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Torres**Afghanistan's importance in the
spread of Daesh-K****Afghanistan's importance in the spread of Daesh-K***Abstract:*

NATO troops withdrawal in 2021 marked a new chapter in Afghanistan's history, in which Daesh-K has played a significant role. Despite declaring that Taliban forces have been effective, the government of the new emirate has not been able to contain Daesh's actions in the fictional Khorasan province. Meanwhile, Daesh-K has carried out numerous attacks in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries while spreading throughout Central Asia and reaching Russia and some European countries. Western action to prevent the organization's spread is essential, and containing the terrorists' recruitment efforts must be one of its main objectives.

Keywords:

Afghanistan, Central Asia, Khorasan, Taliban, Daesh-K (ISIS-K), terrorism

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Introduction

Extremist and radical activities around the world have a long history. Not only have they caused additional suffering in conflicts, leaving behind a high number of victims, but on occasions they have also overthrown established regimes in different countries and changed social structures in various global regions.

Islamic radicalism and extremism began to grow in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s after the Soviet invasion. Little by little it became a challenge for the rest of the world, due to the creation of several terrorist groups over five decades, with Daesh-K being the most recent of these.

From the invasion of Afghanistan by the troops of the former Soviet Union until their defeat, the intelligence services of the US, the West and even those of Asian and African countries in the Islamic world continuously supported certain radical jihadist groups¹. In fact, both Osama bin Laden (OBL) and local jihadist figures and groups based in Pakistan became very important figures for the US CIA, the British foreign intelligence service (MI6) and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)^{2,3}.

In 1992, following the victory of the mujahideen and other groups over the Soviet-backed regime, OBL and his allies returned to their countries of origin, including Saudi Arabia. They soon returned to the battlefields in Afghanistan to support factions sympathetic to them in the civil war that had broken out. Initially, the jihadists joined the Islamic Party, later moving on, together with the Taliban, to carry out terrorist activities against the Islamic regime headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Sha Masud, which lasted until Masud's assassination on 9 September 2001⁴.

One day later, Al Qaeda carried out suicide attacks in the United States, crashing three commercial airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon, with a fourth crashing in an open field in Pennsylvania. The rapid intervention

¹ HARTMAN, Andrew. 'The red template': US policy in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. *Third World Quarterly*, 2002, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 475–478.

² GREENTREE, Todd. 'Afghanistan: Remembering the Long, Long War We Would Rather Forget'. 5 February 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/02/afghanistan-remembering-the-long-long-war-we-would-rather-forget/>

³ RASHID, Ahmed. "Osama Bin Laden: How the U.S. helped midwife a terrorist." Centre for Public Integrity, 13 September 2001. <https://publicintegrity.org/accountability/osama-bin-laden-how-the-u-s-helped-midwife-a-terrorist/>

⁴ PBS News. "A historical timeline of Afghanistan". 30 August 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan>

of the United States in Afghanistan, together with its allies and local coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, ended the resistance of the first Taliban regime and Al Qaeda in just two months.⁵

From that same year onwards, after the fall in 2003 of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the evolution of diverse particular situations, other extremist groups emerged in various regions of Asia and Africa, based on the structures of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Among these cases we can consider Jaish ul-Adl in Iran; the East Turkestan Jihadist Group; the Uighur Movement in East Turkestan (China); Jamaat Ansarullah in Tajikistan; TTP (Pakistani Taliban) and Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

While in Iraq and Syria Daesh attempted to create a caliphate, in 2015 a group composed of Taliban dissidents, though of the same ideology and mentality, emerged in Pakistan under the name Daesh Khorasan (Daesh-K or ISIS-K)⁶. Subsequently, its members began to enter Afghanistan through border and mountain crossings, mainly located near the Pakistani border town of Miram Shah, in the north-west of the country. Their mission was to overthrow the governments of Muslim countries in Central Asia and the rest of the world, where more moderate regimes had no affinity with jihadism⁷.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Daesh calls its organisation in Central Asia Daesh Khorasan because the territories where it operates cover this historic region of the Persian Empire, which included areas that currently belong to Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan, among others.

⁷ The Counter Extremism Project (CEP). "Pakistan: Extremism and Terrorism." 2025. <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/pakistan-extremism-and-terrorism>

established. Abul Rauf Khadim, a former Guantanamo detainee, was appointed deputy emir⁹.

