Forum: Advisory Panel on the Question of the Middle East

Issue: Countering terrorist-influenced insurgencies in the Middle East with special emphasis on Afghanistan and Iraq

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INTRODUCTION

The Middle East stands at the edge of transforming itself, representing the birth of a New World Order and a change in the Middle East's relevance in global politics beyond just oil reserves. However, insurgencies in the region threaten to destabilise the region and cripple it, slowing down progress by years, if not entire decades.

The primary goal of an insurgency is to diminish control of a political institution that is currently in power in a given dominion. Although it is predominantly a political struggle, the social and economic conditions of the region may change the nature and or objective of an insurgency. An insurgency does not necessarily need a centralized chain of command, and may be a loose-knit group of fanatics and participants, each with different goals or different ends to the same goal. Although they are not necessities, insurgencies are aided in their goal of usurping power with the help of strong and capable leaders, large number of supporters, willing recruits, a secure base and ample funding. The terrorist groups provide all of these and fuel the conflict in the region.

In Iraq, times have changed. Till just a few months ago, it represented they symbol of a growing democracy. Now, the Iraqi Government is combatting the Islamic State (IS), which has rampaged Iraq and Syria, capturing various cities, towns and villages, such as Mosul and Fallujah. Iraq has been unable to fend off these attacks by itself completely, despite the Iraqi Army’s best efforts. However, it is also worth mentioning that the Iraqi Army has had some success against the IS, capturing a few towns and cities back, such as Tikrit. Presently, Iraq is relying on the United States (US) for additional military aid such as precision air strikes.

In Afghanistan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the US have announced their withdrawal of troops after over a decade of foreign intervention. Previously, Afghanistan had predominantly been under the control of terrorist organisations such as the Al Qaeda and the Taliban, which used Afghanistan as the base of operations for many of their activities, including the bombings of the World Trade Centre. The withdrawal will be complete by 2016,
and this period will determine whether Afghanistan will finally be able to protect itself from the terrorist organisations like the Taliban and the Al Qaeda. Afghanistan has not been able to completely destroy terrorism and insurgency in the region yet, and without foreign aid, this task will only be more difficult.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Insurgency**

Insurgency is the organized use of violence to seize or challenge political control of a region. It is primarily a political struggle, in which both sides use armed force, to increase their influence in a region.

**Counterinsurgency**

Counterinsurgency is a blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously contain insurgency and address its root causes. Unlike conventional warfare, non-military assets are often the most effective elements, while military forces simply enable these assets to carry out their operations.

**Terrorism**

Although there is no single definition of terrorism that is legally recognised by the United Nations (UN), the General Assembly has used the following description- “Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them”

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   http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf

   http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf

   http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/49/a49r060.htm
Separatist Factions

Separatist groups are those with the goal of separation from existing entities through independence, political autonomy, religious freedom or domination. The ideologies separatists subscribe to include social justice or equity, anti-imperialism and the resistance to conquest or occupation by a foreign power.

Background Information

There is a categorical difference between terrorist-incited and terrorist-led insurgency. In the former, violence and instability caused by terrorist acts result in a worsening of the political situation and a breakdown of law and order. In the latter, terrorist organisations specifically recruit soldiers and arm and train them in order to carry out their goals, which may be toppling of the current political structure, spreading of instability in the region, or simply the spread of violence. In certain cases the terrorist organisations are directly responsible for the growth of insurgencies. This can be seen as in the case of Al Qaeda, which recruits soldiers, and then trains and equips them with weaponry to become an organised insurgency. However, there are terrorist organisations which incite insurgencies as opposed to leading the. This essentially means that they have contributed to the birth and growth of an insurgency, but only indirectly. Such is true in the case of the Taliban, which uses various media such as the Internet, posters and meetings with the civilians to call for Afghans to rise against and attack US soldiers, one of these instances being when the Taliban called for offensives to be led against US troops through their official website, the “Voice of Jihad”. The IS in Iraq is also another terrorist organisation that incites insurgencies as opposed to leading them, though means that are meant to spread at the grass root level, such as by uploading videos to recruit people into their insurgency, or holding rallies at territories they have captured, such as Mosul and Fallujah.

