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These are unquestionably bold claims, and while some agree that al Qaeda is weaker than it was in 2001, pointing to its reduced capability to perform terrorist operations and washed-out senior leadership as confirmation, others claim that al Qaeda is in fact stronger today than when it carried out the 9/11 attacks. Both arguments have some merit.

For more than ten years, the west has done its utmost to crush on al Qaeda operational competences, which may perhaps have been diminished.

The organization's Taliban protectors were toppled in Afghanistan, and its easily accessible training camps, at one time the destination for jihads volunteers worldwide, have been dispersed. In addition, al Qaeda attacks in Indonesia, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey between 2002 and 2006 prompted those governments to attempt to dismantle local terrorist networks.

Cooperation among security services and law enforcement organizations worldwide has made its operating environment increasingly hostile (Ashore, 2011). Accordingly, al Qaeda has not been able to carry out a significant terrorist operation in the West since 2005, although its ability of mounting plausible, worrisome threats is not in question.

Campaign, but it does have a profound effect on the future of the jihads enterprise.

Although there are claims that Osama was "no longer intimately involved in directing specific terrorist operations by the time he was killed by American forces in May 2011" (Atman, 2012), he definitely continued to provide

strategic guidance as well as organizational and operational-level advice meaning his death weakens the movement. Not only was Osama bin Laden al Qaeda spiritual leader, but he was also al Qaeda main link to its financial sources. It is not certain, whether wealthy supporters in the Gulf will continue to contribute to al Qaeda with Bin Laden gone (Oneness, 2012).

His demise was a further blow to the organization's already depleted core leadership, which has continued to suffer losses. Senior ranks of al Qaeda have been suffering damaging attrition for some time and the architects of 9/11 have either been captured or killed. According to a report by the New York Times, 20 of the 30 top al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan and along the Afghan-Pakistan border have been killed. The casualties from drone attacks are thus very significant.

US drones are one of biggest and most dangerous threats al Qaeda faces and have killed several crucial al Qaeda figures; AY-Shari's deputy Tahiti Abdul Raman, the 'sheikh of the internet' Inward al-Alike, and the deputy leader of ASAP Fad al-Quo. While these attacks have certainly weakened al Qaeda, the National Bureau of Economic Research produced a paper that showed how civilian casualties caused by drone attacks leads to increased insurgent violence over the long-run (Atman, 2012) or 'revenge' as we know it.

Promises of retaliation flooded the Internet as a result of the death of such al Qaeda leaders, but despite the aggressive chest thumping, there was no mass rush to martyrdom, and not a single attack in the West. While any post mortem or future attack that would have occurred anyway may be labeled '

retaliation', the passage of time, according to Jenkins (2012), without a spectacular response may be a sign of a weakened al Qaeda.

However much the 'core al Qaeda' has been weakened by Bin Laden's killing and the effectiveness of US drone attacks, some analysts are leading the argument that al-Qaeda is doing better than we realize, probably even stronger than they were when they carried out 9/11. This argument is based in part on the idea that the organization has expanded its reach by cementing new alliances and affiliates, and that al-Qaeda affiliates are part of the same larger collective as the Pakistan-based group that Osama bin Laden helped lead.

According to Lea Feral (2011), accounts that point to al-Qaeda depleted senior leadership as evidence that the group is at its weakest since 9/11 treat the central al-Qaeda organization separately from its subsidiaries and overlook al-Qaeda continuing transformation and evolution. Over the years, the size of al-Qaeda global network has dramatically expanded since the 9/11 attacks, aided by the development of a coherent ideology and 'Meghan' which was lacking then (Andrea Bennie and Christina Hellenic, 2012).

Al-Qaeda has relentlessly cultivated a complex network of franchises (AQUA, ASAP, SWIM), allies (Taliban), affiliated groups (Insignia's Book Harm), and sleeper cells of home grown terrorists (men who carried out the London bombings). Al-Qaeda might not exercise full power over its franchises, but nor is its role restricted to general ideological scale plans, plots against a new target, and plots using a method that has not been previously used, such as the use of chemical devices (Feral, 2011).