The group has reconstituted itself after strategic losses inflicted by US forces, the former Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban themselves. Its areas of occupation have shifted from eastern Afghanistan to the north and north-east of the country. The relocation of Daesh-K to the north is also due to ideological factors, as the organisation is more religiously purist than the Taliban. This makes it easier for them to recruit local followers in this region, as many of the men were sent to Pakistan as children in order to survive and were educated in the Salafi and Deobandi ideologies of Pakistani madrasas¹⁰. However, the organisation's members come from different nationalities, with African and Arab elites from the Middle East featuring prominently. One of the cases of foreign presence in Yowzan province was even attributed to a Frenchman.

The structure of the organisation is considered to be the result of its formation on the basis of former Afghan Taliban, local Pakistanis, fighters returning from Iraq and Syria, and foreigners, mainly from Central Asia. Daesh-K therefore has a hybrid structure with a centralised organisation, although with strong centrifugal tendencies, and is de facto made up of four groups called Tehrik-e Khilafat Khorasan (TKK), Tehrik-e Khilafat Pakistan (TKP), Khilafat Afghan and Azizullah Haqqani¹¹.

The varied composition of its members is reflected in its modus operandi. Generally, the locals, who are very rough, tend to be brutal and are easily detectable. Their behaviour towards the civilian population is often very violent and they act as a peripheral protection for the core of the organisation, while providing logistical support to foreign fighters. Meanwhile, foreigners tend to be more organised and equipped and try to remain underground, hidden in remote locations without interfering with the population¹². There

⁹ FIRDOUS, Iftikhar. "Islamic State's Hafiz Saeed Khan: short-lived, long felt". Friday Times, 19 August 2016. <https://thefridaytimes.com/19-Aug-2016/islamic-state-s-hafiz-saeed-khan-short-lived-long-felt>

¹⁰ AHMADZAI, Atal. IS-Khorasan: Organisational Structure, Ideological Convergence with the Taliban, and Future Prospects. Perspectives on Terrorism, 2022, vol. 16, no 5, pp. 3, 12.

¹¹ GIUSTOZZI, Antonio. *The Islamic State in Khorasan: Afghanistan, Pakistan and the New Central Asian Jihad*. Oxford University Press, 2018. p.25.

¹² One of the most paradigmatic cases was the transfer to Afghanistan in 2017 by the core of Daesh of Abu Qutaiba, who had been the leader of the organisation in the Iraqi province of Saladin. For further information, we suggest reading the following document: United Nations Security Council. Letter dated 16 July 2018 from the Chairman of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989

are exceptions to the rule in cases where Uzbek or Tajik fighters are in areas of ethnic and linguistic affinity, so they do not need local support. As the group has moved its presence to northern Afghanistan, this trend has increased¹³.

The organisation's activities began in the provinces of Kunar and Nuristan. Later they extended their presence towards the northwest, northeast and south, covering the provinces of Jowzan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Zabul, Farah and Ghor, including Kabul, where they still maintain a presence. Currently, Daesh Khorasan is believed to have several bases and to have been divided into two nuclei: one composed of Afghan and Pakistani members, and the other composed of Uzbeks, Tajiks from Jamaat Ansarullah, Uyghurs, Chechens and Kazakhs^{14(,)15}. It is possible that the main base is in southern Baluchistan, on Pakistani territory. Meanwhile, in Kunar province, on the border with Pakistan, they are constantly recruiting. Other bases are in the north-eastern areas of Afghanistan, in the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, and in the provinces of Ghor and Zabul^{16(,)17(,)18}.

The emir of the organisation is possibly Sanaullah Ghafari, also known as Shabab al Muhayir, whose nationality is unknown. He may be an Afghan of unknown ethnicity who gained experience in urban attacks in Kabul¹⁹. His possible chief operational assistant is Gulmurad Haliuf or Gulmurod Halimov, a former lieutenant colonel in the Tajikistan special forces who defected to join Daesh-K. Despite various reports citing the deaths of

(2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Daesh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. 27 July 2018. <https://docs.un.org/es/S/2018/705>

¹³ AHMADZAI, Atal. IS-Khorasan. Op. Cit. p.6.