Iraq

History

The conflict in Iraq cannot be understood without first understanding the Sunni-Shia conflict in Iraq. The division between dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and the

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question of who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation. Sunni Muslims agree with the position taken by many of the Prophet's companions, that the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job. This is what was done, and the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and advisor, Abu Bakr, became the first Caliph of the Islamic nation. The word "Sunni" in Arabic comes from a word meaning "one who follows the traditions of the Prophet."

The Shia Muslims believe that following the Prophet Muhammad's death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin/son-in-law, Ali bin Abu Talib. Throughout history, Shia Muslims have not recognized the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams which they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or God Himself. The word "Shia" in Arabic means a group or supportive party of people. The commonly-known term is shortened from the historical "Shia-t-Ali," or "the Party of Ali." They are also known as followers of "Ahl-al-Bayt" or "People of the Household" (of the Prophet).

Presence of Insurgency

The primary example of such an organisation is the Islamic State, more commonly known as IS. The goal of IS is not to simply remove all coalition forces from Iraq, but to topple the Iraqi government, eliminate all Shias, and establish a purely Sunni Islamic state. This is not the only prominent Sunni-Shia conflict in the region. There are major Sunni-Shia conflicts in addition to this, which have contributed to this conflict. However, they are not caused by insurgencies and hence, are not directly relevant.

Recent Events

The region had been stable for the past decade, with the US-led invasion of Iraq ending with the complete withdrawal of all troops in August 2010. However sectarian violence once again returned in early 2012, with the Shia population being targeted. A total of 900 people were killed in October 2013, resulting in the number of casualties being double those of 2012. In June 2014, IS launched itself onto the global stage by moving from the province of Anbar and capturing Iraq’s second-largest city, Mosul. The Governor of Mosul has also claimed that forces loyal to the Saddam Hussein regime have captured parts of Mosul. After the capture of Mosul, IS forces then marched onward to Baji oil refineries, and are currently in possession of a significant number of cities, towns and villages.

Iraq had been stable still early 2014, when the IS broke off from the Al Qaeda and the Iraqi Government now faces debilitating attacks on various fronts. Though it has already requested US aid, President Barack Obama has declared that the US will not be carrying
out drone strikes in Iraqi territory. There has been a marked increase in sectarian violence, with an escalation of the Sunni-Shi’ite conflict. Iraqi Kurds have also been stirred into action given the latest developments in the region.

**Current Situation**

The Iraqi Government is losing ground to the IS on an almost daily basis. It is not being able to effectively tackle the insurgency on its own and is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign aid to help combat the IS. Iraq is currently receiving aid from not only the US, but also Iran and Russia, as per various reports. However, all three nations are not working in collaboration, which is hampering the progress of Iraq in this war against terrorism.

**Afghanistan**

**History**

Foreign intervention in Afghanistan began in 2001, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre on the 11th of September. The US and the United Kingdom (UK) commenced Operation Enduring Freedom on the 7th of October, 2001, and were shortly joined by the remainder of NATO. Throughout this period, there have been various attempts to destroy the terrorist networks prevalent in the area and elimination of key targets and leaders of the organisations and insurgencies. Through a combination of drone strikes and manned operations, the NATO have declared their operation complete and have announced a complete withdrawal of all troops by the end of 2016.

**Presence of Insurgency**

The two principal terrorist organisations in Afghanistan are the Taliban and the Al Qaeda. The Al Qaeda is responsible for the occupation of Afghanistan, being held accountable for the 9/11 attacks. There has been a decrease in activities of these organisations with NATO forces disrupting various operations carried out by both these organisations, with the assassination of key members and destruction of infrastructure.

**Recent Events**

In Afghanistan, there has been a decrease in military operations being carried out by NATO. This is in accordance with the 2016 withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, which will represent the first time the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will be solely responsible for maintaining peace and security in Afghanistan in over 13 years. Elimination of key leaders and members of the Taliban, as mentioned earlier, has resulted in decrease
of terrorist acts committed by them, as per reports issued by the UN. Landmark Presidential elections have been held, with a record voter turnout of approximately 58%.

