Assessing the Reasons of Al-Qaeda's Survival

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Abstract

Over a decade has passed since the United States launched the global "war on terror" in the aftermath of tragic September 11 incident, yet the defeat of Al-Qaeda seems a far cry. This pre-emptive war, spread across the globe, is falling short of achieving its goals as the threat of Al-Qaeda to the security of the US and other allied countries is still very much alive. This global war seems to have no definitive end. This paper argues that the lack of synergy in the global alliance between the US and Muslim countries, where Al-Qaeda has found safe havens, is the key cause of failure. The Muslim states are either weak to establish its writ on both the material and ideational aspects of life in its societies or they do not share the US threat perception about Al-Qaeda. This leaves the efforts of joint counter-terrorism in doldrums. This paper predicts that lack of will and ability in the partner countries of the US will ensure the continuation of international terrorism.

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Introduction

The global War on Terror (WoT) has achieved some of its key targets. The leadership of the terrorist organization is either dead or hiding. Osama bin Laden was killed on May 2, 2011 in a covert operation in Pakistani city of Abbottabad. Other important leaders were killed in the intensive drone strikes within the tribal territory of Pakistan[1]. Few others got arrested from the cities. There has been no major attack on the US soil since 9/11. Apparently, it seems that WoT is a success. However, it is not the case. The threat of Al-Qaeda to the interests of the Western alliance is still there. Rather it has spread.

WoT has enormous effect on the structure and function of Al-Qaeda though. While the offensive has curtailed the activities of Al-Qaeda's core, the organization has undergone a change from a centralized to highly decentralized one.[2] As such Al-Qaeda can be divided into three types. One is the core which resides in Pakistan. Then it has direct subordinates or affiliates like Al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Qaeda in Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab, Al-Nusra Front in Syria etc.[3] Then there are those terrorist organizations which are ideologically affiliated with Al-Qaeda. They may not be in direct contact with the core, but they share its ideology and emulate its tactics. The shared ideology is of global *Jihad* and to establish Islamic caliphate.[4]

The Al-Qaeda's core group provides leadership, inspiration, finances, and guidelines to its affiliated groups. This core was

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1 Amir Mir, "50th Al-Qaeda Leader Killed in 338th Drone Strike - Thenews.com.pk," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-146255-50th-al-Qaeda-leader-killed-in-338th-drone-strike.
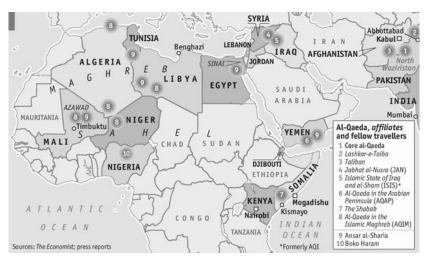
2 Robin Simcox, "Osama Bin Laden: Three Years after Abbottabad," accessed July 4, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/05/osama-bin-laden-three-years-after-2014511123288215.html.

3 Joshua Foust, "How Strong Is Al Qaeda Today, Really?," *The Atlantic*, May 1, 2012, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/05/how-strong-is-al-qaeda-today-really/256609/.

4 Angel Rabasa et al., *Beyond Al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement*, Part 1 (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2006), http://site.ebrary.com/lib/mcny/Doc?id=10152640.

responsible for the terror attacks of 9/11. This core is hierarchical and centralized with Ayman al-Zawahiri as its head, who is alleged to be hiding somewhere in Pakistan.[5] But after the sever blows of WoT to Al-Qaeda it underwent transformation and became decentralized. Thus, different franchises of Al-Qaeda emerged in different parts of the world. There are also inspired groups like Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). ISIS has split with Al-Qaeda yet it remained its branched for long time and share Al-Qaeda's ideology.[6] As such it will be considered as extension of the Al-Qaeda threat.

To understand the franchise network of Al-Qaeda the following map can help:[7]

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5   Amir Mir, "Is Al-Qaeda Chief Zawahiri Hiding in Pakistan? - Thenews.com.pk," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-107276-Is-al-Qaeda-chief-Zawahiri-hiding-in-Pakistan.

6   James Rodger, "What Is ISIS? All You Need to Know about Islamic State - Coventry Telegraph," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/what-isis-you-need-know-7908812.