¹⁴ AZIZI, Ahmad. "ISIS-K eyes Afghan minorities and isolated Salafis, Crisis Group warns." Amu TV, 17 July 2025. <https://amu.tv/186906/>

¹⁵ Wilson Centre. "Explainer: ISIS-Khorasan in Afghanistan" 27 August 2021. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/explainer-isis-khorasan-afghanistan>

¹⁶ Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation. "Overview of recent developments and key players in Afghanistan". ecoinet, 5 September 2023. <https://www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2096722.html>

¹⁷ JADOON, Amira; MINES, Andrew. Broken, But Not Defeated: An Examination of State-Led Operations Against Islamic State Khorasan in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015–2018). 2020. p. 81.

¹⁸ Counter Extremism Project. "Afghanistan Content Report", 7–13 September 2024. <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/afghanistan-content-report-september-7-13-2024>

¹⁹ NAVARRO, Antonio. "Sanaullah Ghafari, the young architect of the rise of the Afghan branch of the Islamic State". La Razón, 30 March 2024. https://www.larazon.es/internacional/sanaullah-ghafari-joven-artifice-ascenso-rama-afgana-estado-islamico_202403316608bd4a5e1b1f00011d61b3.html

both men, it is more than likely that they are still alive²⁰. Other possible members of the Daesh-K leadership could be Omar Faruq and Qais Lagh.

The terrorist group has a series of operating procedures, the most important of which are highlighted below. Each of them has its own characteristics and, depending on their location and the time available, they prioritise and define the most appropriate actions to carry out.

Regarding recruitment, this has evolved, especially in the peripheral layer of the organisation as it has moved northwards. Recruitment actions have experienced a very sharp increase in 2024, with the incorporation of volunteers through online processes being very active²¹. In this regard, it is striking that the Tajik government, as part of a door-to-door campaign, encouraged young people to join a two-year military service to counteract their enlistment in Daesh-K²².

Another of its procedures is the search for sources of funding, which is used for its maintenance, operations and recruitment activities, if they manage to pay more than other groups. The organisation is mainly supported by contributions from its central headquarters, international donations and local taxes through *hawala* mechanisms²³, virtual currencies and *online* financing platforms. Donations from Daesh's own network have declined since the defeat of the Islamic caliphate that ravaged Iraq and Syria. However, the organisation still has funds from that period and continues to extort money from different populations in this region and others, establishing a compensatory mechanism between the different global regions in which it is present²⁴.

²⁰ HEDLUND, Stefan. "Trouble brewing in Tajikistan." GIS, 19 November 2024. <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/tajikistan-afghanistan-russia-china/>

²¹ SANTAMARÍA, Juan Manuel Ramos. Jihadist terrorism as a latent threat in the European Union : capacity vs. intent. *Logos Guardia Civil, Scientific Journal of the University Centre of the Civil Guard*, 2025, no. 4, pp. 326-327.

²² Asia Plus. "Эмомали Рахмон подписал указ о весеннем призыве Подробнее/ Emomali Rahmon signs decree on spring conscription." 20 February 2025. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/power/20250220/emomali-rahmon-podpisal-ukaz-o-vesennem-prizive>

²³ Informal fund transfer network based on the trust of certain prestigious and powerful individuals who guarantee the completion of transactions.

²⁴ SULLIVAN Gregory, Memorandum for Department of Defence, Lead Inspector General. *Department of the Treasury*. OIG-CA-25-037. 27 February 2025. <https://oig.treasury.gov/system/files/2025-02/OIG-CA-25-037.pdf>

Kidnappings have special characteristics in Daesh-k because, along with extortion, they increased due to the drastic decrease in contributions from the central organisation and the great degradation that the Taliban caused in its peripheral structure. During the early years of this decade, the Daesh affiliate in Khorasan had to prioritise its survival over carrying out attacks. Kidnappings have not normally been publicised, mainly to avoid losing credibility and reputation among supporters and potential future members²⁵.

The execution of terrorist acts against previously selected targets resumed after the organisation's resurgence in 2024. The participation of Tajik citizens in terrorist attacks carried out in recent years in Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States and Europe is noteworthy.²⁶ One example of their involvement was the four Tajiks who entered the Crocus concert hall in Moscow on 22 March 2024, shooting at the audience and setting fires that killed 145 people and injured many others. Subsequent investigations led to the arrest of some 20 more people. Other examples include the eight Tajiks arrested in the US for planning several attacks and another who was arrested in Germany²⁷.