**Current Situation**

Currently, a portion of soldiers stationed in Afghanistan believe that the remainder of the terrorist organisations in the region cannot be eliminated using current methods of only carpet bombing and ground offenses. Sections of NATO troops, particularly the infantry, have called for implementation of new counter-insurgency techniques, such as "draining the swamp" or "draining the water," which comprises involves the necessary and unconditional relocation of the civilian population in an attempt to expose the whereabouts of the insurgents.

**Key Issues**

**Maintaining political stability of recognised governments**

In the Middle East, there are various nations with various governments, and some are not recognised by the UN. For example, the State of Palestine, whose territories are claimed by the State of Israel, which is itself not recognised by 32 member nations, but is recognised by the UN. If the UN is to continue any of its various missions in the region, it is imperative to provide assistance to all recognised governments where there is credible threat to the stability of the region, regardless of whether this instability is political, social or economic in nature. This holds especially true in nations such as Iraq, where the currently recognised Shi'ite-led government is facing stiff resistance from Kurdish and Sunni opposition in forming the next government, in the wake of the recent IS insurgency, which has managed to capture various towns and cities, the most important one being Mosul.

**Evaluation of the terrorist organisations and insurgencies**

Despite initial appearances, majority of terrorist organisations and insurgencies are in fact, not the same. For example, the principal goal of the Taliban with respect to Afghanistan is the downfall of the Afghani government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, a goal which is second only to their demand of the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, which is in the process of being carried out. However, Al Qaeda regards Afghanistan primarily as a base of operations for its aforementioned drug trade, as per a document obtained from the Pentagon. Thus, there is a categorical and intrinsic difference in the ideologies and goals of these terrorist organisations and insurgencies. The result is that each organisation and insurgency has different methods, number of recruits, finances, etc. Thus, any attempt to resolve the issue requires an understanding of each organisation
or insurgency as a separate, individual entity.

**Political dynamic of the region**

Although there has been an increase in the number of terrorist organisations and insurgencies since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, there have been rivalries and there has been bloodshed that has lasted generations. The presence of foreign institutions and governments has only resulted in the escalation of these very conflicts. The Sunni-Shi'ite conflict has intensified over the past decade or so. Al Qaeda has managed to grow richer and more powerful, with an annual income exceeding $100 million, as per reports by the Central Intelligence Agency. The rampant growth of IS can be linked to the anti-Shi'ite sentiments being harboured by Kurdish and Sunni minorities, who feel exploited by the current regime. Had the state of Israel ceased to exist, it is likely the terrorist group Hamas would do the same. Knowledge of this topic is incomplete without understanding the socio-economic landscape of the region, bearing in mind the role played by other factors, such as religion and politics.

**Feasibility of negotiation**

Although negotiation would generally be considered unlikely, it is possible that the interests of the UN may coincide with those of the terrorist organisations and insurgencies. For example, the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan is the primary objective of the Taliban, and is in the process of being carried out. Thus, this can be used as a bargaining chip in the event talks were to be held by NATO, the UN or the Afghan government. As a matter of fact, Pakistan held talks with the Taliban earlier this year, near the end of March. This means there is no particular reason why talks cannot be held with some of the other organisations and insurgencies. However, it must also be kept in mind that there are also organisations with whom negotiation is not a possibility, such as Hamas.

**The dangers posed by insurgent groups**

Although Al Qaeda and the Taliban have been recognised on the global stage, the birth and growth of IS is relatively new. The most frightening part about this is that even in this limited timeframe, they have managed to take control over a large number of cities, towns and villages, which is more than what can be said for a significant number of older organisations. But there is only one way to understand how truly dangerous this particular group is. They were excommunicated from the Al Qaeda on the grounds that they were "too extreme" for them. Too extreme for the Al Qaeda. The Al Qaeda has previously issued a statement saying "… (Al Qaeda) does not have an organisational relationship with it and is not the group responsible for their actions." Thus, IS poses perhaps the single greatest
threat to democracy in Iraq, and if it is allowed to spread, may threaten democracy in the entire Middle East.