7   "The State of Al-Qaeda: The Unquenchable Fire | The Economist," accessed November 29, 2014, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21586834-adaptable-and-resilient-al-qaeda-and-its-allies-keep-bouncing-back-unquenchable-fire.

As such Al-Qaeda has rather spread its tentacles to other regions. Documents recovered from Osama bin Laden's compound revealed that the core leadership was in contact with the affiliates[8] through couriers. However, the functionality of the organization has changed. The core does not engage in directing day to day affairs of affiliates or in its operations. The leadership of the affiliate groups enjoys independence in running the organization. Such franchises work well this way, given the restraints put on the core by the WoT. This also ensures the clandestine nature of Al-Qaeda. It is also evident that the core oversees its affiliates and gives them directives. For instance, the recent rise of ISIS in Iraq and their tactics alienated the leadership of the core. When ISIS did not listen to the leadership, the leadership disowned it. ISIS is now fighting the core's affiliate Al-Nusra Front in Syria.[9]

The WoT may have minimized the threat of Al-Qaeda on the US soil or in Europe. Yet, it does not mean that the interests of these countries are safe in the Middle East, South and East Asia and Africa. The Muslim governments in these regions are more vulnerable to the new threat of Al-Qaeda.[10] In Pakistan for instance, its affiliated TTP has undermined the state's writ in the border region. Its terror activities have killed over 50,000 people in the country.[11] Haqqani Network (HQN) and the Taliban pose an existential threat to the Afghan government. And their other affiliates like Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Harkatul Mujahideen have

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8   Pam Bensen, "Documents in Bin Laden Compound Speak of Plan to Attack Obama - CNN.com," accessed July 13, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/07/15/obl.obama.targ eted/index.html.

9   Rodger, "What Is ISIS? All You Need to Know about Islamic State - Coventry Telegraph."

10 Abdulrahman al-Masri et al., "Al-Qaeda Hasn't Gone Away, and Is Gaining," accessed July 4, 2014, http://www.usatoday.com/story/ news/world/2014/01/07/al-qaeda-spread/4358845/.

11 "PST Demands Blood Money from TTP for 50,000 Deaths," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.nation.com.pk/lahore/14-Feb-2014/pst-demands-blood-money-from-ttp-for-50-000-deaths.

caused serious threats to the security of India.[12] AQAP is emerged as even more violent than the core Al-Qaeda. It continuously tried to target the US interests and has spread its tentacles to other countries. Other networks like AQIM, Al-Nusra Front and ISIS have gained much ground over the years. Thus, the decentralization of the Al-Qaeda indicates a shift in Al-Qaeda strategy from targeting the US soil to the Muslim governments while aspiring to target the Western interests.

It can be safely assumed that WoT has not dismantled Al-Qaeda. Its strategy, function, organization character and tactics have rather changed. The threat of Al-Qaeda in the coming future will become more realistic when the US pulls out its troops from Afghanistan. Taliban and HQN pose a real danger to the government in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of the US troops would be considered as the defeat of another super power in Afghanistan after the USSR. This will give a huge boost to the morale of the terrorists. This would be used as a propaganda tool to attract more recruits, funding and appeal to the cause of Al-Qaeda. The Afghan government has little to no writ on the rural side bordering Pakistan where Al-Qaeda and Taliban gain a foothold.[13] Pakistan, too, has no control over the rugged terrain bordering Afghanistan. This cross border area has become the ideal support base for Al-Qaeda in the presence of TTP, Taliban, HQN. Thus, the threat is formidable.

The survival of Al-Qaeda begs the question as to how come it still survives given the huge resources employed in WoT and leadership killed a couple of years ago. Some of the reasons we have discussed already. Yet, the basic argument of this paper is that the joint counter-terrorism efforts of the US are not producing the desired results because the partner countries do

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12 "Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge - International Crisis Group," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/164-pakistan-the-militant-jihadi-challenge.aspx.

13 Zachary Laub, "The Taliban in Afghanistan - Council on Foreign Relations," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/taliban-afghanistan/p10551.

not share the same ideology regarding the threat of Al-Qaeda or they struggle in establishing their writ in their own territories. That is why Al-Qaeda is threatening these Muslim states and trying to overthrow the governments and establish its own government based on its own interpretation of Islam. The peculiar political contexts, societal forces, and ideational contours of these polities set them apart from the threat perception of the US in the war on terror. Additionally, the paper argues that partner countries in WoT lack capabilities of counter-terrorism to fight the menace of Al-Qaeda.

