ISK: Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat, Jundullah-TTP, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Islam, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and the Balochistan National Army. While

101 Bill Roggio and Caleb Weiss, “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan faction emerges after group’s collapse,” FDD’s Long War Journal, June 14, 2016.

102 “Afghan-Pakistan ISIL’s Hafiz Saeed Khan killed,” Al Jazeera, August 13, 2016.

103 Antonio Giustozzi, “Shifting ground: Competition intensifies between the Islamic State and Al-Qa`ida for Central Asian support,” *Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor*, April 25, 2017.

104 Roggio and Weiss.

105 Damon Mehl, “The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan Opens a Door to the Islamic State,” *CTC Sentinel* 8:6 (2015).

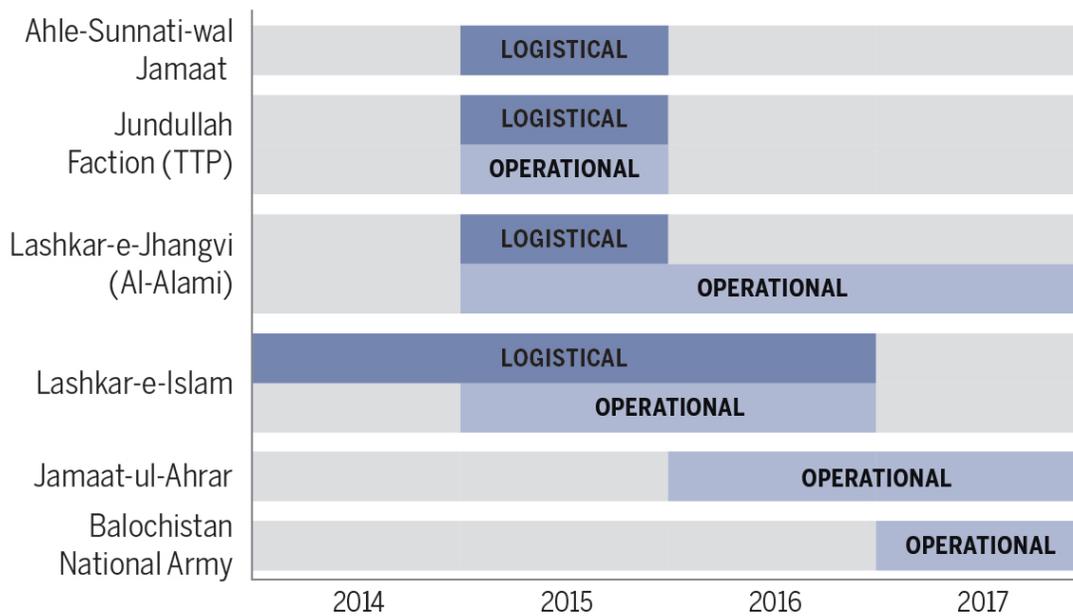
106 Kathy Gannon, “Power struggle seen within surging Islamic State in Afghanistan,” *Military Times*, June 7, 2017. See also Noor Zahid, “Son of Slain IMU Leader Promotes IS in Afghanistan,” *Voice of America*, February 8, 2017.

107 Kathy Gannon, “How Strong is the Islamic State Group in Afghanistan,” *Associated Press*, April 22, 2018.

108 “Afghanistan kidnap: Gunmen seize 30 Hazara men in Zabul,” *BBC*, February 24, 2015.

these groups have not publicly pledged *bay`a* to ISK, some of them have expressed support in the form of general statements. Figure 18 show the years in which there were reports of logistical and/or operational cooperation between ISK and each of these groups. Each group’s relationship with ISK is discussed further below.

**Figure 18: Cooperation Without a Formal Pledge of Allegiance (2014 - 2017)**



**Lashkar-e-Islam (Army of Islam)**

Lashkar-e-Islam was first formed in 2004, with a specific focus on targeting the Sunni Barelvi sect. Around 2007, LeI began a movement to implement sharia law in Pakistan’s Khyber Agency with Mangal Bagh Afridi as its leader.<sup>109</sup> The Khyber Agency encompasses the Khyber Pass, which not only links Pakistan and Afghanistan but also forms part of vital NATO land supply lines. Bordering Nangarhar, the Khyber Pass is known to be a hub for smuggling and critical for accessing weapons black markets.<sup>110</sup> LeI benefitted from this trade, as it gained significant political control over the Khyber Agency by 2008. In 2007 and 2008, the Pakistani government finally cracked down on LeI via the Surat-ul-Mustakeem operation and declared LeI an illegal organization.<sup>111</sup> Post 2014, ongoing military operations compelled LeI to relocate to the Nazyan district of Nangarhar, Afghanistan.<sup>112</sup>

While LeI’s Mangal Bagh did not pledge support to ISK, there have been reports that the group provided logistical and operational support to ISK by entering into a power-sharing arrangement in the Nazyan district.<sup>113</sup> Reportedly, ISK’s earlier consultation meetings in Khost with various groups’ leaders also included LeI, in addition to JuA and LeJ.<sup>114</sup> A practical relationship between ISK and LeI was especially beneficial for the former given LeI’s hold over the smuggling networks, which enabled

109 Daud Khattak, “Mangal Bagh and LI Marginalized in Khyber Agency,” *CTC Sentinel* 5:4 (2012).

110 Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, “The Role of Lashkar-i-Islam in Pakistan’s Khyber Agency,” *CTC Sentinel* 3:10 (2010).

111 “Lashkar-e-Islami / Mangal Bagh Afridi,” *Global Security*, August 15, 2012.

112 Casey Garret Johnson, “The Rise and Stall of the Islamic State in Afghanistan,” United States Institute of Peace, November 3, 2016.

113 Osman, “The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan.’”

114 “Pakistan: Security Assessment 2017,” *Journal for Conflict and Security Studies* 1:1 (2017).

linkages between Nangarhar, Afghanistan, and ISK bases in Orakzai, Pakistan.<sup>115</sup> As such, Figure 18 indicates the group engaged in both logistical and operational cooperation with ISK between 2014 and 2016.<sup>116</sup> ISK and LeI also collaborated to suppress local militia commanders in Afghanistan's Achin and Nazyan districts.<sup>117</sup> The relationship between LeI and ISK appears to have emerged primarily out of practical needs to survive, with some overlapping targets.

While in earlier years LeI was known as ISK's implementing partner in Nangarhar,<sup>118</sup> their relationship became antagonistic by 2017. Several recent reports indicate that there have been serious clashes between LeI and ISK militants in Nangarhar.<sup>119</sup> ISK has released several statements with regard to its clashes with LeI.<sup>120</sup> In October 2018, LeI claimed killing 19 ISK militants in Achin and Nazyan.<sup>121</sup> Why was LeI and ISK's collaboration so short-lived? Local police officials in Afghanistan claim that fighting between the two groups broke out over valuable natural resources; LeI militants occupy the wooded areas in the Achin district and have resisted ISK's attempts to take over the forested areas to engage in illegal logging.<sup>122</sup> Per local police sources, fighting broke out when ISK members encroached upon LeI's forested territory.<sup>123</sup> Overall, it appears that ISK's attempts to take over the economic turf of LeI in Nangarhar resulted in their rivalry and clashes. Thus, the future of their collaborative partnership remains uncertain. LeI is briefly discussed in Part 3 of the report, where the author compares the seasonal trends in its activity with that of ISK's in Afghanistan.

### **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami (Army of Jhangvi - International)**

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), founded in 1996, is one of the deadliest groups in Pakistan and is focused on targeting the Shi'a community. It originated as a splinter group of Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP), when LeJ broke off due to internal conflicts within the SSP, and began aligning itself with the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.<sup>124</sup> In addition to targeting the Shi'a community, the group has also called for the destruction of other religious minorities, as well as the repulsion of Western influences since 2001.<sup>125</sup> While several sectarian militant organizations operate in Pakistan, LeJ stands out as one of the most active, lethal, and sophisticated groups amongst them.<sup>126</sup> LeJ is largely held responsible for introducing suicide missions to sectarian warfare within Pakistan; the first suicide attack targeting a Shiite procession took place in July 2003 in Quetta.<sup>127</sup>

The Pakistani government banned LeJ in 2001 and targeted various members of its leadership in 2003.<sup>128</sup> The government crackdown on LeJ dispersed its members throughout Pakistan and also weakened its central organization structure. Around 2009, attacks began to be claimed under the new banner of LeJ al-Alami (LeJ international). For example, a major suicide attack in Kabul in 2011

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115 Ibid.

116 Osman, "The Islamic State in 'Khorasan.'"

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Mohammad Habibzada, "IS, Lashkar-e-Islam Clash in Eastern Afghanistan," Voice of America, February 11, 2018.

120 ISK statement released via Amaq Agency, available at <https://afghanistan.liveuamap.com/en/2018/5-september-is-released-the-statement-about-clashes-with>

121 "Lashkar-e-Islam claims killing 19 Islamic State militants in Nangarhar," *Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism*, October 7, 2018.

122 Khalid Zerai, "ISIS, other militants clash over illegal logging in Nangarhar," *Salaam Times*, April 5, 2018.

123 Ibid.

124 Asif Farooqi, "Profile: Lashkar-e-Jhangvi," BBC, January 11, 2013.

125 "Chapter 6. Foreign Terrorist Organizations," U.S. State Department, May 30, 2013.

126 Khuram Iqbal, *The Making of Pakistani Human Bombs* (London: Lexington Books, 2015).

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid.

was claimed by LeJ al-Alami.<sup>129</sup> Whether LeJ al-Alami has replaced the original LeJ or is simply an extension remains unclear. Nevertheless, the addition of Alami indicates the group's intention to wage a broader jihad, beyond the boundaries of Pakistan.

While LeJ has not pledged allegiance to ISK, there has been evidence of operational and logistical cooperation between the two groups. There have been reports about LeJ's leadership holding meetings with Islamic State leaders in Saudi Arabia<sup>130</sup> and in Khost, Afghanistan.<sup>131</sup> According to Giustozzi, al-Baghdadi reportedly had direct links with LeJ, and the latter received funds from Islamic State central.<sup>132</sup> Although there is little evidence of such links between LeJ and ISK's leadership, more recently in the Islamic State's weekly newspaper al-Naba, an article claimed that an LeJ leader had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State shortly after the formation of ISK.<sup>133</sup> While the article discussed some jointly planned attacks between ISK and LeJ in Sindh, Balochistan, and Quetta, it did not articulate any details about LeJ's pledge of allegiance and whether this included all of LeJ or only some factions within it. In 2016, an LeJ spokesman, Ali bin Sufyan, clearly stated its intention to work with other militant groups whether they were the Islamic State or al-Qa`ida. The spokesman also admitted to collaborating with ISK in an attack on a police academy in Quetta, Pakistan, in October 2016, which was deemed to be one of the deadliest attacks on a Pakistani security base in history; the attack involved three suicide bombers, which killed at least 60 individuals and injured over 120.<sup>134</sup> Several Pakistani government officials and security experts have pointed out a possible working relationship between LeJ and ISK, given their overlapping ideology and targets.<sup>135</sup> Finally, LeJ is also suspected of actively recruiting militants for ISK; in particular, Farooq Bangulzai, an LeJ commander, has been linked to recruiting militants for ISK within Balochistan.<sup>136</sup>

While the precise nature of the relationship is still unknown, there are strong indications of the two groups possessing logistical and operational synergy, which may endure over time. Given LeJ's suspected cooperation with ISK in the logistical and operational domains, the ISK-LeJ connection is discussed further in Part 3 of this report.

### Jundullah - TTP Faction (Soldiers of God)

Jundullah,<sup>137</sup> a faction of the TTP, first made headlines in 2004 when it attacked the Pakistani Army's Karachi Corps Commander.<sup>138</sup> The group frequently targets Muslim minority sects and other religions, and maintains a presence in Sindh, Balochistan, and FATA.<sup>139</sup> When founded in 2003, Jundullah had strong links with al-Qa`ida's Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.<sup>140</sup> Jundullah was first reported to meet with an Islamic State delegation in November 2014 in Balochistan.<sup>141</sup> Six days after this meeting, Jundul-

129 Saeed Shah, "Al Qaeda linked group claims Kabul suicide attacks on Shia pilgrims," *Guardian*, December 6, 2011.

130 "Jundullah vows allegiance to Islamic State," *Express Tribune*, November 18, 2014.

131 "Pakistan Security Report 2017," Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), January 6, 2018.

132 Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan*.

133 "IS reveals rare details of ties with Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi," BBC Monitoring South Asia, September 10, 2018. The Islamic State article referenced in this report was published in the 146th edition of Al Naba, distributed on September 6, 2018, via the Islamic State's Telegram channel.

134 Andrew Marszal, "Isil 'took part' in Quetta attack, says Pakistani terror group ally," *Telegraph*, October 26, 2016.

135 Farhan Zahid, "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami: A Pakistani Partner for Islamic State," *Terrorism Monitor* 15:2 (2017).

136 Zahid Gishkori, "Balochistan witnesses 70pc surge in violence," *News International*, October 26, 2016.

137 The Jundullah group referred to in this report is a faction of TTP, and distinct from the Iranian Jundullah movement, which operates in southeast Iran.

138 Ilyas Khan, "Pakistan Shia mosque blast in Shikarpur kills dozens," BBC, January 30, 2015.

139 "Jundallah," Jane's Intelligence report, March 24, 2016.

140 Saud Mehsud, "Pakistan officials question group's claim of Islamic State funding," Reuters, May 15, 2015.

141 Basit.

lah had pledged support to the Islamic State, with its spokesperson Marwat stating, “They (Islamic State) are our brothers, and whatever plan they have we will support them.”<sup>142</sup> In 2015 and 2016, ISK attempted to merge the Iranian Jundullah with the Pakistani Jundullah, with the intention to use the unified group to infiltrate Iran.<sup>143</sup>

However, not many details are available on Jundullah’s actual pledge.<sup>144</sup> In addition to the initial meetings reported with ISK, a year later Jundullah’s spokesman indicated that its group had received financial support from the Islamic State, suggesting possible engagement in the logistical domain. However, Pakistani officials have questioned the veracity of the claim.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, there has been some suspicion of joint activity in the operational domain; in 2015, the suicide attack on a Shi`a mosque in Shikarpur, Pakistan, which killed at least 60 people was claimed by Jundullah,<sup>146</sup> but ISK was suspected to be involved in some capacity.<sup>147</sup> One of the top leaders of Jundullah, Qari Ghulam Hazrat, was killed in August 2015 in an airstrike in Kunduz, Afghanistan. Hazrat was believed to be heading operations for ISK earlier in 2015.<sup>148</sup> In February 2018, the Pakistani government placed Jundullah on the first schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, which provides the legal framework for counterterrorism prosecutions in the country.<sup>149</sup>

An examination of the dataset tracking Jundullah’s activity shows limited activity after the death of its leader in 2015. Notably, there have been no reports of any suspected logistical or operational cooperation between Jundullah and ISK in 2016 and 2017. In the time period between January 2012 and July 2018, Jundullah conducted only 28 attacks. Amongst these, there were two attacks that were jointly linked to ISK and Jundullah in 2015.<sup>150</sup> Within Pakistan, the last attack claimed by Jundullah occurred in 2016. No evidence or suspected collaborative attacks by Jundullah and ISK were observed in the years following 2015. In and of itself, Jundullah currently does not emerge as a particularly dangerous entity within Pakistan due to its low levels of activity, and it remains to be seen how closely it is linked with ISK and whether it has genuinely merged with the Iranian Jundullah.