**Major Countries and Organisations Involved**

**Iraq**

Though it had earlier been relatively stable, Iraq is now on the verge of being overrun by insurgents once again. It had established a democratically elected government in 2005, and had maintained stability post the 2011 U.S. withdrawal. There had been an escalation in sectarian violence since the beginning of 2006, with over 34,000 civilians being killed, as per reports issued by the U.N. However, by October of 2007, there was a marked decrease of deaths and use of missiles. In November, 2008, the Iraqi Parliament approved a security pact made with the U.S. by which all U.S. troops had to pull out of Iraq by 2011. Iraq Government has been trying to eliminate IS presence in the region, however it has requested external military aid, such US air strikes. This implies that the Iraqi Government is unable to handle the issue completely by itself and is therefore in need of foreign aid. Despite being supported by Russia, Iran and the US, Iraq is still facing problems due to the fact that these three nations are working independently of each other.

**Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has not seen a significant increase in acts of violence led or incited by Terrorist Organisations such as the Taliban or Al Qaeda. However, it still faces credible threats from these insurgencies. U.S. President Barack Obama has announced the complete withdrawal of all troops by the end of 2016. Till then, Afghanistan faces a pertinent issue, the issue being if NATO and U.S. troops will be able to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by the end of 2016. This period will represent a landmark phase. The training, readiness and capability of the ANSF in countering insurgency will play a key part in determining whether Afghanistan will become an independent and sovereign nation, or be destroyed by insurgents, the very threat posed by Iraq right now. The best chance Afghanistan faces is if it uses foreign troops to eliminate as many terror cells as possible before their withdrawal. Financially crippling these organisations will also prove to be beneficial in the long run.

**United States of America**
The US has had an influential presence in the Middle East for several decades since its invasion of Iran in 1946, with forces strategically placed throughout the region. Its presence peaked when its forces invaded Iraq and occupied Afghanistan. However, under the Obama administration, there has been a reduction and or complete withdrawal of troops from various countries in the region.

Iraq has requested US precision air strikes to combat the IS presence in Iraq, and the US has complied, with President Obama releasing a list of high value targets to be targeted. As of right now, the primary goal of the U.S, with respect to Afghanistan, is to train the aforementioned ANSF in guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency so that they are capable of dealing with the insurgents on their own, after the withdrawal in 2016.

**IS**

The Islamic State was originally a branch of the Al Qaeda, until being expelled on the grounds of being too extreme. It is currently in possession of Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city, and is in control of various towns and villages spread across the country. It commits act of violence on sectarian lines. The goal of IS is to redraw the boundaries of the various nations in the Middle East and establish a purely Sunni dominant Islamic Nation or Caliphate. Though its origins can be traced to Iraq, IS is now expanding. It is fighting Syrian rebels in order to gain pieces of Syrian land, predictions are that Jordan is the IS’ next target.

The IS aims of establishing a purely Sunni Muslim territory throughout the entirety of the Middle East. It is prejudiced against all other religions and forms of Islam, especially Shia Muslims and Yazidi Muslims, another sect of Muslims present in the Middle East and Iraq especially.

**Timeline**

**Afghanistan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 11, 2001</td>
<td>Attack on World Trade Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 7, 2001</td>
<td>Bombing campaign, led by the US and UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 7, 2001</td>
<td>Taliban abandons Kandahar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1, 2003</td>
<td>NATO takes control of Afghan Peacekeeping Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 18, 2005</td>
<td>Local elections held</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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February 17, 2009        17,000 additional troops deployed  
December 1, 2009        U.S. President Barack Obama orders troop surge  
September 18, 2010      Local elections held  
June 21, 2011           Troop reduction ordered  
April 5, 2014           Landmark Presidential elections held with record voter turnout  
May 27, 2014            U.S. announces complete troop withdrawal by the end of 2016  

Iraq

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November, 2002</td>
<td>Weapon inspectors sent by UN reach Iraq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20, 2003</td>
<td>US led invasion of Iraq begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19, 2003</td>
<td>Insurgents bomb U.N. headquarters in Baghdad, envoy killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 28, 2004</td>
<td>US hands interim Iraqi Government sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 30, 2005</td>
<td>Approximately 8 million citizens vote for Transitional National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 28, 2005</td>
<td>Draft Constitution approved by Shi’ite and Kurdish representatives, but not Sunnis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15, 2005</td>
<td>Constitution approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2005</td>
<td>Iraq elects first full-term government since 2003 invasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December,</td>
<td>British forces hand over control of Basra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2007

