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Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?

How are international business organizations and global terrorist networks similar? This question is not a riddle but an analogy made by policymakers ranging from Secretary of State Colin Powell to Russian presidential advisor Gleb Pavlovsky. The comparison seems apropos because the multinational corporation and the transnational terrorist network both utilize the existing global economic, transportation, and communications systems to organize and manage far-flung subsidiaries and to move funds, men, and material from one location to another.

The 2001 trial of Madji Hasan Idris, an Egyptian member of the radical Al Wa'd organization, revealed the extent to which terror has operationally adopted the global business model. Al Wa'd would send young Egyptian recruits to camps in Kosovo or Pakistan and then dispatch them to serve in the Philippines, Kashmir, or wherever else they were needed after their training and indoctrination were complete. Cell phones and e-mail kept the network in constant contact, while couriers provided cash advances, airplane tickets, and passports to facilitate operations.

The objectives of terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda and the symbiotic organized-crime networks that help sustain these groups are also not confined territorially or ideologically to a particular region. They are instead explicitly global in orientation. In contrast, "traditional" terrorist organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) have pursued largely limited, irredentist aims. Each terrorist group drew its membership largely from a specific population, even if they sought the sponsorship of a foreign patron for arms and logistical support.

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Al Qaeda, in contrast, recruits adherents from around the globe and seeks out failed states everywhere to house its own, self-sufficient infrastructure.

Extending the analogy, then, these failed states are the global terrorist network's equivalent of an international business's corporate headquarters, providing concrete locations, or stable "nodes," in which to situate their factories, training facilities, and storehouses. Where the analogy differs is the type of state that each seeks. While the multinational corporation seeks out states that offer political stability and a liberal business climate with low taxes and few regulations, failing or failed states draw terrorists, where the breakdown of authority gives them the ability to conduct their operations without risk of significant interference. Today's terrorist does not need a strong state to provide funding and supplies. Rather, it seeks a weak state that cannot impede a group's freedom of action but has the veneer of state sovereignty that prevents other, stronger states from taking effective countermeasures.

The successful U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan has, in the short run, deprived Al Qaeda of one of its principal centers for bases and training camps. Does it matter? Naturally, Al Qaeda operatives are reportedly seeking to move personnel and equipment to new "hosts"—Somalia, Indonesia, Chechnya, the mountains of Central Asia, Bosnia, Lebanon, or Kosovo. In these places, the writ of state authority is lax or nonexistent, and vibrant civil societies do not exist to deny militants the ability to move and operate in the public mainstream. At the same time, these groups also seek to utilize "brown zones" in Western societies, whether specific neighborhoods or particular types of organizations, where state governments are reluctant to intervene.[1] Do terrorist networks need a failed state or other territorial home where it can base its operations, or can these organizations completely blend into global society?

Why Terrorist Networks Need Failed States

Failed states hold a number of attractions for terrorist organizations. First and foremost, they provide the opportunity to acquire territory on a scale much larger than a collection of scattered safe houses—enough to accommodate entire training complexes, arms depots, and communications facilities. Generally, terrorist groups have no desire to assume complete control of the failed state but simply to acquire de facto control over specified areas where they will then be left alone.

In Bosnia, for example, radical groups took control of a number of districts, such as the village of Bocinja Donja, where they could operate with little scrutiny from the central government and live apart from the rest of

society. Control over territory not only permits the construction of institutions, but it also allows groups to develop business interests such as gum mastic plantations in Sudan or small factories in Albania, which help generate income for operations. The failed state also enables terrorist groups and organized crime networks to establish transshipment points. Italian intelligence, for example, is extremely concerned about how Albania has become the hub of the primary, illicit traffic routes that cross the Balkans and involve the dispersal of drugs, weapons, dirty money, and illegal migrants.

