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**ENVELOPE**

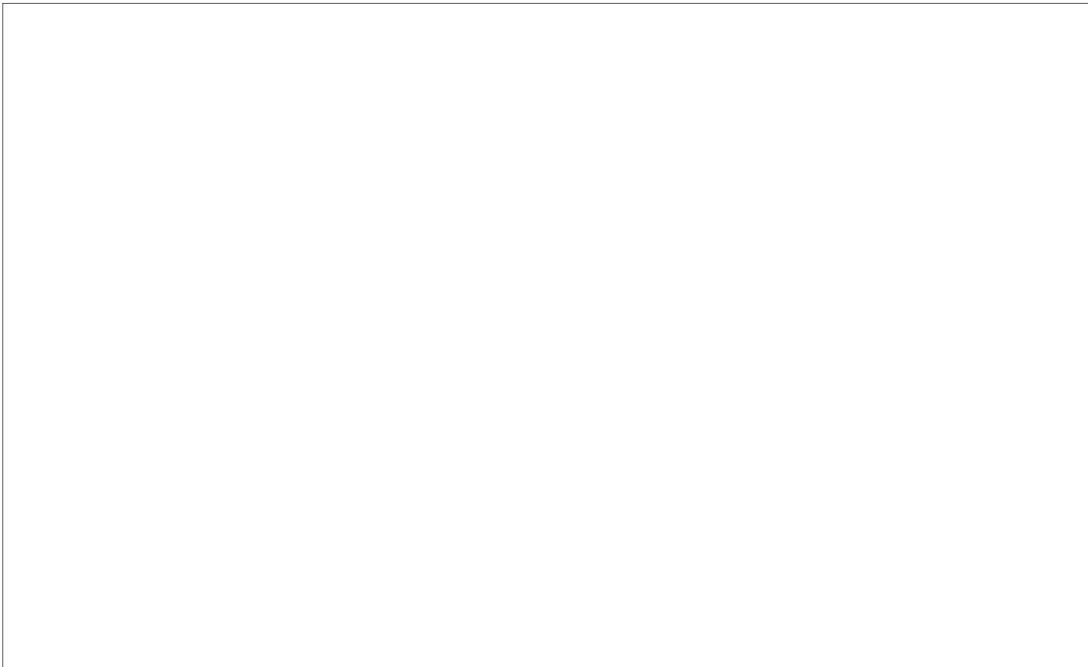
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WARNING: TOPIC: DOMESTIC POLITICAL, INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL,  
MILITARY, TERRORISM  
SERIAL:SAR2015031928188164

**BODY**

COUNTRY: IRAQ, SYRIA, UNITED STATES

SUBJ: (U) INDIAN COMMENTARY SAYS POLITICAL SOLUTION TO SYRIAN WAR

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Necessary To Effectively Contain ISIL

SOURCE: Kolkata The Telegraph Online in English

19 Mar 15 (U)

TEXT:

[ (U) Commentary by Sankar Sen: "Terrible Foe"]

[INTERNET]

[OSC Transcribed Text]

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It seems that the tide is gradually turning against the Islamic State. Its advance, which had seemed unstoppable, has been halted. With the capture of Mosul from the Iraqi army last June, the IS had been able to acquire a huge stockpile of arms supplied by America to

Iraq, including anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles and vast quantities of ammunition. In its campaigns, the IS demonstrated its capacity to launch successfully a mode of hybrid warfare that fuses terrorist and insurgent techniques with conventional warfare. It has

also shown its capacity to simultaneously launch complex operations in Syria and Iraq. It first softens targets with heavy artillery fire, then opens breaches with suicide bombings, and follows it up with attacks with Humvees fitted with guns from all sides. The IS's speed, willingness to suffer casualties and its savage treatment of prisoners scare away its opponents.

The IS now occupies a vast area of Syria and Iraq, an area equalling the size and population of Jordan. It is estimated that it has more than 30,000 fighters in action. Its strength is also augmented by a large number of foreign jihadists. Barack Obama has called for "degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL" and many countries have joined the America-led coalition. The latter is training Iraqi government forces and providing arms to Syrian and Iraqi Kurds. The ground situation shows that the IS is no longer able to advance in areas where the Shias and the Kurds are in the majority.

It is also suffering financially. Aerial bombings have destroyed

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many oil installations; IS earnings from the sale of oil have plummeted from \$2.3 million in June 2014 to about \$1 million a day. Banks under its control have run out of cash. The income from hostage ransoms has also come down.

But in order to effectively destroy the IS, America will have to give up its policy of "no boots on the ground". Obama asked the Congress for a fresh authorization for use of military force, endorsing limited use of ground forces including ground troops against the IS and its allies. Domestic polls in America show that after the murder of the American human rights activist, Kayla Mueller, America now views the IS as a serious threat to its security, but is not in favour of sending ground troops if air strikes fail to provide expected results.

Now a plan for a big offensive by Iraqi and Kurdish forces to recapture Mosul is afoot. It will have a positive effect. A Caliphate without territory will lose its legitimacy and appeal, and will fail to attract recruits from all corners of the globe. A Caliphate, unlike the al Qaida, cannot go underground. The IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has already called himself the "commander of the faithful", a title reserved for the Caliph only. But the risks of escalation are very high. Direct American intervention will provide an enormous propaganda victory to the IS. It will also fuel the suspicion that America wants a modern-day crusade to kill Muslims. This will encourage the worldwide recruitment of jihadists. It seems that the present American strategy to bleed the IS through aerial bombings and a proxy war is the best military option under the given circumstances. Without expansion, the IS will lose its magical appeal and become like any other Middle Eastern Islamic state that has failed to improve the lives of its people.

The end of the IS, however, is not going to come about soon. A successful operation against it will only be practicable when they can be eliminated from their heartland in eastern Syria. Fighting the terrorists is infinitely harder when they enjoy a haven. In Syria, the continuance of the Assad regime creates a serious problem. A

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political solution to the Syrian war is necessary to effectively contain the IS. Further, things can go wrong if the IS wins the allegiance of al Qaida, although at present there is a wide rift between them. This will expand its base and make it a terrible foe.

[Description of Source: Kolkata The Telegraph Online in English -- Website of Kolkata's highest circulation English daily, owned by ABP

Group, with a flagship publication Anandabazar Patrika in Bengali. Known for in-depth coverage of east and northeast India issues, and India-Bangladesh relations. Maintains an impartial editorial policy;

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