Theory and Methodology

This paper bases its analysis in neo-classical realism. Neo-classical realism takes into account not only the structural element of the system but also the domestic politics. The interplay of both international and domestic levels can best explain the phenomenon of Al-Qaeda, its birth at the end of a bipolar system and growth in the post-Cold war era. Neoclassical realism argues that the actions of a state in the international system can be explained by systemic variables like the distribution of power capabilities among states, as well as cognitive variables, such as the perception and misperception of systemic pressures, other states' intentions, or threats and domestic variables – such as state institutions, elites, and societal actors within society – affecting the power and freedom of action of the decision makers in foreign policy.[14]

Neo-classical realism thus explains why countries like Pakistan and other Muslim countries succumb to US pressure and joined the war on Al-Qaeda. It also explains the constraints and pressures of domestic politics, actors and pressure groups on the decision makers of these states. The theory also explains the divergence of strategic objectives of these states in WoT. The system level factors of the US hegemony forced these countries to positively respond to the US call of joining the WoT. The

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14 Baylis, J., and Smith, S., and Ownes, P. (2008). Globalization of World Politics: Introduction to International Relations. Oxford University Press. p. 231.

transformation of bipolar system to unipolar resulted in the US hegemony which the leaders of the Muslim countries perceived as enormous and, thus, with no other option accepted the US pressure. The unipolarity also means that there was no balancer in the system like the Soviet Union which could prevent the dictates of the US to the Muslim countries. As a result, the systemic level pressures were unchecked.

The unipolar moment also gave rise to non-state actors like Al-Qaeda to challenge the supremacy of the sole super power. The resistance of Al-Qaeda is a non-conventional response to the power pole in the absence of a power balancer. Ultimately, the breakdown of states like Iraq and Syria, the Arab Spring, the abysmal security situation and dealing with the Al-Qaeda and like minded groups in countries like Pakistan, Syria, Iraq and Yemen can be attributed to both systemic and domestic factors. Thus, neo-classical realism best explains the failure to counter Al-Qaeda and other affiliated or inspired groups by the coalition of the United States.

This article uses qualitative method of investigation to assess the reasons of Al-Qaeda's survival. Secondary sources are utilized for this purpose. Case studies of Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq and Syria are selected to test arguments and provide required explanations. The reason these four countries are chosen is the fact that Al-Qaeda's core, affiliated groups, and like minded groups exist and thrive in these countries and the alliance of WoT finds it hard to defeat them. The presence of Al-Qaeda like networks in other countries is beyond the scope of this paper.

Divergences in Policies

The countries where Al-Qaeda has strong footprints are allies in WoT except Syria. Nevertheless, Syria also fights Al-Qaeda and ISIS yet it does not make it a partner in the alliance. Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen are allies of the US in the war on terror, yet there own policies are not on the same page with that of the US given their peculiar geo-political environment. Thus, it is pertinent to dilate on the divergences on policies regarding WoT in these countries.

Pakistan's Imbroglio

When the terror incident of 9/11 happened, the US sought an alliance to launch its global war on terror. Some of the reluctant allies, like Pakistan, were coerced to change their previous policies regarding arming militant and terrorist groups. Pakistan was supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan and was tolerating Al-Qaeda and other militant and terrorist networks.[15] But the US pressure forced it to join the global alliance of war on terror. Pakistan was publically supporting the Taliban and Kashmiri militants before that. The society had elements which were supportive of militant and political Islam,[16] thanks to over three decades of radicalization on the part of the government during the Afghan war of 1980s and the subsequent civil war in Afghanistan in which Pakistan supported the Taliban. The tribal areas of Pakistan which are known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were used as training grounds for launching militant groups in Afghanistan. This transformed the whole fabric of the society in FATA. The new generation rose in the politically charged environment of Islam. Radicalism was the currency and militant Islam was the acceptable norm of political expression.

As such, the government really found it hard to completely turn its back on the previous policies of supporting militants as a strategic tool and to turn its guns on the former proxies.[17] This not only enraged the terrorist groups who chose to confront the government and equate it with the US for being its ally, but additionally, some of Pakistan's political parties were also unsupportive of Pakistan's role in WoT.[18]

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15 Jayshree Bajoria and Eben Kaplan, "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations - Council on Foreign Relations," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/isi-terrorism-behind-accusations/p11644.