For the most part, terrorist groups have gained control over territory in a failed state through a Faustian bargain with authorities, usually by offering its services to the failed state during times of conflict. In Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Sudan, and Afghanistan, Islamist fighters would arrive to partake in local wars, bringing with them not only manpower but much-needed equipment and finances. Once on the ground, they could exploit the chaos caused by the fighting to set up their operations. The near-collapse of the Albanian government during the 1990s; the chaos unleashed in Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Bosnia because of civil wars; the protection of warlords in a Chechnya that is de facto independent of Russia; and the continuing absence of an effective judicial system in Kosovo have enabled terrorists of all stripes to continue their work without significant interference.

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Second, failed states have weak or nonexistent law-enforcement capabilities, permitting terrorist groups to engage in smuggling and drug trafficking in order to raise funds for operations. Turkish intelligence sources report that Osama bin Laden extended logistical support and guerrilla training to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), whose leaders have maintained close ties with Islamic radicals in Afghanistan. Using the southern Fergana Valley as a transit point, Afghans have transferred weapons and personnel into Central Asia. They also use the valley as a transshipment point for drugs produced in Afghanistan en route for sale in Europe, the proceeds of which Al Qaeda can then use to finance further operations. Russian law enforcement officers maintain that groups in Afghanistan used opium-derived income to arm, train, and support fundamentalist groups including the IMU and the Chechen resistance. Another key narcotics route has been via Turkey into the Balkans, where the drugs can then be marketed in Western Europe. Moreover, the continuing conditions in Bosnia, Albania, and Kosovo have created ripe conditions for human trafficking, arms smuggling, and narcotics distribution—all areas in which bin Laden reputedly has been a "si-

lent investor," utilizing profits to help fund Al Qaeda operations.[2] Colombia has experienced a similar pattern, with both leftist and rightist terrorist groups protecting coca fields and cocaine processing facilities in return for a share of the proceeds. The "brown zones" represented by offshore banking centers further facilitate the interconnection of terrorist groups with the narcotics trade by allowing terrorist groups to deposit funds and ensure their availability to their operatives.

Terrorist groups seek de facto control over specified areas, not the entire failed state.

Third, failed states create pools of recruits and supporters for terrorist groups, who can use their resources and organizations to step into the vacuum left by the collapse of official state power and civil society. In Central Asia, radicals have taken advantage of the weak successor states to try to establish new outposts, particularly in the Fergana Valley, where mass unemployment and a shortage of land have afflicted the natives. By playing on the widespread dissatisfaction with the corruption, economic stagnation, and political repression of the Central Asian republics, the Islamists have tapped into new pools of recruits and used the rural and mountainous areas of the region to create safe havens for training terrorists.

Observers view Central Asia as a staging area for militant organizations in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Russia. Poor economic conditions in failed states also mean that terrorist groups take advantage of their financial resources to hire recruits and bribe officials. In Colombia, for example, new members of the right-wing "United Self-Defense Forces" receive pay of $180 per month, described as a "healthy sum" in a country with more than 20 percent unemployment. Islamist groups, particularly in the Balkans, found that a useful tool for recruitment was to offer the possibility of high-paying work to unemployed young men in the Persian Gulf states, with the hope of then diverting them into joining mujahideen units.

Finally, failed states retain the outward signs of sovereignty. The presumption against interference in the internal affairs of another state, enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter, remains a major impediment to cross-border action designed to eliminate terrorist networks. Despite the high volume of traffic in drugs, weapons, and migrants undertaken by Italian, Albanian, and Russian mafia groups via the port of Durres, for example, no European state has shown much inclination to enter Albania by force and take control of the city. Failed states may be notoriously unable to control their own territory, but they remain loath to allow access to any other state to do the same.

The governments of failed states also can issue legitimate passports and other documents—or provide the templates needed to forge credible copies—that enable terrorists to move around the world and disguise their true identities.[3] Abu Zubaydah, Al Qaeda's chief of staff, had a number of passports and false aliases that have enabled him to move freely, coordinating the activities of sleeper cells; at the time of his capture, he had a number of blank (and possibly forged) Saudi passports.[4] Bin Laden reportedly holds passports issued by Sudan, Bosnia, and Albania.