### **Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (Assembly of the Free)**

Originally based in the Mohmand tribal agency, JuA is one of TTP’s splinter groups that formed in August 2014 after the death of TTP’s Hakimullah Mehsud in 2013. Currently, it is believed to operate from Nangarhar and the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>151</sup> JuA unwaveringly remains committed to overthrowing the Pakistani government and implementing sharia law.<sup>152</sup> The group is most notorious for its lethal attacks on educational institutions in Pakistan; it is widely held responsible for the attack on the Bacha Khan University in 2016 as well as the attack on the Army Public School in 2014.<sup>153</sup> The group was banned in 2016 by Pakistan, and in mid-2017, the U.N. Security Council Committee added JuA to its ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions list as “associated with Islamic

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142 “Jundullah vows allegiance to Islamic State.”

143 Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan*.

144 Ressler.

145 Mehsud.

146 Ubaidullah Shaikh, “At least 60 killed in blast at Shikarpur imambargah,” *Dawn*, January 30, 2015.

147 Ali K. Chishti, “The ISIS link,” *Friday Times*, February 13, 2015.

148 “Top leader of Jundullah, ISIS-affiliated militant group, killed in Kunduz air strike,” *Afghan Zariza*, August 25, 2015.

149 Azaz Syed, “Govt bans Jundullah, notification issued,” *News International*, February 14, 2018.

150 Sophia Saifi, Jethro Mullen, and Paul Cruickshank, “Gunmen in Pakistan kill 43 in attack on bus killing religious minority,” CNN, 2015.

151 “Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds One Name to Its Sanctions List,” United Nations Security Council, July 6, 2017.

152 Bill Roggio, “US State Department lists Jamaat-ul-Ahrar as terrorist group,” FDD’s Long War Journal, August 3, 2016.

153 Ali Akbar, “TTP names successor to APS mastermind Umar Mansoor,” *Dawn*, October 18, 2017.

State in Iraq and the Levant.”<sup>154</sup>

JuA expressed indirect support for the Islamic State in September 2014 without making any formal pledge. A JuA spokesman told Reuters, “We respect them. If they ask us for help, we will look into it and decide.”<sup>155</sup> However, it wasn’t long before JuA reaffirmed its loyalty to the TTP umbrella leadership in March 2015.<sup>156</sup> This was largely driven by a need to unite the TTP factions against Pakistan’s Operation Zarb-e-Azb.<sup>157</sup> Overall, as far as its relationship with ISK is concerned, JuA seems to be an opportunistic player that seeks to keep the possibility to develop a closer relationship with the Islamic State open. As such, it has praised the Islamic State and also emulates some of the Islamic State’s content in its own propaganda materials.<sup>158</sup>

Besides expressing support indirectly, JuA appears to have collaborated with the Islamic State in an operational capacity. For example, the targeting of four senior police officers in Quetta on July 13, 2017, was carried out by JuA, but claimed by the Islamic State on its website.<sup>159</sup> According to some TTP sources, the two groups maintain a close operational relationship in Nangarhar as well.<sup>160</sup>

JuA’s current status appears precarious, however. In late 2017, JuA’s leader Omar Khurasani announced a breakaway faction called Hizbul Ahrar via a video message, disparaging JuA’s tactics of targeting civilians, including women and children.<sup>161</sup> In January 2018, Pakistani media sources reported that the JuA’s spokesman Assad Mansoor has surrendered to Pakistani military forces.<sup>162</sup> While it appears that JuA as an organization has been somewhat weakened, it continues to pose a security threat in the region; in May 2018, JuA claimed a suicide attack on security forces in Nowshera city in KPK and promised to continue its violent campaign.<sup>163</sup> Taken together, JuA’s supportive statements for the Islamic State, joint activity, overlapping goals of attacking the Pakistani government and creating a caliphate are suggestive of a collaborative relationship. Due to JuA’s suspected cooperation with ISK in the operational domain, and potential to develop deeper collaboration in the Nangarhar province, the ISK-JuA connection is discussed further in Part 3 of this report.

### **Ahle-Sunnat-wal Jamaat (People of the Tradition and the Congregation)**

Ahle-Sunnat-wal Jamaat (ASWJ) was previously known as the anti-Shi`a Sipah-e-Sahaba, which was originally formed in 1985 in Pakistan and operated primarily in Punjab. SSP has also acted as a political party, contesting elections in Punjab in 1993.<sup>164</sup> The group was officially banned by the Pakistani government in 2012 due to its links to terrorist activity.<sup>165</sup> After the ban, many members of the group worked with others such as the LeJ to carry out attacks throughout Pakistan. More recently, the group has tried to rebrand itself as ASWJ and rebuild itself as a political party.<sup>166</sup>

154 “Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds One Name to Its Sanctions List.”

155 Jibril Ahmed and Kay Johnson, “Linked to Taliban and ISIS, Pakistani group seizes notoriety with bomb in park,” Reuters, March 28, 2016.

156 Mureeb Mohamand, “After Khorasani’s death, TTP-Jamaatul Ahrar is all but dead,” *Express Tribune*, October 20, 2017.

157 Animesh Roul, “Pakistan’s Jamaat-ul-Ahrar: A Violent Domestic Threat,” *Terrorism Monitor* 14:18 (2016).

158 Rassler.

159 Gul Yousafzai, “Gunmen kill four police in Pakistani city of Quetta,” Reuters, July 13, 2017.

160 Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan*.

161 Shamim Shahid, “Hizbul Ahrar takes birth as internal rifts tear Jamaatul Ahrar apart,” *Pakistan Today*, November 13, 2017.

162 “Jamaat-ul-Ahrar spokesman Assad Mansoor surrenders to Pakistani forces,” *News International*, January 15, 2018.

163 “At least 1 dead, 11 injured in Nowshera Suicide Attack,” *Express Tribune*, May 17, 2018.

164 “Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan,” South Asia Terrorism Portal.

165 “The Sunnah and Sunnah Ban,” BBC, March 9, 2012.

166 Syed Shoaib Hasan, “Pakistan bans Ahle Sunnah Wal Jamaat Islamist group,” BBC, March 10, 2012.

In 2014, the Balochistan government reported its suspicions that some elements of the ASWJ had joined hands with the ISK, warning of increased attacks in Balochistan and KPK, and especially against the Shi`a community.<sup>167</sup> Members linked to the ASWJ were reportedly openly promoting the Islamic State's activities in Iraq and Syria, and conducting pro-Islamic State campus rallies and sermons.<sup>168</sup> ASWJ's active support of Islamic State activities constitutes logistical cooperation as it helps promote the Islamic State brand in the region. However, there is little evidence to substantiate any material links between the groups presently. ASWJ's support is likely to remain limited to a single domain, as it clearly has political ambitions, which creates strong incentives to steer clear of openly engaging in violent acts. The ASWJ had 150 candidates participate in the 2018 elections in Pakistan, and sanctions on its chief were lifted earlier in June.<sup>169</sup>

### Balochistan National Army

The Baloch National Army (BNA), also known as the Balochistan Liberation Army, has been engaged in a fight with the Pakistani state since its formation in 2000. Its primary goal is to attain greater autonomy in the province of Balochistan. While Balochistan has plentiful natural resources such as natural gas, copper, and coal, it remains one of the country's least developed states with high poverty and unemployment rates. The death of Nawab Akbar Bugti in 2006, a Baloch nationalist leader, refueled the BNA to increase attacks against Pakistani security forces and any non-Baluch citizens.<sup>170</sup> The BNA has been designated a terrorist group by both Pakistan and the United Kingdom.<sup>171</sup>

While the goals of ISK and BNA are unique and driven by separate ideologies, they share a common enemy—the Pakistani state. There are some early indications that this common enemy may create some space for the groups to engage in tactical cooperation, at least in the short term. In December 2017, an attack on a Christian community in Quetta, which killed nine and injured about 57 people was reportedly planned and executed jointly by the BNA and ISK.<sup>172</sup> The BNA has also cooperated with other groups in the operational domain on the basis of a common target; an attack on senior police officers in November 2017 was jointly claimed by TTP and BNA.<sup>173</sup> While it is currently difficult to assess whether these joint efforts can develop into an enduring tactical relationship between ISK and BNA, it is likely that BNA may engage with any dominant group in the region to facilitate its attacks on the Pakistani state, including the emergent ISK.

## 2.4 ISK Alliances Metric #2: Quality of Cooperation

Cooperation between terrorist groups is critical in boosting organizations' capacity and can contribute to their survival and lethality.<sup>174</sup> But not all relationships are equal, and some alliances are more enduring and dangerous than others. This section presents an overview of ISK's relationships with groups operating in the AfPak region and highlights the common characteristics across alliances and rivals. Groups are considered to be engaged in high-end cooperation if they cooperate with ISK in at least two out of three domains (strategic alliance) or merge, and are considered to be engaged in low-end cooperation if they cooperate in only one domain. High-end cooperation is likely to be more enduring

167 "IS footprints growing in Pakistan: report," *Dawn*, November 9, 2014.

168 See Arif Rafiq, "Will the Islamic State Spread Its Tentacles to Pakistan?" *Diplomat*, July 28, 2014, and Kiran Nazish, "The emergence of the Islamic State in Pakistan," *Qantara*, November 12, 2014.

169 Madeeha Anwar, "Hundreds With Terror Ties Run in Pakistan Elections," *Voice of America*, July 24, 2018.

170 Asad Hashim, "Pakistan's unending battle over Balochistan," *Al Jazeera*, April 16, 2013.

171 "Baloch Liberation Army," *Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, 2012.

172 Zaheerul Hassan, "Quetta Church Attack Planned by Daesh and BNA," *Asian Tribune*, December 18, 2017.

173 *Ibid.*

174 For example, see Asal and Rethemeyer as well as Phillips.

than low-end, as the latter is usually a temporary tactical association between groups. Assessing the relational characteristics of cooperating groups collectively, Table 4 summarizes which groups are engaged in high-end cooperation with ISK versus low-end cooperation.

Overall, 11 groups were identified as being engaged with ISK in some cooperative domain. From these, seven are categorized as engaged in high-end cooperative relationships; of those seven, three have potentially merged with ISK while the remaining four groups are deemed to be cooperating with ISK in more than one domain without being fully absorbed by it. Groups that have merged with ISK (i.e., the TTP Bajaur and Orakzai factions and IMU) are suspected to have united their leadership and members with ISK. Jundallah-TTP, Lashkar-e-Islam, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad are expected to have enduring relationships with ISK with the potential to deepen in the future. Four groups are identified as being engaged in low-end cooperation with ISK: Ansar al Mujahiddeen, Ahl-e- Sunnat Wal Jamaat, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and Balochistan National Army. While there are suspected links between these groups and ISK, the cooperation reported thus far has been limited, and restricted to only one of the three cooperative domains.

*Table 4: Landscape of ISK’s Allies*

<i>Group Name</i>	<i>Ideological Cooperation</i>	<i>Logistical Cooperation</i>	<i>Operational Cooperation</i>	<i>Quality of Cooperation</i>
	<i>Pledge of Allegiance</i>	<i>Sharing Resources</i>	<i>Joint Attacks</i>	<i>High-End/Low-End</i>
<b>Bajaur Faction (TTP)</b>	√			High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Oraknzai Faction (TTP)</b>	√			High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</b>	√	√	√	High-End (Potential Merger)
<b>Jundullah Faction (TTP)</b>	√	√	√	High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Ansar al-Mujahideen</b>	√			Low-End
<b>Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad</b>	√	√		High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan/Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)</b>		√		Low-End
<b>Lashkar-e-Islam</b>		√	√	High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Al-Alami)</b>		√	√	High-End (Strategic Alliance)
<b>Jamaat-ul-Ahrar</b>			√	Low-End
<b>Balochistan National Army</b>			√	Low-End

*Ideology, Goals, and Targets of ISK's Alliances*

In order to comprehend the underlying factors driving ISK's various relationships in the region, Table 5 presents an overview of the primary ideology, goals, and targets of all groups listed in Table 4. Table 5 also indicates whether a group was subject to counterterrorism measures by the Pakistani state and/or the United States. In general, for cooperation to take place, groups are expected to have some ideological affinity as well as some overlap in their goals and/or targets.

*Table 5: Ideology, Goals, and Target (High/Low End Cooperation)*

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Quality of Cooperation</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Targets</i>	<i>Subjected to CT measures by Pak State or U.S.?</i>	
<b>Bajaur Faction (TTP)</b>	Potential Merger	Sharia Law, Pan-Islamist	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites, Minorities, Pakistani State	Yes	Operation Sher-e-Dil on September 9, 2008
<b>Orakzai Faction (TTP)</b>	Potential Merger	Sharia Law, Pan-Islamist	Sunni Deobandi	Pakistani Security Forces	Yes	Khwakh Ba De Sham Operation - 2010
<b>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</b>	Potential Merger	Overthrow Uzbek Government, Jihad against Pakistani State, Sharia Law, Pan-Islamist	Sunni, Salafist	Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan State	Yes	Sustained Military Campaign post 9/11
<b>Jundullah Faction (TTP)</b>	High-End	Sharia Law, Pan-Islamist	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites, minorities, Pakistani State	Yes	Splinter group created in response to military ops.
<b>Ansar al-Mujahideen</b>	Low-End	Sharia Law	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites, minorities, Pakistani Army	Indirect	Clashes with PK military 2013 in North Waziristan
<b>Ansar ul Khilafat Wal Jihad/Tehrik-e-Khilafat</b>	High-End	Pan-Islamist	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites, local police, Western forces in Afghanistan	N/A	Unknown

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Quality of Cooperation</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Targets</i>	<i>Subjected to CT measures by PAK State or U.S.?</i>	
<b>Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan/Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)</b>	Low-End	Sharia Law	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites	No	Unknown
<b>Lashkar-e-Islam</b>	High-End	Sharia Law	Sunni Deobandi	Pakistani Military, India, Eastern Afghanistan, Shiites, Barelvi	Yes	Targeted since 2001
<b>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Al-Alami)</b>	High-End	Sharia Law, Pan-Islamist	Sunni Deobandi	Shiites, minorities, Pakistan, Iranians, Westerns targets in AfPak	Yes	Sustained crackdown on group and arrests
<b>Jamaat-ul-Ahrar</b>	Low-End	Sharia Law	Sunni Deobandi	Pakistani State	Yes	Has been targeted by Pak military since 2014
<b>Balochistan National Army</b>	Low-End	Regional Autonomy	Ethno-nationalist	Pakistani State	Yes	Renewed military operations since 2004

*Explaining the Variation in Quality of Cooperation*

An examination of the characteristics of ISK’s alliances listed in Table 5 shows that the AfPak militant landscape offers a plethora of militant groups that share ISK’s core goals, ideology, and/or targets. These groups differ significantly from other regional groups that have either clashed or kept their distance from ISK such as the Afghan Taliban or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which not only have divergent goals and targets from the former, but also enjoy passive or active support from the Pakistani state.