16 C. Christine Fair, "The Militant Challenge in Pakistan," *Asia Policy* 11, no. 1 (2011): 105–37.

17 Bajoria and Kaplan, "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations - Council on Foreign Relations."

18 Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Countering Terrorism – The Express Tribune," accessed November 30, 2014, http://tribune.com.pk/story/576868/countering-terrorism/.

On the other hand Pakistan still considered these *Jihadi* proxies to be of strategic use in Afghanistan.[19] The new government seemed more inclined towards Pakistan's archrival India and thus Pakistan had little clout there. The fear of encirclement by India led Pakistan policy makers to clandestinely continue support or toleration of some of these militant groups in order to influence the political landscape of Afghanistan.[20] Thus, the Taliban leadership, HQN and those Taliban supporting the Afghan Taliban were tolerated. Their havens were not touched. And thus the term 'good Taliban' got currency.[21] These groups were and are still in symbiotic relationship with the core of Al-Qaeda.[22] Al-Qaeda provides them funding and training,while in return they are provided shelter and logistic support. The terror alliance of these groups, however, is not limited to only operational or functional domains. Their ideologies are also identical.

While dealing with the militants and terrorists in its tribal territory, Pakistan struck a few deals with the local tribes and militant groups to allow them to stay there in case they did not attack Pakistani security forces.[23] Some groups like TTP in Swat, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber and South Waziristan were targeted in operations. North Waziristan (NW) was left alone. NW had a global mix of *jihadis*, the headquarter of HQN and base of other

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19 Jayshree Bajoria and Eben Kaplan, "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations - Council on Foreign Relations," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/isi-terrorism-behind-accusations/p11644.

20 Nicholas Howenstein and Sumit Ganguly, "India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan - JIA SIPA," accessed November 30, 2014, http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan/.

21 Arif Rafiq, "Killing the 'Good Taliban,'" accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/04/mullah_nazir_taliban_pakistan_jihad.

22 "Haqqani Network | Mapping Militant Organizations," accessed July 13, 2014, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/363.

23 Daud Khattak, "Reviewing Pakistan's Peace Deals with the Taliban | Combating Terrorism Center at West Point," accessed July 13, 2014, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/reviewing-pakistans-peace-deals-with-the-taliban.

international terrorist groups like East Turkistan Islamic Movement, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Arab militants, Punjabi Taliban and most importantly the local Gul Bahadur Group of Taliban.[24] Gul Bahadur had struck a peace deal with the government. Under the peace agreement, he would not attack Pakistani troops while in return the government would allow him to rule the Wazir tribes of NW.[25] He also openly supported Afghan Taliban. The recent operation in NW also does not clearly specify if the government is targeting all the militants regardless of 'good' or 'bad' Taliban.[26]

Due to such policies of the government, Al-Qaeda's core could avoid defeat at the hands of the US, survive, and remain alive and functional. Most of the killings of Al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan resulted from the drones' strikes within tribal territory of Pakistan[27] and were not the handiwork of Pakistan. Even the apprehension of some leaders was made possible due to joint efforts of the US and Pakistan in the cities of Pakistan. However, the killing and capturing of the core of Al-Qaeda does not mean that Al-Qaeda has been dismantled. It may have weakened it, yet the terror organization has a structure and system for replacing the fallen cadres. As long as its support network is in place and the government's dubious policies continue there is no realistic hope for the elimination of the terror core in Pakistan.

When the core is intact, it is easy to control or direct the affiliate groups. The countries where the affiliated groups are active have

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24 Jeffrey Dressler, "A Dangerous Mix: Militant Groups in North Waziristan | Critical Threats," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.criticalthreats.org/pakistan/dangerous-mix-militant-groups-north-waziristan-june-1-2011.

25 Khattak, "Reviewing Pakistan's Peace Deals with the Taliban | Combating Terrorism Center at West Point."

26 Reza Jan, "Gauging the Success of Pakistan's North Waziristan Operation | Critical Threats," accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.criticalthreats.org/pakistan/jan-gauging-success-nwa-operation-july-25-2014.