Moreover, failed states have had—and in some cases continue to possess—official military units that under international law can legitimately purchase weaponry. In some cases, such equipment is transferred to terrorist groups; in other cases, the failed state is simply too weak to secure armories, as occurred in Albania. Interpol estimates that, during January–March 1997, terrorists and organized-crime gangs seized hundreds of thousands of assault rifles, machine guns, and rocket launchers from state depots.

Bin Laden's experiences in Sudan following his expulsion from Saudi Arabia in 1991 demonstrated the value of relocating operations to a failed state. Sudan, riven by political instability and civil war, was a classic example of a failed state. Bin Laden established training camps, set up front companies to move assets and generate new revenues, and used the cloak of state sovereignty to shield his operations. Sudan became known as a way station for bin Laden's operatives, a place where terrorists could gather, train, and plan in relative safety and comfort. This pattern repeated itself in Albania and Bosnia, where radical groups, utilizing large donations from Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf region, established charitable organizations that doled out humanitarian relief, created schools and orphanages, and even developed a network of banks and credit agencies for the populace. By creating an alternative to a failed state, these groups won supporters both in the ranks of the government and among the general population.[5]

At the same time, terrorist organizations utilized the "brown zones" found in Western societies as secondary bases of operations. Taking advantage of lax asylum laws and immigration procedures, and the low level of scrutiny given to religious and charitable organizations, Al Qaeda has dispatched operatives and sleepers into Western countries, creating a network of safe houses and acquiring vehicles as well as equipment. Moreover, it has intensified its efforts to recruit operatives who are fully integrated members of society—whether second-generation Muslim immigrants or converts—and can move without attracting undue attention. Even after the decisive military strikes launched against Al Qaeda installations in Afghanistan, therefore, the organization and others like it remain a threat.

The Afghanistan Question: Stopgap or Solution?

Washington's global antiterrorism coalition has legitimately focused the initial response to the September 11 attacks on the failed state of Afghanistan and the Al Qaeda network. An effective and judicious use of force by the United States and its allies has been largely successful so far in destroying Al Qaeda's infrastructure on Afghan territory. Islamists themselves have admitted that the loss of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" represents a major setback to the cause but are confident that Al Qaeda can revive under the proper conditions.[6]

Terrorists are relying on two developments: that long-term occupation and reconstruction in Afghanistan will not follow short-term military action and that the United States has no real stomach for pursuing terrorist enclaves in other, more inaccessible locations. Islamist sources have proclaimed their confidence in the survival of their networks in places such as Kashmir, Kosovo, Chechnya, and Palestine, where they believe that the United States and its allies will choose not to risk significant losses in urban or guerrilla warfare and where no "fifth columns" can undermine the terrorist groups, as occurred in Afghanistan.[7]

The operations in Afghanistan result from a unique and serendipitous convergence of several factors: the existence of anti-Taliban resistance on the ground; the absence of international recognition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a legal government; the general consensus among the world's major powers that decapitation of the Taliban served international order and stability; and, finally, the very real sense of shock in the aftermath of the destruction wrought in Washington, D.C., and New York City. Somalia, which lacks any central government, and the Philippines, where the government asked for U.S. assistance to combat Abu Sayyaf and where a peace plan for granting autonomy to the Muslim southern regions enjoys the support of the state as well as of Muslim moderates, are other areas where concerted military action can be predominantly successful. These areas are the exception, however, rather than the rule.

Solving the problem of global terrorism by conducting military operations in failed states will be difficult to repeat elsewhere. Russian defense minister Sergei Ivanov said, "Any actions, including the use of force, by states and international organizations must be based on the norms and principles of international law and be appropriate for the threats."[8] Few states are eager to extend any sort of carte blanche to the United States to engage in military action anywhere in the world. Moreover, states may have their own security concerns that conflict with the aims of the war on terrorism.