But what explains the varying degrees of cooperation amongst ISK’s alliances? Why have some groups engaged in deeper relationships with ISK than others? Below are some of the key factors driving ISK’s high- and low-end relationships.

Strategic Alliances

Comparing the groups along four criteria (goals, ideology, targets, and subsection to counterterrorism operations) shows that six out of the seven groups engaged in high-end cooperation with ISK share several characteristics. All groups share the goal of implementation of sharia law and subscribe to the Sunni Deobandi school of thought. Their targets include the Pakistani state, minorities, and especially the Shi`a community. Groups targeting minorities and the Pakistani state fit well with the sectarian stance of ISK and its call to target national governments in pursuit of an Islamic caliphate. Perhaps

most importantly, all of the groups except AKWJ have been subjected to military operations by the Pakistani Army. Being subjected to Pakistani counterterrorism operations poses an existential threat, which may provide the impetus to align with ISK, compared to groups that have been actively or passively supported by the state. These four key characteristics seem to underpin high-end cooperation with ISK in AfPak.

### Mergers

Why would some groups decide to merge with ISK rather than simply becoming allies? Generally, mergers are advantageous for groups that lack financial sources, are plagued with recruitment issues, or are suffering from an ‘identity crisis.’<sup>175</sup> Viewed from this lens, many of the smaller factions within the TTP seem like prime candidates to merge with ISK given TTP’s internal divisions, disagreements, and a lack of a unified vision. For the smaller factions within TTP, merging with ISK can thus provide a brand new outfit that can reinforce dwindling resources and personnel. On the other hand, subsuming TTP factions bolsters ISK’s resources and brand.

### Low-End Cooperation

As for groups with low-end cooperative relationships with ISK, a variety of factors explain the basis for tactical engagement. While the BNA has a common enemy with ISK, it does not share ISK’s ideology or long-term goals; rather its only incentive to cooperate with ISK is to bolster its ability to attack the Pakistani state. BNA’s long-term goal is to gain more autonomy in the province of Balochistan, which directly contradicts ISK’s mission to eliminate national boundaries. While ASWJ shares some goals and ideological elements with ISK, it does not focus on targeting the Pakistani state nor has it been subjected to any sustained military campaigns in a way that groups engaged in high-end cooperation with ISK have been. Moreover, there are indications that ASWJ intends to become politically active within the Pakistani polity, suggesting that it may have little desire to actually launch attacks against state targets. Thus, their ideological support for ISK may be primarily rooted in ASWJ’s desire to highlight its agenda to implement sharia law. Finally, with regard to Ansar-ul-Mujahideen, it remains unclear the extent to which they have the capacity to engage in a relationship with ISK beyond pledging allegiance. The last observed attack by the group took place in 2015, which suggests that the group has largely fallen apart or its members have likely joined other groups.

### *The Effect of Alliances on ISK’s Capacity*

Of all the cooperative relationships identified in this section, groups that have merged with ISK are likely to impact its operational capacity more directly as they entail a direct transfer of resources into ISK. The unification of leadership ranks and fighters of TTP factions and the IMU with ISK has provided ISK the resources and local expertise to operate and expand its bases in the AfPak region. Whether these mergers eventually generate internal conflict and negative outcomes within ISK to disrupt its trajectory remains to be seen.

Amongst the remaining groups, Lashkar-e-Islam, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Jamaat-ul-Ahraar are most likely to significantly impact ISK’s capacity to conduct violence since their cooperation with ISK in the operational domain spanned over two years. Of course, this is not to suggest that groups’ logistical cooperation such as sharing of training or leadership consultations does not contribute to ISK’s organizational capacity, but rather that the effect of logistical cooperation is difficult to measure. Similarly, the effect of merged groups on ISK’s observable capacity is also challenging to capture since merged groups no longer operate under their original name. On the other hand, the effects of ISK’s opera-

175 Daniel Byman, “Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the Al Qaeda Relationship with its Affiliate Organizations,” *Security Studies* 23:3 (2014): p. 442.

tional alliances can be estimated by examining their jointly claimed attacks, geographical locations, and seasonal trends.

Part 3 of this report takes a deep-dive into the three groups that have cooperated with ISK in the operational realm for at least two years: LeJ, LeI, and JuA. In particular, Part 3 takes a closer look at the three groups' areas of operation, seasonal trends, and jointly claimed attacks with ISK. Doing so provides an assessment of the extent to which ISK has successfully leveraged its operational alliances to build its capacity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## Part 3: Leveraging Operational Alliances

This part of the report examines the extent to which ISK's operational cooperation with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, and Lashkar-e-Islam has contributed to its overall organizational capacity. In the sections below, ISK's relationship with each of these groups is assessed with regard to joint attacks,<sup>176</sup> geographical areas of operation and seasonality trends. Each of the three sections on LeJ (3.1), JuA (3.2), and LeI (3.3.) presents an analysis of the data and key takeaways. Overall, a closer examination of ISK's connection with LeJ and JuA reveals that ISK relies heavily on attacks conducted jointly with these two groups to claim its high lethality in Pakistan. Additionally, ISK's seasonal trends, as discussed in Part 1 of the report, closely align with the seasonal trends of LeJ and LeI in Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively.

### 3.1 The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Connection

Although LeJ has not explicitly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, various reports highlight logistical and tactical cooperation between LeJ and ISK between 2015 and 2018 (as discussed in Part 2 of the report). LeJ has openly expressed its willingness to cooperate with ISK and acknowledged cooperation in the 2016 Quetta attack that killed 63 individuals.<sup>177</sup> The LeJ dataset, drawn upon in this section, tracks all attacks carried out by the group between January 2012 and July 2018 in Pakistan.

#### *Jointly Claimed Attacks*

For the five attacks listed below, either ISK or LeJ both claimed them or Pakistani officials reported suspicions of coordination between the groups. The bulk of these attacks took place in Baluchistan.

- October 2016: Suicide attack on a police academy in Baluchistan, killing at least 61 and wounding 120 was claimed by ISK, however, based on communications intercepts, authorities suspected it was carried out by LeJ militants.<sup>178</sup>
- November 2016: Suicide attack on a Sufi shrine in Baluchistan, killing 52 and injuring over 100 in Baluchistan, was claimed by both groups.<sup>179</sup>
- December 2016: Attack outside the Counter Terrorism Department in Punjab, which injured three, was claimed by ISK and suspected to involve LeJ.<sup>180</sup>
- May 2017: An attack on a politician in Baluchistan, killing 25 and injuring 30 was claimed by ISK, although authorities suspected LeJ.<sup>181</sup>
- July 2018: The third-deadliest attack in Pakistan's history targeted an election campaign in Baluchistan, killing 150 and wounding 189, and was claimed by ISK. Authorities later identified the suicide bomber as a member of LeJ.<sup>182</sup>

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176 These include all attacks that were (a) claimed by both groups, or (b) where an attack was claimed by one of the two groups but local officials suspected involvement of the other, and/or (c) where there were reports of cooperation between the two groups.

177 Andrew Marszal, "ISIL 'Took Part' in Quetta Attack, Says Pakistani Terror Group Ally," *Telegraph*, October 26, 2016.

178 Gul Yusufzai, "Islamic State Claims Attack on Pakistan Police Academy, 59 Dead," Reuters, October 24, 2016.

179 Salman Masood, "Bombing at Sufi Shrine in Pakistan Kills Dozens," *New York Times*, November 12, 2016.

180 "Explosion outside CTD building in RYK injured 3," *Nation*, December 30, 2016.

181 Asad Hashim, "Bomb Attack Kills at least 25 in Pakistan's Balochistan," *Al Jazeera*, May 12, 2017.

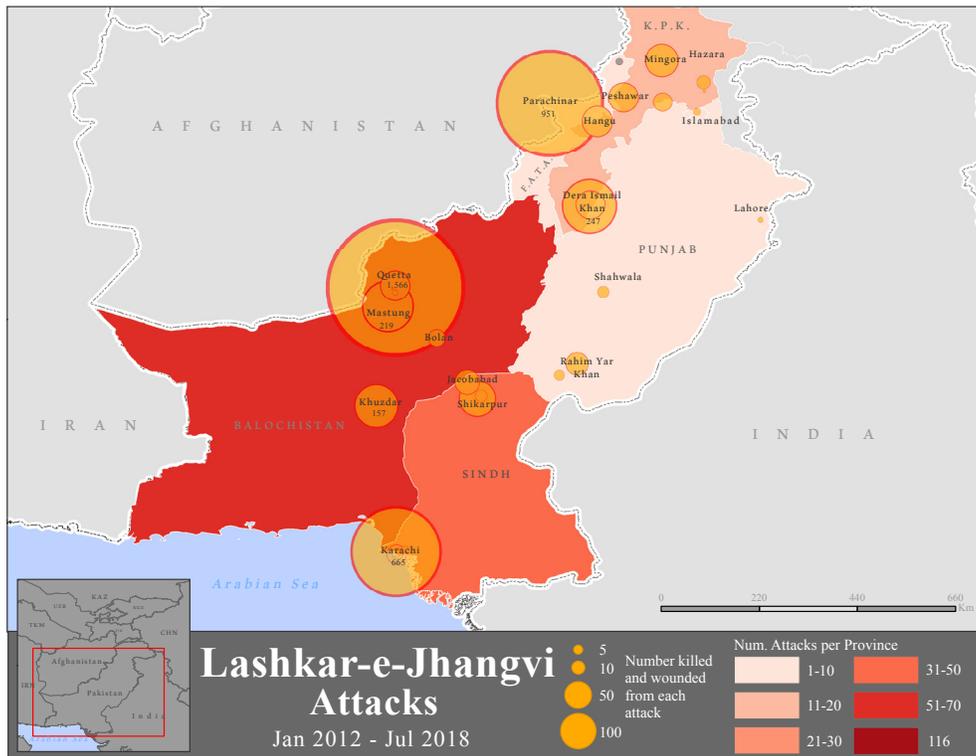
182 Zafar, "Mastung Suicide Bomber Identified as Hafeez Nawaz from Abbottabad."

*LeJ Attacks in Pakistan*

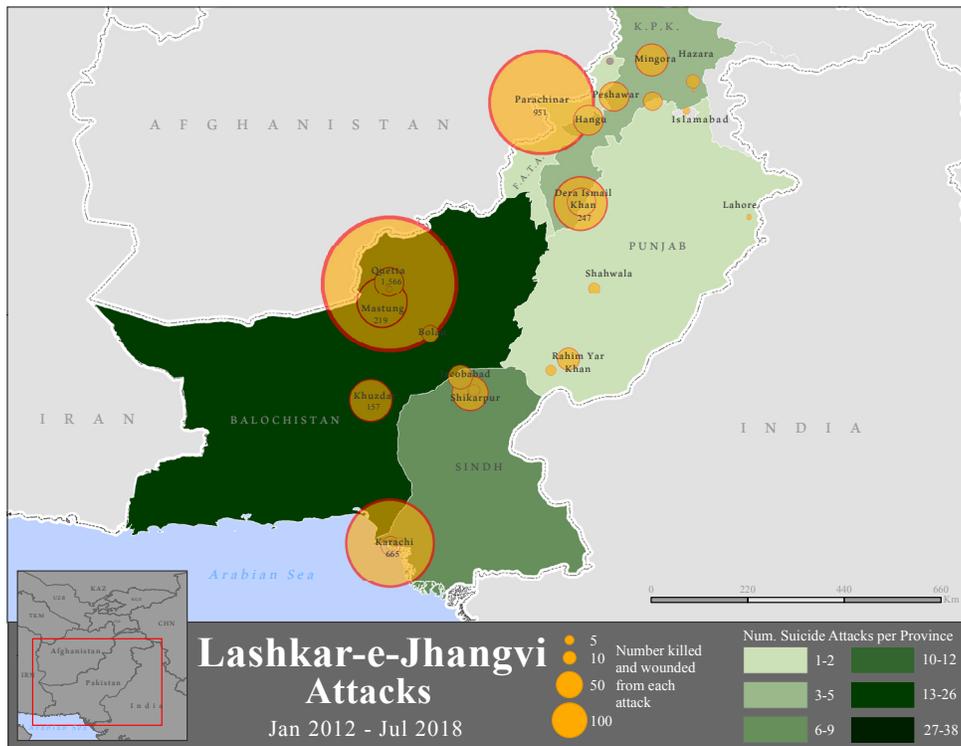
The figures below provide an overview of LeJ’s attacks in Pakistan. Figure 19 indicates the total number of attacks, lethality (total killed and injured) of individual attacks, and the number of suicide attacks per province (Figure 19(b)). Figure 20 shows the geographical shifts in LeJ’s activity before and after becoming linked with ISK (i.e., in 2012-2014 and in 2015-2018). Finally, Figure 21 compares LeJ’s seasonal trends with that of ISK-PK.