The creation and consolidation of Daesh-K

Before 2015, the first Daesh Khorasan groups appeared in Afghanistan in the eastern provinces of Nuristan, Kunar and Nangarhar, which border Pakistan. According to information provided by sources at the time to the Afghan government intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), these were small groups composed of Taliban supporters who had been supported by Pakistan's intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

²⁵ SANTAMARÍA, Juan Manuel Ramos. Jihadist terrorism as a latent threat in the European Union Op. Cit. pp. 325-330.

Al-Mirsaad English. "ISIS-K Turns to Kidnapping and Extortion After Military Defeat." 27 July 2025. <https://almirsaden.com/isis-k-turns-to-kidnapping-and-extortion-after-military-defeat/>

²⁶ MACFARQUHAR, Neil; SCHMITT Eric, "An ISIS terror group draws half its recruits from tiny Tajikistan" The New York Times, 18 April 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/18/world/europe/tajikistan-isis-k-terrorism.html>

²⁷ STRACHOTA, Krzysztof. "Islamic State-Khorasan: global jihad's new front". Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), 29 March 2024. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-03-29/islamic-state-khorasan-global-jihads-new-front>

When Daesh-K began operating in Afghanistan, it started recruiting its members from among the Taliban militias. According to information provided by NDS collaborators, in 2014 the Pakistani ISI may have told the commanders of the Taliban groups based in the east of the country to "lower the white flags" (associated with the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban in Afghanistan) and "raise the black flags" (characteristic of the Islamic State, with the Islamic profession of faith, shahada). Shortly afterwards, videos began to circulate showing Afghan jihadists in traditional dress and carrying traditional flags, announcing their presence in Afghanistan under the affiliated name of Daesh Khorasan. During military operations carried out at that time in eastern Afghanistan, Afghan government forces managed to eliminate many of the leaders of the new group. Between 2016 and 2017, the Afghan armed forces and their Western allies had destroyed their largest bases and arrested or eliminated their main leaders.

The NDS had contrasted and reliable information demonstrating the strategic relationship that existed between central Daesh and Daesh Khorasan, especially in relation to the appointments of leaders. Its information could also confirm that the ISI and other intelligence services were supporting the transfer from Syria and Pakistan, via Turkey, of operational members of non-Afghan origin who began to settle in the provinces of Jowzjan, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Baghlan, situated in northern and northeastern Afghanistan. These were Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Uighurs from China who travelled with their wives and children. The NDS detained many of these families attempting to join the jihadists. By having more advanced materials and through recruitment, training and terrorist activities, the fighters of Daesh Khorasan managed to expand their bases and activities towards the south and west of the country, reaching provinces such as Sar-e Pol, Ghor and Farah.