Despite the fact that its centre has been relatively hollowed since the heaviest blows have fallen on al Qaeda core in Pakistan, these al Qaeda offshoots remain strong and “ all have attacked Western interests in their regions of operation” (Farrell, 2011), for in times of sustained pressure and increased drone attacks al Qaeda central has delegated significant responsibility to ASAP and other franchises to embark on external operations.

The transformation of the nature and organization of the group since 9/11 has been recognized by the Western intelligence community who now refer to the ideologically inked Jihad network as GAMMA (al Qaeda and Associated Movements). One way to detect this is by analyzing the words of President Obama who appears to be backing away from his often-stated claim - a cornerstone of his 2012 campaign - that “ al Qaeda is on the path to defeat” (Coffer, 2012). A subtle but important shift has occurred.

In more recent statements, Obama revised the assertion, stipulating that “ the al Qaeda core is on the path to defeat” (Coffer, 2012). The addition of one word to Obama’s usual statement may seem a small matter, but the president chooses his words very carefully, and the insertion of the word ‘ core’ probably represents a major reassessment by the administration of al Qaeda overall strength and durability. The use of the word ‘ core’ implies that while the administration is having success against the al Qaeda central leadership, al Qaeda wide-ranging affiliates are not on the ‘ path to defeat’.

Such a shift represents an acknowledgement that, with al Qaeda affiliates still able to inflict damage and casualties, the war against terrorism will be a longer and more difficult road than previously thought.

Numerous of the recent terrorist attempts on the West were launched or inspired by ASAP (they have twice attempted to bring down commercial planes bound for the United States), which also has forged a close relationship with al Shabby, an Salamis insurgency in Somalia. In recent years, American officials indicated that some surviving members of al Qaeda core have relocated to Somalia and Yemen.

There also have been reports indicating that some of al Qaeda leaders in Yemen have moved to Somalia (Schmitt and Ganger, 2009; Dared, 2011; Osama, 2010). When examining these reports, a degree of connectivity and mobility among Shadiest in hose three countries can be analyses and confirmed. Further west, al Qaeda in the Islamic Manager (SWIM) has sought to expand its area of influence in Africa, in particular, the Manager and Sale regions, with camps and occasional forays into Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Chad, and Niger as evidence of its capabilities.

A weakened but still lethal al Qaeda in Iraq continues its campaign of terror aimed at Iraqi government officials, Sunnis tribal leaders who have turned against it, and members of the Shih community, in an effort to provoke a sectarian civil war between the country's Sunnis and Shih communities. Finally, Book Harm, a radical Salamis group in northern Nigeria, is almost certainly also receiving instruction and indoctrination from al Qaeda elements. Affiliates is also on the rise, even after bin Alden's death.

AY Qaeda in Iraq, for example, has piloted greater than 200 attacks and killed more than a thousand Iraqis since the bin Laden raid, a Jump from the previous year Cones, 2012). And despite the group's violent legacy, popular support for al Qaeda remains fairly high in countries such as Nigeria and Egypt, though it has steadily declined in others.

As Seth Jones 2012) puts it nicely; “ if this is what the brink of defeat looks like, I'd hate to see success”.

Equally as consequential for al Qaeda strength has been the Arab Spring, which since February 2011 has completely transformed the political landscape of MEAN region. The mostly non-violent mass protests of the Arab Spring were successful in overturning hated despots, and this discredited al Qaeda longstanding message that only violence and Jihad could achieve the same ends, especially as different jihad groups such as Egypt Islamic Group were undergoing a ' De-retaliation' transformation (Ashore, 2011).