**Figure 19: LeJ Attacks (2012 - 2018)**

**(a) Number of Attacks Per Province**



*(b) Number of Suicide Attacks Per Province*

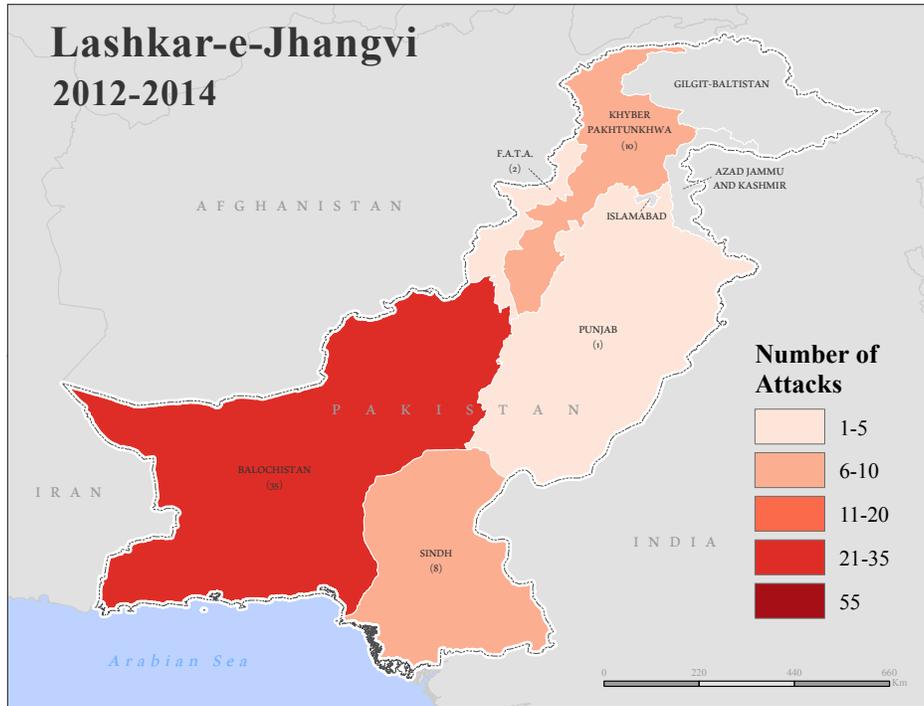


**Takeaway 1: ISK’s lethality in Pakistan has heavily drawn on LeJ’s capacity; approximately 40% of all deaths and injuries related to ISK attacks in Pakistan were a result of attacks linked to both groups.**

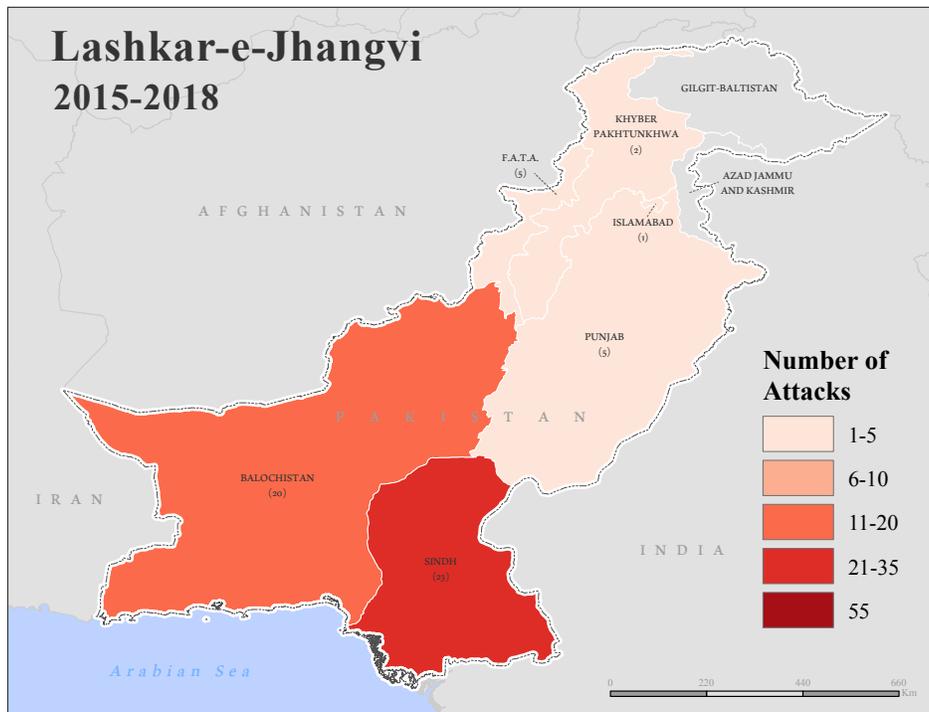
A key source of ISK’s prowess in Baluchistan, Pakistan, is its close operational links with LeJ. While it is difficult to assess the extent of coordination between ISK and LeJ, the ISK-PK dataset identifies at least five attacks in 2016, 2017, and 2018 where both groups were jointly involved. Collectively, even though the joint attacks account for only 6% of ISK’s total attacks in Pakistan between 2014 -2018, they make up about 40% of all lethality claimed by ISK in Pakistan (288 deaths and 441 injuries). Figure 19 maps LeJ’s attacks between January 2012 and July 2018 geographically, as well as the number of suicide bomb attacks in each province. Overall, LeJ has maintained an intense focus on launching attacks in Balochistan, which is also a focus of ISK-PK attacks. (See Figure 2 in Part 1 of the report.)

Figure 20: Geographical Shifts in LeJ Attacks Before and After Aligning with ISK

(a) LeJ Attacks 2012- 2014



(b) LeJ Attacks 2015 - 2018

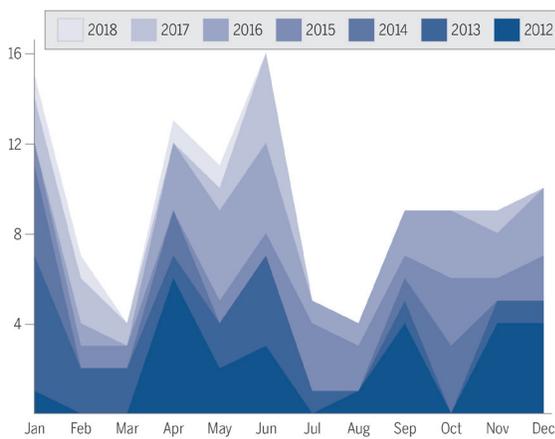


**Takeaway 2: Geographical shifts in LeJ’s operations post alliance with ISK overlap with the latter’s activity in Pakistan.**

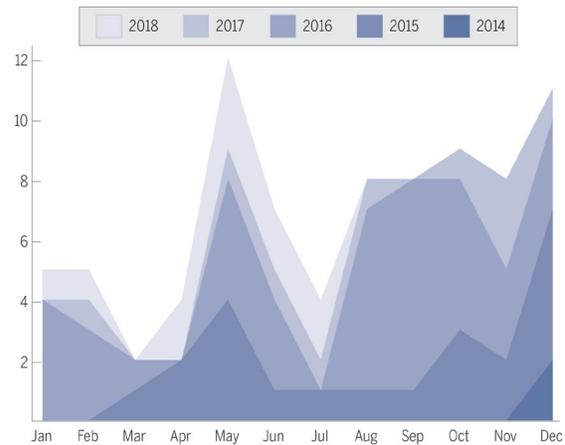
Figure 20(a) shows the number of attacks LeJ launched in each province in the three years prior to cooperation with ISK, whereas Figure 20(b) maps LeJ’s attacks post cooperation with ISK. A comparison of the maps denotes a notable shift in the location of LeJ claimed attacks in the post-ISK era. In relative terms, LeJ reduced its attacks in Baluchistan and KPK but intensified them in Sindh post-ISK alliance. In the 2015-2018 period, LeJ launched 20 attacks in Baluchistan (a 42% drop), while increasing them to 23 attacks in Sindh (an 187% increase). Thus, LeJ’s shift away from Baluchistan during and after 2015, and increased focus on Sindh overlaps with ISK-PK’s shift toward Sindh in the period 2015 to 2017. (See Figure 4 in Part 1.)

*Figure 21: Comparing Seasonal Trends - ISK-PK and LeJ*

*(a) LeJ*



*(b) ISK-PK*



**Takeaway 3: There is overlap in ISK-PK and LeJ’s high- and low-activity seasons.**

Comparing the datasets of ISK-PK and LeJ demonstrates similar patterns in their seasonal trends. Figure 21 shows a striking correspondence in their high- and low-activity periods. For both groups, their high-activity periods are between April and July and between September and January. The overlap in seasonal peaks and troughs of both groups suggests that cooperation between the two groups runs deeper than expected.

**3.2 The Jamaat-ul-Ahrar Connection**

As highlighted in Part 2 of the report, JuA was suspected of cooperating with ISK in the operational domain in both 2016 and 2017. JuA formed as a splinter group of TTP in August 2014, as a merger of Mohmand Pakistani Taliban and Punjabi militants Ahrar ul Hind.<sup>183</sup> On various occasions, it has stated its support for the Islamic State.<sup>184</sup> It is believed to operate from Nangarhar, Afghanistan, and the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>185</sup> Thus far, JuA has shown to be an opportunistic player. Although it reaffirmed its loyalty to the TTP umbrella in March 2015, it remains supportive of the

183 Saeed Shah, “Pakistan Militant Group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar Threatens Fresh Wave of Violence,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2016.

184 Ahmed and Johnson.

185 “Security Council ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds One Name to Its Sanctions List,” United Nations, June 16, 2017.

Islamic State more generally. In 2017, it was placed on the U.N. Security Council's sanctions list due to its operational links with the Islamic State and TTP.<sup>186</sup> The JuA dataset, drawn upon in this section, tracks all instances of attacks between January 2014 and July 2018.

### *Jointly Claimed Attacks*

A total of 121 attacks were attributed to JuA between 2012 and 2018; of these, nine attacks have been linked to both ISK and JuA groups across Baluchistan, KPK, Sindh, and Kurram Agency. Each of these attacks are listed below:

- August 2016: Bomb attack in Baluchistan, which killed at least 56 and injured approximately 100 people, was claimed by both JuA and ISK.
- September 2016: Attack in KPK, which killed three soldiers, was claimed by both JuA and ISK.
- October 2016: A remotely detonated bomb attack on a polio security team in Peshawar injured two policemen.<sup>187</sup> Per GTD database, both JuA and ISK claimed these attacks.
- October 2015: Three Frontier Corps soldiers were killed in Quetta, Baluchistan.<sup>188</sup> Per GTD database, both JuA and ISK claimed these attacks.
- November 2016: Three Frontier Corps were killed in a bomb blast in a funeral in Peshawar, and three others were injured.<sup>189</sup> Per GTD database, both JuA and ISK claimed these attacks.
- February 2017: Attack on a Sufi shrine in southeastern Sindh, which killed 88 and injured 343 was claimed by ISK. Pakistani authorities attributed the attack to JuA.
- April 2017: Roadside bomb in Kurram Agency, which killed at least 14 people, was claimed by both JuA and ISK.
- June 2017: Suicide attack in Baluchistan, killing 20 and injuring 21, was claimed by both groups.
- July 2017: Attack in Baluchistan targeting a police chief, killing 1 and injuring 11, was claimed by both ISK and JuA.

### *JuA Attacks in Pakistan*

The figures below provide an overview of JuA's attacks in Pakistan. Figure 22 indicates the total number of attacks, the lethality (total killed and injured) of individual attacks, and the number of suicide attacks per province. Figure 23 shows the geographical shifts in JuA's activity before and after becoming linked with ISK (i.e., in 2014-2015 and in 2016-2018). Finally, Figure 25 compares JuA's seasonal trends with that of ISK-PK.

186 "Narrative Summaries of Reasons for Listing," United Nations Security Council Subsidiary Organs, 2017.

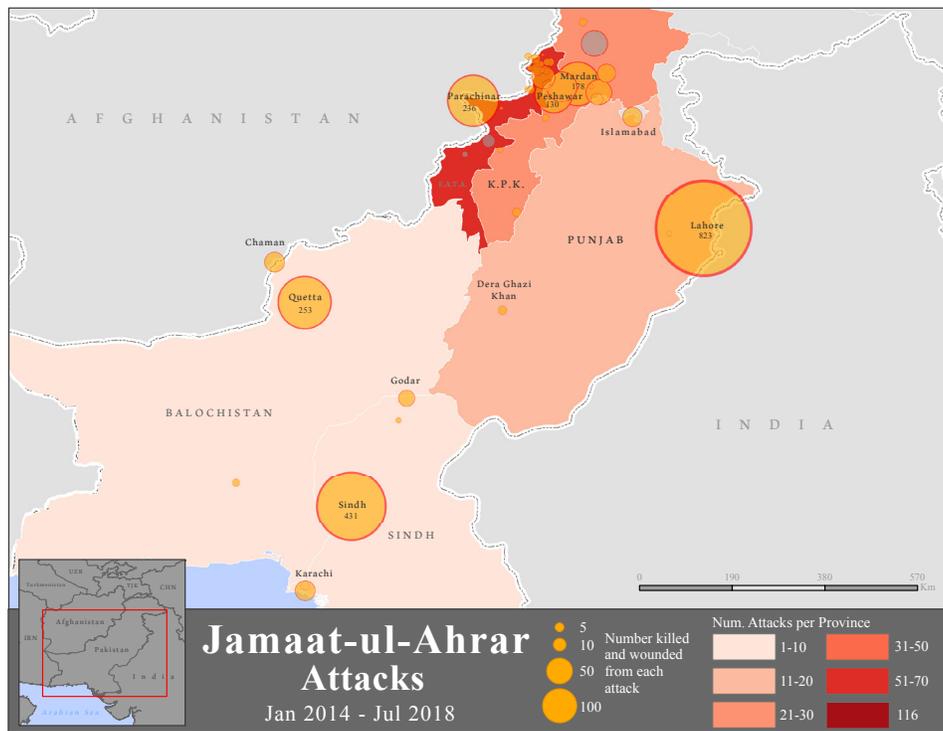
187 "Policeman Dies in Bomb Attack on Polio Security Team," *Dawn*, 2016.

