Terrorism Outlook for 2012

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Ten years after its iconic attacks on US landmarks, al Qaeda no longer occupies the centre stage in global security. The relentless US targeting led to the massive degradation of al Qaeda, the core of the global terrorist movement. This included the decapitation of Osama bin Laden, the al Qaeda founder leader, in Abbotabad in Pakistan on May 2, 2011. The epicentre of the network suffered another blow when his successor Dr. Ayman al Zawahiri's deputy Attiyah Abd-al-Rahman alias Attiyah Allah was killed in a CIA US drone strike in North Waziristan, Pakistan on August 22, 2011. Nonetheless, al Qaeda's ideology and its clones in Asia, Caucuses, Africa and the Middle East still present a real threat to societies and governments worldwide.

America's unfinished war in Iraq and its intent to withdraw forces from Afghanistan emboldened the transnational terrorists and extremists. They believe that the US suffered a defeat in Iraq and is at the threshold of another defeat in Afghanistan. Although citizen protests replaced dictators, the Arab Spring created opportunities in favour of the Islamists and Islamist rulers. Western intervention in Libya created an unfavourable environment in Sahel and West Africa. The resultant proliferation of weapons including Manpads, availability of trained fighters and massive human rights violations present a new scale of threat. Unless stability is restored, the pre-counter-insurgency environment created is likely to deteriorate culminating in an insurgency.

Of the centres of gravity of international terrorism, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area remains the primary hub for international operations closely followed by Iraq, Yemen and Somalia. While the threat has not plateaued in the Caucuses, it continues to grow both in North and West Africa. The threat remains significant in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines, but the threat in Northeast Asia has appreciably decreased.[1]

The Context

Failed states and ungoverned spaces as well as geopolitical rivalry present a threat to global security. The persistent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen have created the environment for migration of foreign and rooting of new terrorist and extremist groups. Nonetheless, with increases in border security measures, terrorist groups face difficulties mounting trans-border operations. To compensate, terrorist and extremist groups increasingly exploit the Internet to reach out to their diaspora and migrant communities. With both radicalization and training on-line, the threat of self radicalized homegrown terrorism is on the rise especially in the West. Although the attacks mounted by well structured groups located in the global south present a lethal threat, the frequency of attacks by self radicalized cells and individuals is on the rise especially in the West.[2] With government failure to counter terrorist ideology, the world is witnessing the steady rise of incidents of self radicalized terrorism.[3]

The tempo of attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, the high signature battlefields, is influencing the global threat landscape. Despite the US ending its mission in Iraq, terrorism presents the pre-eminent challenge to the security and stability of Iraq and beyond. US intervention in March 2003 based on flawed intelligence and final US withdrawal in December 2011 has left an insecure and unstable region. The al Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) conducted a wave of bombings against government and Shia targets in Baghdad on December 2011.[4] With Iraqi forces incapable of maintaining security, a future Iraq is likely to continue to produce several hundred fatalities and casualties every month. Like Afghan veterans, Iraqi veterans seek targets outside the Middle East. Like Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, the Iraqi-Swede, who killed only himself in Stockholm on December 11, 2010, other Iraqi

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veterans seek targets in the West.

Inspired and instigated by the US withdrawal from Iraq, embolden insurgent and terrorist groups seek to attack the seat of power in Kabul. Rather than assure support to partners in Afghanistan, the public announcement of the withdrawal of the US created conditions favourable to the Taliban insurgents and al Qaeda terrorists. The international community's effort in 2012 to negotiate with the Taliban is likely to fail. In their favour, Pakistan, India, Iran, and China watch and influence the developments in Afghanistan. Keen to avoid direct confrontation, Iran continues to advance its foreign policy goals by providing support both for Sunni and Shia threat groups.

Developments likely to Impact on Security

In the face of persistent threat, the year 2012 is likely to witness four significant developments.

First, self-radicalized homegrown terrorism will eclipse the threat posed by traditional terrorist groups operating out of failed and fragile states.

Second, continuity and likely escalation of threat in Iraq and Afghanistan,

Third, expansion and escalation of threat in Yemen and Somalia, and,

Fourth, displacement of the threat from the Maghreb to the Sahel and West Africa.

The year 2012 will be a crucial year in the global fight against insurgency, terrorism and ideological extremism. The global economic down-turn has led the US, backbone of the global counter terrorism, and other governments to scale down counter-insurgency and counter terrorism budgets. With the US-led coalition preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, the situation both in Afghanistan and Pakistan is likely to deteriorate.[5]

To stabilize Af-Pak and the region, including Central Asia, western forces will need to invest in two areas in 2012 and 2013. First, to build a robust law enforcement, military and intelligence capability in Afghanistan and second, to improve relations with and build capacity in Pakistan to dismantle the al Qaeda and Taliban infrastructure on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Operating in an environment of high threat, Iraqi and Afghan forces will need long term international support to face the challenge of insurgency, terrorism, and extremism.