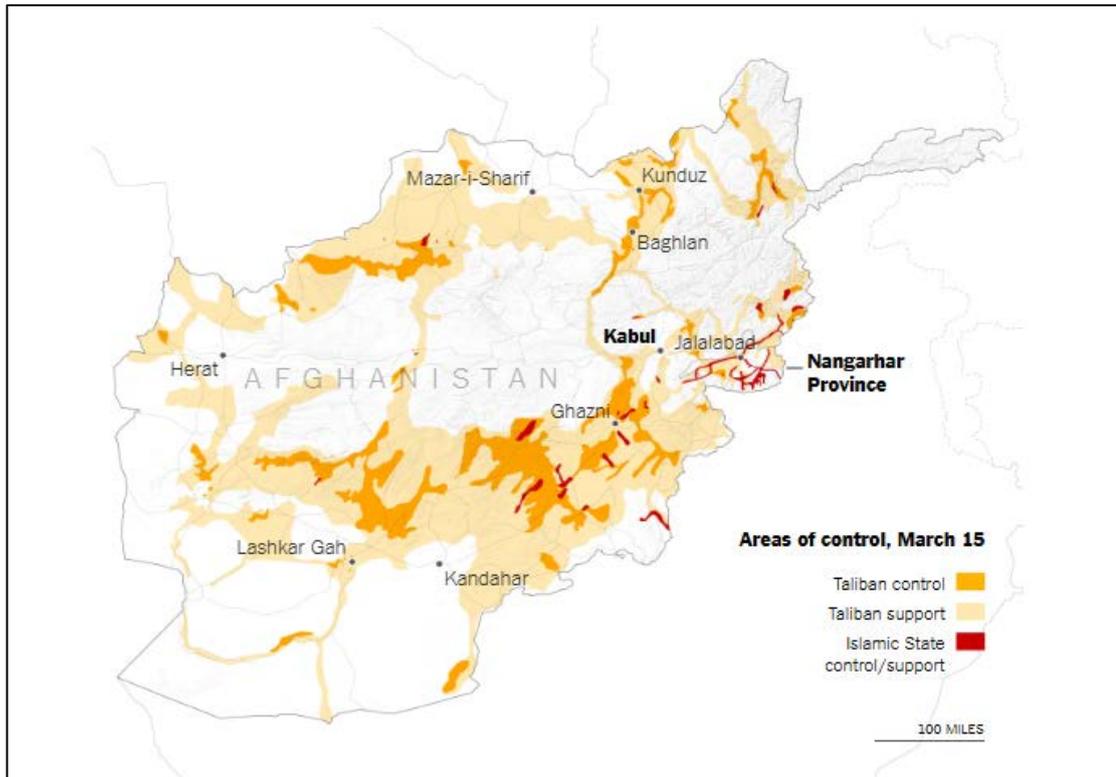


Illustration 2: Areas under Taliban and Daesh-K influence versus the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in 2017. Source: ALMUKHTAR, Sarah. The New York Times, 6 June 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/06/world/middleeast/afghanistan-isis-taliban-attacks.html>

From the same period, there are reports of a Tajik jihadist leader who had more than 400 foreign fighters in the Jastak Valley, in the province of Badakhshan, in the north-east of the country. He was known by the nickname Qari Furqan and, according to the NDS, remained operational until the fall of the government in 2021. Furqan maintained constant contact with and received financial support from Daesh in Syria. His forces always fought against the Afghan armed forces and in favour of the Taliban. In one of the Afghan forces' operations, Furqan was seriously wounded but surprisingly managed to recover and return to the fight. Other NDS reports mentioned the presence in the valley of Hamza bin Laden, son of OBL.

The terrorists had infiltration networks in Central Asia that facilitated secure routes of arrival from Africa, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. In interrogations, some detainees explained how they arrived from Syria via Turkey to the already mentioned Pakistani border city of Miram Shah, and others admitted the existence of networks in Shanghai, China. In border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan there were identified gathering points for fighters.

Other NDS sources confirmed that these terrorist groups had as sources of income both drug trafficking and ransom payments for releasing hostages.

In 2019, NDS informants cited a young man, known by the nickname Dr Shahab Almuhajir, as the leader of Daesh Khorasan in the Shakar Dara district, north of Kabul. According to the information received, this individual, after travelling to Iraq and Syria, was appointed by the leaders of the organisation with the knowledge of Pakistani intelligence officials in the region. Currently, the available information suggests that this group continues to be led from the south-eastern Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

In 2020, a BBC investigative report also identified an Iraqi citizen, surnamed Almahajir, as the leader of Daesh Khorasan for Afghanistan and other countries in the region. The documentary reported that this terrorist had participated in a series of bloody attacks in Kabul in 2016 and that the organisation had appointed an Iraqi citizen to try to mobilise its affiliates, because local Afghan and Pakistani leaders did not have that capacity²⁸. However, the NDS was able to confirm that the use of this nickname of alleged Iraqi origin was actually a decoy to hide his real identity, as he was Sanallah Ghafari, an Afghan individual born in the district of Shakar Dara, who was initially a member of the Islamist political party Hizb-i-Islami and later joined the Haqqani Network (HQN). In his appointment as regional governor of Daesh, he reportedly had the direct support of the network's leader himself, Sirajuddin Haqqani, the current interior minister of the Taliban regime. In fact, on 11 August 2020, the then interior minister of the government, Massoud Andarabi²⁹, stated that the Haqqani Network used the name Daesh according to its own political interests.

