

Isis' Reputation Exceeds Its Reach

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In recent weeks, every major terrorist assault around the world has brought with it questions about the possible involvement of [the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant](#), the group known as Isis. The truth is that, in many countries in the Muslim world, Isis may have sympathisers but it does not yet have well-established roots. Last week in Chechnya, it seemed that the Russian province's third war in recent memory had broken out when [Chechen militants stormed a building](#) in central Grozny, the capital. The attack paralysed the city and killed some twenty people, including ten police officers. Soon after, Russian media suggested that Isis was responsible, alleging that hundreds of Chechens are already fighting for the group in Syria and Iraq.

In India, the media has expressed concerns that Isis may have laid down roots in that country's cities. There are fears that it may be linked to Pakistani groups fighting Indian forces in the disputed territory in Kashmir. Those concerns were strengthened on November 27 when [militants attacked an Indian army base in Kashmir](#), killing seventeen people. Nobody claimed responsibility for the attack, making it easy to blame Isis.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, while some local Taliban militants have pledged loyalty to Isis, there are already dozens of active terrorist groups with political affiliations that go back decades. Isis is hardly needed to foment jihad. Instead, the organisation's connections with Pakistan are likely opportunistic, treating the country as a recruiting ground for the fight in Syria while local jihadis hope to benefit financially from connections with the well-heeled foreign fighters.

The truth is that, rather than an omnipresent enemy, Isis is the latest fad among Islamic militants. Its commitment to jihadist Islam, its brutal methods, and the prospect of building a new kind of state are exciting to some and have fueled its popularity. Its current status is comparable to al' Qaeda's after 9/11, when copy cat jihadis and militant groups everywhere clamoured to demonstrate a special relationship with the newly notorious terrorist group.

But well before 9/11, al Qaeda had spent nearly twenty years building up contacts and cells in Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. It had taken part in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Al' Qaeda had developed deep roots, recruiting local militants to run their franchises, training bomb makers and marrying into local communities.

Isis's history goes back to the war that followed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, when militants led by Abu Musab al Zarqawi adopted the al' Qaeda franchise. Its incredible success in the past twelve months has so far been confined to Iraq and Syria, where political chaos and a civil war have created fertile conditions for expansion. Isis may now have eighteen thousand foreign fighters from ninety countries in its ranks according to US officials, but it has no roots in India, Pakistan, Central Asia or north Africa – at least not yet.

New jihadist groups such as Isis often find it difficult to garner support in regions where long standing local Islamic groups have been fighting for years. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Chechnya have been awash with Islamic groups for the past four decades. They have no need or desire to surrender leadership, manpower and finances to an outside group like Isis, no matter how prestigious it may be at the moment.

The unprecedented atrocities carried out by Isis are an inspiration to other groups, and this is a real concern. But the problem is that intelligence agencies around the world are now looking for Isis under their beds. The truth – mercifully – is that Isis

has not arrived yet. But what remains present are extremist groups with deep roots in the local soil, and these are just as dangerous.