



# PERSPECTIVES

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## ISIS and Its War on the Taliban

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The attack by ISIS on Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul at the end of August targeted both the American “crusaders” and the Taliban, demonstrating the group’s unwillingness to cooperate with potential Islamist partners as well as its determination to advance toward its global goals (“Caliphate Now”) all by itself.

A powerful suicide bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan on August 26 killed 13 American soldiers and 169 Afghans, including about 30 Taliban fighters. The attack once again pointed to ISIS’s high operational capabilities even during a slump period, as well as the rigid and consistent ideological line against all “infidels” to which it has held ever since its inception.

Unlike other Islamist terrorist organizations that tend to unite under threat or common interest as needed, ISIS remains true to its DNA and refuses to cooperate with other Islamist organizations of which it does not approve. As ISIS declared in June 2014, Islam must be imposed and enforced around the world “under one flag, a flag of faith,” and that flag is solely its own. Anyone who does not practice Islam the ISIS way is a sworn enemy, “infidel,” “crusader,” or “abandoner of Islam,” including other Islamist terrorist organizations. Hence, ISIS refrains from forming alliances with such organizations, even when doing so could strengthen its position in various locations around the world. ISIS’s “war on infidels” is as intolerant of other Muslims as it is of Jews and Christians.

Unlike other Islamist terrorist organizations like Hamas, ISIS took a critical view of the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan and neither welcomed nor identified with its success. Recently, an article was published in an ISIS magazine that poured fire and brimstone on the cooperation between the Taliban and the US during the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan. It claimed that the Taliban’s conquest of the country had been accomplished in full agreement and coordination with the US military and

therefore did not attest to the organization's impressive operational capabilities. The thousands of "Crusader" soldiers were evacuated in good spirits and with mutual trust between the parties, whereas, according to ISIS, they should have been shamefully expelled without any prior negotiations or agreements. In ISIS's view, the US evacuation of Afghanistan was a transfer of power from one friend to another and was therefore a disgrace rather than a triumph for the Taliban.

It was thus to be expected (and there were clear intelligence warnings to this effect) that ISIS-Khurasan province would raise its head and take a violent course against the Taliban and its "foreign allies." Kabul airport, from which tens of thousands of American and Western soldiers and civilians were being evacuated, was the ideal ground for a terrorist attack. On August 26, ISIS conducted a suicide bombing there that killed at least 182 people, including 169 Afghan civilians and 13 members of the US military. On August 30, the organization fired rockets at the airport that were intercepted by the US military.

Despite a number of key ideological intersections, such as establishing sharia, carrying out jihad, and taking over territory, there is an inherent hostility on the part of ISIS toward the Taliban due to what it perceives as its compromises with the West. The attacks in Kabul reiterated ISIS's adherence to an uncompromising ideological line and unwillingness to be part of an Islamist terrorist alliance, even if it contains Sunni Muslims like the Taliban who hearken back to Islam's early days. As the late ISIS leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi defined it, the ISIS "Islam and Faith Camp" stands firmly ahead of the "camp of heresy and hypocrisy" represented by the rest of the world, including non-ISIS Islamist terrorists.

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