Forces have spotted Al Qaeda operatives in two areas in the south Caucasus: the Pankisi gorge (which links Chechnya and Georgia) and the

Kodori gorge (which runs between Georgia and the breakaway republic of Abkhazia). In an ideal world, the simple solution is that Georgia should work closely with Russian security forces, utilizing U.S. equipment and training, to deny Chechen militants the ability to transit Pankisi and to prevent the transfer of weapons and funds into Chechnya from the Georgian side. At the same time, one would argue, the international community should recognize the reality of a separate Abkhazian state, which has effectively existed since 1993, thereby giving Abkhazia the wherewithal to police its borders adequately. Anyone remotely familiar with Caucasian politics, however, knows how unlikely this scenario is. Georgia, for instance, will not undertake any action that either weakens its sovereignty (e.g., grant extraterritorial privileges for Russian security forces to engage in hot pursuit across the border) or undermines its territorial integrity (e.g., recognize the existence of a separate Abkhazia). Last autumn, Georgian paramilitary forces allegedly even sought to engage the services of Chechen fighters, including Al Qaeda operatives, by bringing a group from Pankisi across Georgia into Kodori to utilize them in the struggle against the Abkhazians, with the government turning a blind eye to the whole operation. Indeed, the Georgian government might redirect U.S. aid intended for use against terrorist groups in Pankisi toward retaking Abkhazia by force instead, which could precipitate a larger regional crisis.

> Failed states still possess the outward signs of sovereignty.

Moreover, no one in the region supports the principle of recognizing de facto statelets as de jure independent because the same precedent could then apply to the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh against Azerbaijan and even to the Chechens themselves vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. Similar problems in the Balkans regarding Kosovo, the constituent entities of the Bosnian republic, and the Albanian-majority regions of southern Serbia and Macedonia indicate that, for the foreseeable future, areas effectively outside of any state's purview will continue to litter Southeastern Europe and the Caucasus.

The continuing weakness of other states also will prove to be a major liability in the war against terrorism. The arrest of Al Qaeda sympathizers in Yemen risks escalating tribal tensions, which could lead the government to back away from enforcing a true crackdown against proterrorist elements. The arrest of Yemeni and Egyptian fighters in Bosnia last autumn led to vociferous protests in Sarajevo, highlighting the continuing fragility of the coalition government and raising the possibility that, should the Party of Islamic Action return to power, future antiterrorist cooperation could end. In February 2002, riots broke out in Pristina when authorities from the UN

Mission in Kosovo took three former Kosovo Liberation Army members into custody for suspected terrorist acts and war crimes. Around the world, therefore, governments will likely play a double game—appeasing Washington by cooperating to some extent, while striking bargains with terrorists to prevent further destabilization.

Pakistan, one of the key members of the antiterrorist alliance, is a weak link. Indeed, President Pervez Musharraf is discovering the difficulties in containing the forces that he himself helped to unleash when he was army chief of staff. The Pakistan of the 1990s was a state mired in ethnic tension, sectarian violence, and an absence of cohesive central rule. The theological centers (the *madrassahs*), political parties, intelligence services, and retired generals had utilized the services of Al Qaeda, with motivations ranging from religious fanaticism to strategic advantage. Pakistan found Al Qaeda useful as a source of guerrilla fighters that Pakistan could send into Kashmir while providing the government in Islamabad with "plausible deniability"; according to the best estimates, up to 40 percent of the Kashmiri guerrillas came from Afghanistan. Reversing course after September 11 is no easy task. Many of the leading extremists and their cadres have avoided the police dragnets unleashed by Musharraf and simply bide their time, often in refuges where Islamabad's writ runs sluggishly. The December 2001 assassination of the brother of Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider, who is overseeing the crackdown on militants; the attack against the Indian parliament that same month; and the kidnapping and murder of journalist Daniel Pearl in January 2002 are reminders that Pakistan has by no means been "rehabilitated."