The youthful protestor's demands for freedom and democracy initially suggested that extremist, Jihad groups were facing redundancy, and that peaceful protests could achieve what violence had not (Atman, 2012). On the other hand, some have even suggested that while the Arab Spring might have initially caught al Qaeda on the back foot, the organization has expanded its reach by exploiting the opportunities regional turmoil affords. The effects of the Arab Spring in Yemen for instance, have clearly benefited ASAP at the expense of the chronically weak central government in that country.

ASAP in fact has been able to expand; seizing and controlling territory (according to some estimates, amounting to nearly half the country), gaining new adherents and supporters, and continuing to innovate tactically as it labors to extend its attack capabilities beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Mien is on its way to becoming a failed state and ASAP has already exploited the security vacuum to seize vast swathes of the south and centre of the country' (Atman, 2012).

Although developments in Somalia suggest that al-Schwab, another close al Qaeda ally, has suffered a critical setback in the capital, Mogadishu, the group nonetheless maintains a stranglehold over the southern third of the country where a terrible drought and famine threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Al-Saab's recent declaration of a formal alliance with al Qaeda proves the point that the movements brand and overall message still had a strong resonance and attraction in at least some corners of the world. AY Qaeda gains in Syria may be the most worrisome.

A rebellion against Basher al Sad's regime that was not begun by al Qaeda has quickly evolved into one of al Qaeda chief warhorses. According to Animal Ferguson, "if a revolution fails to usher in ideal anticipated changes for the better, disappointment may produce more extremist ideological tendencies" (Atman, 2012). In other words, the longer the civil war rages and the bloodshed, upheaval, and uncertainty continues, the greater the potential opportunities for al Qaeda. Furthermore, the Arab Spring is likely to re-fuelling for years in Iraq, consequently increasing its operational scope throughout the region.

Shadiest around the world long to fight in Syria.

AY Qaeda arm there is called the AY Nassau Front, which has been designated by the U. S. Government as a terrorist organization. Since late 2011, according to the U. S. State Department, the AY Nassau Front has claimed responsibility for more than 600 attacks.

The growth in the AY Nassau Front's operations is alarming as the al Qaeda affiliate has become the most effective and lethal part of the Syrian insurgency. To conclude, there is little doubt that developments like the death of Bin Laden and other leaders are a huge blow to al Qaeda.

Eradicating the spiritual leader of a militant group might be regarded as a political victory for the US in the short term, argues Ashore (2011), but the death of individual leaders such as Bin Laden and al- Alike have not destroyed al Qaeda and can now be absorbed and digested by the movement easier. Atman (2012) emphasizes this by likening the al Qaeda network to a “ mature tree whose branches are easily seen but which is supported by an invisible and increasingly complex underground root system”.

The problem for those prosecuting the War on terror' is that cutting of a branch (even big branches like Bin Laden, Raman, Alike, and al-Quo) does little to weaken the roots which are nurtured by a fertile mix of grievances and aspiration (Atman, 2012).

Drone attacks can definitely target the leadership, but not a mind-set. It is important to understand that the network has transformed over the years

from a highly centralized hierarchy - with recruiting, training and orders all scrutinized by its top leaders - to something much more loose and amorphous.

AY Qaeda today is far more decentralized than it was ten years ago and far more dependent on its autonomous field commands, its affiliates, its allies, and its ability to inspire home-grown terrorists. Accordingly, a more diffuse terrorist threat has been created, maybe "less-destructive but still dangerous terrorist plots that often are harder to detect" (Oneness, 2012). Moreover, the Arab Spring has allowed GAMMA groups the chance to expand their operation room, particularly in Libya and Syria (Atman, 2012), thus increasing the strength of al Qaeda.

The emphasis on unity in al Qaeda ideology and Meghan and a desire to maintain the status quo will likely allow the organization to hold together, even as it comes under more and more pressure from the West. "What becomes clear is that the differences among assessments over al Qaeda situation stem essentially from the fact that al Qaeda is many things at once and must accordingly be analysed with regards to all of its different dimensions. It is a global terrorist enterprise, the centre of a universe of like-minded radicals, an ideology of violent Jihad, an autonomous online network.