188 Mohammad Zafar, "Three FC Soldiers Gunned Down in Quetta," *Express Tribune*, 2016.

189 Riazul Haq, "Three FC Men Killed in TTP-JA Blast at Funeral in Peshawar," *Express Tribune*, 2018.

**Figure 22: JuA Attacks (2014 - 2018)**

**(a) Number of Attacks Per Province**



**(b) Number of Suicide Attacks Per Province**

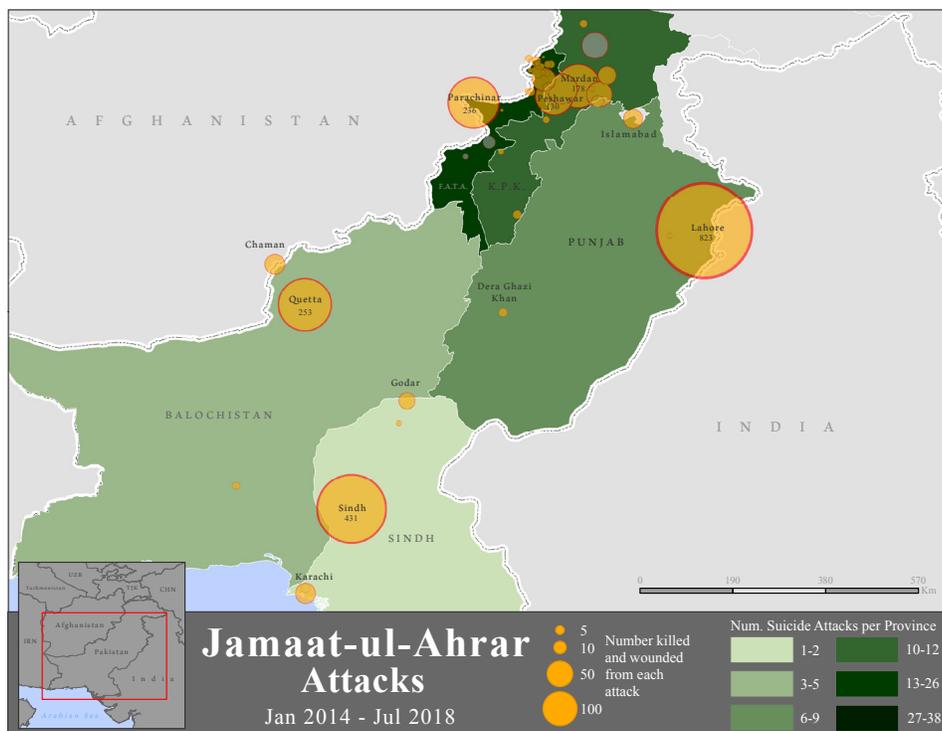
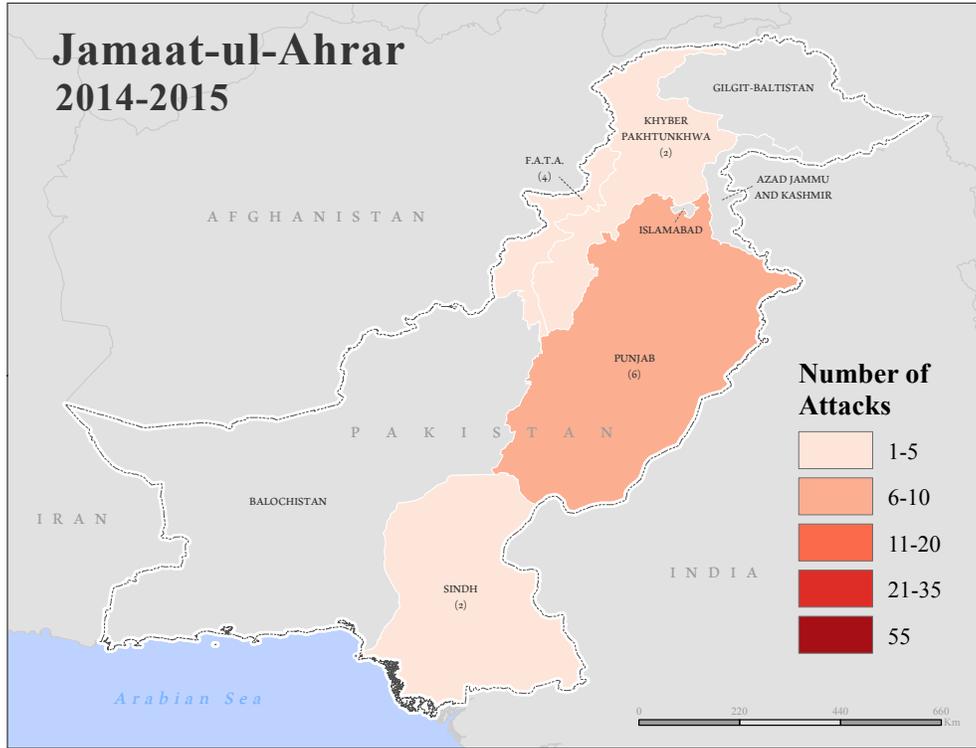
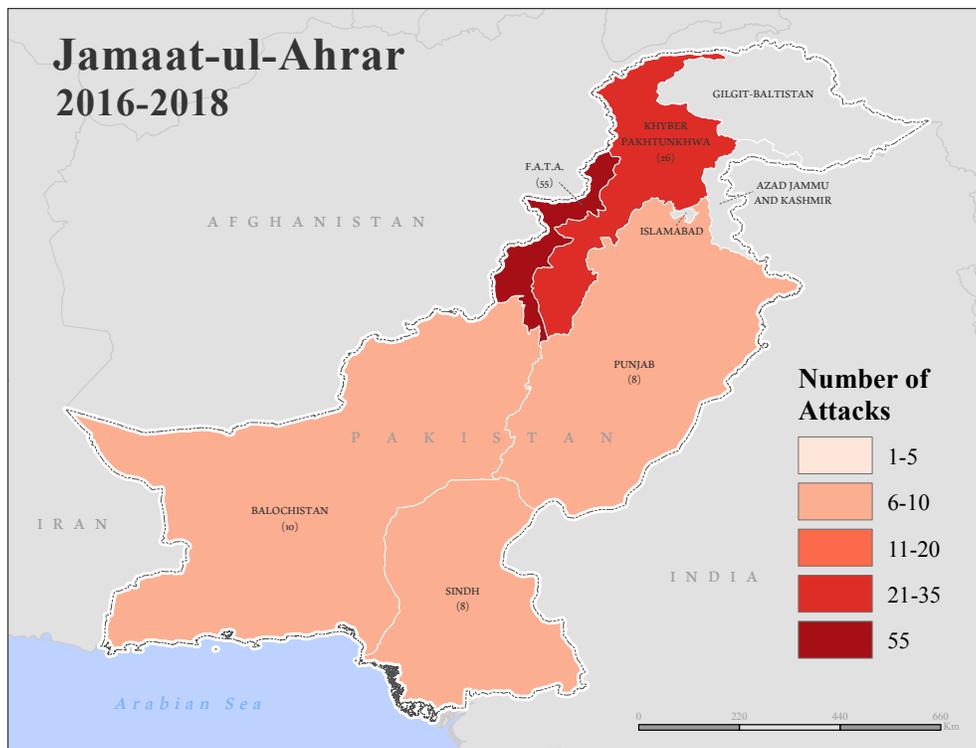


Figure 23: Geographical Shifts in JuA Attacks Before and After Aligning with ISK

(a) JuA Attacks 2014 - 2015



(b) JuA Attacks in 2016 - 2018



**Takeaway 4: ISK's lethality in Pakistan has heavily drawn on JuA's capacity; approximately 31% of all deaths and 44% of all injuries related to ISK attacks in Pakistan were a result of attacks linked to both groups.**

ISK and JuA were jointly linked to at least nine attacks between 2014 and 2018. Three of these involved suicide attacks and two targeted Muslim minority sects. Collectively, the joint attacks made up 11% of all ISK-PK attacks, and accounted for 31% of all deaths and 44% of all injuries (219 deaths and 490 injured) claimed by ISK attacks in Pakistan. Notably, seven out of the nine attacks were directed at the Pakistani police, military, or government officials. Figure 22 maps JuA's attacks between January 2014 and July 2018 geographically, as well as the number of suicide bomb attacks in each province. Overall, JuA has maintained an intense focus on launching attacks in Mohmand Agency, followed by KPK.

**Takeaway 5: Geographical shifts in JuA's operations post alliance with ISK overlap with ISK's geographical expansion in Pakistan post 2016.**

As highlighted in Part 2 of the report, JuA was first suspected to be operationally cooperating with ISK in 2016. A closer examination of the geographical locations of attacks by JuA before and after 2016 highlights significant shifts in JuA's areas of operation. As shown in Figure 23(b), after 2016, JuA became active in Baluchistan, where it had not conducted any attacks previously, and drastically intensified its attacks in FATA and KPK. JuA's attacks in FATA and KPK increased by almost 14 times and 13 times, respectively, in the 2016-2018 period compared to 2014-2015. A comparison of JuA's activity with ISK-PK attacks shows that ISK was highly active in Baluchistan and KPK post 2016, coinciding with JuA's activity in those provinces over the same time period.

### 3.3 The Lashkar-e-Islam Connection: Friend or Foe?

Another militant group suspected to have resettled in Nangarhar, Afghanistan, is Mangal Bagh's Lashkar-e-Islam. Part 2 of the report noted LeI's suspected logistical and operational links with ISK between 2014 and 2016, even though LeI never pledged allegiance publicly. LeI relocated to the Nazyan district of Nangarhar when it came under pressure from the Pakistani military in 2014 and reportedly coordinated with ISK to take control of the district.<sup>190</sup> The LeI dataset tracks the group's activity between January 2012 and July 2018, however, there are no attacks conducted by LeI post 2017.

The relationship between LeI and ISK seems complex. It appears that there was initially some operational-level cooperation between the two groups, which helped ISK embed itself in Nangarhar province. As noted in the previous section of the report, ISK and LeI collaborated to conduct three suicide attacks against local militia commanders, in Achin and Nazyan.<sup>191</sup> However, this relationship appears to have broken down;<sup>192</sup> recent reports indicate that fighting broke out between the two groups over valuable natural resources, in particular with regard to illegal logging in the Achin district in Afghanistan.<sup>193</sup> Unlike LeJ and JuA, the LeI dataset contains no attacks in Pakistan that have been jointly claimed by ISK and LeI.

#### *LeI Attacks*

The LeI dataset that tracks the group's activity between 2012 and 2018 shows that LeI's activity in

<sup>190</sup> Johnson.

<sup>191</sup> Osman, "The Islamic State in 'Khorasan.'"

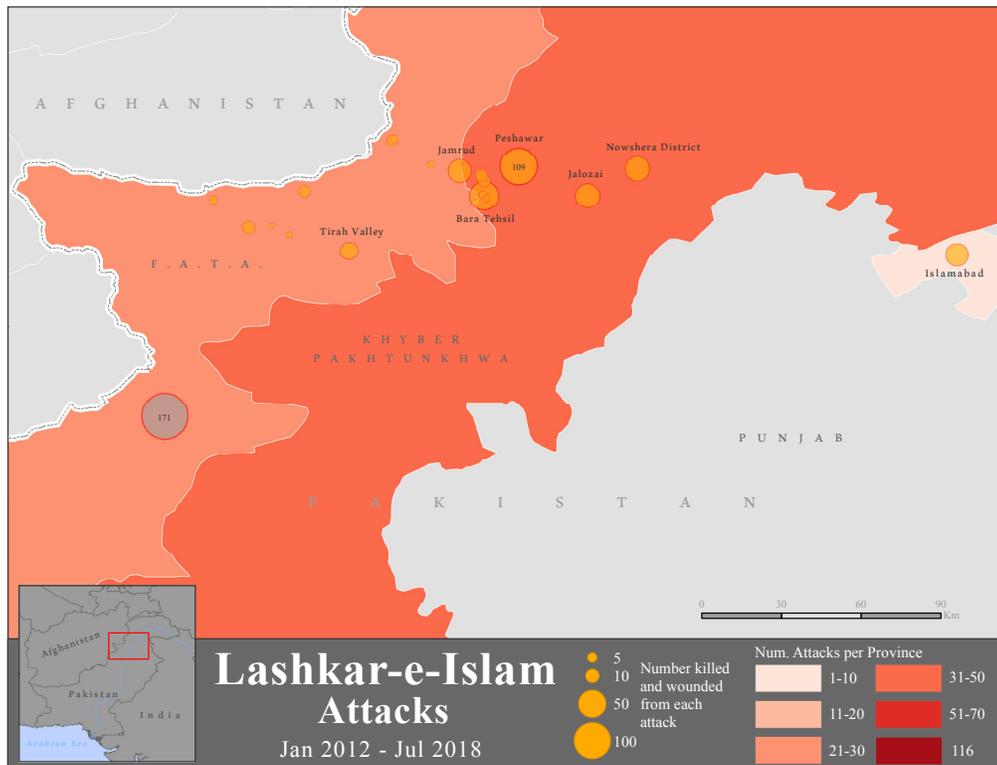
<sup>192</sup> "Lashkar-e-Islam Chief Mangal Bagh Killed in a Drone Strike," *Pakistan Today*, July 24, 2016.

<sup>193</sup> Khalid Zerai, "ISIS, Other Militants Crash Over Illegal Logging in Nangarhar," *Salaam Times*, April 5, 2018.

Pakistan has largely remained focused in KPK and FATA. (See Figure 24.) Figure 25 compares LeI’s seasonal trends with ISK-AFG between 2015 and 2018.<sup>194</sup> Per the LeI dataset, there were no significant geographical shifts in LeI’s activity post cooperation with ISK.

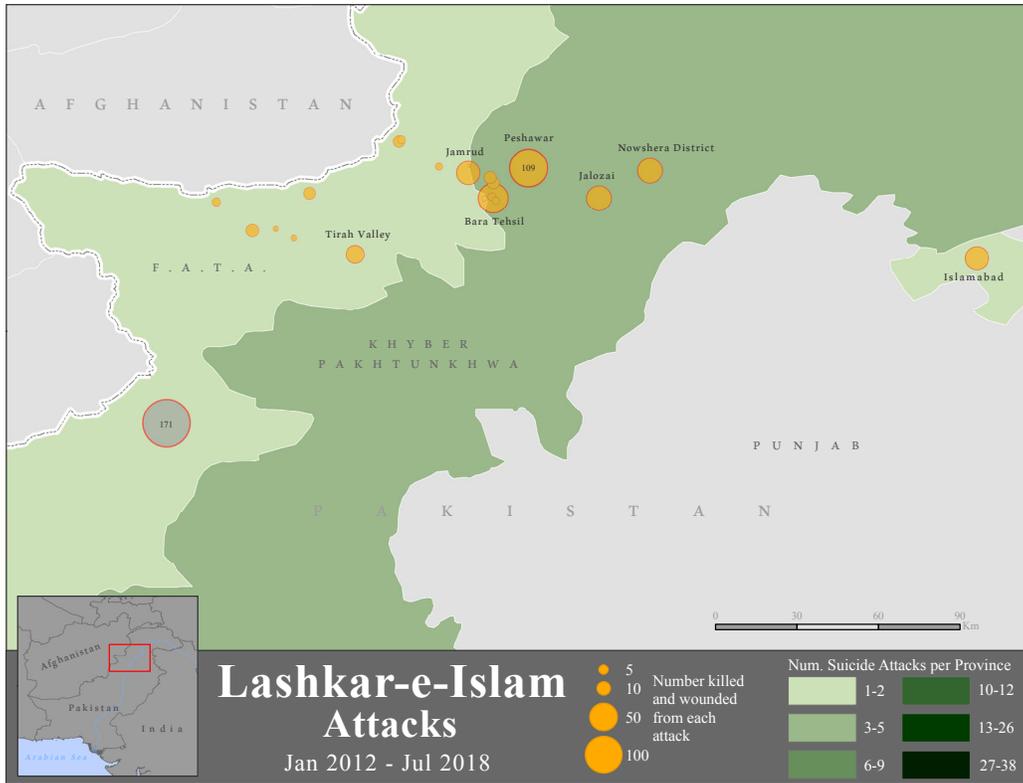
**Figure 24: LeI Attacks (2012 - 2018)**

**(a) Number of Attacks Per Province**



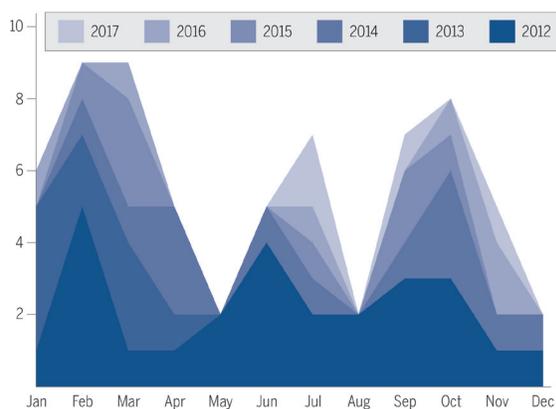
194 LeI’s seasonal trends overlap with ISK-AFG rather than with ISK-PK. This is likely due to LeI’s relocation to Nangarhar post 2014 (as discussed in Part 2), and its initial cooperation with ISK.