International assistance is needed to stabilize both neighbourhoods and very countries where Arab Spring brought about regime change. In the fragile neighbourhood of Sahel, with the flow of weapons and fighters from Libya, a pre-counter-insurgency environment has been created. Unless the fallout from Libya is not addressed in the coming months, it is likely to impact on the security of the Maghreb, Sahel and West Africa. Determined to establish an Islamic State, Boko Haram attacked churches on Christmas day, 2011. In Nigeria, over 500 civilians were killed in terrorist attacks in 2011.[6] Poor leadership, bad governance and lack of economic development make Africa ripe for conflict.

Governments will need to build non-military capacities to respond to threat groups that are gaining mastery in infiltrating the political parties, religious organizations, educational institutions, and mass media. With better educated leaders joining such entities, threat groups influence their potential supporters and sympathizers. By investing in carefully crafted propaganda, the many faces of terrorist groups, appeal to diverse audiences. Terrorist ideologues lack religious credentials, but by ridiculing established authorities and appealing to the masses, they build constituencies sufficient to advance their goals and aims. Although less than 1% of the Muslims worldwide subscribe to Salafi jihadism, the ideology is spreading from the Middle East to Africa and to Asia.[7]

Due to international neglect and tolerance of the operation of threat groups on the web, propaganda is now the primary activity of insurgent, terrorist and extremist groups. Almost all the threat groups worldwide have established a presence on the web. They are expanding their presence on the web on a scale and at a rate where governments find it hard to catch up, both to counter disinformation and monitor operational activity. Although dissent must be

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permitted, maintaining websites and blogs aimed at radicalizing youth under the pretext of freedom of expression should not be tolerated. Over 90% of the threat groups use US servers.[8] Media teams of threat groups including the most puritanical, today utilize social media extensively. Wherever there is internet penetration, the cyber space has emerged as the principal propaganda platform for threat groups to recruit, raise funds and to coordinate operations.

Conclusion

To manage the global threat of insurgency, terrorism and extremism, it is imperative to prevent politicization and radicalization of vulnerable populations. In order to end terrorism and insurgency, the international community has also to make a concerted effort to resolve regional rivalries. For instance, the regional dispute between India and Pakistan has contributed both to state and non state terrorism. International neglect of geopolitical conflicts has resulted in an escalation of global threat.

The continuing and growing instability in Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan and Pakistan will threaten international security. Terrorism will remain the tier one threat to the US, their European allies and friends. Although the threat is manageable, all the major powers, China, Russia and India will continue to suffer from acts of terrorism intermittently in the foreseeable future.

In the age of persistent conflict, the threat to aviation, maritime and land transportation remains significant. Although aviation is the most protected domain, the threat to aviation will persist. Similar to the suicide attack on a Japanese oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz by the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in Lebanon on July 28, 2010, both state sponsored and non-state sponsored terrorists continues to threaten sea routes. While the bulk of the terrorists will use the gun and bomb in 2012, a few terrorists will either invest or attempt to mount attacks using unconventional agents. While physical security measures can displace the threat, counter terrorism operations and community engagement strategies are paramount to reduce the threat.

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[1] The East Asian threat landscape is assessed by: Muh Taufiquorrohaman and Rebecca C. Lunnon, Southeast Asia Country Assessment, Indonesia, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2012; Diane Russel O. Junio, Southeast Asia Country Assessment, Indonesia, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2012; Su Hao' En, Southeast Asia Country Assessment, Indonesia, Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2012; Jacob Zenn, Al-Qaeda's Uighur Jihadi: A Profile of the Tukistan Islamic Party's Abdul Shakoor Turkistani Jamestown Foundation, *Militant Leadership Monitor*, Volume II, Issue 12, December 2011. The operations by Pakistani and US government led to the death of Chinese terrorists located in tribal Pakistan degrading the Chinese terrorist capabilities. Abdul Shakoor Turkistani was appointed as the new leader of the Turkistan Islamic Party, after the deaths of Abdul Haq al-Turkistani and Hasan Maksum in tribal Pakistan by US drone and Pakistani military operations.

[2]"Threats to the American Homeland after Killing Bin Laden: An Assessment" House Homeland Security Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on May 25, 2011.<http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2011/05/25/ Americans-self-radicalized-recruited/UPI-19961306368303/#ixzz1kowLWSzk> <accessed on January 28, 2012>

[3] Frank J. Cilluffo, Joseph R. Clark, and Michael P. Downing,"Counterterrorism Intelligence: Law Enforcement Perspectives," Homeland Security Policy Institute at George Washington University, September 2011.

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[4]ISI Claims Wave of Bombings in Baghdad, Details One Operation, SITE Monitoring Service: Jihadist Threat News Issue #39, December 31, 201

[5] The security is likely to deteriorate not only in Afghanistan but in the neighborhood. Security in Afghanistan, International Crisis Group, August 23, 2011 http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/key-issues/security-in-afghanistan.aspx <January 29, 2012> and *Jacob Zenn*, The Indigenization of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Jamestown Terrorism Monitor, Volume X, Issue 2, January 26, 2012

[6] Toni Johnson, Backgrounder on Boko Haram, Council on Foreign Relations, December 27, 2011, < http://www.cfr.org/africa/boko-haram/p25739> <January 29, 2012>

[7] Ali Soufan, The Black Banners: The Inside Story of 9/11 and the War Against al-Qaeda, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2011

[8] Global Pathfinder II, The database of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, Singapore