> The continuing weakness of states will be a major liability in the war against terrorism.

Finally, military campaigns to deny terrorists access to failed states do not address the role of Middle Eastern states in financing Islamist terror or their interest in using failed states as dumping grounds for their own militants. By subsidizing disillusioned young men to "fight for Islam" in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, and Chechnya, many leading Middle Eastern politicians and business figures burnished their own Islamic credentials and removed potentially disruptive figures from the domestic arena.

Military operations against or within failed states designed to destroy bases and infrastructure and neutralize terrorist operatives can only be one aspect of the war on terrorism. At times, military force is not appropriate. Carrier-launched fighter-bombers are useless for uncovering Al Qaeda sleeper cells in Hamburg or shutting down Web sites that provide instruc-

tions to terrorist recruits. Food airdrops cannot compensate for the bribes that terrorist groups pay underfunded police officers. The willingness to close the loopholes allowing terrorists to function in the "brown zones" of the West has already begun to recede. In most Western countries, especially Germany, "the right to nearly absolute civil and personal privacy amounts to a state theology."[9] Restrictions may tighten, but fundamental change in a whole host of policies ranging from privacy laws to asylum procedures is unlikely. Proponents must seek the long-term victory against international terrorism in the rehabilitation, not the conquest, of the failed state.

A New Type of Nation Building

The United States and its allies cannot conduct the fight against global terrorism in a vacuum. Effective combat is impossible as long as the failed states that terrorist movements use for refuge are left to flounder. If the United States is serious about rooting out terrorism, it cannot stop at the destruction of a few camps or the freezing of bank accounts. Once the military strikes end, state reconstruction must occur.

Nation building has received a bad reputation in U.S. policy circles, notably because of failures in the Balkans and Somalia, among others, and in part due to the quasi-utopian air surrounding nation building in the 1990s, with greater stress given to empowering downtrodden ethnic groups than on constructing viable state institutions. In fact, many of the idealistic democracy-promotion programs of this period may have had a counterproductive effect by encouraging the diffusion and decentralization of power and the weakening of executive branch institutions.

The situation requires realistic nation building, focusing on existing conditions and working to rebuild and reconstruct viable institutions. The Bush administration has recognized that war against terrorism implies a war against political chaos in favor of strengthening legitimate states. Despite all the claims about globalization creating a new world order, states remain the key actors in the international arena.

In Afghanistan, for example, nation building cannot stop with signing papers in Bonn. A token central government is insufficient. Afghanistan requires effective regional administrations based in Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, and Jalalabad, working with, not around, the regional leaders and warlords. The nation- and state-building efforts of Mexican president Plutarco Elias Calles during the 1920s may set a precedent: regional strongmen were incorporated into the army, given positions within the political administration, or bribed with lucrative business opportunities. Until local institutions are strong enough to assume responsibility for law and or-

der, the international community must ensure that the necessary forces are in place.

The first task in rehabilitating failed states is not holding elections but assisting in the swift reconstruction of the basic infrastructure of society—the health care system, the police force, and so forth—followed by longer-term investment. Linked to that process should be generous aid to reconstruct the bases of community life and to ensure that the wellsprings of civil society—religious organizations, schools, and the media—do not fall victim to extremist forces. In explaining the spread of Islamist extremism across Eurasia, Ravil Gainutdin, the chair of the Muslim Religious Board for European Russia, maintains that financial difficulties have rendered moderate groups unable to afford the costs of print and broadcast media. Reconstructing states will be a wasted effort if extremist groups dominate the airwaves and provide the textbooks used in schools.

> Rehabilitation, not the conquest, of failed states must be sought.