*(b) Number of Suicide Attacks Per Province*

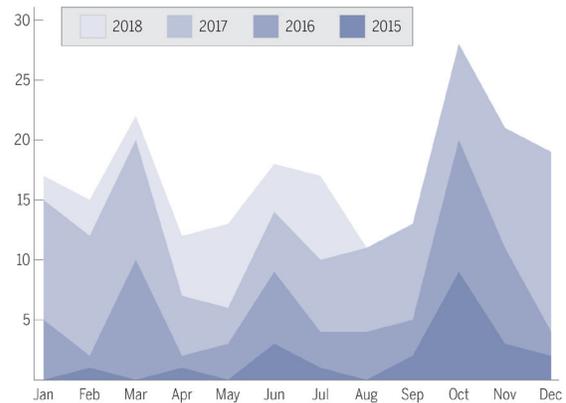


**Figure 25: ISK-AFG: Comparing Seasonal Trends with LeI (Pakistan)**

*(a) LeI*



*(b) ISK - Afghanistan*



**Takeaway 6: There is overlap in ISK and LeI’s high- and low-activity periods in Afghanistan.**

LeI and ISK’s initial cooperation seems to be limited to activity that enabled the group to take control of districts within Nangarhar (for example, suppressing local militia commanders in Nangarhar<sup>195</sup>).

195 Osman, “The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan.’”

Although LeI relocated to Nangarhar in 2014, it remained active in conducting attacks in Pakistan until at least 2017. Despite LeI and ISK's clashes during 2017 and 2018, in Figure 25, a comparison of LeI's seasonal trends with that of ISK-AFG's shows a strong overlap in the groups' high- and low-activity periods during the year. LeI's busiest months in terms of attacks in Pakistan between 2012 and 2017 appear to be January-March, June-July, and finally September-October. These three peaks of intense activity are very similar to those of ISK-AFG attacks in Afghanistan.

These trends suggest that LeI, at least in its early years of suspected links with ISK between 2014 and 2016, may have provided both logistical and operational assistance to ISK operating in Afghanistan. Notably, the LeI dataset indicates that LeI's attacks in Pakistan fell in absolute numbers post its affiliation with ISK (2014-2017). Taken together, this suggests that LeI may well have conducted attacks on both sides of the border, but only claimed the ones in Pakistan under its own organizational name.

### **ISK's Consequential Alliances**

The findings presented in this part of the report demonstrate that amongst other factors, a primary source of ISK's sizable footprint in Afghanistan and Pakistan is its operational links with preexisting militant groups in the region. While ISK-PK's jointly conducted attacks with LeJ and JuA only make up a small percentage of the ISK's total attacks, they account for an overwhelming majority of its lethality—at least in Pakistan. What remains unknown is the extent to which ISK's alliances carry out attacks on behalf of ISK in either country, without claiming them under their own group's name. Having said that, ISK's overlapping geographic focus and seasonal trends with those of its allies is indicative of cooperation, which runs deep across borders.

## Part 4. Analysis and Conclusion

This report has sought to offer the most comprehensive analysis to date on ISK's operational trends and its relationships with regional militant groups. The findings of this report strongly suggest that the two are interlinked. This part of the report provides a brief overview of ISK's strategy to succeed in the Khorasan region, the key differences and similarities in its behavior in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the associated security implications.

### 4.1 Networking to Succeed

In general, the data on ISK's operational trends indicates that thus far, the group has been successful in building its organizational capacity in the AfPak region. While many situational and organizational factors have likely contributed to this capacity, the findings of this report indicate that ISK's ability to leverage its relationships with other regional militant groups has been a force multiplier for ISK. In general, ISK has used a two-pronged approach at the organizational and individual level to carve out a space for itself in the region, with some distinctions in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Within Afghanistan, it has actively subsumed defectors and factions from other groups (such as the TTP and IMU), with the goal of emerging as the dominant group rivaling the Taliban. But in Pakistan, where it faces a relatively strong military, it has opted to establish tactical relationships with powerful militant groups to conduct lethal attacks against both civilian and state targets. As evidenced through several jointly conducted attacks, ISK's relationships with LeJ and JuA have a direct effect on the lethality that ISK claims.

Given the mobility of many Pakistan-based militants across the border, it is quite possible that ISK's network in Pakistan also enables its activity in Afghanistan. The opposing seasonal trends in ISK activity in the two countries between 2014 and 2018, especially the strong decline in ISK-PK attacks in 2017 accompanied by a near simultaneous rise in ISK-AFG attacks, suggest that this might be the case. Further, the similarity in the nature of ISK's attacks in both countries demonstrates coordination at the strategic and tactical level across the border. This has potentially dangerous consequences that must be considered carefully. The porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan can offer ISK an opportunity to exploit safe havens in ungoverned areas on both sides of the border as well as any seasonal dynamics. This means that any aggressive state-led actions on one side of the border can result in the dispersion of ISK militants rather than their elimination. Finally, a presence on both sides of the border offers greater opportunities to ISK to diversify its resources, benefit from cross-border smuggling, and set up a financial infrastructure in the broader shadow economy of the region.

### 4.2 ISK in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Similarities and Differences

This section provides a brief overview of the similarities and differences in ISK's operational trends in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the associated implications for ISK's future trajectory in the region.

#### *Key Similarities*

##### Upward Trajectory

Demonstrably, ISK's total lethality each year, as well as its lethality per attack increased every year between 2014 and 2018 in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. ISK also ramped up its use of suicide attacks in both countries, which partly explains its rising average lethality per attack. In general, though, ISK's strategy in Afghanistan entails more frequent and smaller attacks, while in Pakistan, it conducts fewer but more destructive attacks. Overall, ISK's escalating lethality denotes a dangerous upward trajectory.

### Unleashing Terror through Suicide Attack Campaigns – Kabul and Balochistan

In each country, ISK choose one specific location in which it unleashed a suicide attack campaign to cause high levels of death and destruction. In Pakistan, ISK conducted 77% of all of its total suicide attacks in Balochistan. Kabul suffered a similar suicide attack campaign; about 56% of all of ISK's suicide attacks in Afghanistan took place in Kabul. ISK's heavy reliance on the use of suicide attacks is unlikely to subside in the short- to medium-term, especially against state targets.

### Targeting the State More Frequently than Civilians in Both Countries

The target selection of ISK in either country indicates that the group does not shy away from directly aiming at state targets. Of all attacks linked to ISK between 2014 and 2018, 62% were directed against state targets such as the local police, military, or government. In Afghanistan, 48% were directed toward state targets. The percentage is lower in Afghanistan because ISK also expends a portion of its energy clashing with local militias and the Afghan Taliban; the significantly more fragile government in Afghanistan has meant that ISK has to tackle multiple non-state actors that seek to exert control within parts of Afghanistan. This is likely to be a continuous feature of ISK's struggle within Afghanistan.

Attacking the state in both countries serves multiple purposes. First, doing so is a prerequisite for ISK to demonstrate its commitment toward its stated goal of eliminating national borders, overthrowing Western-supported governments, and establishing a caliphate.<sup>196</sup> Second, attacking the state helps it differentiate itself from groups that ISK frames as clients of the Pakistani state, such as the Afghan Taliban and LeT, and reinforces the appeal of its meta-narrative of global jihadism. Finally, attacking the state allows it to display its prowess and ambition, especially in juxtaposition to a weak state with subpar security services; this serves to undermine the legitimacy of the government and reinforce recruitment for ISK. As long as ISK maintains its organizational capacity, it is likely to sustain its violent campaign against state targets in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### Targeting Sufis and Shiites

In both countries, ISK has actively pursued attacks against minority sects, and most frequently against Shiites and Sufis. In Pakistan, more than half of all attacks against non-Muslim minorities and other Muslim sects were conducted against Sufis and Zikri Baluchis, in the province of Balochistan. In Afghanistan, the overwhelming majority of all attacks against specific sects targeted Shiites. Parallel to this trend, the data shows that in both countries, religious institutions have been the most frequently hit by ISK suicide attacks amongst all attacks against civilian targets. ISK's focus on targeting Muslim-minority sects and religious institutions aligns with its openly espoused takfirist ideology that denounces nonconforming Muslims as apostates<sup>197</sup> and is likely to continue unabated and could even intensify.

### *Key Differences*

#### Parameters of Geographical Expansion in Pakistan and Afghanistan

ISK's activity in Pakistan has been more widely dispersed than it has been in Afghanistan. In 2014 and 2015, ISK attacks emerged in Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, KPK, and FATA. In subsequent years, it appeared to be most active in Balochistan and KPK. One factor underlying this phenomenon is ISK's

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196 Osman, "ISK's Battle for Minds."

197 Ibid.

operational network that includes groups like LeJ and JuA, whose areas of operation have overlapped with that of ISK's. While the precise nature of inter-group relationships is yet to be determined, the overlap of these groups' and ISK's spatial presence indicates that ISK is utilizing its militant partners to extend its geographical reach in Pakistan, and has strong incentives to continue this approach.

In contrast to Pakistan, while ISK has been active in Ghor, Herat, Zabul, Jowzjan, Logar, and Balkh, most of its activity has surfaced in Nangarhar and Kabul. There are several factors that underlie ISK's relatively concentrated activity in Afghanistan. First, its cadres consist of members of the Pakistani Taliban who, fleeing from Pakistan Army's military operations, primarily relocated from FATA to the bordering areas of Afghanistan. These groups, unlike LeJ and JuA who operate throughout Pakistan, are likely to have geographically restricted infrastructures that ISK can tap into. Second, the Afghan Taliban control approximately 14 districts and have significant presence in at least another 263 districts.<sup>198</sup> The Taliban's dispersed control throughout Afghanistan, in addition to a few strongholds (Helmand, Sare-e-Pul, and Farah<sup>199</sup>), means that ISK faces widespread resistance to any attempts to penetrate areas under Taliban or Afghan government control. ISK's activity in its nascent stage has been limited geographically in Afghanistan, and is unlikely to change substantially as long as its rivalry with the Afghan Taliban persists. Given the intense clashes between the Afghan Taliban and ISK, and prospects of peace talks between the former and the United States, a compromise of any sort between the Afghan Taliban and ISK appears unlikely in the foreseeable future.

#### A More Active Jihad in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, ISK attacks and total deaths and injuries were almost double the magnitude of that in Pakistan between 2014 and 2018. The difference in magnitude is striking; in Afghanistan, ISK-linked attacks amounted for a total of 211 attacks (68 suicide attacks), 1,511 deaths and 3,220 injuries. In contrast, over the same time period, ISK-linked attacks in Pakistan amounted for a total of 83 attacks (18 suicide attacks), 706 deaths and 1,120 injuries. Although presently there have only been a handful of reports of Islamic State fighters relocating from the Iraq and Syria theater to Afghanistan, such an infusion of militants into Afghanistan could significantly augment ISK's potency within Afghanistan.

Having said that, despite being less active, ISK-PK has proven to be a more lethal group than ISK-AFG in terms of deaths and injuries per attack. The drastic variation in the total number of attacks, however, primarily comes down to differences in the opportunity and incentive structures that ISK militants face in both countries. First, Afghanistan's weaker economy and security environment provides more opportunities for ISK to launch attacks against both state and civilians. Second, the weak capacity of the state and its willingness to negotiate with the Afghan Taliban provides added incentives to wage a more aggressive jihad in Afghanistan; attacks in Afghanistan can derail any peace negotiations, and the weaker capacity of the state also makes Afghanistan a more likely place within which ISK can establish localized forms of governance.

#### Inverse Cycle of High-Activity Period in Afghanistan Compared to Pakistan

For the first nine months of the year, ISK's attacks in Afghanistan follow an almost reverse cycle of its high- and low-activity periods in Pakistan. While January to April sees a slowing down of activity in Pakistan, ISK's attacks in Pakistan begin to escalate in February and peak in March. When activity in Pakistan peaks in May, there is a significant drop in ISK's attacks in Afghanistan in that month. The reverse cycle continues in subsequent months; the drop in ISK-AFG activity between July and September in Afghanistan is matched with a notable increase in attacks within Pakistan, where attacks rise sharply post July and remain on an upward trend until December. While the factors underpinning

198 Shoaib Sharifi and Louise Adamou, "Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan," BBC, January 31, 2018.

199 Alia Chughtai, "Afghanistan: Who Controls What?" Al Jazeera, October 19, 2018.

ISK's seasonal trends may be rooted in country-level characteristics, it is possible that resource-sharing and coordination across the border may be driving the reverse seasonal cycles in the two countries.

### 4.3 Security Implications

Terrorist organizations cooperate because it augments their longevity and performance,<sup>200</sup> and ultimately their political relevance. Surviving and thriving in a region like AfPak, with its tremendous diversity of non-state actors, necessitates a transnational jihadi group to form and operate as a network. There are clear indications that this is the preferred approach of ISK. Based on the analysis of ISK's linkages with regional groups and its overall organizational capacity, as measured by the metrics used in this report, ISK is likely to continue to foster stronger inter-group cooperation.

Research shows that the benefits that terrorist groups can gain via alliances are even more pronounced when a core central group is involved, around which an alliance cluster forms.<sup>201</sup> As such, alliance hubs are well positioned to endure in difficult environments. Viewed from this lens, the ISK alliance hub presents a grave threat to both regional and international security. ISK's ability to establish an affiliate in a region distant from its birthplace and its ability to attract allies and recruits must not be underestimated. While the Islamic State may be considered a 'foreign' brand espousing an ideology unnatural to the social fabric of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has made a concerted effort to localize its Khorasan chapter by recruiting from the "Khorasan" region, tapping into local grievances, and appealing to local youth using social media. But perhaps most importantly, as this report highlights, the ISK threat is likely to become considerably more potent if ISK transforms its links with other groups into an enduring network capable of moving resources and members across the border. Further, the successful emergence of ISK intensifies the complexity of the intractable militant landscape of the AfPak region, which has long hosted civil conflict, as well as tribal and ethnic tensions. ISK's search for allies in the Khorasan extends the rivalry between al-Qa`ida and the Islamic State to South and Central Asia, which brings with it its own set of security implications.

The distinctions and parallels in ISK's operational trends in Afghanistan and Pakistan must also be considered carefully for domestic and regional security policies. Regionally, if ISK's operations are indeed coordinated across the AfPak region, as the findings of this report suggest, then cooperation amongst Afghan and Pakistan authorities is essential to contain ISK's overall growth. Coordinated operations are especially important to constrain militants' movement across the porous Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, because ISK's targeting of state actors and civilians within both Afghanistan and Pakistan tends to share common characteristics, intelligence sharing can yield holistic insights applicable to the broader Khorasan region. That said, ongoing tensions between the two governments are likely to make such cooperation challenging.

Across AfPak, ISK has demonstrated a tendency to instigate sectarian violence by repeatedly attacking religious institutions, and in particular, the Shiite and Sufi communities. Both countries need to prioritize the protection of minority Muslim sects and non-Muslim minorities to not only protect vulnerable civilian populations but also to constrain spiraling animosity between communities.