September, 2008

US hands over control of western province of Anbar

June, 2009

US forces begin pulling out of Iraq

December, 2009

IS claims responsibility for suicide bombings that killed a total of 127 people

September, 2010

Iraq and Syria breakoff diplomatic ties

December, 2011

Complete U.S. troop pull out

June, 2014

Suni rebels led by IS march from Anbar, capture Mosul, and move on to Baji

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

**Afghanistan**

- Situation in Afghanistan, S/RES/1383 (2001)
- Situation in Afghanistan, S/RES/1378 (2001)
- Situation in Afghanistan, S/RES/1363 (2001)

**Iraq**

- Resolution regarding disarmament obligations of Iraq, 8th November 2002, No. 1441
- Resolution recognising US and UK as occupying powers, 22nd May 2003, No. 1483
- Resolution transferring partial power to Iraqi Interim Government, 8th June 2004, No. 1546

**Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**
Over the past decade, the issue of terrorist influenced insurgency has been tackled again and again, with various operations being launched to counter this issue.

**Operation Iraqi Freedom**

Operation Iraqi Freedom was the name was the code name given to the US-led invasion of Iraq. Soon after the invasion was complete, there were various skirmishes with insurgencies. However, on the whole, there was a reduction in acts carried out by insurgencies. The operation resulted in peace even after withdrawal of forces in 2010, for a period lasting till 2012. On the other hand, invasion of a nation is a violation of that nation’s sovereignty and as such should only be considered a final approach.

**Elimination of Infrastructure and Leaders**

There has generally been a notable decrease in terrorist activities following the assassination of a key leader or destruction of infrastructure. Continuation of this method will not always be feasible without foreign aid, however.

**Counter-insurgency Methods**

Various counter-insurgency methods have been used in both Iraq and Afghanistan, to varying degrees of success. These methods include “Cordon and Search”, in which an area is cordoned off and premises are searched for weapons or insurgents, “Oil Spot”, a descriptive term for the concentration of counter-insurgent forces into an expanding, secured zone, and "draining the swamp" or "draining the water," which comprises involves the necessary and unconditional relocation of the civilian population in an attempt to expose the whereabouts of the insurgents.

**Negotiations**

Although the war against terrorist organisations has been long and at times bloody, compromises have been reached in the past. The Pakistani Government held discussions with the Lakshar E-Taliba and Israel has had various ceasefires with Hamas, with regard to the issue of the Gaza strip.

**Possible Solutions**

Given the fact that conventional methods have been unable to resolve the issue completely, it is possible that unconventional solutions may hold the key to ridding the region from these insurgencies. Holding peace talks between terrorist organizations and member nations or the UN itself may seem impossible or unfeasible, however
Pakistan and the Lakshar-e-Taliba held peace talks early in 2014 and Israel and Hamas have agreed on temporary truces regarding the situation in Gaza. It stands to reason that compromises may be worked out between other member nations and terrorist organisations.

The ANSF require further training, an issue that needs to be tackled. This is evident from the fact that One of the reasons trained armed forces deployed by the Afghan Government have had difficulties in combatting the insurgencies is that the terrorists use the landscape of the area to their benefit, and thus fight the battle on their own terms by using guerilla warfare. The ANSF will not be able to rely on NATO forces for help after the 2016 withdrawal of forces.

Any terrorist organisation requires funds and equipment to continue its mission. As such, a detailed investigation should be carried out by the UN to determine the sources of income for these terrorist organisations. Freezing of assets and cutting off funding will choke the organisations and halt their progress and operations. Training the ANSF in the latest counter-insurgency methods may also yield results.

One advantage possessed by some insurgencies, as in the case of Hamas, is that they have support of the common people. This gives them an edge. As such, civil rallies should be organized to change the opinion of the people at a grass root level. The dangers posed by these insurgencies needs to be illustrated to the people.

Any operation carried out by these insurgencies requires funds. As such, the funding for these operations should be frozen. The Taliban for example, receives funds from the drug trade in Afghanistan.

Bibliography