The second task is effective military and security assistance. The IMU has been so difficult to crush because, among other reasons, the weak militaries of states such as Kyrgyzstan are no match for a well-armed, well-trained, and well-financed insurgency. Police and security forces need training and equipment that will enable them to intercept and destroy terrorist formations and to crack down on the narcotics trade that supplies much of the income radical groups use to purchase arms and supplies and to bribe impoverished government officials.

The scale of smuggling across the Eurasian arc (from Asia to the Balkans) demonstrates how the culture of lawlessness, abetted by failed states, has taken root. Last year, the Russian Federal Security Service alone confiscated some two tons of narcotics en route from Afghanistan to Europe. Effective financial and logistical support to regional efforts, such as the one envisioned by the draft agreement reached in December 2001 between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines that created a joint rapid-response force to fight terrorism and border crime, can help strangle the international networks that have benefited from porous borders and undefined jurisdiction to smuggle personnel, funds, and equipment from place to place.

Terrorism will be problematic as long as people are disaffected. Strengthening states around the world, however, prevents scattered, localized cells from transforming into a potent network with a global reach. Recent history demonstrates that relatively weak and isolated insurgencies from Kosovo to the South Philippines became much more deadly and effective once they

drew upon an international network for a continuous supply of recruits, funds, and equipment coordinated and dispatched from bases located in failed states. The best means for emasculating international terrorist networks are effective regimes policing their borders and exercising supervision over their territory.

The United States faces the new challenge of transnational terrorists who establish sanctuaries in failed states and attract support worldwide. The traditional approach of combating terrorism, namely, using a combination of economic sanctions, military reprisals, and political pressure, may have succeeded in dissuading individual state sponsors of discrete terrorist groups—states with vested economic and political interests, such as Libya—but will likely fail at coping with this new brand of terror. Special military operations are only the first step in rooting out terror. Substantial economic and political investment designed to reconstruct regimes in failed states will be necessary if the United States and its allies hope not simply to disable terror's infrastructure temporarily, but to prevent such forces from seeking out new adherents and bases of operations in other failed states.

Notes

1. See Guillermo O'Donnell, *On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems (A Latin American View with Glances at Some Post-Communist Countries)*, working paper #192 (Notre Dame, Ind.: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1993).

2. See, for example, the report issued by the Macedonian Information Agency (MIA), September 20, 2001.

3. Of great concern, for example, is the fate of some 100,000 Albanian passports that "disappeared" during the 1997 unrest, some of which Interpol fears have been used to "legalize" terrorists in Europe. *Ta Nea*, September 14, 2001, p. 11. Thailand, for instance, is trying to take steps to combat the "illicit network … that produced forged passports and documents [that] has made the country attractive to foreign terrorists." *Nation* (Bangkok), March 11, 2002 (editorial).

4. See *Al-Sharg Al-Awsat*, March 8, 2002, p. 3 (interview of Muhammad Al-Shafi'i with a former "Afghan Arab").

5. For a discussion of this process in Albania, see *Hurriyet*, October 25, 2001; *Albania*, October 31, 2001.

6. See *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, February 27, 2002 (communiqué reportedly issued by Mullah Omar). Concerning the fragility of the Karzai government, the Iranian newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* editorialized:

   Even if, due to coercion and foreign military pressure, no reaction is seen for a while, the freedom-loving and independent-spirited people of Afghanistan will not remain passive and idle for long. The turmoil is there, and at the right moment and appropriate opportunity they will rise like a burning fire from under the ashes and devour all the foreigners and their domestic lackeys.

   Jomhuri-ye Eslami, February 24, 2002.

7. Mamduh Isma'il, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, January 22, 2002 (providing an Islamist perspective regarding the post–September 11 future of the international Islamist movement, including its ability to survive the losses of its Afghan bases).

8. ITAR-TASS, February 3, 2002.

9. Jane Kramer, "Letter from Europe: Private Lives," *New Yorker*, February 11, 2002, p. 36.