Overall, while the odds of ISK realizing its goal of establishing an expansive Khorasan Wilayat remain low, its strategies and tactics at the regional, state, and individual level in pursuit of such a goal have significant security implications. While the sizable footprint of ISK in AfPak has created a real risk of further instability in the region, it has also created a space for governments to collaborate to tackle the threat faced by them jointly.

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200 See Asal and Rethemeyer. See also Phillips.

201 Bacon.

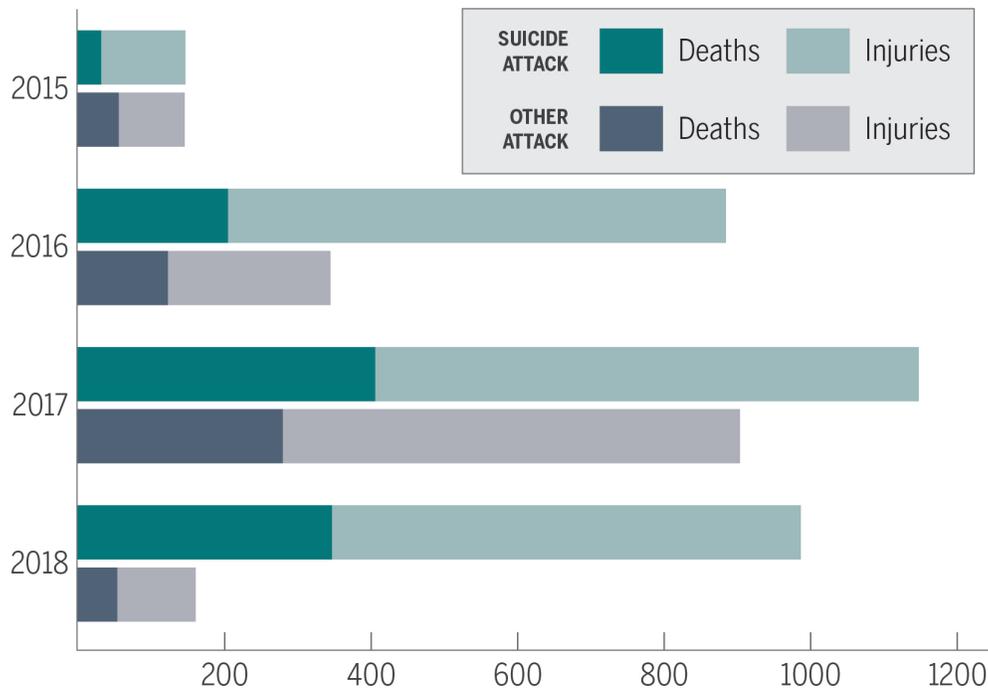
## APPENDIX

### A1. ISK Lethality by Tactic per Year

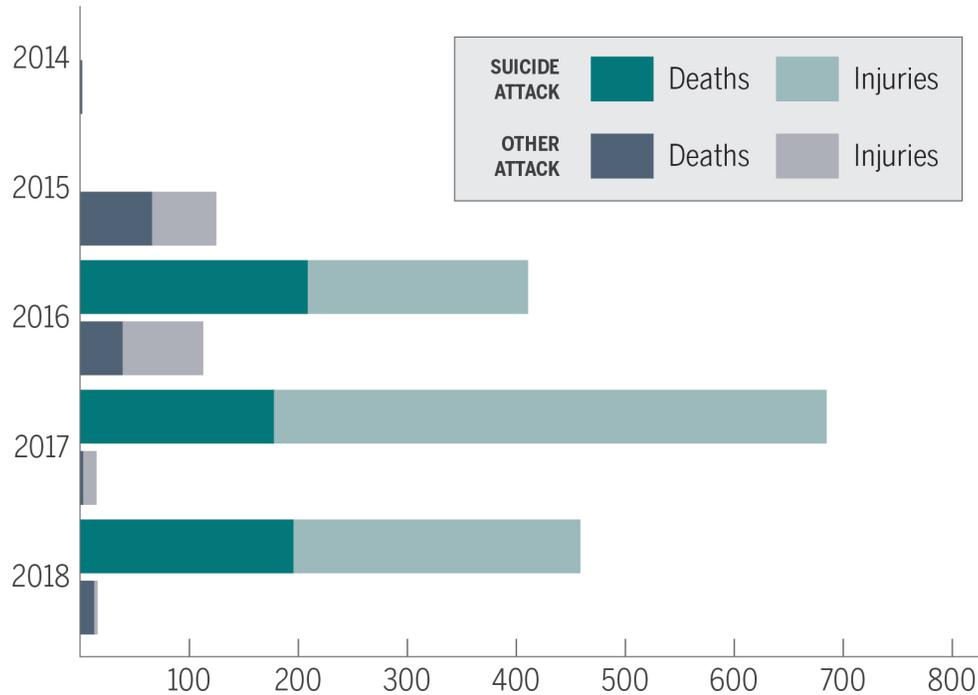
As highlighted in Figure A1, deaths and injuries due to suicide attacks in both Pakistan and Afghanistan exceeded deaths and injuries due to non-suicide attacks in all years post 2015. In Pakistan, in 2017 and 2018, ISK almost exclusively relied on suicide attacks to inflict high levels of destruction. As mentioned in Part 1 of the report, an increased reliance on suicide bombing may have likely been triggered by the Pakistani state’s targeted operations against ISK in 2016 and 2017. From this perspective, ISK was successful in using suicide attacks to maintain high levels of lethality. In Afghanistan, ISK leaned most heavily on suicide attacks in 2018, where deaths and injuries due to suicide attacks was at least five times higher than that associated with non-suicide attacks. In comparison to 2018, ISK-AFG employed heavy use of both suicide and non-suicide attacks in 2017, 34 and 67 respectively, which explains why both types of attacks yielded comparable levels of deaths and injuries.

*Figure A1: ISK Lethality by Tactic per Year (2014 - 2018)*

*(a) Afghanistan*



*(b) Pakistan*



**A2: High-level Overview of ISK Tactics**

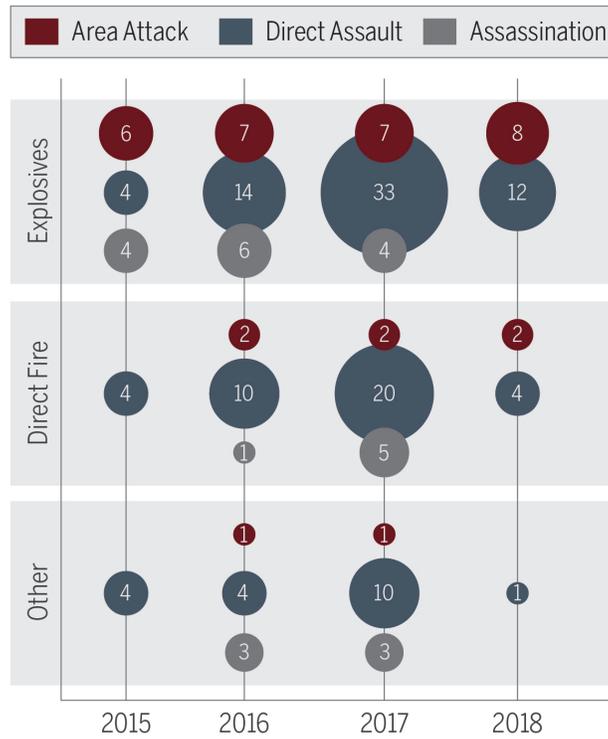
Per the ISK-AFG and ISK-PK datasets, a high-level overview of ISK’s tactics shows that in each country, ISK has a general tendency to conduct more direct assaults than area attacks (Figure A2). Examples of area attacks include detonations of IEDs near busy places such as markets, whereas direct attacks include ambushes and instances such as firing directly at individuals in a mosque or detonating a bomb at a security checkpoint or near a police vehicle.

In the ISK-AFG dataset, of the total 207 attacks for which the tactic was reported, 70% consisted of direct attacks. About 25% of the ISK-AFG attacks consisted of area attacks which mostly employed explosives. In the ISK-PK dataset, 64% of all attacks were direct attacks while 11% were area attacks. Again, area attacks tend to mostly use explosives.

Both datasets also comprised a number of targeted assassinations. The ISK-AFG contains 26 instances of assassinations across all years, which included a variety of targets. Of all assassinations, about 42% targeted local government officials and 36% targeted other militant leaders or local tribal elders. Per the ISK-PK dataset, there were at least 21 assassinations between 2014 and 2018, 85% of which targeted individual police officials and local government employees. A small number of assassinations also targeted individuals from a media organization, religious leaders, as well as local police and military.

Figure A2: ISK High-Level Overview of Tactics (2014 - 2018)