27 "Drone Wars Pakistan: Leaders Killed | The International Security Program," accessed July 13, 2014, http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/pakistan/leaders-killed.

different approaches than Pakistan. But Pakistan is very important to the removal of Al-Qaeda as the core is hidden there. The birth and rise of the affiliate groups is dependent on the core which is based in Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan is the core ally in WoT. Its different approach towards the use of proxies has undermined the global effort to stamp out Al-Qaeda. Also, theaffiliated groups came about only after the survival of the Al-Qaeda core in Pakistan. And, thus, WoT had ignored these groups in the start and focused more on Afghanistan and later Iraq. The affiliates also caused the WoT to spread to other countries who in turn opened up new fronts.

Yemen's Problem

Yemen is the base of AQAP. This affiliated group of Al-Qaeda has undermined the government of Yemen. Although Yemen has fully cooperated with the US, the complexity of the societal structure and weak government has created a space for the growth and rise of AQAP. The intricate tribal structure of the society has left little for the government to establish its writ.[28] This maze of tribal affiliations and loyalties has rendered the counter-terror efforts of the US alliance in doldrums. As a result, AQAP has emerged as very formidable and defiant enemy on the political and security scene of Yemen. AQAP is considered now more lethal than core Al-Qaeda and is considered as independent and more sophisticated terror network. Its leader, Nasser al-Wahayshi, became Al-Qaeda's general manager in August 2013. Its threats caused the closure of over 20 U.S. diplomatic posts across the Middle East and North Africa at that time. AQAP is still trying to target Americans and continues find a way of doing the damage.[29]

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28 Sarah Phillips, *What Comes Next in Yemen?: Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building*, vol. 107 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/handle/123456789/27580.

29 Katherine Zimmerman, "Don't Replicate the Failure of Yemen Critical Threats," accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/zimmerman-dont-replicate-failure-yemen-september-11-2014.

The US strategy depends on the Yemeni forces to replace American boots on the ground. But, Yemen is not a country capable of countering the threat. It lacks a sound professional command-and-control system in its forces. The forces are based on patronage networks. Some the forces' units have refused to obey orders of the command and instead have thrown the commanders out of their bases. Yemen also faces a serious threat from the armed, Shiite al Houthi movement which has seized territory from the state. It does not have the ample security resources to address the twin threats of AQAP and the al Houthis at once. In the past, war against al Houthi was one of the main reasons for Yemen to not fight Al-Qaeda seriously before 2010.[30] With the current sectarian rift in the Middle East, analysts have also warned that AQAP may project itself as the protector of Sunnis and that Saudi Arabia would support anti-al Houthi tribes and Sunni militants to undermine the influence of Shiite Iran, which is blamed for arming and supplying the al Houthis.[31]

Yemen is an ideal place for AQAP operations. Yemen's population is poor, disperse, rural, and tribal. The government is known for poor governance and corruption, which lacks direct control in several of its own governorates without the support of the tribes. Ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh had ruled Yemen since its unification in 1990 and had ruled North Yemen from 1978 onward. He had allied himself with Sunni Islamist militants against Shiites. This might explain his complacent attitude toward Al-Qaeda sympathizers when he was faced with al Houthis. In addition, there has been a drop in Yemen's oil, a rise in population, and a drop in watertables, which have affected the government. As a result, Yemen becomes more ripe for instability and extremist activity of AQAP.

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30 Ibid.

31 Dominique Soguel, "Why Yemen, a Shaky US Ally against Al Qaeda, Is Cracking Apart," Yahoo News, accessed November 28, 2014, http://news.yahoo.com/why-yemen-shaky-us-ally-against-al-qaeda-151224460.html.

Iraq and Syria: Borders Redrawn

The sudden rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria took all those concerned by surprise. ISIS now controls large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria. ISIS was once part of Al-Qaeda but split with the core. However, it adheres to the worldview of Al-Qaeda. As such, it will be dealt with here as an Al-Qaeda inspired group. The rise of ISIS and the resultant breakdown of security can be attributed to both system level pressures and domestic politics. At the system level, the Arab Spring hit Syria as well where popular revolt tried to oust the long rule of Bashar al-Assad. The resistance forces were provided support by regional players and as well by the United States. From this situation emerged Al-Qaeda's affiliated group Al-Nusra Front and ISIS.

