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# **The Terrorism Threat In 2012: Global Perspective**

**Terrorism Risk And Insurance Markets In 2012**

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# Key Trends and Developments in 2012

- The decline of al Qaeda *but* the rise of al Qaeda-ism
  - The “Arab Spring” has created new opportunities and new dangers—for Core al Qaeda and its affiliates as well
  - Failed or failing states and ungoverned spaces present the movement with the best chance of reviving its—and perhaps Core al Qaeda’s—waning fortunes
  - Fate of the Assad regime and the future of Syria will be pivotal
- Organizations and leadership still matter in terrorism and Sunni jihadis remain the preeminent threat
  - The lone wolf threat is real and potentially tragic; but comparatively less serious
  - Disquieting trend in jihadi Internet communication and recruitment potentially bodes ill for the future
- The return of state sponsored terrorism
  - Disturbing global pattern of Iranian-backed incidents
- Rising violence in Mexico and possible re-emergence of left-wing/anarchist violent are second order threats
  - But bear watching

# Decline of al Qaeda and Rise of al Qaeda-ism

- Killing of bin Laden and the drone program's effectiveness have profoundly weakened Core al Qaeda
  - More than half its top commanders have been eliminated in past 3 years (4-fold increase since 2009 = 34 leaders & 235 fighters killed)
- Al Qaeda was mostly inactive and largely irrelevant to transformative events across the Middle East and North Africa since 2011
  - Civil protests achieved what terrorists had failed to deliver
  - Al Qaeda's killing of Muslims had arguably alienated its base
  - Al Qaeda had lost the war of ideas and the struggle for Muslim "hearts and minds"
  - Longing for democracy and economic reform trumped repression and violence

# But Even While Core al Qaeda Has Suffered, Its Ideology and Brand Prospered in 2012

- Today, al Qaeda is present in more places than it was ten years ago
  - Its message remains compelling and its brand still resonates
- Currently 13 major networks or theatres of operation  
(Threat: Blue=decline; Yellow=caution; Green=continuing; Red=alarming)
  - Senior core leadership
  - aQ in Far East
  - aQ in Europe
  - aQ Two Niles (Sudan)
  - aQ USA
  - aQ in Afghanistan
  - aQ in Pakistan
  - aQ in East Africa (al Shabaab)
  - aQ in Yemen (AQAP)
  - aQ in Iraq
  - aQ in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
  - aQ in West Africa (Mali, Mauritania, Niger, & Nigeria)
  - *Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahli al-Shaam* (“Front for the Victory of the Levantine People”—Syria)

# Change Drivers in 2012 (1): Syria and Emergent Hybridization of al Qaeda's strategy

- Determination to exploit instability and upheaval of "Arab Spring"
  - Increasing emphasis on sectarian messages and attacks (esp. in Iraq & Syria—account for 86% of aQI attacks in Iraq)
  - aQI is the Core's spear carrier in Syria, mostly indistinguishable from Jabhat al Nusra
- Syrian civil war has breathed new life into al Qaeda's efforts to appear relevant
  - Main focus of the three most important, password-protected, on-line forums and attendant selectivity
    - al Shumukh al-Islam; al Fida'; & Ansar al Mujahideen
  - Treasured Muslim territory; perfect storm (Afghanistan circa 1980s); operationally convivial environment; contiguous borders with Jordan and Israel
- Emergence of a hybrid far enemy/near enemy strategy
  - With attendant exploitation of new opportunities to attack U.S. and West

# Change Drivers in 2012 (2): North, West & East Africa

- Confusion and uncertainty surrounding the killing of US ambassador and 3 State Dept. personnel in Benghazi, Libya
- Disquieting signs of renewed AQIM activity in Algeria
  - Suicide bombing of police post; plot to attack US and European ships in Mediterranean Sea
- Marked escalation of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria
  - Targeting of Christians, security forces, government officials, foreign businesses and foreign workers; including suicide tactics
- Seizure of Northern Mali by MUJAO
  - Reports of growing jihadi presence in Mauritania and Niger
- Spread and escalation of al Shabaab attacks to Kenya
  - Attacks on security forces, ordinary citizens, and churches, including use of suicide tactics

# Change Drivers in 2012 (3): State-Sponsorship; Left-wing/Anarchism; & Crime-Terrorism Nexus

- *Return of state-sponsored terrorism*—Iranian operatives linked to plots against Israeli targets in
  - Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia (US, too), India, Kenya (US, UK & Saudi, too) and Thailand
  - Suicide bombing in Bulgaria kills six
  - Reasons: targeting of Iran’s nuclear program; effects of sanctions; & possible rise in influence of radical elements
- *Return of left-wing/anarchist terrorism*
  - Growing popular outrage among workers and students *could* lead to re-emergence of more systemic terrorism
  - Low-level bombings, arson attacks and vandalism have already occurred in Greece, Italy, Germany, France, and the US
- *Crime-Terrorism nexus*—rising narcotics-driven crime wave in Mexico
  - Danger of spreading to US: linkage with Latino gangs, suborning of US law enforcement

# Concluding Observations: 2012 and Beyond

- Core al Qaeda continues to degenerate and becomes a post-modern, disparate movement with a loose set of ideas & ideologies
  - Would still pose a terrorist threat, but a far weaker and more sporadic—hence, less consequential—one
- Core's continued weakening produces a more fragmented jihadi movement
  - Smaller, more dispersed adversaries, who gravitate between groups
  - Lighter footprint with no established modus operandi
  - More difficult to track, anticipate and predict
- Future depends on whether Syria in 2012 becomes like Iraq in 2003 and re-vitalizes al Qaeda's waning fortunes
  - And, if al Qaeda can avoid the mistakes that previously undermined its struggle
- The struggle against terrorist cannot be wished away
  - No matter how much we all may prefer to focus on domestic challenges