(a) Afghanistan



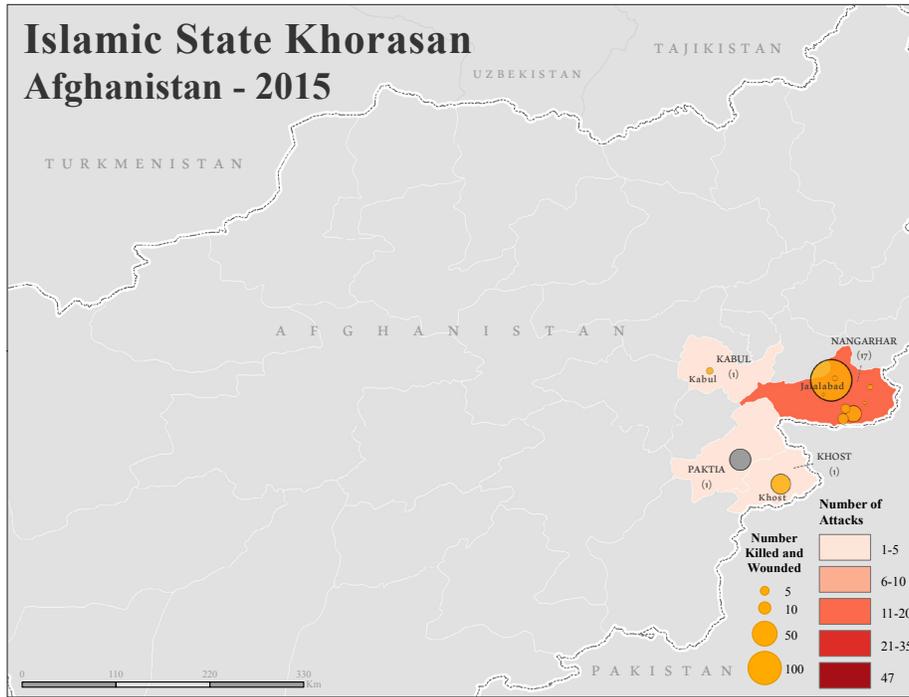
(b) Pakistan



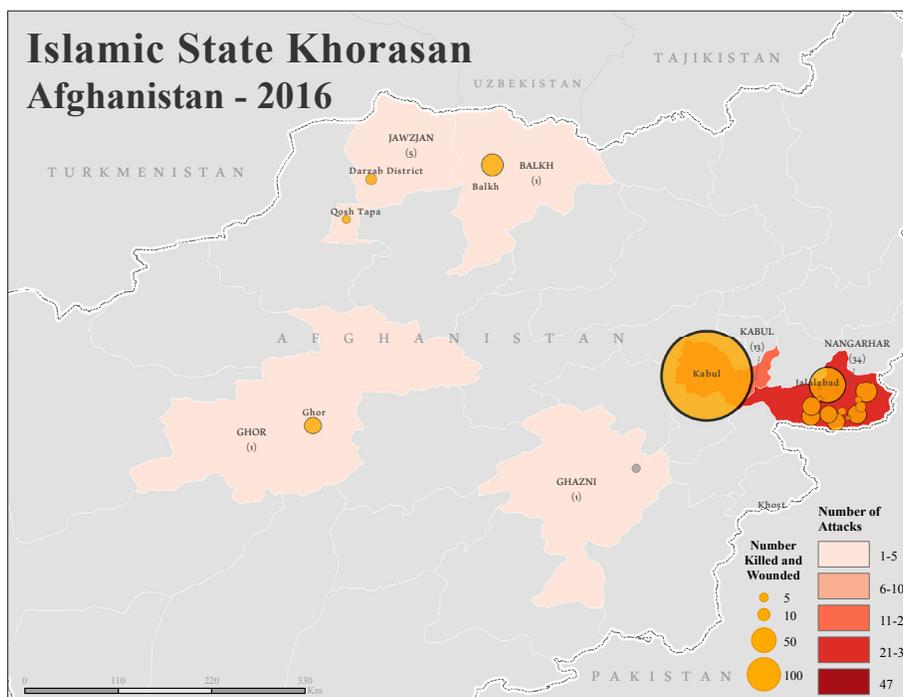
**A3: Enhanced Maps**

*Figure 3: Geographical Shifts in ISK-AFG Attacks Over Time (2015 - 2018)*

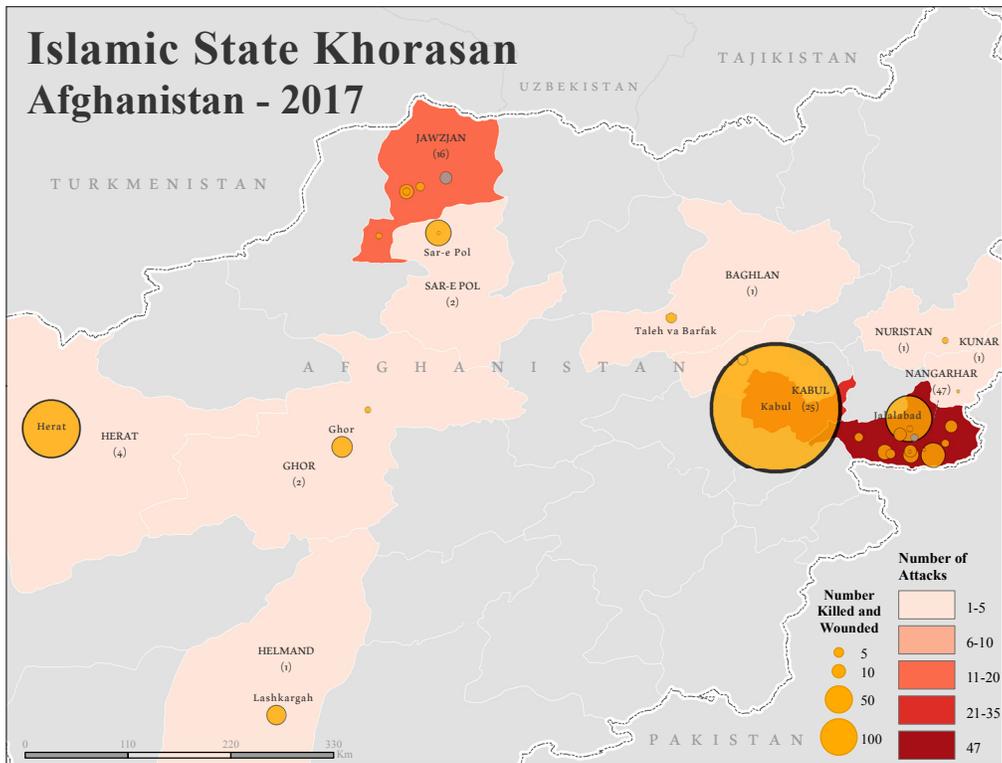
*(a) 2015*



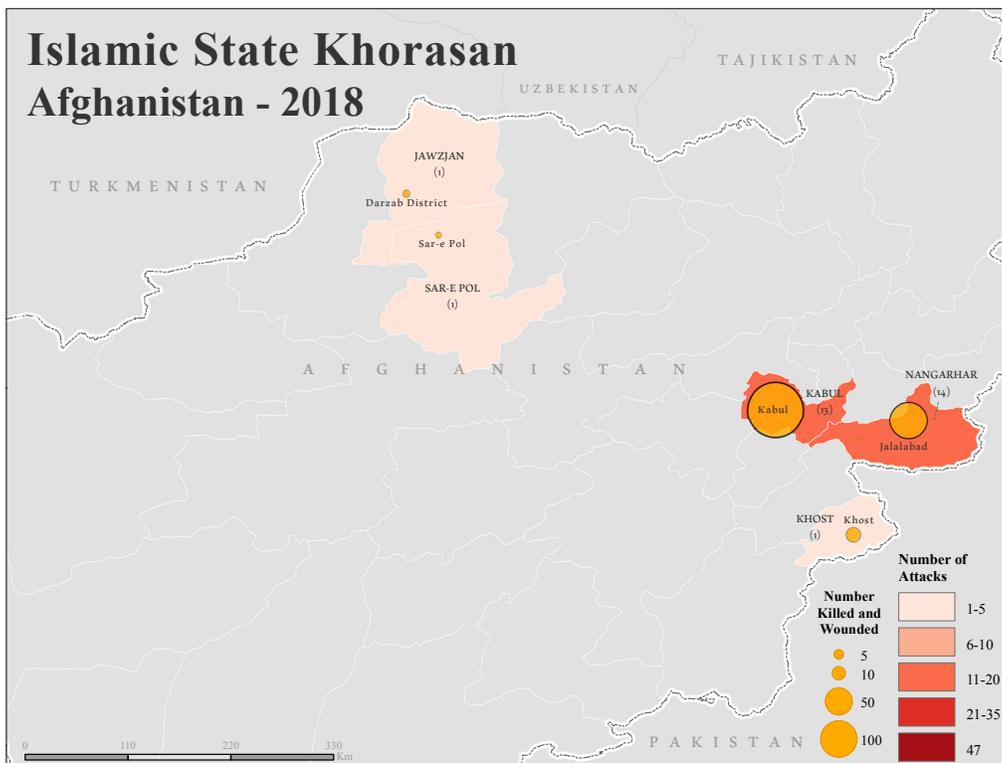
*(b) 2016*



(c) 2017



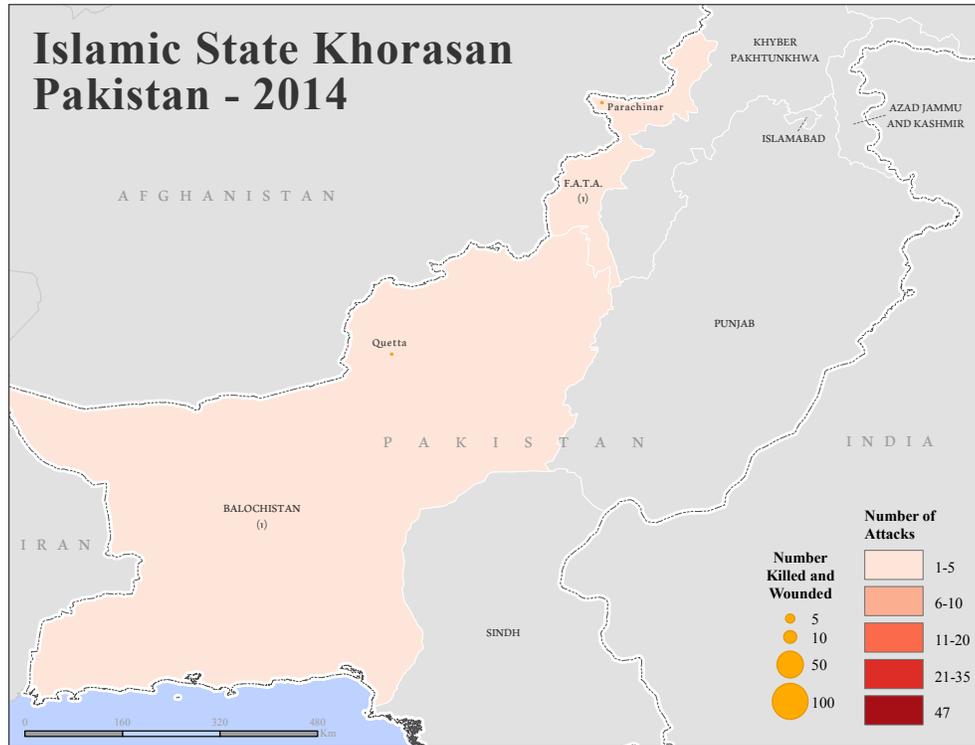
(d) 2018\*



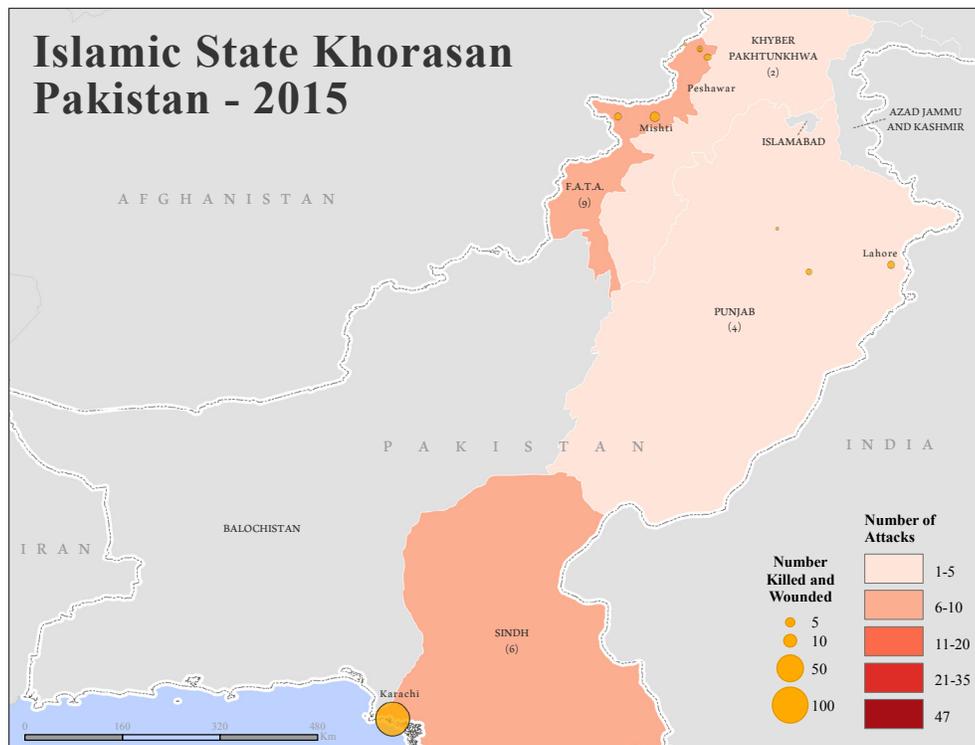
\* Partial Year Data

Figure 4: Geographical Shifts in ISK-PK Attacks Over Time (2014 - 2018)

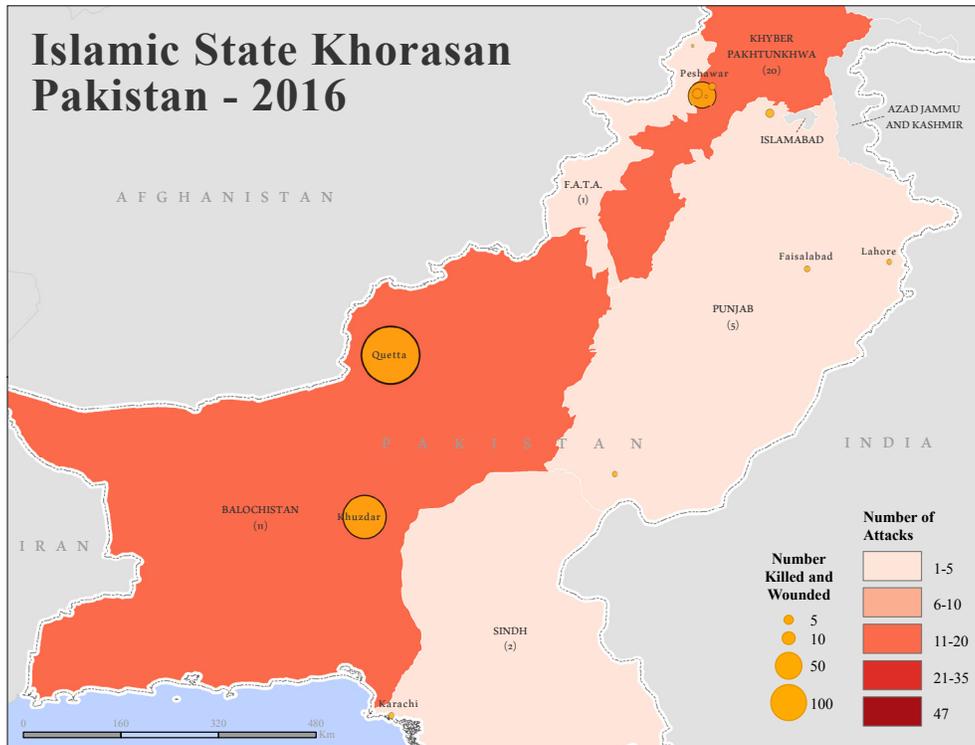
(a) 2014



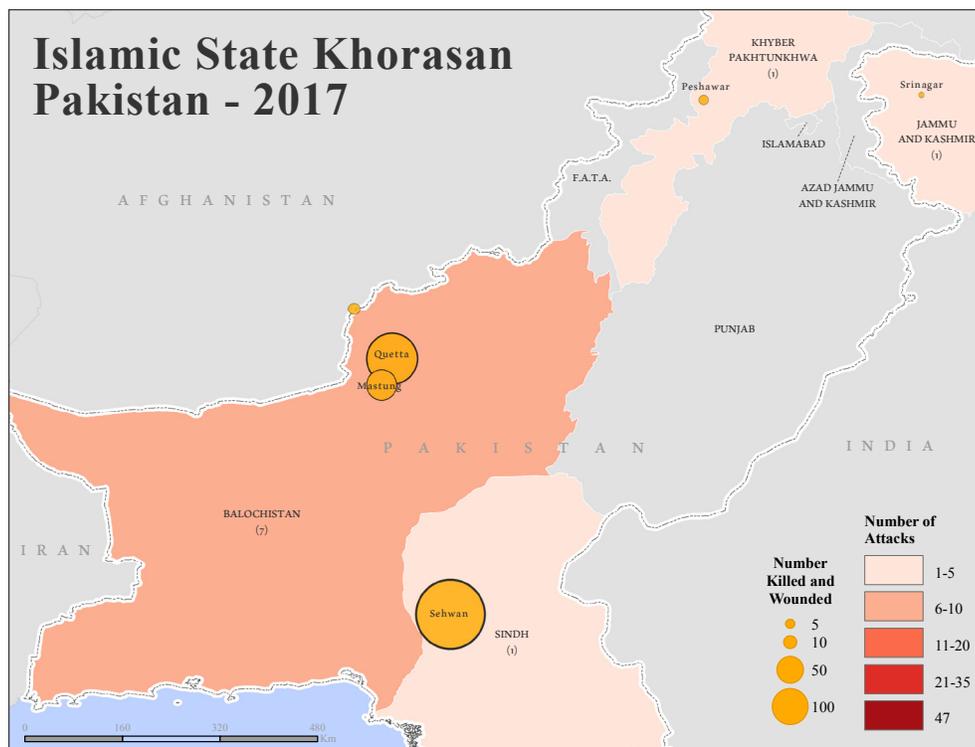
(b) 2015



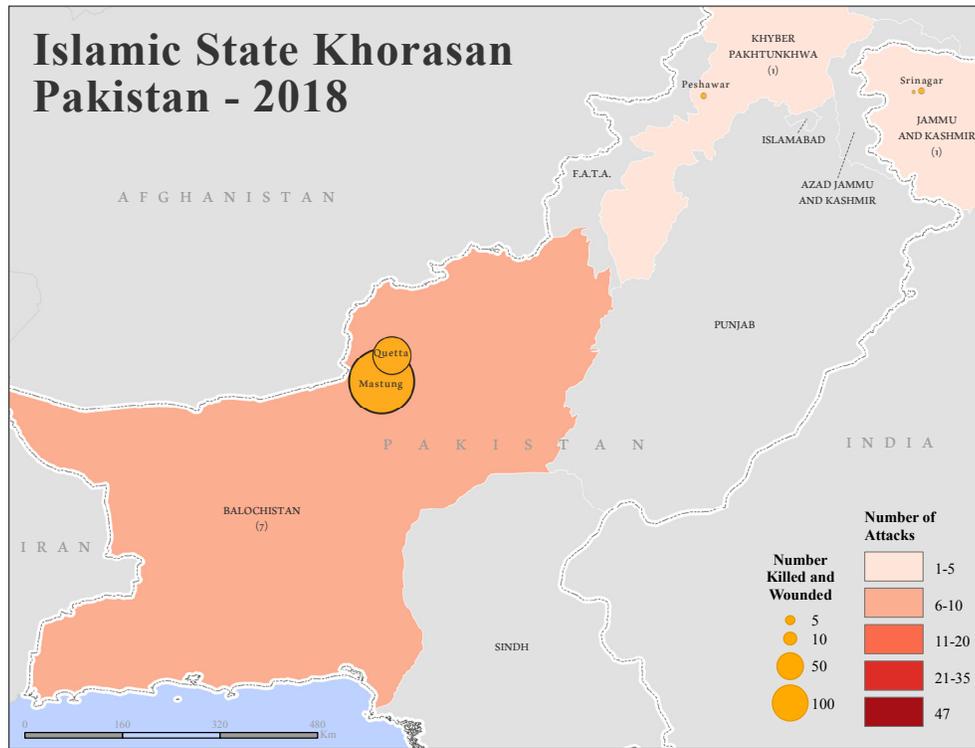
(c) 2016



(d) 2017



(e) 2018\*



\* Partial Year Data



Combating Terrorism Center

AT WEST POINT