In Iraq, the pullout of the US troops created a power vacuum. The government of Nouri al-Maliki disenfranchised the Sunni Arab population.[32] In reaction, ISIS found a foothold there and nurtured on the feelings of discrimination. The sectarian factor became the dominant identifier in Iraq, which boded well for ISIS.[33] ISIS imposes strict Shariah laws in the territory it controls. The week government in Iraq and Syria are unable to launch an effective counterterrorism strategy against it. Ironically, the traditional saying "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" does not fit in the Syrian situation. In Syria, the US wants Assad out of power, and he is the enemy of ISIS. Assad too wants to defeat ISIS, which again is the enemy of the US. The situation seems complex. The US would not want to see Assad rule Syria any more than it wants to see ISIS take over after Assad. Thus, this complexity makes the fight against the Al-Qaeda like network very difficult.

The analysis of these four case studies suggests that allies in WoT are not always on the same page when it comes to fighting

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32 "The Sunni-Shia Divide," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!/.

33 Ibrahim Marashi, "Reconceptualizing Sectarianism in the Middle East and Asia | Middle East Institute," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.mei.edu/content/map/reconceptualizing-sectarianism-middle-east-and-asia.

Al-Qaeda in the allies' territories. The governments of these Muslim countries are not entirely free in their decisions. They are constrained by different domestic pressures, limitations and complexities, which they do not share with the US. This makes it difficult for the WoT to achieve its objectives. Whether it's the core of Al-Qaeda or its affiliated or inspired groups, they are far from being defeated. The original US authorization for the use of force against Al-Qaeda is also short of its definition to encompass all the groups and terrorist networks which are inspired by Al-Qaeda. The US relied on the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) to fight against ISIS.[34] This means that instead of ending the WoT it is expanding it with no end in sight.

Lack of Capabilities

The other half of the argument is that the Muslim governments posed with the threat of Al-Qaeda are weak and cannot establish complete writ on its territory. They are politically unstable, economically poor, undemocratic, and illiterate. The weak writ of the state and the chasm between the populace and the government make the government unpopular in these countries. As such the societies are ripe for revolutionary ideas to overthrow the governments. The only thriving idea of revolution and resistance is that of political Islam: that Islam and *shariah* have the panacea for all evils of the society and government, and that Islam can resurrect the Muslim societies and stand against the West as everything is squarely blamed on the West. The Muslim governments have experimented with different governments but none is democratic nor does every country abide by the *shariah* rule. The failure of the Muslim governments provides any opportunity for organizations like Al-Qaeda to flourish.

This is helped by the fact that the Afghan war or the so called *Jihad* brought militants from all over the Muslim countries. They got training and practical experience there. A huge number of Arabs also participated in the war which was facilitated by Al-

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34 Charles "Cully" Stimson, "A Framework for an Authorization for Use of Military Force Against ISIS," accessed November 28, 2014, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/09/a-framework-for-an-authorization-for-use-of-military-force-against-isis.

Qaeda. A lot of them became Al-Qaeda members and some got to the leadership roles. After the ouster of the Taliban and denial of sanctuary to Al-Qaeda they went back to their homes and started their activities there. AQAP which is now considered even more dangerous than Al-Qaeda's core had its members trained in Afghanistan.[35] When they sheltered themselves in Pakistan, the government of Pakistan, although it had a lack of will to fight them, was not capable of launching a counterterrorism operation against them.

The poor state of economics, political instability and lack of writ on the FATA were the reasons it could not pursue the terrorists. Pakistan had to depend on the Coalition Support Fund of the US to carry out its counterterrorism in the FATA.[36] Its police and armed forces were not trained for this kind of fight, especially, when there was a huge support base for terrorist or *jihadi* groups in the country.[37] Where the religious political parties and the so called independent media ridiculed and criticized the state's new policy of disowning the militant groups. The government faced tough opposition and most of its operations had no political support.[38]

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35 Helene Cooper, "In Yemen, a Counterterrorism Challenge - NYTimes.com," accessed July 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/world/middleeast/in-yemen-a-counterterrorism-challenge.html?_r=0.

36 "Coalition Support Fund: Pakistan to Receive $380m This Month – The Express Tribune," accessed November 30, 2014, http://tribune.com.pk/story/706543/coalition-support-fund-pakistan-to-receive-380m-this-month/.

37 "Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge - International Crisis Group," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/164-pakistan-the-militant-jihadi-challenge.aspx.

38 Sherry Rehman, "Winning Our Own War ‹ Newsweek Pakistan," accessed November 30, 2014, http://newsweekpakistan.com/winning-our-own-war/.