Before the fall of the Islamic Republic and the return of the Taliban to power, most Daesh-K members were eliminated, detained by Afghan security forces or by the Taliban groups themselves in the aforementioned provinces. During those years, the NDS alone detained more than 2,000 Daesh Khorasan affiliates. With the arrival of the Taliban after the fall of Kabul in August 2021, all prisoners held for terrorism-related activities were released.

²⁸ OMERI, Abdulhaq "Iraqi Assigned to Lead Daesh's Khorasan Branch" TOLO news, 23 August 2020. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/iraqi-assigned-lead-daesh%E2%80%99s-khorasan-branch-bbc>

²⁹ He held the position between January 2019 and March 2021. Previously, he served as director of the NDS.

Since then, despite reports circulated by the Taliban regime, Daesh-K has grown stronger, gaining the capacity to carry out complex attacks outside Afghanistan.

Daesh-K's connections: From the withdrawal from Kabul to the Moscow attacks

In March 2025, Pakistan handed Mohammad Sharifullah over to the US authorities as a co-perpetrator of the 2021 attack on Kabul International Airport, which killed 13 US soldiers and some 160 Afghan civilians³⁰. FBI agents announced that the individual had admitted to belonging to Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS_K) or DAESH Khorasan and had confessed to participating in the January 2024 attacks in Kerman, Iran, and the March 2024 attack on the Crocus concert hall in Moscow³¹. This is surprising because both former US President Joe Biden and the Taliban authorities had announced in 2022 that they had eliminated the perpetrator of the attack.

Related to this matter, it should be noted that, after the attack, the Taliban spokesperson announced that Daesh-k's headquarters were in Pakistan. Sharifullah's subsequent arrest confirmed the Taliban's accusation^{32,33}. At the same time, the Taliban acknowledged that they had Tajik citizens linked to this incident in their prisons³⁴.

On 6 March 2025, former CIA agent Sarah Adams stated that Sharifullah was not the main perpetrator of the attack nor an important figure in the terrorist group's structure. In addition to refuting the Taliban's claim that they had killed Sharifullah in 2023, Adams blamed the attack on Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the Haqqani Network, and the aforementioned Sanaullah Ghafari, leader of Daesh Khorasan³⁵. The claim was based on the fact that the latter was allegedly present during the operation and ordered the

³⁰ GOLDMAN Adam, "Afghan charged in 2021 Kabul attack that killed 13 U.S. Service members"; The New York Times, 5 March 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/05/us/politics/afghan-charged-abbey-gate.html#:~:text=The%20man%2C%20Mohammad%20Sharifullah%2C%20is,members%20and%20approximately%20160%20civilians.>

³¹ PRUDNIKOV, Vasily. "Why would Islamic State attack Russia and what does it mean for the global terrorist threat?" The Conversation, 24 March 2024. <https://theconversation.com/por-que-el-estado-islamico-habria-atacado-a-rusia-y-que-significa-para-la-amenaza-terrorista-global-226476>

³² McCAUSLAND, Phil. "Man accused of aiding Kabul airport bombing charged in US court." BBC, 6 March 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce8m77e8jpmo>

³³ According to statements by Khosal Sadat, the last Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs until the fall of the republic, Sharifullah was arrested in 2019 during a night-time operation and released by the Taliban on 16 August 2021.

³⁴ Sangar. "Tajik authorities: 'The Taliban are lying'." 9 March 2025. <https://sangar.info/en/news/n/tajik-authorities-the-taliban-are-lying>

³⁵ Amu TV. "New report reveals Siraj Haqqani and Daesh leader coordinated Abbey Gate Bombing." 26 August 2024. <https://amu.tv/119661/>

suicide bombing by Aziz Ullah Haqqani, a relative of Sirajuddin and brother-in-law of Ayman Al Zawahiri, leader of Al Qaeda after OBL and killed in 2022 by the Americans in Kabul.

Also on 6 March, Mr Shuaib, an expert on terrorist groups, stated in London that Daesh-K members Mohammad Sharifullah, Farhad Panjshiri, known as Adel, and Abdul Rauf Sangar, were released from prison by the Taliban after the fall of the GIRoA and moved to Logar province, where both their boss, Sanaullah Ghafari, and Sirajuddin Haqqani himself were waiting for them to prepare the attack.

