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## The Pakistan Taliban Movement: An Appraisal

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In October 2014 the spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) announced his movement's backing for the "Islamic State" (IS) and its efforts to re-establish the Caliphate. The spokesman pledged that the Taliban would align their efforts with the Islamic State by sending fighters and military experts to the Middle East. In the wake of the statement, the TTP had to issue a clarification that their admiration for the actions of the Islamic State did not imply any intention to formally affiliate with it. This clarification was necessary to maintain the convenient fiction that the TTP are under the authority of the Afghan Taliban leader, Mullah Omar. Eventually the leadership had to go further and sack the spokesman.

The statement and the reactions to it epitomise the confusion surrounding the Pakistan Taliban Movement. Through this public positioning, the TTP essentially claimed that ideologically it had found common cause

with the most dynamic jihadi movement in the Middle East; that practically it had links with the IS ; and that militarily the Taliban were strong enough to make a difference to the IS. Thus, the spokesman sought to present the TTP as a significant player in a regional conflict with global dimensions. The first round of commentators were sceptical about these claims implied in the TTP statement. They essentially dismissed it as bombast by a local armed group, largely confined to Pakistan's remote tribal areas, which is simply using the media to exaggerate its importance. And yet, for a decade, the TTP and its antecedents have kept the world's eighth largest army occupied in a highly destructive but inconclusive conflict. In the light of the controversy over whether the TTP really matters, this paper reappraises the movement's aspirations, capabilities, linkages and significance.

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