The government could not either provide the political narrative which could be an alternative to the jihadist narrative.[39] Besides the lack of will, it had lost control over the management of narratives to the jihadists. As such, the only narrative that has currency in Pakistan is that of the jihadists. In face of such odds it is difficult for the government to conduct its counterterrorism operation across the board.[40] Thus, such lack of capability to have writ over its territory and ideation of terrorism helped Al-Qaeda and its affiliates to survive in Pakistan. The core could not only easily hide in a supportive population, but it also has network for disseminating its propaganda, video messages and directives to affiliates in other countries.

Besides the core, the affiliated groups also have the same advantage in the countries they operate in. AQAP is taking full advantage of the weak government of Yemen. The context in Yemen is entirely different for Al-Qaeda. While the core lives in an alien land of Pakistan and Afghanistan as they are Arabs, in Yemen they are part and parcel of the tribal society. They are not only Al-Qaeda members but are also related to the people and tribes. Thus action against them becomes more complex. The government is also weak and relies heavily on the US for its counterterrorism operations.[41] This provides fodder to Al-Qaeda, that they are fighting the US ally. It helps them to get more recruits and support. Additionally, the victim of drone strikes in Yemen may be both an Al-Qaeda member as well as a member of a tribe. This invites the wrath of the locals who in turn helps Al-Qaeda even more.

The story of the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS is also very complex. As the Arab Spring challenged Bashar al-Assad's government and reduced its influence, Al-Qaeda got an opportunity to make inroads in there. Although the Syrian government is no friend of the West, it has a serious threat of Al-Qaeda. The US on the other hand is in a quagmire when it comes to the support of rebels. Al-

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39 Aimal Khan, "Pakistan-and-the-Narratives-of-Extremism.pdf," accessed July 13, 2014, http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR327-Pakistan-and-the-Narratives-of-Extremism.pdf.

40 Rehman, "Winning Our Own War ‹ Newsweek Pakistan."

41 Phillips, *What Comes Next in Yemen?*.

Qaeda finds weak and failing governments as ideal for entrenching itself in that terrain. The conflicts in the Muslim countries provide opportunity to Al-Qaeda and its affiliate groups to train themselves and get experience. The foreigners in such conflicts will return to their home countries and pose a threat to their security.[42] The Iraqi government lacks the capability to tackle ISIS. This has been proven by the sudden sweep of several cities like Mosul by ISIS fighters. The Iraqi forces could not face the threat of ISIS. Although the US is providing the Iraqi government forces training and weapons, the predominant Shiite force lacks the discipline and capability to wrest back the lost territories. This is amplified by the sectarian factors as well.

Conclusion

The vulnerability of the governments, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia, not only risk their security but also that of the interests of the US and the West. Al-Qaeda has survived because of the counterterrorism objectives of the WoT alliance countries are not always the same. The different agenda of the key ally, Pakistan, helped the core of Al-Qaeda to survive in Pakistan and the global empire of terrorism to spread. This lack of will was coupled with the lack of capability as well. The government is weak and has no complete writ over its territories. Its border area with Afghanistan is made of rugged mountains and difficult terrain. Security forces cannot sweep the area completely. There is a lack of political support as well for such actions. On the other hand, there is no alternative provided to the terrorists' narrative and political discourse. The society in general is receptive to the radicalized version of Islam and thus is found in harmony with Al-Qaeda regarding different issues of the Muslim world.

The story of the affiliated groups is no different. The governments of Yemen, Syria and Iraq, Somalia, Nigeria and Mali are weak. They lack resources and training to fight such a formidable

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42 James Rodger, "What Is ISIS? All You Need to Know about Islamic State - Coventry Telegraph," accessed November 30, 2014, http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/what-isis-you-need-know-7908812.

enemy. They are also politically unstable, ethnically divided, lacking cohesion, economically weak, and lacking democracy. The US cannot go to all the countries and do the job of their governments. Even if it does it may render the problem more complex. This paper argued that although the core of A-Qaeda was devastated, it still has a command structure and has undergone a shift from attacking the US to the Muslim governments. It has also become more decentralized. Its ideology has not been defeated so far. And the paper predicts that if there is no dramatic change at the structural level of the Muslim countries, Al-Qaeda, its affiliates and other such terror organizations will thrive in these regions.