Apparently, Sirajuddin Haqqani, his younger brother Abdul Aziz Haqqani and Mawlawi Rayab or Shahabul Mahayer (Sanaullah Ghafari's assistant), while in Logar province, planned the airport attack. Abdul Rauf Sangar and Sharifullah then led the operation and Sirajuddin's brother drove them to the scene of the attack.

According to Shuaib, Sharifullah and Farhad Panjshiri had been in Iran for the past three years and were allegedly involved in the aforementioned attack in Kerman in 2024. For unknown reasons, both travelled to Pakistan, where they were detained by the ISI. In any case, Amrullah Saleh, former director general of the NDS, former interior minister and former first vice-president of the GIRoA, has questioned the true importance of Mohammad Sharifullah's role in the attack on Kabul airport, in 2021³⁶. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that Pakistan may have manipulated the narrative to boost its image as an ally in the fight against terrorism.

All of the aforementioned connections in territories as disparate as the Afghan–Pakistani region, Russia or Iran reveal the dangerous nature of Daesh-K at both regional and global levels, and show that relations between the organisation and certain Taliban sectors may be superficially hostile but, in areas of mutual interest, may be collaborative. Moreover, the Taliban have not been able to degrade Daesh-K to the point of making it irrelevant, as they have tried to present on various occasions before the Western world.

³⁶ *Afghan entities challenge the narrative on Kabul airport attack*, by Abdinandan Mishra (9 March 2025) <https://latest.sundayguardianlive.com/investigation/afghan-entities-challenge-the-narrative-on-kabul-airport-attack>

Conclusions

The structure, relationships, and actions of Daesh-K demonstrate that the group is far from being a local or regional organisation, constituting a serious transnational threat with strong potential to act across a wide range of global scenarios.

This transnational composition could support the above statement, as it includes Afghan-Pakistani elements, joined by others from Central Asia or Arab countries, where other related organisations are present. Its two-tier structure, consisting of a periphery and a core, provides the organisation with resilience, preserving individuals with greater experience in carrying out attacks or combat.

This complexity shows that the fight against Daesh-K is extremely complicated and demonstrates that there is no effective international collaboration in all areas of power, at least in the diplomatic, informational, military and economic aspects, to which social and police aspects should be added.

The evolution of the group's bases towards northern Afghanistan means that the regions of Central Asia, with greater emphasis on Tajikistan, may face destabilisation as a consequence of Daesh-K's actions in these countries or due to possible links with other local terrorist organisations. In the global geopolitical sphere, these former Soviet republics could request support from Russia, which could lead Moscow to increase its influence in the region against the European Union's connectivity policy.

One of the key aspects for the degradation of Daesh-K is related to recruitment, both in Afghanistan and in other territories. This is due to the conditions of poverty and unemployment in these countries; the lack of cultural and religious education and ignorance of the international reality; and, finally, the absence of opportunities in an environment of injustice and great differences between social classes.

Without attempting to offer an illusory solution, many of the factors that lead to this undesirable situation can be avoided through effective international collaboration in Central Asia, mainly in Tajikistan, to improve the environment for the civilian population and discourage possible recruitment activities. Many of the actions to be taken should be carried out through the use of social networks and, fundamentally, with the support of the internet.

In the specific case of Afghanistan, it should be borne in mind that the cruelty and inefficiency of the Taliban regime have fostered this situation, and therefore the actions of the international community should be directed towards a return to democracy in the country, respecting its specific characteristics, in the style of the previous Islamic republic, and without interference from the intelligence services of other states.

In Western countries, protection measures should be implemented for the refugee population, who are in a situation of psychological and employment-related vulnerability, as they may fall victim to propaganda and recruitment activities by terrorist groups. Therefore, all integration and protection measures for refugees and their families should be a priority.

Another important aspect is the control of individuals who may move from terrorist sanctuaries to other countries where they can carry out attacks. In the particular case under study, control over individuals of Asian origin should be increased, in collaboration with their countries of origin, so that their backgrounds can be verified.

It is also necessary to carry out audits on the granting of financial or material aid to certain Central Asian states, primarily Afghanistan, in order to prevent the diversion of funds and resources to terrorist organisations³⁷.

In any case, all actions to be taken should be backed by accurate knowledge of the situation, and it is therefore considered appropriate to set up groups of experts capable of providing adequate information and effective advice.

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³⁷ Reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) have confirmed that terrorist groups have indirectly taken advantage of this aid.